

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1

Chapter I, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50," pp. 1-52.

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

"The contents of this volume are drawn from the official record of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds. No copyright is claimed in the text of this official Government document."

Summary

INDOCHINA IN U.S. WARTIME POLICY, 1941-1945

Significant misunderstanding has developed concerning U.S. policy towards Indochina in the decade of World War II and its aftermath. A number of historians have held that anti-colonialism governed U.S. policy and actions up until 1950, when containment of communism supervened. For example, Bernard Fall (e.g. in his 1967 postmortem book, *Last Reflections on a War*) categorized American policy toward Indochina in six periods: "(1) Anti-Vichy, 1940-1945; (2) Pro-Viet Minh, 1945-1946; (3) Non-involvement, 1946-June 1950; (4) Pro-French, 1950-July 1954; (5) Non-military involvement, 1954-November 1961; (6) Direct and full involvement, 1961- ." Commenting that the first four periods are those "least known even to the specialist," Fall developed the thesis that President Roosevelt was determined "to eliminate the French from Indochina at all costs," and had pressured the Allies to establish an international trusteeship to administer Indochina until the nations there were ready to assume full independence. This obdurate anti-colonialism, in Fall's view, led to cold refusal of American aid for French resistance fighters, and to a policy of promoting Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh as the alternative to restoring the French bonds. But, the argument goes, Roosevelt died, and principle faded; by late 1946, anti-colonialism mutated into neutrality. According to Fall: "Whether this was due to a deliberate policy in Washington or, conversely, to an absence of policy, is not quite clear. . . . The United States, preoccupied in Europe, ceased to be a diplomatic factor in Indochina until the outbreak of the Korean War." In 1950, anti-communism asserted itself, and in a remarkable volte-face, the United States threw its economic and military resources behind France in its war against the Viet Minh. Other commentators, conversely-prominent among them, the historians of the Viet Minh-have described U.S. policy as consistently condoning and assisting the reimposition of French colonial power in Indochina, with a concomitant disregard for the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese.

Neither interpretation squares with the record; the United States was less concerned over Indochina, and less purposeful than either assumes. Ambivalence characterized U.S. policy during World War II, and was the root of much subsequent misunderstanding. On the one hand, the U.S. repeatedly reassured the French that its colonial possessions would

be returned to it after the war. On the other hand, the U.S. broadly committed itself in the Atlantic Charter to support national self-determination, and President Roosevelt personally and vehemently advocated independence for Indochina. F.D.R. regarded Indochina as a flagrant example of onerous colonialism which should be turned over to a trusteeship rather than returned to France. The President discussed this proposal with the Allies at the Cairo, Teheran, and Yalta Conferences and received the endorsement of Chiang Kai-shek and Stalin; Prime Minister Churchill demurred. At one point, Fall reports, the President offered General de Gaulle Filipino advisers to help France establish a "more progressive policy in Indochina"--which offer the General received in "Pensive Silence."

Ultimately, U.S. Policy was governed neither by the principles of the Atlantic Charter, nor by the President's anti-colonialism but by the dictates of military strategy and by British intransigence on the colonial issue. The United States, concentrating its forces against Japan, accepted British military primacy in Southeast Asia, and divided Indochina at 16th parallel between the British and the Chinese for the purposes of occupation. . U.S. commanders serving with the British and Chinese, while instructed to avoid ostensible alignment with the French, were permitted to conduct operations in Indochina which did not detract from the campaign against Japan. Consistent with F.D.R.'s guidance, U.S. did provide modest aid to French--and Viet Minh--resistance forces in Vietnam after March, 1945, but refused to provide shipping to move Free French troops there. Pressed by both the British and the French for clarification U.S. intentions regarding the political status of Indochina, F.D.R. maintained that "it is a matter for postwar."

The President's trusteeship concept foundered as early as March 1943, when the U.S. discovered that the British, concerned over possible prejudice to Commonwealth policy, proved to be unwilling to join in any declaration on trusteeships, and indeed any statement endorsing national independence which went beyond the Atlantic Charter's vague "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." So sensitive were the British on this point that the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944, at which the blueprint for the postwar international system was negotiated, skirted the colonial issue, and avoided trusteeships altogether. At each key decisional point at which the President could have influenced the course of events toward trusteeship--in relations with the U.K., in casting the United Nations Charter, in instructions to allied commanders--he declined to do so; hence, despite his lip service to trusteeship and anti-colonialism, F.D.R. in fact assigned to Indochina a status correlative to Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia: free territory to be reconquered and returned to its former owners. Non-intervention by the U.S. on behalf of the Vietnamese was tantamount to acceptance of the French return. On April 3, 1945, with President Roosevelt's approval, Secretary of State Stettinius issued a statement that, as a result of the Yalta talks, the U.S. would look to trusteeship as a postwar arrangement only for "territories taken from the enemy," and for "territories as might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." By context, and by the Secretary of State's subsequent interpretation, Indochina fell into the latter category. Trusteeship status for Indochina became, then, a matter for French determination.

Shortly following President Truman's entry into office, the U.S. assured France that it had never questioned, "even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China." The U.S. policy was to press France for progressive measures in Indochina, but to expect France to decide when its peoples would be ready for independence; "such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government." These guidelines, established by June, 1945--before the end of the war—remained fundamental to U.S. policy.

With British cooperation, French military forces were reestablished in South Vietnam in September, 1945. The U.S. expressed dismay at the outbreak of guerrilla warfare which followed, and pointed out that while it had no intention of opposing the reestablishment of French control, "it is not the policy of this government to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force, and the willingness of the U.S. to see French control reestablished assumes that [the] French claim to have the support of the population in Indochina is borne out by future events." Through the fall and winter of 1945-1946, the U.S. received a series of requests from Ho Chi Minh for intervention in Vietnam; these were, on the record, unanswered. However, the U.S. steadfastly refused to assist the French military effort, e.g., forbidding American flag vessels to carry troops or war materiel to Vietnam. On March 6, 1946, the French and Ho signed an Accord in which Ho acceded to French reentry into North Vietnam in return for recognition of the DRV as a "Free State," part of the French Union. As of April 1946, allied occupation of Indochina was officially terminated, and the U.S. acknowledged to France that all of Indochina had reverted to French control. Thereafter, the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam were dealt with in the context of the U.S. relationship with France.

U.S. NEUTRALITY IN THE FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR, 1946-1949

In late 1946, the Franco-Viet Minh War began in earnest. A chart (pp. 37 ff) summarizes the principal events in the relations between France and Vietnam, 1946-1949, describing the milestones along the route by which France, on the one hand, failed to reach any lasting accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and, on the other hand, erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead. The U.S. during these years continued to regard the conflict as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. The U.S. in its representations to France deplored the prospect of protracted war, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the U.S., deterred by the history of Ho's communist affiliation, always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Minh. Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Beginning in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. The U.S. [words illegible] Vietnamese nationalism relatively insignificant compared with European economic recovery and collective security from communist domination.

It is not as though the U.S. was not prepared to act in circumstances such as these. For example, in the 1945-1946 dispute over Dutch possessions in Indonesia, the U.S. actively intervened against its Dutch ally. In this case, however, the intervention was in concert with the U.K. (which steadfastly refused similar action in Indochina) and against the Netherlands, a much less significant ally in Europe than France. In wider company and at projected lower cost, the U.S. could and did show a determination to act against colonialism.

The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. Moreover, at the time, Indochina appeared to many to be one region in the troubled postwar world in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

In February, 1947, early in the war, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France in recovering its economic, political and military strength:

In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring to undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready to assist in any appropriate way we can to find a solution for the Indochinese problem. At the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are two sides to this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack of French understanding of the other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and the continued existence of a dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in the area. Furthermore, there is no escape from the fact that the trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in the XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming things of the past. Action by Britain in India and Burma and the Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples of this trend, and the French themselves took cognizance of it both in their new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On the other hand we do not lose sight of the fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin. . . .

Frankly we have no solution of the problem to suggest. It is basically a matter for the two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep the door open to some sort of settlement. We appreciate the fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for the French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that the French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution.

The U.S. anxiously followed the vacillations of France's policy toward Bao Dai, exhorting the French to translate the successive "agreements" they contracted with him into an effective nationalist alternative to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. Increasingly, the U.S. sensed that French unwillingness to concede political power to Vietnamese heightened the possibility of the Franco-Viet Minh conflict being transformed into a struggle with Soviet imperialism. U.S. diplomats were instructed to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result [of France's] unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." France was notified that the U.S. was willing to extend financial aid to a Vietnamese government not a French puppet, "but could not give consideration of altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress [is] made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country."

As of 1948, however, the U.S. remained uncertain that Ho and the Viet Minh were in league with the Kremlin. A State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh in July 1948, indicated that:

1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper Humanite since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called "leading communist" by recent Russian publications as well as Daily Worker makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able evaluate amount pressure or guidance Moscow exerting. We have impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages which favorable to growth communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts.

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam. . . .

Evaluation. If there is a Moscow directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly so far. Possible explanations are:

1. No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow
2. The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightist elements that must be purged.
3. The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow.
4. A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely.

ORIGINS OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

The collapse of the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949 sharpened American apprehensions over communist expansion in the Far East, and hastened U.S. measures to counter the threat posed by Mao's China. The U.S. sought to create and employ policy instruments similar to those it was bringing into play against the Soviets in Europe: collective security organizations, economic aid, and military assistance. For example, Congress, in the opening paragraphs of the law it passed in 1949 to establish the first comprehensive military assistance program, expressed itself "as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties, and to protect their security and independence.." But, the negotiating of such an organization among the disparate powers and political entities of the Far East was inherently more complex a matter than the North Atlantic Treaty nations had successfully faced. The U.S. decided that the impetus for collective security in Asia should come from the Asians, but by late 1949, it also recognized that action was necessary in Indochina. Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming; by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible; but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

January and February, 1950, were pivotal months. The French took the first concrete steps toward transferring public administration to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh denied the legitimacy of the latter, proclaiming the DRV as the "only legal government of the Vietnam people," and was formally recognized by Peking and Moscow. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the "nationalist" nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, we have every reason to believe that those legal governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these local governments by the countries of the world whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas. . . .

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced 4 February 1950; on the same date, President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai. French requests for aid in Indochina followed within a few weeks. On May 8, 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

The United States Government convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated State of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

The U.S. thereafter was deeply involved in the developing war. But it cannot be said that the extension of aid was a volte-face of U.S. policy precipitated solely by the events of 1950. It appears rather as the denouement of a cohesive progression of U.S. policy decisions stemming from the 1945 determination that France should decide the political future of Vietnamese nationalism. Neither the modest O.S.S. aid to the Viet Minh in 1945, nor the U.S. refusal to abet French recourse to arms the same year, signaled U.S. backing of Ho Chi Minh. To the contrary, the U.S. was very wary of Ho, apprehensive lest Paris' imperialism be succeeded by control from Moscow. Uncertainty characterized the U.S. attitude toward Ho through 1948, but the U.S. incessantly pressured France to accommodate "genuine" Vietnamese nationalism and independence. In early 1950, both the apparent fruition of the Bao Dai solution, and the patent alignment of the DRV with

the USSR and Communist China, impelled the U.S. to more direct intervention in Vietnam.

(End of Summary)

1. INDOCHINA IN U.S. WARTIME POLICY, 1941-1945

In the interval between the fall of France in 1940, and the Pearl Harbor attack in December, 1941, the United States watched with increasing apprehension the flux of Japanese military power into Indochina. At first the United States urged Vichy to refuse Japanese requests for authorization to use bases there, but was unable to offer more than vague assurances of assistance, such as a State Department statement to the French Ambassador on 6 August 1940 that:

We have been doing and are doing everything possible within the framework of our established policies to keep the situation in the Far East stabilized; that we have been progressively taking various steps, the effect of which has been to exert economic pressure on Japan; that our Fleet is now based on Hawaii, and that the course which we have been following, as indicated above, gives a clear indication of our intentions and activities for the future.

The French Ambassador replied that:

In his opinion the phrase "within the framework of our established policies." when associated with the apparent reluctance of the American Government to consider the use of military force in the Far East at this particular time, to mean that the United States would not use military or naval force in support of any position which might be taken to resist the Japanese attempted aggression on Indochina. The Ambassador [feared] that the French Government would, under the indicated pressure of the Japanese Government, be forced to accede . . .

The fears of the French Ambassador were realized. In 1941, however, Japan went beyond the use of bases to demands for a presence in Indochina tantamount to occupation. President Roosevelt himself expressed the heightening U.S. alarm to the Japanese Ambassador, in a conversation recorded by Acting Secretary of State Welles as follows:

The President then went on to say that this new move by Japan in Indochina created an exceedingly serious problem for the United States . . . the cost of any military occupation is tremendous and the occupation itself is not conducive to the production by civilians in occupied countries of food supplies and new materials of the character required by Japan. Had Japan undertaken to obtain the supplies she required from Indochina in a peaceful way, she not only would have obtained larger quantities of such supplies, but would have obtained them with complete security and without the draining expense of a military occupation. Furthermore, from the military standpoint, the President said, surely the Japanese Government could not have in reality the slightest belief that China, Great Britain, the Netherlands or the United States had any territorial designs on Indochina nor

were in the slightest degree providing any real threats of aggression against Japan. This Government, consequently, could only assume that the occupation of Indochina was being undertaken by Japan for the purpose of further offense and this created a situation which necessarily must give the United States the most serious disquiet . . .

. . . The President stated that if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indochina with its military and naval forces, or, had such steps actually been commenced, if the Japanese Government would withdraw such forces, the President could assure the Japanese Government that he would do everything within his power to obtain from the Governments of China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States itself a binding and solemn declaration, provided Japan would undertake the same commitment, to regard Indochina as a neutralized country in the same way in which Switzerland had up to now been regarded by the powers as a neutralized country. He stated that this would imply that none of the powers concerned would undertake any military act of aggression against Indochina and would remain in control of the territory and would not be confronted with attempts to dislodge them on the part of de Gaullist or Free French agents or forces.

The same date, Secretary of State Cordell Hull instructed Sumner Welles to see the Japanese Ambassador, and

Make clear the fact that the occupation of Indochina by Japan possibly means one further important step to seizing control of the South Sea area, including trade routes of supreme importance to the United States controlling such products as rubber, tin and other commodities. This was of vital concern to the United States. The Secretary said that if we did not bring out this point our people will not understand the significance of this movement into Indochina. The Secretary mentioned another point to be stressed: there is no theory on which Indochina could be flooded with armed forces, aircraft, et cetera, for the defense of Japan. The only alternative is that this venture into Indochina has a close relation to the South Sea area and its value for offense against that area.

In a press statement of 2 August 1941, Acting Secretary of State Welles deplored Japan's "expansionist aims" and impugned Vichy:

Under these circumstances, this Government is impelled to question whether the French Government at Vichy in fact proposes to maintain its declared policy to preserve for the French people the territories both at home and abroad which have long been under French sovereignty.

This Government, mindful of its traditional friendship for France, has deeply sympathized with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories and to preserve them intact. In its relations with the French Government at Vichy and with the local French authorities in French territories, the United States will be governed by the manifest effectiveness with which those authorities endeavor to protect these territories from domination and control by those powers which are seeking to extend their rule by force and conquest, or by the threat thereof.

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, as part of the U.S. attempt to obtain Japanese consent to a non-aggression pact, the U.S. again proposed neutralization of Indochina in return for Japanese withdrawal. The events of 7 December 1941 put the question of the future of Indochina in the wholly different context of U.S. strategy for fighting World War II.

A. ROOSEVELT'S TRUSTEESHIP CONCEPT

U.S. policy toward Indochina during World War II was ambivalent. On the one hand, the U.S. appeared to support Free French claims to all of France's overseas dominions. The U.S. early in the war repeatedly expressed or implied to the French an intention to restore to France its overseas empire after the war. These U.S. commitments included the August 2, 1941, official statement on the Franco-Japanese agreement; a December, 1941, Presidential letter to Pétain; a March 2, 1942, statement on New Caledonia; a note to the French Ambassador of April 13, 1942; Presidential statements and messages at the time of the North Africa invasion; the Clark-Darlan Agreement of November 22, 1942; and a letter of the same month from the President's Personal Representative to General Henri Giraud, which included the following reassurance:

. . . The restoration of France to full independence, in all the greatness and vastness which it possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United Nations. It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939.

On the other hand, in the Atlantic Charter and other pronouncements the U.S. proclaimed support for national self-determination and independence. Moreover, the President of the United States, especially distressed at the Vichy "sell-out" to Japan in Indochina, often cited French rule there as a flagrant example of onerous and exploitative colonialism, and talked of his determination to turn Indochina over to an international trusteeship after the war. In early 1944, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, called on Secretary of State Hull to inquire whether the President's "rather definite" statements "that Indochina should be taken away from the French and put under an international trusteeship"-made to "Turks, Egyptians and perhaps others" during his trip to Cairo and Teheran-represented "final conclusions in view of the fact that they would soon get back to the French (The French marked well the President's views-in fact as France withdrew from Vietnam in 1956, its Foreign Minister recalled Roosevelt's assuring the Sultan of Morocco that his sympathies lay with colonial peoples struggling for independence. Lord Halifax later recorded that:

The President was one of the people who used conversation as others of us use a first draft on paper . . . a method of trying out an idea. If it does not go well, you can modify it or drop it as you will. Nobody thinks anything of it if you do this with a paper draft; but if you do it with conversation, people say that you have changed your mind, that "you never knew where you have him," and so on.

But in response to a memorandum from Secretary of State Hull putting the question of Indochina to F.D.R., and reminding the President of the numerous U.S. commitments to restoration of the French empire, Roosevelt replied (on January 24, 1944), that:

I saw Halifax last week and told him quite frankly that it was perfectly true that I had, for over a year, expressed the opinion that Indo-China should not go back to France but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country-thirty million inhabitants for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning.

As a matter of interest, I am wholeheartedly supported in this view by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and by Marshal Stalin. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign Office in this matter. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. They have never liked the idea of trusteeship because it is, in some instances, aimed at future independence. This is true in the case of Indo-China.

Each case must, of course, stand on its own feet, but the case of IndoChina is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that.

1. Military Strategy Pre-eminent

Throughout the year 1944, the President held to his views, and consistent with them, proscribed U.S. aid to resistance groups-including French groups-in Indochina. But the war in the Asian theaters moved rapidly, and the center of gravity of the American effort began to shift northward toward Japan. The question of U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia then came to the fore. At the Second Quebec Conference (September, 1944), the U.S. refused British offers of naval assistance against Japan because Admiral King believed "the best occupation for any available British forces would be to re-take Singapore, and to assist the Dutch in recovering the East Indies," and because he suspected that the offer was perhaps not unconnected with a desire for United States help in clearing the Japanese out of the Malay States and Netherlands East Indies." Admiral King's suspicions were not well-founded, at least insofar as Churchill's strategic thought was concerned. The Prime Minister was evidently as unwilling to invite an active American role in the liberation of Southeast Asia as the U.S. was to undertake same; as early as February, 1944, Churchill wrote that:

A decision to act as a subsidiary force under the Americans in the Pacific raises difficult political questions about the future of our Malayan possessions. If the Japanese should withdraw from them or make peace as the result of the main American thrust, the United States Government would after the victory feel greatly strengthened in its view that all possessions in the East Indian Archipelago should be placed under some international body upon which the United States would exercise a decisive concern.

The future of Commonwealth territories in Southeast Asia stimulated intense British interest in American intentions for French colonies there. In November and December of 1944, the British expressed to the United States, both in London and in Washington, their concern "that the United States apparently has not yet determined upon its policy toward Indochina." The head of the Far Eastern Department in the British Foreign Office told the U.S. Ambassador that:

It would be difficult to deny French participation in the liberation of Indochina in light of the increasing strength of the French Government in world affairs, and that, unless a policy to be followed toward Indochina is mutually agreed between our two governments, circumstances may arise at any moment which will place our two governments in a very awkward situation.

President Roosevelt, however, refused to define his position further, notifying Secretary of State Stettinius on January 1, 1945:

I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for postwar.-- . . . I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese.--You can tell Halifax that I made this very clear to Mr. Churchill. From both the military and civil point of view, action at this time is premature.

However, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff were concurrently planning the removal of American armed forces from Southeast Asia. In response to approaches from French and Dutch officials requesting aid in expelling Japan from their former colonial territories, the U.S. informed them that:

All our available forces were committed to fighting the Japanese elsewhere in the Pacific, and Indochina and the East Indies were therefore not included within the sphere of interest of the American Chiefs of Staff.

American willingness to forego further operations in Southeast Asia led to a directive to Admiral Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander in that theater, to liberate Malaya without U.S. assistance. After the Yalta Conference (February, 1945), U.S. commanders in the Pacific were informed that the U.S. planned to turn over to the British responsibility for operations in the Netherlands East Indies and New Guinea. The President, however, agreed to permit such U.S. military operations in Indochina as avoided "alignments with the French," and detraction from the U.S. military campaign against Japan. The latter stricture precluded, in the U.S. view, the U.S. cooperation with the French at Mountbatten's headquarters, or the furnishing of ships to carry Free French forces to Indochina to undertake its liberation. This U.S. position came under particularly severe French criticism after 11 March 1945, when the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Vietnam, and prompted the Emperor Bao Dai to declare Vietnam unified and independent of France under Japanese protection. On 16 March 1945, a protest from General de Gaulle led to the following exchange between the Secretary of State and the President:

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington
March 16, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Indo-China.

Communications have been received from the Provisional Government of the French Republic asking for:

- (1) Assistance for the resistance groups now fighting the Japanese in Indo-China.
- (2) Conclusion of a civil affairs agreement covering possible future operations in Indo-China.

These memoranda have been referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to obtain their views concerning the military aspects of the problems, and I shall communicate with you further on the subject upon receipt of the Joint Chiefs' reply.

Attached herewith is the text of a recent telegram from Ambassador Caffery describing his conversation with General de Gaulle on the subject of Indo-China. From this telegram and de Gaulle's speech of March 14, it appears that this Government may be made to appear responsible for the weakness of the resistance to Japan in Indo-China. The British may likewise be expected to encourage this view. It seems to me that without prejudicing in any way our position regarding the future of Indo-China we can combat this trend by making public [material illegible] a suggested statement, subject to your approval, by the State Department.

/s/ E. R. Stettinius, Jr.

Enclosures:

1. Proposed Statement.
2. Copy of telegram from Ambassador Caffery [not included here]

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1

Chapter I, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50"

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 12-29

[Enclosure 1]

PROPOSED STATEMENT

The action of the Japanese Government in tearing away the veil with which it for so long attempted to cloak its domination of Indo-China is a direct consequence of the ever-mounting pressure which our arms are applying to the Japanese Empire. It is a link in the chain of events which began so disastrously in the summer of 1941 with the Franco-Japanese agreement for the "common defense" of Indo-China. It is clear that this latest step in the Japanese program will in the long run prove to be of no avail.

The Provisional Government of the French Republic has requested armed assistance for those who are resisting the Japanese forces in Indo-China. In accordance with its constant desire to aid all those who are willing to take up arms against our common enemies, this Government will do all it can to be of assistance in the present situation, consistent with plans to which it is already committed and with the operations now taking place in the Pacific. It goes without saying that all this country's available resources are being devoted to the defeat of our enemies and they will continue to be employed in the manner best calculated to hasten their downfall.

[Response]

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington
March 17, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Secretary of State

By direction of the President, there is returned herewith Secretary of State Memorandum of 16 March, subject Indo-China, which includes a proposed statement on the Japanese action in Indo-China.

The President is of the opinion that it is inadvisable at the present time to issue the proposed statement

/s/ William D. Leahy

The French were also actively pressuring the President and his key advisors through military channels. Admiral Leahy reported that, following Yalta:

The French representatives in Washington resumed their frequent calls to my office after our return from the Crimea. They labeled most of their requests "urgent." They wanted to

participate in the combined intelligence group then studying German industrial and scientific secrets; to exchange information between the American command in China and the French forces in Indo-China; and to get agreement in principle to utilizing the French naval and military forces in the war against Japan (the latter would assist in returning Indo-China to French control and give France a right to participate in lend-lease assistance after the defeat of Germany.)

Most of the time I could only tell them that I had no useful information as to when and where we might make use of French assistance in the Pacific.

However, we did attempt to give a helping hand to the French resistance groups in Indo-China. Vice Admiral Fenard called me on March 18 to say that planes from our 14th Air Force in China were loaded with relief supplies for the undergrounders but could not start without authority from Washington. I immediately contacted General Handy and told him of the President's agreement that American aid to the Indo-China resistance groups might be given provided it involved no interference with our operations against Japan.

2. Failure of the Trusteeship Proposal

In the meantime, the President's concept of postwar trusteeship status for dependent territories as an intermediate step toward autonomy had undergone study by several interdepartmental and international groups, but had fared poorly. In deference to British sensibilities, the United States had originally sought only a declaration from the colonial powers setting forth their intention to liberate their dependencies and to provide tutelage in self-government for subject peoples. Such a declaration would have been consistent with the Atlantic Charter of 1941 in which the U.S. and the U.K. jointly agreed that, among the "common principles . . . on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world," it was their policy that:

. . . they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them. . . .

In November, 1942, Secretary Hull submitted to the President a proposed draft US-UK declaration entitled "The Atlantic Charter and National Independence," which the President approved. Before this draft could be broached to the British, however, they submitted a counter-proposal, a statement emphasizing the responsibility of "parent" powers for developing native self-government, and avoiding endorsement of trusteeships. Subsequent Anglo-American discussions in March 1943 addressed both drafts, but foundered on Foreign Secretary Eden's opposition. Secretary Hull reported in his memoirs that Eden could not believe that the word "independence" would be interpreted to the satisfaction of all governments:

. . . the Foreign Secretary said that, to be perfectly frank, he had to say that he did not like our draft very much. He said it was the word "independence" that troubled him, he had to

think of the British Empire system, which was built on the basis of Dominion and colonial status.

He pointed out that under the British Empire system there were varying degrees of self-government, running from the Dominions through the colonial establishments which had in some cases, like Malta, completely self-government, to backward areas that were never likely to have their own government. He added that Australia and New Zealand also had colonial possessions that they would be unwilling to remove from their supervisory jurisdiction.

U.S. inability to work out a common policy with the U.K. also precluded meaningful discussion, let alone agreement, on the colonial issue at the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations in 1944. Through March, 1945, the issue was further occluded by debates within the U.S. Government over the postwar status of Pacific islands captured from the Japanese: in general, the War and Navy Departments advocated their retention under U.S. control as military bases, while State and other departments advocated an international trusteeship.

3. Decision on Indochina Left to France

Secretary of State Stettinius, with the approval of President Roosevelt, issued a statement on April 3, 1945, declaring that, as a result of international discussions at Yalta on the concept of trusteeship, the United States felt that the postwar trusteeship structure:

. . . . should be designed to permit the placing under it of the territories mandated after the last war, and such territories taken from the enemy in thi war as might be agreed upon at a later date, and also such other territories as might be voluntarily placed under trusteeship.

Indochina thus seemed relegated to French volition.

Nonetheless, as of President Roosevelt's death on. April 12, 1945, U.S. policy toward the colonial possessions Of its allies, and toward Indochina in particular, was in disarray:

--The British remained apprehensive that there might be a continued U.S. search for a trusteeship formula which might impinge on the Commonwealth.

-- The French were restive over continued U.S. refusal to provide strategic transport for their forces, resentful over the paucity of U.S. support for French forces in Indochina, and deeply suspicious that the United States—possibly in concert with the Chinese—intended to block their regaining control of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

B. TRUMAN AND THE OCCUPATION OF INDOCHINA, 1945

Within a month of President Truman's entry into office, the French raised the subject of Indochina at the United Nations Conference at San Francisco, Secretary of State Stettinius reported the following conversation to Washington:

...Indo-China came up in a recent Conversation I had with Bidault and Bonnet. The latter remarked that the French Government interprets [Under Secretary of State] Welles, statement of 1942 concerning the restoration of French sovereignty over the French Empire as including Indo-China, the press continues to imply that a special status will be reserved for this colonial area. It was made quite clear to Bidault that the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China. Certain elements of American public opinion, however, condemned French governmental policies and practices in Indo-China. Bidault seemed relieved and has no doubt cabled Paris that he received renewed assurances of our recognition of French sovereignty over that area.

In early June 1945, the Department of State instructed the United States Ambassador to China on the deliberations in progress within the U.S. Government and its discussions with allies on U.S. policy toward Indochina. He was informed that at San Francisco:

...the American delegation has insisted upon the necessity of providing for a progressive measure of self-government for all dependent peoples looking toward their eventual independence or incorporation in some form of federation according to circumstances and the ability of the peoples to assume these responsibilities. Such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government. The latter seems unlikely. Nevertheless, it is the President's intention at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intention in regard to the establishment of civil liberties and increasing measures of self-government in Indochina before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect.

The United Nations Charter (June 26, 1945) contained a "Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories":

Article 73

Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present Charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and, to this end:

a. to ensure, with due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses;

b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement; . . .

Again, however, military considerations governed U.S. policy in Indochina. President Truman replied to General de Gaulle's repeated offers for aid in Indochina with statements to the effect that it was his policy to leave such matters to his military commanders. At the Potsdam Conference (July, 1945), the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that Indochina south of latitude 16' North was to be included in the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten. Based on this decision, instructions were issued that Japanese forces located north of that line would surrender to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and those to the south to Admiral Lord Mountbatten; pursuant to these instructions, Chinese forces entered Tonkin in September, 1945, while a small British task force landed at Saigon. Political difficulties materialized almost immediately, for while the Chinese were prepared to accept the Vietnamese government they found in power in Hanoi, the British refused to do likewise in Saigon, and deferred to the French there from the outset.

There is no evidence that serious concern developed in Washington at the swiftly unfolding events in Indochina. In mid-August, Vietnamese resistance forces of the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh, had seized power in Hanoi and shortly thereafter demanded and received the abdication of the Japanese puppet, Emperor Bao Dai. On V-J Day, September 2nd, Ho Chi Minh had proclaimed in Hanoi the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The DRV ruled as the only civil government in all of Vietnam for a period of about 20 days. On 23 September 1945, with the knowledge of the British Commander in Saigon, French forces overthrew the local DRV government, and declared French authority restored in Cochinchina. Guerrilla war began around Saigon. Although American OSS representatives were present in both Hanoi and Saigon and ostensibly supported the Viet Minh, the United States took no official position regarding either the DRV, or the French and British actions in South Vietnam. In October, 1945, the United States stated its policy in the following terms:

US has no thought of opposing the reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by US GOVT has questioned even by implication French sovereignty over Indochina. However, it is not the policy of this GOVT to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force and the willingness of the US to see French control reestablished assumes that French claim to have the support of the population of Indochina is borne out by future events.

French statements to the U.S. looked for an early end to the hostilities, and spoke reassuringly of reforms and liberality. In November, Jean Chauvel, Secretary-General to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, told the U.S. Ambassador that:

When the trouble with the Annamites broke out de Gaulle had been urged by the French Mission in India to make some sort of policy statement announcing France's intention to

adopt a far-reaching progressive policy designed to give the native population much greater authority, responsibility and representation in govt. De Gaulle considered the idea but rejected it because in the state of disorder prevailing in Indochina he believed that no such policy could be implemented pending restoration of French authority and would therefore just be considered by everyone as "merely more fine words." Furthermore de Gaulle and the Foreign Minister believe that the present situation is still so confused and they have so little information really reliable on the overall Indochina picture that such plans and thoughts as they held heretofore may have to be very thoroughly revised in the light of recent developments.

Despite the fact that the French do not feel that they can as yet make any general statements outlining specific future plans for Indochina, Chauvel says that they hope "very soon" to put into operation in certain areas programs including local elections which will be designed to grant much greater authority and greater voice in affairs to the natives. This he said would be a much better indication of the sincerity of French intentions than any policy statement. . . . The French hope soon to negotiate an agreement with [the King of Cambodia] which will result in the granting of much greater responsibility and authority to the Cambodians. He mentioned specifically that there would be many more natives integrated into the local administrative services and it was also hoped that local elections could soon be held. The French he said intend to follow the same procedure in Laos when the situation permits and eventually also in Annam and Tonkin. When order is restored throughout Indochina and agreements have been reached with the individual states Chauvel said the French intend to embody the results of these separate agreements into a general program for all of Indochina.

From the autumn of 1945 through the autumn of 1946, the United States received a series of communications from Ho Chi Minh depicting calamitous conditions in Vietnam, invoking the principles proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter and in the Charter of the United Nations, and pleading for U.S. recognition of the independence of the DRV, or-- as a last resort--trusteeship for Vietnam under the United Nations. But while the U.S. took no action on Ho's requests, it was also unwilling to aid the French. On January 15, 1946, the Secretary of War was advised by the Department of State that it was contrary to U.S. policy to "employ American flag vessels or aircraft to transport troops of any nationality to or from the Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina, nor to permit use of such craft to carry arms, ammunition or military equipment to these areas." However, the British arranged for the transport of additional French troops to Indochina, bilaterally agreed with the French for the latter to assume British occupation responsibilities, and signed a pact on 9 October, 1945, giving "full recognition to French rights" in Indochina. French troops began arriving in Saigon that month, and subsequently the British turned over to them some 800 U.S. Lend-Lease jeeps and trucks. President Truman approved the latter transaction on the grounds that removing the equipment would be impracticable.

The fighting between the French and the Vietnamese which began in South Vietnam with the 23 September, 1945, French *coup d'état*, spread from Saigon throughout Cochinchina, and to southern Annam. By the end of January, 1946, it was wholly a French affair, for by that time the British withdrawal was complete; on 4 March, 1946,

Admiral Lord Mountbatten deactivated Indochina as territory under the Allied Southeast Asia Command, thereby transferring all control to French authorities. From French headquarters, via Radio Saigon, came announcements that a military "mopping-up" campaign was in progress, but pacification was virtually complete; but these reports of success were typically interspersed with such items as the following:

20 March 1946:

Rebel bands are still (wreaking destruction) in the areas south of Saigon. These bands are quite large, some numbering as many as 1,000 men. Concentrations of these bands are to be found . . . in the villages. Some have turned north in an attempt to disrupt (communications) in the Camau Peninsula, northeast of Batri and in the general area south of (Nha Trang). In the area south of Cholon and in the north of the Plaine des Jenes region, several bands have taken refuge. . . .

21 March 1946:

The following communique was issued by the High Commissioner for Indochina this morning: "Rebel activities have increased in the Bien Hoa area, on both banks of the river Dong Nai. A French convoy has been attacked on the road between Bien Hoa and Tan Uyen where a land mine had been laid by the rebels.

"In the (Baclo) area, northwest of Saigon, a number of pirates have been captured in the course of a clean-up raid. Among the captured men are five Japanese deserters. The dead bodies of three Japanese, including an officer, have been found at the point where the operation was carried out.

"A French detachment was ambushed at (San Jay), south Annam. The detachment, nevertheless, succeeded in carrying out its mission. Several aggressions by rebel parties are reported along the coastal road."

Violence abated in South Vietnam somewhat as Franco-DRV negotiations proceeded in spring, 1946, but in the meantime, French forces moved into further confrontation with Vietnamese "rebels" in Tonkin. In February, 1946, a French task force prepared to force landings at Haiphong, but was forestalled by diplomatic maneuver. A Franco-Chinese agreement of 28 February 1946 provided that the Chinese would turn over their responsibilities in northern Indochina to the French on 31 March 1946.

On March 6, 1946, a French-DRV accord was reached in the following terms:

1. The French Government recognizes the Vietnamese Republic as a Free State having its own Government, its own Parliament, its own Army and its own Finances, forming part of the Indochinese Federation and of the French Union. In that which concerns the reuniting of the three "Annamite Regions" [Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin] the French Government pledges itself to ratify the decisions taken by the populations consulted by referendum.

2. The Vietnamese Government declares itself ready to welcome amicably the French Army when, conforming to international agreements, it relieves the Chinese Troops. A Supplementary Accord, attached to the present Preliminary Agreement, will establish the means by which the relief operations will be carried out.

3. The stipulations formulated above will immediately enter into force. Immediately after the exchange of signatures, each of the High Contracting Parties will take all measures necessary to stop hostilities in the field, to maintain the troops in their respective positions, and to create the favorable atmosphere necessary to the immediate opening of friendly and sincere negotiations. These negotiations will deal particularly with:

- a. diplomatic relations of Viet-nam with Foreign States
- b. the future law of Indochina
- c. French interests, economic and cultural, in Viet-nam.

Hanoi, Saigon or Paris may be chosen as the seat of the conference.

DONE AT HANOI, the 6th of March 1946

Signed: Sainteny

Signed: Ho Chi Minh and Vu Hong Khanh

French forces quickly exercise their prerogative, occupying Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and negotiations opened in Da Lat in April.

Hence, as of April 10, 1946, allied occupation in Indochina was officially over, and French forces were positioned in all of Vietnam's major cities; the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam then shifted from the context of wartime strategy to the arena of the U.S. relationship with France.

II. U.S. NEUTRALITY IN THE FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR, 1946-1949

A. FAILURES OF NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

The return of the French to Tonkin in March, 1946, created an explosive situation. North Vietnam, a traditionally rice-deficit area, had experienced an extraordinarily bad harvest in 1945. Severe famine was scarcely helped by the concentration of armies in the Red River Delta-Vietnamese irregular forces, the most numerous belonging to the Viet Minh; some 150,000 Chinese; and then the French Expeditionary Corps. The people were not only hungry, but politically restive; the popular appetite for national independence had been thoroughly whetted by the Viet Minh and the formation of the DRV. While feeling against all foreign occupiers ran high, the French remained the primary target of enmity. But the March 6 Accord deferred a reckoning, serving to mollify extremists in Tonkin, and to dampen guerrilla operations in South Vietnam. The accord in any event underwrote peaceful cooperation between France and the DRV in North Vietnam for eight months.

Yet the March 6 Accord constituted an admission of defeat for Ho Chi Minh, because his policy had been directed toward internationalizing the Indochina problem. Ho made repeated overtures to the United States, to the United Nations, and to China, the USSR, and the U.K. His letters presented eloquent appeals for U.S. or U.N. intervention in Vietnam on the grounds of the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and on humanitarian grounds. The last such to be forwarded to the U.S. prior to the Accord of 6 March 1946, is summarized in the following telegram from an American diplomat in Hanoi, received in Washington 27 February 1946:

Ho Chi Minh handed me 2 letters addressed to President of USA, China, Russia, and Britain identical copies of which were stated to have been forwarded to other governments named. In 2 letters to Ho Chi Minh request [sic] USA as one of United Nations to support idea of Annamese independence according to Philippines [sic] example, to examine the case of the Annamese, and to take steps necessary to maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina. He asserts that Annamese will fight until United Nations interfere in support of Annamese independence. The petition addressed to major United Nations contains:

A. Review of French relations with Japanese where French Indochina allegedly aided Japs:

B. Statement of establishment on 2 September 1945 of PENW [sic] Democratic Republic of Viet Minh:

C. Summary of French conquest of Cochin China begun 23 Sept 1945 and still incomplete:

D. Outline of accomplishments of Annamese Government in Tonkin including popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities:

E. Request to 4 powers: (1) To intervene and stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate fair settlement and (2) to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations organization. The petition ends with statement that Annamese ask for full independence in fact and that in interim while awaiting UNO decision the Annamese will continue to fight the reestablishment of French imperialism. Letters and petition will be transmitted to Department soonest.

There is no record that the U.S. encouraged Ho Chi Minh thus to submit his cause to the U.S., beyond the O.S.S. support he received during and immediately after World War II; nor does the record reflect that the U.S. responded affirmatively to Ho's petitions. Rather, the U.S. Government appears to have adhered uniformly to a policy of looking to the French rather than to Vietnamese Nationalists for constructive steps toward Vietnamese independence. On 5 December, 1946, after the November incidents, but before the fighting broke out in earnest, State instructed the U.S. diplomatic representative in Hanoi as follows:

Assume you will see Ho in Hanoi and offer following summary our present thinking as guide.

Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam. Report fully, repeating or requesting DEPT repeat Paris.

Recent occurrences Tonkin cause deep concern. Consider March 6 accord and modus vivendi as result peaceful negotiation provide basis settlement outstanding questions between France and Vietnam and impose responsibility both sides not prejudice future, particularly forthcoming Fontainebleau Conference, by resort force. Unsettled situation such as pertains certain to offer provocations both sides, but for this reason conciliatory patient attitude especially necessary. Intransigence either side and disposition exploit incidents can only retard economic rehabilitation Indochina and cause indefinite postponement conditions cooperation France and Vietnam which both agree essential.

If Ho takes stand non-implementation promise by French of Cochinchina referendum relieves Vietnam responsibility compliance with agreements, you might if you consider advisable raise question whether he believes referendum after such long disorder could produce worthwhile result and whether he considers compromise on status Cochinchina could possibly be reached through negotiation.

May say American people have welcomed attainments Indochinese in efforts realize praiseworthy aspirations greater autonomy in framework democratic institutions and it would be regrettable should this interest and sympathy be imperilled by any tendency Vietnam administration force issues by intransigence and violence.

May inform Ho [U.S. Ambassador Paris] discussing situation French similar frankness. For your INFO, [Foreign Office] in DEC 3 conversation stated (1) no question reconquest Indochina as such would be counter French public opinion and probably beyond French military resources, (2) French will continue base policy March 6 accord and modus vivendi and make every effort apply them through negotiation, Vietnam (3) French would resort forceful measures only on restricted scale in case flagrant violation agreements Vietnam, (4) d'Argenlieu's usefulness impaired by outspoken dislike Vietnam officials and replacement perhaps desirable, (5) French Communists embarrassed in pose as guardian French international interests by barrage telegraphic appeals from Vietnam. [Ambassador] will express gratification this statement French policy with observation implementation such policy should go far obviate any danger that (1) Vietnamese irreconcilables and extremists might be in position make capital of situation (2) Vietnamese might be turned irrevocably against West and toward ideologies and affiliations hostile democracies which could result perpetual foment Indochina with consequences all Southeast Asia.

Avoid impression US Govt making formal intervention this juncture. Publicity any kind would be unfortunate.

Paris be guided foregoing.

Acheson, Acting.

For a while, the French seemed genuinely interested in pursuing a policy based on the March 6 Accord and the *modus vivendi*, and in avoiding a test of arms with the DRV. If there were contrary utterances from some, such as Admiral d'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner Of Indo-China,--who recorded his "amazement that France has such a fine expeditionary corps in Indochina and yet its leaders prefer to negotiate rather than to fight..."--there were many such as General Leclerc, who had led French forces into Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and promptly called on Ho Chi Minh, announcing every intention of honoring the March 6 Accord. "At the present time," he said, "there is no question of imposing ourselves by force on masses who desire evolution and innovation." The French Socialist Party--the dominant political party in France--consistently advocated conciliation during 1946. In December, 1946, even after the armed incidents in November between French and DRV armed forces in North Vietnam, Leon Blum--who had become Premier of France, at the head of an all-Socialist Cabinet--wrote that France had no alternative save to grant the Vietnamese independence:

There is one way and only one of preserving in Indochina the prestige of our civilization, our political and spiritual influence, and also those of our material interests which are legitimate: it is sincere agreement [with Viet Nam] on the basis of independence. . . . -

The Communists, the other major Leftist party in France, were also vocally conciliatory; but, expectant of controlling the government, if not alone at least as part of a coalition, they tended to be more careful than the Socialists of their ability to sway nationalist sentiment. In July of 1946, *L'Humanité*, the Communist newspaper, had emphasized that the Party did not wish France to be reduced to "its own small metropolitan territory," but warned that such would be the consequence if the colonial peoples turned against France:

Are we, after having lost Syria and Lebanon yesterday, to lose Indochina tomorrow, North Africa the day after?

In the National Assembly in September, 1946, a Communist deputy had declared that:

The Communists are as much as the next person for the greatness of the country. But . . . they have never ceased to affirm that the French Union . . . can only be founded on the confident, fraternal, and above all, democratic collaboration of all the peoples and races who compose it. . . .

However, Ho Chi Minh was unable to capitalize upon this connection with the French Left (Ho had been one of the founding members of the French Communist Party in the early 1920's) to turn the expressed convictions of either the Socialists or the Communists

to the advantage of the DRV. The Communists were not prepared to press the case for the Vietnamese at the cost of votes in France. The Socialists in power paid only lip service to conciliation, and allowed the more militant colonialists, especially those in Vietnam, to set France's policy in Indochina; thus, Admiral d'Argenlieu, not General Leclerc, spoke for the French Government.

In mid-December, 1946, as soon as Blum took office, Ho sent him a telegram with proposals for easing tension in Vietnam, but the message did not reach Paris until December 26. By that time the flashpoint had been passed. In Hanoi, on 19 December 1946, Vietnamese troops, after several days of mounting animosity punctuated with violence, cut off the city's water and electricity, and attacked French posts using small arms, mortar and artillery. The issue of who was the aggressor has never been resolved. The fighting flared across North Vietnam, and two days later, the guerrilla war in South Vietnam quickened pace. The French responded to the initial attacks with an occasional savagery which rendered increasingly remote restoration of *status quo ante*.

On 23 December 1946, Premier Leon Blum addressed the National Assembly on the Indochina crisis. His speech was characteristically principled, and characteristically ambiguous: he talked peace, but endorsed militant French officials in Vietnam. Although he declared that "the old colonial system founded on conquest and maintained by constraint, which tended toward exploitation of conquered lands and peoples is finished today," he also stated that:

We have been obliged to deal with violence. The men who are fighting out there, the French soldiers and the friendly populations, may count unreservedly on the vigilance and resolution of the government.

It was our common task to try everything to spare the blood of our children-and also the blood that is not ours, but which is blood all the same, that of a people whose right to political liberty we recognized ten months ago, and who should keep their place in the union of peoples federated around France. . . .

Before all, order must be reestablished, peaceful order which is necessarily the basis for the execution of contracts.

Premier Blum was succeeded within a week of his speech by the first government of the Fourth Republic under Paul Ramadier. France sent three emissaries to Vietnam at this juncture: Admiral d'Argenlieu, General Leclerc, and the Socialist Minister of Overseas France, Marius Moutet. Admiral d'Argenlieu became the High Commissioner of Indochina, and accused the Vietnamese of breaking faith with France. He stated emphatically that France intended to preserve in Indochina:

. . . the maintenance and development of its present influence and of its economic interests, the protection of ethnic minorities with which it is entrusted, the care of assuring the security of strategic bases within the framework of defense of the Federation and the French Union. . . .

France does not intend in the present state of evolution of the Indochinese people to give them unconditional and total independence, which would only be a fiction gravely prejudicial to the interests of the two parties.

The other two representatives of France were dispatched on fact-finding missions. Their reports contained diametrically opposing policy recommendations. General Leclerc wrote:

In 1947 France will no longer put down by force a grouping of 24,000,000 inhabitants which is assuming unity and in which there exists a xenophobic and perhaps a national ideal. . . .

The capital problem from now on is political. It is a question of coming to terms with an awakening xenophobic nationalism, channeling it in order to safeguard, at least in part, the rights of France.

The General had been sent to examine the military situation, and returned recommending a political solution. The Socialist Marius Moutet had been sent to inquire into the political prospects, and returned with the conclusion that only a military solution was promising. Like Admiral d'Argenlieu, Moutet believed that there could be no negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. He wrote of the "cruel disillusionment of agreements that could not be put into effect..." and he declared that:

We can no longer speak of a free agreement between France and Vietnam. . . .

Before any negotiations today, it is necessary to have a military decision. I am sorry, but one cannot commit such madness as the Vietnamese have done with impunity.

It was the politician's ideas, rather than the general's, which prevailed in Paris. Premier Ramadier-himself a Socialist-spoke of peace in Vietnam, and announced that his government favored independence and unity for Vietnam:

Independence within the French Union [and] union of the three Annamese countries, if the Annamese people desire it.

At the same time, however, his government permitted Admiral d'Argenlieli to launch a military campaign of major proportions and punitive intent.

Very early in the war, the French raised the spectre of Communist conspiracy in Vietnam. Admiral d'Argenlieu in Saigon called for an internationally concerted policy to array the Western powers against the expansion of communism in Asia, beginning with Vietnam. In the National Assembly debated in March, 1947, a Rightist deputy introduced the charge that the violence in Vietnam had been directed from Moscow:

Nationalism in Indochina is a means, the end is Soviet imperialism.

Neither the government nor the people of France heeded General Leclerc's statement of January, 1947:

Anti-communism will be a useless tool as long as the problem of nationalism remains unsolved.

Ho Chi Minh, for his part, issued repeated appeals to France for peace, even offering to withdraw personally:

When France recognizes the independence and unity of Vietnam, we will retire to our village, for we are not ambitious for power or honor.

In February, 1947, the French offered terms to Ho tantamount to unconditional surrender. Ho flatly rejected these, asking the French representative, "If you were in my place, would you accept them? . . . In the French Union there is no place for cowards. If I accepted their conditions I should be one." On 1 March 1947, Ho appealed again to the French government and the French people:

Once again, we declare solemnly that the Vietnamese people desire only unity and independence in the French Union, and we pledge ourselves to respect French economic and cultural interests. . . . If France would but say the word to cease hostility immediately, so many lives and so much property would be saved and friendship and confidence would be regained.

But the French displayed little interest in negotiations. Premier Ramadier stated in March, 1947, that:

We must protect the life and possessions of Frenchmen, of foreigners, of our Indochinese friends who have confidence in French liberty. It is necessary that we disengage our garrisons, re-establish essential communications, assure the safety of populations which have taken refuge with us. That we have done.

Ramadier and his ministers spoke repeatedly in the spring of 1947 of an imminent end to the "military phase" of the crisis, and of the beginning of a "constructive phase," in which presumably economic and political assistance would supplant the military instrument; but in what was to become a pattern of expectation and frustration, the Fourth Republic discovered that its military forces were incapable of controlling even the principal lines of communication in Vietnam, and that the military solution severely taxed the full resources of the French Union. In March, 1947 an additional division of troops for the French Expeditionary Corps, dispatched to Vietnam per General Leclerc's recommendation, had to be diverted en route to quell an insurgency in Madagascar.

By the summer of 1947, the French Government was aware that the situation in Indochina was at an impasse. Having failed in its attempt to force a military decision, it turned to a political solution, as suggested by General Leclerc. But again the ideas of Admiral d'Argenlieu weighed heavily. In January, 1947, d'Argenlieu wrote that:

If we examine the problem basically, we are led to inquire whether the political form unquestionably capable of benefiting from the political prestige of legitimacy is not the traditional monarchic institution, the very one that existed before the Japanese surrender. . . . The return of the Emperor [Bao Dai] would probably reassure all those who, having opposed the Viet Minh, fear they will be accused of treason.

It was with Bao Dai, not Ho Chi Minh, that the French elected to negotiate for a political settlement with Vietnamese Nationalists.

French emissaries approached Bao Dai with terms not unlike those Ho Chi Minh had negotiated on 6 March 1946: unity and independence within the French Union, provided Bao Dai formed a government which would furnish a clear alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV. With French encouragement, a group of Vietnamese Nationalists formed a political party advocating the installation of Bao Dai at the head of a non-Viet Minh Vietnamese regime. Bao Dai was at first evasive and skeptical, but was eventually convinced that the French situation in Indochina was sufficiently desperate that they would have to honor commitments they made to him. Bao Dai also seems to have believed that he could attract American support and material aid—a view which may have stemmed in part from a 1947 *Life* magazine article by William C. Bullitt, the influential former U.S. Ambassador to France, endorsing Bao Dai as a solution to France's dilemma.

France then proceeded to contract with Bao Dai a series of agreements, each of which ostensibly brought Bao Dai closer to genuine autonomy for Vietnam. It was not, however, until February, 1950, that the French National Assembly acceded to political independence and unification for Vietnam. Chronicled below are the principal steps by which France failed on the one hand to reach an accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and on the other hand erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead.

B. U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE CONFLICT, 1947-1949

The U.S. manifested increasing concern over the conflict in Indochina, but through 1949 American policy continued to regard the war as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. It is clear on the record that American policymakers of the day perceived the vacuity of French policies in 1946 and 1947. The U.S., in its representations to France, consistently deplored the prospect of protracted war in Vietnam, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the United States always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh, deterred by Ho's history of communist affiliation.

Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Moreover, in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe, and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. Compared with European recovery, and escape from communist domination, the U.S. considered the fate of Vietnamese

nationalism relatively insignificant. Further, the dispute in 1946 and 1945 over the Dutch possession in Indonesia had furnished a precedent: there the U.S. had moved cautiously, and only after long delays, to internationalize the conflict. Extensive American and British investments in Indonesia, moreover, afforded common ground for intervention. No similar rationale or commonality existed for intervention in Indochina, since Indochina was almost exclusively a French economic preserve, and a political morass which the U.K. was manifestly interested in avoiding.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1

Chapter I, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50"

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 3, pp. 29-42

The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. It was, moreover, a policy formulated with an undertone of indifference: at the time, Indochina appeared to be one region in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

When open warfare broke out between the DRV and France in December, 1946, John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, in a memorandum to Under Secretary Acheson of 23 December 1946, recommended that the latter call in the French Ambassador to highlight inherent dangers. The memorandum included this acute analysis:

Although the French in Indochina have made far-reaching paper-concessions to the Vietnamese desire for autonomy, French actions on the scene have been directed toward whittling down the powers and the territorial extent of the Vietnam "free state." This process the Vietnamese have continued to resist. At the same time, the French themselves admit that they lack the military strength to reconquer the country. In brief, with inadequate forces, with public opinion sharply at odds, with a government rendered largely ineffective through internal division, the French have tried to accomplish in Indochina what a strong and united Britain has found it unwise to attempt in Burma. Given the present elements in the situation, guerrilla warfare may continue indefinitely.

Secretary Acheson acted on Mr. Vincent's suggestion, and expressed to the Ambassador views summarized as follows:

We had anticipated such a situation developing in November and events have confirmed our fears. While we have no wish to offer to mediate under present conditions we do want the French GOVT to know that we are ready and willing to do anything which it might consider helpful in the circumstances. We have been gratified to learn of Moutet's mission and have confidence in his moderation and broad viewpoint. We believe however that the situation is highly inflammatory and if present unsettled conditions continue, there is a possibility that other powers might attempt to bring the matter up before the Security Council. If this happens, as in the case of Indonesia, the question will arise whether the matter is one of purely French internal concern or a situation likely to disturb the peace. Other powers might likewise attempt some form of the Chinese press. We would be point of view it seems important possible. Mr. Acheson added that attempt to reconquer the country that the British had found unwise of intervention as has been suggested in opposed to such steps, but from every that the question be settled as soon as he wondered whether the French would through military force which was a step to attempt in Burma.

On 8 January, 1947, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris that the U.S. would approve sale of arms and armaments to France "except in cases which appear to relate to Indochina." On the same date, 8 January 1947, the French conveyed to the Department of State a message that:

. . . the French Government appreciated the understanding attitude that Mr. Acheson had shown in discussing the problem of Indochina; that it had taken note of Mr. Acheson's offer of "good offices" and appreciated the spirit in which the offer was made; and that the French Government did not feel that it could avail itself of our offer but must continue to handle the situation single-handedly along the lines stated by Moutet. [The emissary] went on to say that the principal objective of the French military was to restore order and reopen communications. He said that after this was done the French Government would be prepared to discuss matters with the Vietnamese. He said that the French Government had every intention of living up to the agreement of last March 6 and the *modus vivendi* of September 15, once order was restored. [He was] asked . . . whether he thought the French military could restore order within any foreseeable future time. He seemed to think, without much evidence of conviction, that they could.

There then ensued an interesting exchange between the U.S. official and the French representative in which the Frenchman sketched a claim of American culpability for the war:

Speaking personally, I told him that I thought there was one flaw in the French approach to the problem worth mentioning. I had in mind an apparent assumption by the French that there was an equality of responsibility as between the French and the Vietnamese. I said that this did not seem to me to be the case; that the responsibility of France as a world power to achieve a solution of the problem was far greater than that of the Vietnamese; and that the situation was not one which could be localized as a purely French-Vietnamese one but might affect adversely conditions throughout Southeast Asia.

[The emissary] quickly substituted the word "authority" for "responsibility" and said that the French were now faced with the problem of reasserting their authority and that we must share the responsibility for their delay in doing so because we had not acceded to French requests in the autumn of 1945 for material assistance.

Early in February, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France's recovering economic, political and military strength:

In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring to undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready to assist in any appropriate way we can to find a solution for the Indochinese problem. At the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are two sides to this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack of French understanding of the other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and the continued existence of a dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in the area. Furthermore, there is no escape from the fact that the trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in the XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming things of the past. Action Britain in India and Burma and the Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples of this trend, and the French themselves took cognizance of it both in their new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On the other hand we do not lose sight of the fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin.

Frankly we have no solution of the problem to suggest. It is basically a matter for the two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep the door open to a settlement. We appreciate the fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for the French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that the French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution.

Thus, the U.S. chose to remain outside the conflict; the announced U.S. position was, in the words of Secretary of State George C. Marshall, to hope that "a pacific basis of adjustment of the difficulties could be found." Events conspired against this hope, however, and as the fighting continued, the prospect of a Moscow-controlled state in Vietnam continued to draw the U.S. nearer to involvement. On 13 May 1947, the Department of State furnished the following guidance to U.S. diplomats in Paris, Saigon, and Hanoi:

Key to our position is our awareness that in respect of developments affecting the position of Western democratic powers in southern Asia, we are essentially in the same boat as the French, also as the British and the Dutch. We cannot conceive of setbacks to the long-range interests of France which would not also be setbacks to our own. Conversely we should regard close association

France and members French Union as not only to advantage peoples concerned, but indirectly our own.

In our view, southern Asia in critical phase its history with seven new nations in process achieving or struggling independence or autonomy. These nations include quarter inhabitants world and their future course, owing sheer weight populations, resources they command, and strategic location, will be momentous factor world stability. Following relaxation European controls, internal racial, religious, and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord, or already apparent anti-Western Pan-Asiatic tendencies could become dominant political force, or Communists could capture control. We consider as best safeguard against these eventualities a continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible their welfare. In particular we recognize Vietnamese will for indefinite period require French material and technical assistance and enlightened political guidance which can be provided only by nation steeped like France in democratic tradition and confirmed in respect human liberties and worth individual.

We equally convinced, however, such association must be voluntary to be lasting and achieve results, and that protraction present situation Indochina can only destroy basic voluntary cooperation, leave legacy permanent bitterness, and irrevocably alienate Vietnamese from France and those values represented by France and other Western democracies.

While fully appreciating difficulties French position this conflict, we feel there is danger in any arrangement which might provide Vietnamese opportunity compare unfavorably their own position and that of other peoples southern Asia who have made tremendous strides toward autonomy since war.

While we are still ready and willing do anything we can which might be considered helpful, French will understand we not attempting come forward with any solution our own or intervene in situation. However, they will also understand we inescapably concerned with situation Far East generally, upon which developments Indochina likely have profound effect.

For your INFO, evidence that French Communists are being directed accelerate their agitation French colonies even extent lose much popular support France (URTEL 1719 Apr 25) may be indication Kremlin prepared sacrifice temporary gains with 40 million French to long range colonial strategy with 600 million dependent people, which lends great urgency foregoing views DEPT much concerned lest French efforts find QUOTE true representatives Vietnam UNQUOTE with whom negotiate result creation impotent puppet GOVT along lines Cochinchina regime, or that restoration Baodai [sic] may be attempted, implying democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism. You may refer these further views if nature your conversations French appears warrant.

The U.S. position may have influenced the French to revise the first Ha Long Bay Agreement (December, 1947) and when the second agreement was signed in June, 1948, the U.S. promptly instructed the U.S. Ambassador to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result" of France's "unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." Again, however, the Ambassador was instructed to avoid ostensible intervention while making it clear that the U.S. foresaw France's losing Indochina if it persisted to ignore American advice. These instructions were repeated at the end of August, 1948, with the assertion that the Department of State "believes nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group."

The first suggestions that the U.S. became tangibly involved in Vietnam appear in a reported conversation of the U.S. Ambassador with the French Foreign Office in September, 1948. The U.S. Ambassador again urged on France legislation or other definite action to move toward the unification of Vietnam, and the immediate negotiation of concrete steps toward autonomy as envisaged by the Ha Long Bay Agreement. He then told the French representative that:

US is fully appreciative difficulties which face French Government in Indochina at this time and reminds him that US had already indicated its willingness, if French Government so desired, to give public indication its approval of concrete steps by French Government to come to grips with basic. political problem of Indochina. I informed him that US also willing under similar circumstances to consider assisting French Government with respect to matter of financial aid for Indochina through ECA but could not give consideration to altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country.

As negotiations proceeded with Bao Dai preliminary to the Elysee Agreement, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris, on 17 January 1949, that:

While the Department is desirous of the French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has a reasonable chance of winning over the preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrievably commit the U.S. to support of a native government which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually a puppet government separated from the people and existing only by the presence of French military forces.

Following the Elysee Agreement, the U.S. was better disposed toward providing aid in Indochina. On 10 May 1949, the American Consul in Saigon was informed that the U.S. desired the "Ba6 Dai experiment" to succeed, since there appeared to be no other alternative:

At the proper time and under the proper circumstances, the Department will be prepared to do its part by extending recognition to the Bao Dai government and by expressing the possibility of complying with any request by such a government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. It must be understood, however, that an aid program of this nature would require Congressional approval. Since the U.S. could, however, scarcely afford backing a government which would have the color and be likely to suffer the fate of a puppet regime, it must be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make the Bao Dai solution attractive to the nationalists. This is a step of which the French themselves must see the urgency and necessity in view of the possibly short time remaining before Communist successes in China are felt in Indochina. Moreover, the Bao Dai government must through its own efforts demonstrate the capacity to organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to insure the maximum opportunity for obtaining requisite popular support.

But "anti-communism" initially proved to be no better guideline for the formulation of American policy in Indochina than it had been for the French. Indeed, early U.S. attempts to discern the nature and extent of communist influence in Vietnam devolved to the seeming paradox that if Ho Chi Minh were communist, he seemed to have no visible ties with Moscow. For example, a State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh provided to the U.S. Ambassador in China in July, 1948, was admittedly speculative:

1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper *Humanite* since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called "leading communist" by recent Russian publications as well as *Daily Worker* makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able to evaluate amount of pressure or guidance Moscow is exerting. We have the impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR is accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending to retard recovery and dissipate ECA. assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages which are favorable to growth of communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts.

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence

of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam.

Evaluation. If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly *so far*. Possible explanations. are:

No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.

The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightest elements that must be purged.

The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow

A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely.

III. ORIGINS OF THE U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

A. THE POLICY CONTEXT

Events in China of 1948 and 1949 brought the United States to a new awareness of the vigor of communism in Asia, and to a sense of urgency over its containment. U.S. policy instruments developed to meet unequivocal communist challenges in Europe were applied to the problem of the Far East. Concurrent with the development of NATO, a U.S. search began for collective security in Asia; economic and military assistance programs were inaugurated; and the Truman Doctrine acquired wholly new dimensions by extension into regions where the European empires were being dismantled. In March, 1947, President Truman had set forth the following policy guidelines:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

The President went on to underscore the U.S. determination to commit its resources to contain communism. While he clearly subordinated military aid to economic and political means, he did assert the U.S. intent to assist in maintaining security:

To insure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to

make possible freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.

In the year 1947, while U.S. military assistance began to flow into Greece to ward off subversive aggression, the U.S. inaugurated the European Recovery Plan (ERP). ERP was aimed at economic recovery in Western Europe, especially in countries such as France and Italy where post-war depression was fostering marked leftward political trends. In one of the high level appraisals of the situation that the U.S. had to counter in 1947, the Harriman Committee on Foreign Aid has concluded that:

The interest of the United States in Europe . . . cannot be measured simply in economic terms. It is also strategic and political. We all know that we are faced in the world today with two conflicting ideologies. .

Our position in the world has been based for at least a century on the existence in Europe of a number of strong states committed by tradition and inclination to the democratic concept. .

The fall of the Czechoslovakian Government in February 1948 brought about the Brussels Pact, a Western European collective defense and economic collaboration arrangement. The blockade of Berlin, which began on 1 April 1948, accelerated U.S. movement toward membership in the alliance. On June 11, 1948 the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution advising the Executive to undertake the:

Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in accordance with the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Charter [of the UN], association of the United States, by constitutional process, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security.

That same month, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act, and in July, 1948, opened negotiations for a North Atlantic Alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in April, 1949, and entered into force in August of that year.

In the same omnibus foreign assistance legislation which had authorized ECA in June, 1948, Congress had provided for a China Aid. Program. This measure met almost immediate failure, for Mao's armies spread unchecked over the China mainland, and by mid-1949 the position of the nationalists there was untenable. The "failure" of U.S. aid-which was termed such by Congressional critics-no less than the urgent situation in Europe and the exploding of the first Soviet nuclear device in September, 1949, figured in Congressional action on military assistance legislation.

On October 6, 1949, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) through which U.S. arms, military equipment and training assistance might be provided

world-wide for collective defense. In the first appropriations under MDAP, NATO countries received 76% of the total, and Greece and Turkey (not yet NATO members), 16%. But Korea and the Philippines received modest aid, and the legislators clearly intended the law to underwrite subsequent appropriations for collective security in Asia. The opening paragraph of the law not only supported NATO, but foreshadowed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty:

An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the Defense and General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Military Assistance to Foreign Nations, Approved October 6, 1949.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949."

FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be used except in the common interest. The Congress hereby finds that the efforts of the United States and other countries to promote peace and security in furtherance of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations require additional measures of support based upon the principle of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid. These measures include the furnishing of military assistance essential to enable the United States and other nations dedicated to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter to participate effectively in arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in support of those purposes and principles. In furnishing such military assistance, it remains the policy of the United States to continue to exert maximum efforts to obtain agreements to provide the United Nations with armed forces as contemplated in the Charter and agreements to achieve universal control of weapons of mass destruction and universal regulation and reduction of armaments, including armed forces, under adequate safeguards to protect complying nations against violation and evasion.

The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence.

The Congress recognizes that economic recovery is essential to international peace and security and must be given clear priority. The Congress also recognizes that the increased confidence of free peoples in their ability to resist direct or indirect aggression and to maintain internal security will advance such recovery and support political stability.

While Congress was deliberating on MDAP, the staff of the National Security Council, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, had been reexamining U.S. policy toward Asia. In June, 1949, the Secretary had noted that he was:

. . . increasingly concerned at the . . . advance of communism in large areas of the world and particularly the successes of communism in China.

A major objective of United States policy, as I understand it, is to contain communism in order to reduce its threat to our security. Our actions in Asia should be part of a carefully considered and comprehensive plan to further that objective.

The NSC study responding to the Secretary's request is remarkable for the rarity of its specific references to Indochina. The staff study focused, rather, on generalities concerning the conflict between the interests of European metropolises and the aspirations of subject Asian peoples for independence. The following extract is from the section of the study dealing with Southeast Asia:

The current conflict between colonialism and native independence is the most important political factor in southeast Asia. This conflict results not only from the decay of European imperial power in the area but also from a widening political consciousness and the rise of militant nationalism among the subject peoples. With the exception of Thailand and the Philippines, the southeast Asia countries do not possess leaders practiced in the exercise of responsible power. The question of whether a colonial country is fit to govern itself, however, is not always relevant in practical politics. The real issue would seem to be whether the colonial country is able and determined to make continued foreign rule an overall losing proposition for the metropolitan power. If it is, independence for the colonial country is the only practical solution, even though misgovernment eventuates. A solution of the consequent problem of instability, if it arises, must be sought on a non-imperialist plane. In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia. The United States should continue to use its influence looking toward resolving the colonial nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist-colonial conflict, lay the basis for political stability and resistance to communism, and avoid weakening the colonial powers who are our western allies. However, it must be remembered that the long colonial tradition in Asia has left the peoples of that area suspicious of Western influence. We must approach the problem from the Asiatic point of view in so far as possible and should refrain from taking the lead in movements which must of necessity be of Asian origin. It will therefore be to our

interest wherever possible to encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area.

It would be to the interest of the United States to make use of the skills, knowledge and long experience of our European friends and, to whatever extent may be possible, enlist their cooperation in measures designed to check the spread of USSR influence in Asia. If members of the British Commonwealth, particularly India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, can be persuaded to join with the United Kingdom and the United States in carrying out constructive measures of economic, political and cultural cooperation, the results will certainly be in our interest. Not only will the United States be able thus to relieve itself of part of the burden, but the cooperation of the white nations of the Commonwealth will arrest any potential dangers of the growth of a white-colored polarization.

On December 30, 1949, the National Security Council met with President Truman presiding, discussed the NSC staff study, and approved the following conclusions:

As the basis for realization of its objectives, the United States should pursue a policy toward Asia containing the following components:

a. The United States should make known its sympathy with the efforts of Asian leaders to form regional associations of non-Communist states of the various Asian areas, and if in due course associations eventuate, the United States should be prepared, if invited, to assist such associations to fulfill their purposes under conditions which would be to our interest. The following principles should guide our actions in this respect:

Any association formed must be the result of a genuine desire on the part of the participating nations to cooperate for mutual benefit in solving the political, economic, social and cultural problems of the area.

The United States must not take such an active part in the early stages of the formation of such an association that it will be subject to the charge of using the Asiatic nations to further United States ambitions.

The association, if it is to be a constructive force, must operate on the basis of mutual aid and self-help in all fields so that a true partnership may exist based on equal rights and equal obligations.

United States participation [words illegible] association formed will be in accord with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with regional arrangements.

b. The United States should act to develop and strengthen the security of the area from Communist external aggression or internal subversion. These steps should take into account any benefits to the security of Asia which may flow from the development of one or more regional groupings. The United States on its own initiative should now

Improve the United States position with respect to Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines.

Scrutinize closely the development of threats from Communist aggression, direct or indirect, and be prepared to help within our means to meet such threats by providing political, economic, and military assistance and advice where clearly needed to supplement the resistance of the other governments in and out of the area which are more directly concerned.

Develop cooperative measures through multilateral or bilateral arrangements to combat Communist internal subversion.

Appraise the desirability and the means of developing in Asia some form of collective security arrangements, bearing in mind the following considerations:

The reluctance of India at this time to join in any anti-Communist security pact and the influence this will have among the other nations of Asia.

The necessity of assuming that any collective security arrangements which might be developed be based on the principle of mutual aid and on a demonstrated desire and ability to share in the burden by all the participating states.

The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangements would be consonant with the purposes of any regional association which may be formed in accordance with paragraph 3-a above.

The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangement would be in conformity with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter relating to individual and collective self-defense.

c. The United States should encourage the creation of an atmosphere favorable to economic recovery and development in non-Communist Asia, and to the revival of [words illegible] non-discriminatory lines. The policy of the United States should be adapted to promote, where possible, economic conditions that will contribute to political stability in friendly countries of Asia, but the United States should carefully avoid assuming responsibility for the economic welfare and development of that continent. .

h. The United States should continue to use its influence in Asia toward resolving the colonial-nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movement while at the same time minimizing the strain on the colonial powers who are our Western allies. Particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China. and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese. . .

i. Active consideration should be given to means by which all members of the British Commonwealth may be induced to play a more active role in collaboration with the United States in Asia. Similar collaboration should be obtained to the extent possible from other non-Communist nations having interests in Asia.

j. Recognizing that the non-Communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against Communist expansion in Asia, the United States should exploit every opportunity to increase the present Western orientation of the area and to assist, within our capabilities, its governments in their efforts to meet the minimum aspirations of their people and to maintain internal security.

Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming, by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible, but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950~1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

B. THE U.S. ENTERS THE WAR

On December 30, 1949, the French signed over ten separate implementing agreements relating to the transfer of internal administration in Vietnam to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, in accordance with the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949. By January, 1950, Mao's legions had reached Vietnam's northern frontier, and North Vietnam was moving into the Sino-Soviet orbit. A Department of State statement enunciated U.S. policy as of 20 January 1950:

DEPT still hopeful Bao Dai will succeed in gaining increasing popular support at Ho's expense and our policy remains essentially the same; to encourage him and to urge FR toward further concessions.

The start made by Bao Dai, the qualities exhibited by him, and his initial reception seem to have been better than we might have anticipated, even discounting optimism of FR sources. Transfer of power apparently well received. FR success in disarming and interning fleeing CHI Nationalists without serious intervention to the present by CMI COMMIES also encouraging.

However, more recently, marked opposition has been encountered which demonstrates at least that Bao Dai's popular support has not yet widened. Increased Viet Minh MIL activity is disquieting. This CLD be special effort by Ho, timed to coincide with transfer of power and the arrival of CHI COMMIES armies on frontier, and to precede Bangkok Conference, or CLD be evidence of increasing strength reinforced by hopes of CR1 COMMIE support, direct or indirect.

DEPT has as yet no knowledge of negotiations between Ho and Mao groups although radio intercept of New China News Agency release of JAN 17 indicates that Ho has

messed the "GOVTS of the world" that "the GOVT of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is the only legal GOVT of the Vietnam people" and is "ready to establish DIPL relations with any GOVT which WLD be willing to cooperate with her on the basis of equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory so as to defend world peace and democracy." Ho's radio making similar professions. .

Nature and timing of recognition of Bao Dai now under consideration here and with other GOVTS. .

First the Chinese Communists, and then the Soviets recognized the DRV. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the "nationalist" nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, we have every reasonable [words illegible] governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal governments by the countries of the world. whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas. Ambassador Jessup has already expressed to Emperor Bao Dai our best wishes for prosperity and stability in Vietnam, and the hope that closer relationship will be established between Vietnam and the United States.

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950, President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai the same date, and on 4 February, the American Consul General in Saigon was instructed to deliver the following message to Bao Dai:

Your Imperial Majesty:

I have Your Majesty's letter in which I am informed of the signing of the agreements of March 8, 1949 between Your Majesty, on behalf of Vietnam, and the President of the French Republic, on behalf of France. My Government has also been informed of the ratification on February 2, 1950 by the French Government of the agreements of March 8, 1949;

Since these acts establish the Republic of Vietnam as an independent State within the French Union, I take this opportunity to congratulate Your Majesty and the people of Vietnam on this happy occasion.

The Government of the United States of America is pleased to welcome the Republic of Vietnam into the community of peace-loving nations of the world and to extend diplomatic recognition to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. I look forward to an early exchange of diplomatic representatives between our two countries.

Recognition of Bao Dai was followed swiftly by French requests for U.S. aid. On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson released the following statement in Paris:

The [French] Foreign Minister and I have just had an exchange of views on the situation in Indochina and are in general agreement both as to the urgency of the situation in that area and as to the necessity for remedial action. We have noted the fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos which now enjoy independence within the French Union. is primarily the responsibility of France and the Governments and peoples of Indochina. The United States recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives.

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1

Chapter I, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50"

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 4, pp. 42-52

On May 11, 1950, the Acting Secretary of State made the following statement:

A special survey mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, has just returned from Southeast Asia and reported on economic and technical assistance needed in that area. Its over-all recommendations for the area are modest and total in the neighborhood of \$60 million. The Department is working on plans to implement that program at once.

Secretary Acheson on Monday in Paris cited the urgency of the situation applying in the associated states of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. The Department is working jointly with ECA to implement the economic and technical assistance recommendations for Indochina as well as the other states of Southeast Asia and anticipates that this program will get underway in the immediate future.

Military assistance for Southeast Asia is being worked out by the Department of Defense in cooperation with the Department of State, and the details will not be made public for security reasons.

Military assistance needs will be met from the President's emergency fund of \$75 million provided under MDAP for the general area of China.

Economic assistance needs will be met from the ECA China Aid funds, part of which both Houses of Congress have indicated will be made available for the general area of China. Final legislative action is still pending on this authorization but is expected to be completed within the next week.

The United States thereafter was directly involved in the developing tragedy in Vietnam.

IV. THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH -- A SUMMARY

One of the recurrent themes of criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam has been that from the end of World War II on, there was a failure to recognize that the Viet Minh was the principal vehicle for Vietnamese nationalism and that it, in fact, was in control of and effectively governing all of Vietnam. Evidence on issues like popularity and control is always somewhat suspect -- especially when dealing with an exotic country like Vietnam at a time when what Americans knew about it was largely dependent on French sources. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made and supported.

First, the Viet Minh was the main repository of Vietnamese nationalism and anti-French colonialism. There were other such groups promoting Viet independence but none were competitive on a country-wide scale. It is also true that the disciplined, well-organized, and well-led Indochinese Communist Party was the controlling element in the Viet Minh. The ICP was not, however, in the numerical majority either in total membership or in leadership posts held. This gap between control and numbers can be explained by two factors: (a) ICP strategy was to unify nationalist elements to achieve the immediate objective of independence; and (b) the other components of the Viet Minh were sizable enough to fractionalize the whole movement. In other words, from World War II on, the ICP was strong enough to lead, but not to dominate Vietnamese nationalism.

Second, the Viet Minh was sufficiently popular and effective to turn itself into a Vietnam-wide government that could have extended its authority throughout the country after World War II -- except for the obstacle of reasserted French power, and, to a lesser degree, of indigenous political opposition in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh was always more powerful in Tonkin and Annam than in South Vietnam. However, it seems likely

that in the absence of the French, the Viet Minh through its governmental creation, the DRV, would have overridden indigenous tribal, religious, and other opposition in short order.

Vietnamese nationalism developed three types of political parties or movements:

Reform parties. Narrowly based among the small educated Vietnamese elite, these parties made little pretense at representing the masses of the peasantry except in the ancient mandarin sense of paternal leadership. In general, they advocated reform of the relationship between France and Vietnam to establish an independent and united nation, but would neither sever beneficial bonds with the metropole, nor alter drastically the Vietnamese social structure. Members included many men of impeccable repute and undoubted nationalist convictions - among them Ngo; Dinh Diem-but also a number of known opportunist and corrupt Vietnamese. The reformist parties were further discredited by collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. These parties formed the basis for the "Bao Dai solution" to which France and the U.S. gravitated in the late 1940's.

Theocratic parties. In Cochinchina and almost exclusively there during the 1930's there emerged religious sects commanding firm loyalties of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Two of these -- the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao -- aspired to temporal as well as spiritual power, fielded armed - forces, and formed local governments. They opposed both French political and cultural hegemony, and domination by other Vietnamese parties. Some elements collaborated openly with the Japanese during 1940-1945. Because these parties were of local and religious character, any parallel with other Viet political organizations would be inexact. These movements account in large measure for the distinctive character of South Vietnamese nationalism as compared with that of Annam or Tonkin.

Revolutionary parties. The numerous remaining Vietnamese political parties fall into the revolutionary category: they advocated Vietnam's independence from France and some degree of radical reorganization of the Viet polity. Their political coloration ranged from the deep red of the Saigon-centered Trotskyites (who advocated anti-imperialist - revolution throughout the world, and within Vietnam, expropriation for the workers and peasants) through the less violent hues of communism and Kuomintang-styled nationalism, to the indistinct, eclectic nationalism of the Binh Xuyen criminal fraternity (another Saigon phenomenon).

Only two of these movements developed a Vietnam-wide influence: the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Both these parties were troubled throughout their history by factionalism, and by repeated (French police) purges. Both aspired to politicizing the peasants; neither wholly succeeded.. Of the two, the ICP consistently demonstrated the greater resiliency and popularity, attributable to superior conspiratorial doctrine and technique, and to more coherent and astute leadership. Both the ICP and the VNQDD figured in peasant uprisings in 1930/1931, and 1940/1941. Each played a role in the Vietnamese resistance against the Vichy French and the Japanese during World War II: the ICP as the nucleus of the Viet Minh, and the

VNQDD as the principal component of the Chinese Nationalist-sponsored Dong Minh -Hoi.

The Viet Minh -*Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi*, League for the Independence of Vietnam - came into being in May, 1941, at the 8th Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party, held in South China. It was formed as a "united front" organization initially composed of the ICP, Revolutionary Youth League, the New Vietnam Party, and factions of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Membership was held open to any other individuals or groups willing to join in struggling for "national liberation." The announced program of the Viet Minh called for a wide range of social and political reforms designed mainly to appeal the Viet patriotism. Emphasis was placed on an anti-Japanese crusade and preparation for "an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps," not on communist cant.

Though a Kuomintang general originally sponsored the Viet Minh, Ho soon became suspect, and in 1942 was jailed by the Chinese. While he was in prison, probably to offset the Viet Mine's growing appeal, and to assure tighter Chinese control of the Vietnamese, the KMT fostered a rival Viet "popular front," the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), which was based on the VNQDD), the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet), and a number of smaller groups, but was supposed to include the Viet Minh. In fact, however, the Dong Minh Hoi never acquired more than a nominal control over the Viet Minh. In 1943, Ho was released from prison and put in charge of the Dong Minh Hoi--a status apparently conditioned on his accepting overall Chinese guidance and providing the allies with intelligence. But, as the war progressed, Ho and the Viet Minh drew apart from the Dong Minh Hoi, and the latter never succeeded in acquiring apparatus within Vietnam comparable to the Viet Minh's.

During the war, some Vietnamese political parties collaborated with the Japanese or the Vichy French. These were put at a disadvantage during and after the war in competition with the ICP, the Viet Minh, or the Dong Minh Hoi--all of which developed an aura of unwavering faith to resistance against all foreign domination. But only the ICP and the Viet Minh established their reputations by extensive wartime operations among the people of Vietnam. In Cochinchina, up until surfacing in April 1945, the ICP continued to operate largely underground and without much regard for the Viet Minh mantle; in Annam and Tonkin, however, all ICP undertakings were given Viet Minh identity. Throughout Vietnam, the ICP initiated patient political action: the dissemination of propaganda, the training of cadres, the establishment of a network of cells down to hamlet level. The ICP was during the war the hard core of the Viet Minh, but the bulk of the Viet Minh membership were no doubt quite unaware of that fact: they served the Viet Minh out of a patriotic fervor.

The American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, depending upon it for reliable intelligence, and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. However, the Viet Minh itself assigned priority to political tasks ahead of these military missions. The first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942-43 in the mountains north of Hanoi. Only after its political

network was well established did it field its first guerrilla forces, in September 1943. The first units of the Viet Minh Liberation Army came into being on December 24 of that year, but there is no evidence of large scale, concerted guerrilla operations until after March 1945.

At the end of 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a total membership of 500,000, of which 200,000 were in Tonkin, 150,000 in Annam, and 150,000 in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh political and military structure was significantly further developed in North Vietnam. In May 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border. As the war drew to a close the Viet Minh determined to preempt allied occupation, and to form a government prior to their arrival. The Viet Minh ability to do so proved better in the north than in the south. In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh's forces seized over from the Japanese and Bao Dai in North Vietnam, forced the emperor to abdicate, and to cede his powers to Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In Cochinchina, however, the Viet Minh were able to gain only tenuous control of Saigon and its environs. Nonetheless, when the allies arrived, the Viet Minh were the *de facto* government in both North and South Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh and his DRV in Hanoi, and an ICP-dominated "Committee of the South" in Saigon.

On 12 September 1945, the British landed a Gurkha battalion and a company of Free French soldiers in Saigon. The British commander regarded the Vietnamese government with disdain because of its lack of authority from the French and because of its inability to quell civil disorder in South Vietnam. Saigon police dashed with Trotskyites, and in the rural areas, fighting broke out between Viet Minh troops and those of Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa. Spreading violence rendered futile further attempts to draw together the Vietnamese factions, and prompted the French to importune the British commander to permit them to step in to restore order. On the morning of 23 September, French troops overthrew the Vietnamese government after a tenure of only three weeks. The official British account termed the French method of executing the coup d'etat "unfortunate" in that they "absolutely ensured that countermeasures would be taken by the [Vietnamese] Vietnamese retaliation was quick and violent: over one hundred Westerners were slain in the first few days, and others kidnapped; on 26 September, the U.S. commander of the O.S.S. in Saigon was killed. Thus, the first Indochina War began in Cochinchina in late September, 1945, and American blood was shed in its opening hours.

At that juncture, the ICP in Cochinchina was in a particularly vulnerable position. The ICP had permitted the Viet Minh to pose as an arm of the Allies, and had supported cooperation with the British and amnesty for the French. The Party had even undertaken, through the Committee of the South, to repress the Trotskyites. But violence undermined its advocacy of political moderation, of maintaining public order, and of negotiations with the French. Further, the ICP in Saigon was assured by French communists that they would receive no assistance from Party brethren abroad. The French coup d'etat thrust conflict upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists was how to respond; the ICP leadership determined [words illegible] and that to maintain leadership of the nationalist movement in South Vietnam they had to make the Viet Minh the most unbending foe of compromise with the French.

The situation in all of Vietnam at the end of the war was confused -- neither the French, nor the Viet Minh, nor any other group exercised clear authority. While the Viet Minh was far and away the single most powerful Vietnamese organization, and while it claimed dominion over all Vietnam, its authority was challenged in the North by the Chinese and in the South by the British. The French position was patently more tenuous than that of the Viet Minh until 9 October 1945. On that date, France and the UK concluded an agreement whereby the British formally recognized French civil administration in Indochina and ceded its occupation rights to France south of the 16th parallel. This ceding of authority in the South did not, as a practical matter, ensure French rule. With only 35,000 French soldiers in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh and other parties were well able to contest the French.

Viet Minh authority in Annam and Tonkin was less ambiguous, but by no means unchallenged. In the North, the salient political fact of life for the Viet Minh was the presence of the Chinese Nationalist Army of Occupation numbering 50,000 men.. Through this presence, the Chinese were able to force the Viet Minh to accommodate Chinese-Viet Nationalists within the DRV and to defer to Chinese policy in other respects.

The Viet Minh had to go further still in accommodating the wishes of the Chinese. In setting up the DRV government of 2 September 1945, pro-Chinese, non-Viet Minh politicians were included, and the ICP took only 6 of 16 cabinet posts. On 11 November 1945, the Viet Minh leadership went even further, and formally dissolved the ICP in the interest of avoiding "misunderstandings." Even this, however, was not sufficient. Compelled by opposition demands, Ho agreed to schedule national elections for January of 1946 . The results of these elections were arranged beforehand with the major opposition parties, and the Assembly thus "elected" met on 2 March 1946. This Assembly approved a new DRV government, with the ICP holding only 2 of 12. cabinet posts.

By then, France was ready to pose a stronger challenge. French reinforcements had arrived in Indochina, so that Paris could contemplate operations in North Vietnam as well as in Cochinchina. In early 1946, the Chinese turned over their occupation rights in the North to France. Faced with increased French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from abroad, Ho decided that he had no recourse save to negotiate with the French. On 6 March 1946, Ho signed an Accord with the French providing for French re-entry into Vietnam for five years in return for recognizing the DRV as a free state within the French union.

This Accord taxed Ho's popularity to the utmost, and it took all Ho's prestige to prevent open rebellion. On 27 May 1946, Ho countered these attacks by merging the Viet Minh into the Lien Viet, a larger, more embracing "national front." Amity within the Lien Viet, however, lasted only as long as the Chinese remained in North Vietnam. When they withdrew a few weeks later, in mid-June, the Viet Minh, supported by French troops, attacked the Dong Minh Hoi and the VNQDD, as "enemies of the peace," effectively

suppressed organized opposition, and asserted Viet Minh control throughout North Vietnam.

But even this ascendancy proved transitory. Ho Chi Minh, though he tried hard, was unable to negotiate any durable *modus vivendi* with the French in the summer and fall of 1946. In the meantime, the DRV and the Viet Minh were drawn more and more under the control of the "Marxists" of the former ICP. For example, during the sessions of the DRV National Assembly in November, nominal opposition members were whittled down to 20 out of more than 300 seats, and a few "Marxists" dominated the proceedings. Nonetheless, the DRV government maintained at least a facade of coalition. Through 1949, ICP members remained in the minority, and nominally oppositionist VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi politicians were consistently included.

Although the Cochinchina war continued throughout 1946, with the Viet Minh assuming a leading role in resistance, war in North Vietnam did not break out until December, 1946. A series of armed clashes in November were followed by a large scale fighting in Hanoi in late December. The DRV government took to the hills to assume the status of shadow state. The Viet Minh transformed itself back into a semi-covert resistance organization and committed itself throughout the nation to the military defeat of the French. During the opening year of the war, 1947, the Viet Minh took steps to restore its image as a popular, patriotic, anti-foreign movement, and again to play down the ICP role in its leadership. The DRV government was reorganized and prominent communists excluded. As the Viet Minh gathered strength over the years, however, these same leaders reentered the DRV government.

In February 1951, addressing the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), Ho Chi Minh stated that the Communist Party had formed and led the Viet Minh, and founded and ruled the DRV. When the French colonialists reappeared in South Vietnam and a Nationalist Chinese-sponsored government seemed in prospect in North Vietnam, Ho averred, the Party went underground, and entered into agreements with the French:

Lenin said that even if a compromise with bandits was advantageous to the revolution, he would do it.

But Ho's explanation notwithstanding, the Viet Minh was irrefutably nationalist, popular, and patriotic. It was also the most prominent and successful vehicle of Viet nationalism in the 1940's. To a degree it was always non-communist. Available evidence indicates, however, that from its inception, Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants of the Indochinese Communist Party conceived its strategy, directed its operations, and channeled its energies consistent with their own goals as they subsequently claimed. Whether the non-communist elements of the Viet Minh might have become dominant in different circumstances must be relegated to speculation. It seems clear that, as matters developed, all of the non-communist nationalist movements-reformist, theocratic, or revolutionary-were too localized, too disunited, or too tainted with Japanese or Nationalist Chinese associations to have competed successfully with the ICP for control of the Viet Minh.

And none could compete effectively with the Viet Minh in gaining a following among Vietnam's peasants.

[Supporting text not available]

V. HO CHI MINH: ASIAN TITO? A SUMMARY

Among the more cogent critiques of U.S. policy toward Vietnam is the contention that the U.S. failed to recognize in Ho Chi Minh a potential Asian "Tito." This view holds that Ho has always been more concerned with Vietnam's independence and sovereign viability than with following the interests and dictates of Moscow and Peking. With U.S. support, the argument runs, Ho would have adopted some form of neutrality in the East-West conflict and maintained the DRV as a natural and durable bulwark against Chinese expansion southward. Thus, were it not for "U.S. communist blinders," Ho would have served the larger purposes of American policy in Asia. Though the focus of inquiry in this study is the period immediately following World War II, when it would have been relatively easy to support an anti-Japanese, anti-colonial Ho, it is often argued that the U.S. neglected another opportunity after the Geneva Conference of 1954--and indeed, that U.S. acceptance of Ho, and a communist dominated Vietnam, may be the only path to peace in Southeast Asia today. The historical (1945-1954) argument has a persuasive ring. In the light of the present costs and repercussions of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, any prior way out can seem attractive. It is possible, however, that a dynamic and unified communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh could have been vigorously expansionist, thus causing unanticipated difficult problems in some ways comparable to current ones.

Many authors have advanced one version or another of the "Tito" hypothesis. Some develop the principal thesis that a different U.S. policy could have moved Ho to non-alignment and opposition to Peking; others stress the corollary that Ho was forced into dependence upon Peking and Moscow by American opposition or indifference. Whether Ho was a nationalist or a communist is not at issue; all of the authors quoted seem to accept that Ho was a communist, and that a communist Vietnam would probably have eventuated under his leadership. Rather, their arguments center on what they perceive to be Ho's willingness to subordinate communist goals, forms, and international discipline to attaining Vietnam's independence and unity. A few openly favor a communist Vietnam on the grounds that only a national communism led by Ho would be sufficiently strong to survive adjacent to China. They stress Ho's attempts in 1945 and 1946 to obtain Western backing, and point out that antipathy to China is a pillar of Viet nationalism. Many concede that the Tito analogy is not wholly appropriate. Unlike Tito, Ho came to power after the war - without the aid of another communist state. More basically, there was no analogy to be made until late 1948, when the experiment with Tito seemed like it would work. Nonetheless, these authors point out that if the U.S. found it advantageous to set aside its repugnance to Tito's communism in the interest of stemming Russian expansion in Europe, it should have been willing to accommodate Ho Chi Minh's communism for similar ends in Asia. This critique generally ends with the accusation that the U.S. purpose in Southeast Asia is simply and solely to stop communism.

An examination of Ho Chi Minh's political development through 1950 may provide a basis to narrow the range of speculation concerning Ho and U.S. policy. From such a review, it is evident that the man who in 1945 became President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was a mature, extraordinarily dedicated revolutionary who had undergone severe hardships serving the cause of Vietnam's freedom from France. Fifty-five years of age in 1945, he had been a communist for twenty-five years, one of the founding members of the French Communist Party, and a Comintern agent in Asia for fifteen years before World War II. He was originally of Nghe-An, a province traditionally a spawning ground of revolutionists; of a father imprisoned by the French for nationalist activism; and of a Hue school known for radical nationalism among its students. Exiled from Vietnam from 1910 to 1940, imprisoned in Hong Kong and in China, deprived of home, family, fame, fortune and companionship outside the Comintern's conspiratorial circles, he apparently devoted himself selflessly all those years to revolution in Vietnam. Ruth Fischer, a well-known German former communist who knew Ho during this period, has written, "It was Ho Chi Minh's nationalism which impressed us European Communists born and bred in a rather grey kind of abstract internationalism."

For Ho, now back in Asia, World War II opened new avenues to the attainment of his lifelong goals. France discredited itself in Vietnam through Vichy's collaboration with the Japanese, and then in 1945 was toppled from power altogether by Japanese arms. In the meantime, Ho had built the Viet Minh into the only Vietnam-wide political organization capable of effective resistance to either the Japanese or the French. Ho was the only Vietnamese wartime leader with a national following, and he assured himself wider fealty among the Vietnamese people when in August-September, 1945, he overthrew the Japanese, obtained the abdication of Bao Dai, established the DRV, and staged receptions for in-coming allied occupation force in which the DRV acted as the incumbent Vietnamese government. For a few weeks in September 1945, Vietnam was--for the first and only time in its modern history--free of foreign domination, and united from north to south under Ho Chi Minh.

Ho became the focus of the nationalist fervor evoked by these and subsequent events. Leaders of the rival Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) and the Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), although admitted to the DRV government, commanded no grass-roots organizations, and since they were closely associated with the Chinese Nationalists, shared in full measure in the anti-Chinese odium among the people of North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, French intrigue, and Vietnamese disunity precluded the emergence of a competitor to Ho. When France resorted to force to restore its control over Vietnam, Ho again became the head of Viet resistance, and the Viet Minh became the primary nationalist protagonists. Hence, Ho Chi Minh, both on his own merits and out of lack of competition, became the personification of Vietnamese nationalism.

Ho, nonetheless, found himself, his movement, and his government under intense pressure. From within the nation, the Chinese-backed Viet parties attacked communist domination of his government. For the sake of national unity, Ho dissolved the Communist Party, avoided communist cant, announced general elections, and assured the

contending factions representation in the government well out of proportion to their popular support. External pressures from France and from China proved more difficult. The French capitalized on the relative weakness of the Viet Minh in South Vietnam, and the dissension among the Vietnamese there to overthrow the DRV government in Saigon, and to force the Viet Minh to resort to guerrilla warfare. In famine-wracked North Vietnam, Chinese hordes under booty-minded warlords descended on the DRV, supplanting its local government with committees of their own sponsoring and systematically looting. Ho vainly sought aid abroad; not even the Soviet Union proved helpful. Ho eventually (March, 1946) negotiated with the French, accepting a French military presence in North Vietnam for a period of five years in return for vague French assurances to the DRV as a "Free State within the French Union." When Ho was attacked for this by the pro-Chinese elements within the DRV, he declared:

You fools! Don't you realize what it means if the Chinese stay? Don't you remember your history? The last time the Chinese came, they stayed one thousand years!

The French are foreigners. They are weak. Colonialism is dying out. Nothing will be able to withstand world pressure for independence. They may stay for a while, but they will have to go because the white man is finished in Asia. But if the Chinese stay now, they will never leave.

As for me, I prefer to smell French shit for five years, rather than Chinese shit for the rest of my life.

The unresolved historic problem, of course, is to what extent Ho's nationalist goals overrode his communist convictions in these maneuvers. Ho seemed to place the former above the latter not solely as a matter of dissemblance, as he might have done in the dissolution of the Party and the simultaneous formation of a "Marxist Association," but possibly as a result of doubts about communism as a political form suitable for Vietnam. Bao Dai is reputed to have said that: "I saw Ho Chi Minh suffer. He was fighting a battle within himself. Ho had his own struggle. He realized communism was not best for his country, but it was too late. Ultimately, he could not overcome his allegiance to communism." During negotiations for a *modus vivendi* with the French in Paris in autumn, 1946, Ho appealed to the French to "save him from the extremists" within the Viet Minh by some meaningful concession to Vietnamese independence, and he told the U.S. Ambassador that he was not a communist. He is reputed to have asserted at that time that Vietnam was not ready for communism, and described himself as a Marxist. In reply to a journalist's inquiry, Ho claimed that he could remain neutral, "like Switzerland" in the developing world power struggle between communism and the West. But these and other such statements could have come either from a proper Leninist or a dedicated nationalist. Ho's statements and actions after 1949, and his eventual close alignment with the Sino-Soviet Bloc, support the Leninist construction. But, then, U.S. insistence on Ho's being a doctrinaire communist may have been a self-fulfilling prophesy.

There remains, however, the matter of Ho's direct appeals for U.S. intervention in Vietnam, at which even a Leninist might have scrupled. These occurred (late 1945, early

1946) just after France has reasserted itself militarily in South Vietnam, while Chinese Nationalist warlords were ensconced in Hanoi, and before the 6 March 1946 Accord with France. Desperately, Ho turned to the United States, among other powers, asking for "immediate interference" in Vietnam.

There were, at least, eight communications from Ho to the President of the United States, or to the Secretary of State, from October, 1945, to February, 1946. Ho had conveyed earlier, in August and September, 1945, *via* O.S.S. channels, proposals that Vietnam be accorded "the same status as the Philippines," for an undetermined period of tutelage preliminary to independence. With the outbreak of hostilities in South Vietnam, September-October 1945, he added formal requests for U.S. and U.N. intervention against French aggression, citing the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and a foreign policy address of President Truman in October, 1945, endorsing national self-determination. Ho's last direct communication with the U.S. was in September, 1946, when he visited the U.S. Ambassador in Paris to ask vaguely for U.S. assistance in obtaining independence for Vietnam within the French Union.

There is no record of U.S. reply to any of Ho's appeals for aid. Extant instructions to a U.S. diplomat in contact with Ho in December, 1946, reveal U.S. preoccupation with his known communist background, and apprehension that he might establish a "communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state." Two months later, when the Franco-Viet Minh war in North Vietnam was underway, Secretary of State Marshall emphasized that "we do not lose sight [of the] fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin." In May, 1949, Secretary of State Acheson admitted that as a "theoretical possibility" the establishment of a "National Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any area beyond reach [of the] Soviet Army," but pointed out that:

Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement national aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even. slightest deviation.

When, in early 1950, Ho's DRV lay within reach of Mao's Chinese Army, and Ho had openly embraced communism, Secretary Acheson declared that bloc recognition of the DRV "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Vietnam."

But Ho's behavior in 1949-1950, however convincingly it endorsed U.S. policy at that juncture, does not necessarily explain away his earlier eagerness for U.S. and U.N. intervention - in Vietnam, nor otherwise gainsay the "Tito" hypothesis as applied to the 1945-1947 period. Of that period, it can be said that the U.S. offered Ho only narrow options. He received no replies to his appeals. After 1946, not only were Ho's direct

communications with the U.S. cut, but also the signals he received from the U.S. were hardly encouraging. By the time the Indochina war began in earnest in late 1946, U.S. military equipment had already been used by French forces against the Vietnamese, and the U.S. had arranged credit for France to purchase \$160 million worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for use in Indochina. Secretary of State George C. Marshall's public comment on the outbreak of war in January, 1947, was limited to a hope that "a pacific basis for adjustment of the difficulties could be found," and within six months the Marshall Plan threw even greater U.S. resources behind France.

The simple truth seems to be that the U.S. knew little of what was transpiring inside Vietnam, and certainly cared less about Vietnam than about France. Knowing little and caring less meant that real problems and variety of choices were perceived but dimly. For example, the U.S. could have asked itself--"Did we really have to support France in Southeast Asia in order to support a non-communist France internally and in Europe?" Another question we could have asked ourselves was--"If the U.S. choice in Vietnam really came down to either French colonialism or Ho Chi Minh, should Ho automatically be excluded?" Again, "If the U.S. choice was to be France, did France have any real chance of succeeding, and if so, at what cost?"

Even before World War II was over, Washington had placed the decision on Ho's fate in the hands of France. It can be argued, nonetheless, that the U.S. could have insisted that Paris buy Ho and provide Indochinese independence without endangering the more basic relationship between the U.S. and France in Europe. Just as the U.S. came to recognize the prime importance of Europe over any policy it pursued elsewhere, so the French government would have soon realized (if it had not already done so) that nothing should be done to impair seriously U.S. acceptance of common interests in European recovery and collective security. Moreover, it was not as if there were not sizable segments of the French community which would not have supported graceful U.S. attempts to extricate France from Indochina. It may well be, however, that the "Tito hypothesis" assumes a compliance from France of which France was demonstrably incapable. No French government is likely to have survived a genuinely liberal policy toward Ho in 1945 or 1946; even French communists then favored redemption of control in Indochina. From '46 on, however, bloodshed hardened policy in France. As before, the Ho alternative was never seriously contemplated.

French representations to the contrary notwithstanding, Ho Chi Minh possessed real political strength among the people of Vietnam; While calling Ho another George Washington may be stretching the point, there is no doubt about his being the only popularly recognized wartime leader of the Vietnamese resistance, and the head of the strongest and only Vietnam-wide political movement. There can be no doubt either that in a test by ballot only Ho's Viet Minh could have delivered votes at the hamlet level. Washington and Paris, however, did not focus on the fact of Ho's strength, only on the consequences of his rule. Paris viewed Ho as a threat to its regaining French economic, cultural and political prerogatives in Indochina. The U.S., wary of Ho's known communist background, was apprehensive that Ho would lead Vietnam into the Soviet, and later Chinese, orbit. President Eisenhower's later remark about Ho's winning a free

election in Vietnam with an 80% vote shone through the darkness of our vision about Vietnam; but U.S. policy remained unilluminated.

In the last speculation, U.S. support for Ho Chi Minh would have involved perspicacity and risk. As clear as national or independent or neutral communism may seem today, it was a blurred vision in 1945-1948. Even with the benefit of seeing Tito successfully assert his independence, it would have been hard for Washington to make the leap from there to an analogy in Asia. Recourse to "national communism" in Vietnam as an eventual bulwark against China, indeed, would have called for a perspicacity unique in U.S. history. The risk was there, too. The reality of Ho's strength in Vietnam could have worked seriously against U.S. interests as well as against Chinese Communist interests. Ho's well-known leadership and drive, the iron discipline and effectiveness of the Viet Minh, the demonstrated fighting capability of his armies, a dynamic Vietnamese people under Ho's control, could have produced a dangerous period of Vietnamese expansionism. Laos and Cambodia would have been easy pickings for such a Vietnam. Ho, in fact, always considered his leadership to extend to Indochina as a whole, and his party was originally called the Indochinese Communist Party. Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, and even Indonesia, could have been next. It could have been the "domino theory" with Ho instead of Mao. And, it could have been the dominoes with Mao. This may seem implausible, but it is only slightly less of a bad dream than what has happened to Vietnam since. The path of prudence rather than the path of risk seemed the wiser choice.

[Supporting text not available]

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Chapter 2, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954"

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 1, pp. 53-75

Foreword

This portion of the study treats U.S. policy towards the war in Indochina from the U.S. decision to recognize the Vietnamese Nationalist regime of the Emperor Bao Dai in February, 1950, through the U.S. deliberations on military intervention in late 1953 and early 1954.

Summary

It has been argued that even as the U.S. began supporting the French in Indochina, the U.S. missed opportunities to bring peace, stability and independence to Vietnam. The

issues arise from the belief on the part of some critics that (a) the U.S. made no attempt to seek out and support a democratic-nationalist alternative in Vietnam; and (b) the U.S. commanded, but did not use, leverage to move the French toward granting genuine Vietnamese independence.

U.S. POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

The record shows that through 1953, the French pursued a policy which was based on military victory and excluded meaningful negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. The French did, however, recognize the requirement for an alternative focus for Vietnamese nationalist aspirations, and from 1947 forward, advanced the “Bao Dai solution.” The record shows that the U.S. was hesitant through 1949 to endorse the “Bao Dai solution” until Vietnam was in fact unified and granted autonomy and did consistently support the creation of a genuinely independent, noncommunist Vietnamese government to supplant French rule. Nonetheless, the fall of China and the deteriorating French military position in Indochina caused both France and the U.S. to press the “Bao Dai solution.” In early 1950, after French ratification of the Elysee Agreement granting “Vietnam’s independence,” the U.S. recognized Bao Dai and initiated military and economic aid, even before transfer of governmental power actually occurred. Thereafter, the French yielded control only pro forma, while the Emperor Bao Dai adopted a retiring, passive role, and turned his government over to discreditable politicians. The Bao Dai regime was neither popular nor efficient, and its army, dependent on French leadership, was powerless. The impotence of the Bao Dai regime, the lack of any perceptible alternatives (except for the communists), the fact of continued French authority and control over the GVN, the fact that the French alone seemed able to contain communism in Indochina—all these constrained U.S. promptings for a democratic-nationalist government in Vietnam.

LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S.-French ties in Europe (NATO, Marshall Plan, Mutual Defense Assistance Program) only marginally strengthened U.S. urgings that France make concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. Any leverage from these sources was severely limited by the broader considerations of U.S. policy for the containment of communism in Europe and Asia. NATO and the Marshall Plan were of themselves judged to be essential to our European interests. To threaten France with economic and military sanctions in Europe in order to have it alter its policy in Indochina was, therefore, not plausible. Similarly, to reduce the level of military assistance to the French effort in Indochina would have been counter-productive, since it would have led to a further deterioration in the French military position there. In other words, there was a basic incompatibility in the two strands of U.S. policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the anti-communist war and win, preferably with U.S. guidance and advice; and (2) Washington expected the French, when battlefield victory was assured, to magnanimously withdraw from Indochina. For France, which was probably fighting more a colonial than an anti-communist war, and which had to consider the effects of withdrawal on colonial holdings in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, magnanimous withdrawal was not too likely.

France, having no such policy incompatibilities, could and did pursue a consistent course with the stronger bargaining hand. Thus, the French were able to resist pressures from Washington and through the MAAG in Saigon to create a truly Vietnamese army, to grant the Vietnamese more local autonomy and to wage the war more effectively. MAAG was relegated to a supply function and its occasional admonitions to the French were interpreted by them as interference in their internal affairs. Even though by 1954, the U.S. was financing 78% of the costs of the war, the French retained full control of the dispensation of military assistance and of the intelligence and planning aspects of the military struggle. The expectation of French victory over the Viet Minh encouraged the U.S. to "go along" with Paris until the conclusion of the war. Moreover, the U.S. was reluctant to antagonize the French because of the high priority given in Washington's planning to French participation in the European Defense Community. France, therefore, had considerable leverage and, unless the U.S. supported Paris on its own terms, the French could, and indeed did, threaten not to join the EDC and to stop fighting in Indochina.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

American thinking and policy-making was dominated by the tendency to view communism in monolithic terms. The Viet Minh was, therefore, seen as part of the Southeast Asia manifestation of the world-wide communist expansionary movement. French resistance to Ho Chi Minh, in turn, was thought to be a crucial link in the containment of communism. This strategic perception of the communist threat was supported by the espousal of the domino principle: the loss of a single nation in Southeast Asia to communism would inexorably lead to the other nations of the area falling under communist control. The domino principle, which probably had its origin at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China, was at the root of U.S. policy. Although elements of a domino-like theory could be found in NSC papers before the start of the Korean War, the Chinese intervention in Korea was thought to be an ominous confirmation of its validity. The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to that in Korea, was feared, especially after the armistice in Korea.

The Eisenhower Administration followed the basic policy of its predecessor, but also deepened the American commitment to containment in Asia. Secretary Dulles pursued a forthright, anti-communist policy and made it clear that he would not permit the "loss" of Indochina, in the manner the Democrats had allegedly allowed the "loss" of China. Dulles warned China not to intervene, and urged the French to drive toward a military victory. Dulles was opposed to a cease-fire and tried to dissuade the French from negotiations with the Viet Minh until they had markedly improved their bargaining position through action on the battlefield. The NSC in early 1954 was persuaded that a non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to the Viet Minh. In consequence of this more militant policy, the U.S. Government tended to focus on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle.

Among the more frequently cited misapprehensions concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam is the view that the Eisenhower Administration flatly rejected intervention in the First Indochina War. The record shows plainly that the U.S. did seriously consider intervention, and advocated it to the U.K. and other allies. With the intensification of the French-Viet Minh war and the deterioration of the French military position, the United States was forced to take a position on: first, a possible U.S. military intervention in order to avert a Viet Minh victory; second, the increasingly likely contingency of negotiations between Paris and Ho Chi Minh to end the war through a political settlement. In order to avoid a French sell-out, and as an alternative to unilateral U.S. intervention, the U.S. proposed in 1954 to broaden the war by involving a number of allies in a collective defense effort through "united action."

THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

The U.S. Government internal debate on the question of intervention centered essentially on the desirability and feasibility of U.S. military action. Indochina's importance to U.S. security interests in the Far East was taken for granted. The Eisenhower Administration followed in general terms the rationale for American interest in Indochina that was expressed by the Truman Administration. With respect to intervention, the Truman Administration's NSC 124 of February 1952 recognized that the U.S. might be forced to take some military action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In late 1953-early 1954, as the fall of Indochina seemed imminent, the question of intervention came to the fore. The Defense Department pressed for a determination by highest authority of the size and nature of the forces the U.S. was willing to commit in Indochina. Some in DOD questioned the then operating assumption that U.S. air and naval forces would suffice as aid for the French. The Army was particularly concerned about contingency planning that assumed that U.S. air and naval action alone could bring military victory, and argued for realistic estimates of requisite land forces, including the degree of mobilization that would be necessary. The State Department thought that Indochina was so critical from a foreign policy viewpoint that intervention might be necessary. But DOD and the JCS, estimating that air-naval action alone could not stem the surging Viet Minh, recommended that rather than intervening directly, the U.S. should concentrate on urging Paris to train an expanded indigenous army, and should exert all possible pressures-in Europe as well as in Asia-to motivate the French to fight hard for a military victory. Many in the U.S. Government (the Ridgway Report stands out in this group) were wary that U.S. intervention might provoke Chinese Communist intervention. In the latter case, even a considerable U.S. deployment of ground forces would not be able to stem the tide in Indochina. A number of special high-level studies were unable to bridge the evident disparity between those who held that vital U.S. interests were at stake in Indochina, and those who were unwilling to make a firm decision to intervene with U.S. ground forces to assure those interests. Consequently, when the French began pressing for U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu, the Eisenhower Administration took the position that the U.S. would not intervene unilaterally, but only in concert with a number of European and Far Eastern allies as part of a combined force.

THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

This "united action" proposal, announced publicly by Secretary Dulles on March 29, 1954, was also designed to offer the French an alternative to surrender at the negotiating table. Negotiations for a political settlement of the Franco-Viet Minh war, however, were assured when the Big Four Foreign Ministers meeting in February at Berlin placed Indochina on the agenda of the impending Geneva Conference. Foreign Minister Bidault insisted upon this, over U.S. objections, because of the mounting pressure in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The "peace faction" in Paris became stronger in proportion to the "peace feelers" let out by Ho Chi Minh, and the lack of French success on the battlefield. U.S. policy was to steer the French away from negotiations because of the fear that Indochina would thereby be handed over to the communist "empire."

Secretary Dulles envisaged a ten-nation collective defense force to take "united action" to prevent a French defeat-if necessary before the Geneva Conference. Dulles and Admiral Radford were, at first, inclined towards an early unilateral intervention at Dien Bien Phu, as requested by the French (the so-called "Operation Vulture"). But Congressional leaders indicated they would not support U.S. military action without active allied participation, and President Eisenhower decided that he would not intervene without Congressional approval. In addition to allied participation, Congressional approval was deemed dependent upon a public declaration by France that it was speeding up the timetable for independence for the Associated States.

The U.S. was unable to gather much support for "united action" except in Thailand and the Philippines. The British response was one of hesitation in general, and flat opposition to undertaking military action before the Geneva Conference. Eden feared that it would lead to an expansion of the war with a high risk of Chinese intervention. Moreover, the British questioned both the U.S. domino principle, and the belief that Indochina would be totally lost at Dien Bien Phu and through negotiations at Geneva. As for the French, they were less interested in "united action" than in immediate U.S. military assistance at Dien Bien Phu. Paris feared that united action would lead to the internationalization of the war, and take control out of its hands. In addition, it would impede or delay the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. But repeated French requests for direct U.S. intervention during the final agony of Dien Bien Phu failed to alter President Eisenhower's conviction that it would be an error for the U.S. to act alone.

Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu during the Geneva Conference, the "domino theory" underwent a reappraisal. On a May 11 press conference, Secretary Dulles observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without, perhaps, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." In a further remark that was deleted from the official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager populations.

(End of Summary)

I. U.S. POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

A. THE BAO DAI SOLUTION

1. The French Predicament

French perceptions of the conflict which broke out in December, 1946, between their forces in Indochina and the Viet Minh forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) began to alternate between boundless optimism and unbridled gloom. In May, 1947, Minister of War Coste-Floret announced in Paris that: "There is no military problem any longer in Indochina . . . the success of French arms is complete." Within six months, though ambitious armored, amphibious, and airborne drives had plunged into the northern mountains and along the Annam coast, Viet Minh sabotage and raids along lines of communication had mounted steadily, and Paris had come to realize that France had lost the military initiative. In the meantime, the French launched political forays similarly ambitious and equally unproductive. Leon Pignon, political adviser to the French Commander in Indochina, and later High Commissioner, wrote in January, 1947, that:

Our objective is clear: to transpose to the field of Vietnamese domestic politics the quarrel we have with the Viet Minh, and to involve ourselves as little as possible in the campaigns and reprisals which ought to be the work of the native adversaries of that party.

Within a month, an emissary journeyed into the jungle to deliver to Ho Chi Minh's government demands tantamount to unconditional surrender. About the same time, French representatives approached Bao Dai, the former Emperor of Annam, with proposals that he undertake to form a Vietnamese government as an alternate to Ho Chi Minh's. Being unable to force a military resolution, and having foreclosed meaningful negotiations with Ho, the French turned to Bao Dai as their sole prospect for extrication from the growing dilemma in Vietnam.

2. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, 1948

Bao Dai's mandarinal court in Hue, Annam, had been little more than an instrument of French colonial policy, and-after the occupation by Japan-Of Japanese policy. Bao Dai had become Emperor at the age of 12, in 1925, but did not actually ascend the throne until 1932, after education in France. In August, 1945, when the Viet Minh arrived in Hue, he abdicated in favor of Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and accepted the post of "Supreme Adviser" to the new state. In 1946, he left Vietnam, and went to Hong Kong. There, he found himself solicited not only by French representatives, but by the DRV, who sought him to act on their behalf with the French.

Bao Dai attempted at first to maintain a central position between the two protagonists, but was soon persuaded to decline the Viet Minh overtures by non-Communist nationalists. A group of these, including members of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dong Minh Hoi, Dai Vet, and the VNQDD formed a National Union, and declared support for Bao Dai. One authority termed the National Union "a fragile coalition of discredited collaborators, ambitious masters of intrigue, incompetent sectarians, and a smattering of honest leaders

without a following." Among the latter were Ngo Dinh Diem, who "for the first and only time, joined a party of which he was not the founder," and pledged to back the Emperor so long as he pursued independence for Vietnam. Now, having eliminated the Viet Minh support option, Bao Dai became more compliant in his discussions with the French, and the French became correspondingly stiffer in their attitude toward the Viet Minh. Yet, little came of the talks. On December 7, 1947, aboard a French warship in Ha Long Bay, Bao Dai signed an accord with the French, committing the French to Vietnamese political independence so minimally that it was promptly condemned not only by Diem, but also by more opportunistic colleagues in the National Union. Bao Dai, in what might have been a political withdrawal, removed himself from the developing intrigue, and fled to European pleasure centers for a four month jaunt which earned him the sobriquet "night club emperor."

The French, despite lack of cooperation from their elusive Vietnamese principal, sent diplomats to pursue Bao Dai and publicized their resolve "to carry on, outside the Ho Chi Minh Government, all activities and negotiations necessary for the restoration of peace and freedom in the Vietnamese countries"--in effect, committing themselves to military victory and Bao Dai. French persistence eventually persuaded Bao Dai to return to Hong Kong, to endorse the formation of a Vietnamese national government prior to independence, and finally, to return to Vietnam as the Head of State. French negotiating pressures on him and the National Union included both spurious "leaks" of Franco-Viet Minh settlement talks, and further assurances of intentions to grant Vietnamese autonomy. On June 5, 1948, Bao Dai witnessed the signing of another Bay of Ha Long Agreement. Thereby, France publicly and "solemnly" recognized the independence of Vietnam-but specifically retained control over foreign relations and the Army, and deferred transfer of other governmental functions to future negotiations; no authority was in fact transferred to the Vietnamese. Again Bao Dai retired to Europe, while in Hanoi the French assembled a transparently impotent semblance of native government. A second summer of war passed in 1948 without dispelling the military miasma over Indochina, and without making the "Bao Dai solution" any less repugnant among Vietnamese patriots. Opposition to it began to mount among French Leftists. This disenchantment, combined with a spreading acceptance of the strategic view that the Franco-Viet Minh war was a key anti-Communist struggle, influenced French leaders to liberalize their approach to the "Bao Dai solution."

3. Elysee Agreement, 1949

On March 8, 1949, after months of negotiations, French President Auriol, in an exchange of letters with Bao Dai, reconfirmed independence for Vietnam as an Associated State of the French Union and detailed procedures for unifying Vietnam and placing it under Vietnamese administration. Nonetheless, in the Elysee Agreement, France yielded control of neither Vietnam's army nor its foreign relations, and again postponed arrangements for virtually all other aspects of autonomy. However, Bao Dai, apparently convinced that France was now sufficiently desperate in Indochina that it would have to honor the Agreements, declared that:

...An era of reconstruction and renovation will open in Vietnam. The country will be given democratic institutions that will be called on primarily to approve the present agreement. . . . Profound economic and social reforms will be instituted to raise the general standard of living and to promote social justice, which is the condition and guarantee of order . . . [I look for] the union of all Vietnamese regardless of their political and religious tendencies, and the generous support of France on which I can count

His public stance notwithstanding, Bao Dai delayed his return to Vietnam until a Cochinchinese Assembly had been elected (albeit in a farce of an election), and did not proceed to Saigon until the French Assembly had approved Cochinchina's joining the rest of Vietnam. In late June, 1949, Vietnam was legally united under Bao Dai, but the related alteration of administrative functions was slow, and usually only pro forma; no genuine power or authority was turned over to the Vietnamese. The State of Vietnam became a camouflage for continued French rule in Indochina. As Bao Dai himself characterized the situation in 1950, "What they call a Bao Dai solution turned out to be just a French solution. . . . The situation in Indochina is getting worse every day..."

4. Bao Dai's Governments

The unsavory elements of the coalition supporting Bao Dai dominated his regime. Ngo Dinh Diem and a few other upright nationalists refused high government posts, and withdrew their support from Bao Dai when their expectations of autonomy were disappointed. Diem's public statement criticized the probity of those who did accept office:

The national aspirations of the Vietnamese people will be satisfied only on the day when our nation obtains the same political regime which India and Pakistan enjoy . . . I believe it is only just to reserve the best posts in the new Vietnam for those who have deserved best of the country; I speak of those who resist .

However, far from looking to the "resistance," Bao Dai chose his leaders from among men with strong identification with France, often men of great and dubious wealth, or with ties with the sub-worlds of French neo-mercantilism and Viet vice. None commanded a popular following. General Georges Revers, Chief of Staff of the French Army, who was sent to Vietnam to appraise the situation in May and June, 1949, wrote that:

If Ho Chi Minh has been able to hold off French intervention for so long, it is because the Viet Minh leader has surrounded himself with a group of men of incontestable worth . . . [Bao Dai, by contrast, had] a government composed of twenty representatives of phantom parties, the best organized of which would have difficulty in rallying twenty-five adherents .

Bao Dai himself did next to nothing to make his government either more representative or more efficient. He divided his time among the pleasures of the resort towns of Dalat,

Nha Trang, and Banmethuout, and for all practical purposes, remained outside the process of government.

An American diplomat serving in Vietnam at the time who knew Bao Dai well, characterized him in these terms:

Bao Dai, above all, was an intelligent man. Intellectually, he could discuss the complex details of the various agreements and of the whole involved relationship with France as well as or better than anyone I knew. But he was a man who was crippled by his French upbringing. His manner was too impassive. He allowed himself to be sold by the French on an erroneous instead of a valid evolutionary concept, and this suited his own temperament. He was too congenial, and he was almost pathologically shy, which was one reason he always liked to wear dark glasses. He would go through depressive cycles, and when he was depressed, he would dress himself in Vietnamese clothes instead of European ones, and would mince no words about the French. His policy, he said to me on one of these dour occasions, was one of "grignotage," or "nibbling," and he was painfully aware of it. The French, of course, were never happy that we Americans had good relations with Bao Dai, and they told him so. Unfortunately, they also had some blackmail on him, about his relationship with gambling enterprises in Saigon and his love of the fleshpots.

Whatever his virtues, Bao Dai was not a man who could earn the fealty of the Vietnamese peasants. He could not even hold the loyalty of honest nationalists, one of whom, for example, was Dr. Phan Quang Dan--a prominent and able non-Communist leader and early supporter of the "solution," and a personal friend of Bao Dai-(Dr. Dan later was the opposition leader of the Diem era). Dr. Dan reported a touching conversation with Bao Dai's mother in which she described her son at a loss to know whom to trust, and heartsick at the atmosphere of hostility which surrounded him. Yet Dr. Dan resigned as Bao Dai's Minister of Information over the Elysee Agreement, and, though he remained close to the Emperor, would not reassume public office for him. Bao Dai himself furnished an apt description of his political philosophy which may explain why he failed to capture the hearts of either beleaguered farmers or serious political leaders--neither of whom could stomach "nibbling" when revolution was required. Said Bao Dai:

To practice politics is like playing a game, and I have always considered life a game.

5. The Pau Negotiations, 1950

Yet Bao Dai did work at pressing the French. French officials in fact complained to an American writer that Bao Dai spent too much of his time on such pursuits:

He has concentrated too much on getting what he can from us instead of building up his support among the people of the country . . . History will judge if he did right in putting so much stress on that

From late June, 1950, until the end of November, Bao Dai stayed close to the series of conferences in Pau, France, designed to arrange the transfer to the Vietnamese of the services of immigration, communications, foreign trade, customs, and finances. The issue of the finance service was a particularly thorny one, involving as it did lucrative foreign exchange controls. While the French did eventually grant significant concessions to the Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians in each area discussed, they preserved "rights of observation" and "intervention" in matters that "concerned the French Union as a whole." Indeed, the French assured themselves full access to government information, license to participate in all government decisions, and little reduction in economic benefits.

Some French commentators viewed Pau as an unmitigated disaster and the assurance of an early French demise in Indochina. As one writer put it:

By accepting the eventual restriction of trade within the French Union, by losing all effective authority over the issuance of money, by renouncing control over foreign trade, by permitting a system of controlled prices for exports and imports, we have given the Associated States all the power they need if they wish to assure the ruin of our enterprises and compel their withdrawal without in any way molesting our compatriots.

But a contemporary Vietnamese critic took a quite different view:

All these conventions conserve in Indochina a privileged position for French capital, supported by the presence of a powerful fleet and army. Even if no one talks any more of an Indochinese Federation, it is still a federalism both administrative and economic (Monetary Union, Customs Union, Communications Union, etc.) which co-ordinates the various activities of the three Associated States. France always exercises control through the representatives she has in all the organs of planning or of federal surveillance, and through what is in effect the right of veto, because the president or the secretary general of these committees is always elected by joint decision of the four governments and, further, because most of the decisions of the committees are made by unanimous agreement.

Bao Dai's delegates were, however, generally pleased with the outcome of Pau. His Prime Minister, Tran Van Huu declared as he signed the conventions that "our independence is now perfect." But to the ordinary Vietnamese, to honest Frenchmen, and to the Americans, Tran Van Huu was proved dramatically wrong.

B. U.S. POLICY TOWARDS BAO DAI

1. Qualified Approval, 1947-1950

The "Bao Dai solution" depended on American support. During the 1950 negotiations in Pau, France, Bao Dai's Prime Minister Tran Van Huu was called back to Indochina by a series of French military reverses in Tonkin. Tran Van Huu seized the occasion to appeal to the United States "as the leading democratic nation," and hoped that the U.S. would:

...bring pressure to bear on France in order to achieve democratic freedom. We want the right to decide our own affairs for ourselves.

Tran demanded the Elysee Agreement be superseded by genuine autonomy for Vietnam:

It is not necessary for young men to die so that a French engineer can be director of the port of Saigon. Many people are dying every day because Viet Nam is not given independence. If we had independence the people would have no more reason to fight.

Tran's addressing the U.S. thus was realistic, if not judicious, for the U.S. had already become involved in Indochina as one part of a troubled triangle with France and Bao Dai's regime. Indeed, there had been an American role in the "Bao Dai solution" from its inception. Just before the Ha Long Bay Agreements, the French initiative had received some support from a December, 1947, Life magazine article by William C. Bullitt, former U.S. Ambassador to France. Bullitt argued for a policy aimed at ending "the saddest war" by winning the majority of Vietnamese nationalists away from Ho Chi Minh and from the Communists through a movement built around Bao Dai. Bullitt's views were widely accepted in France as a statement of U.S. policy, and a direct endorsement, and promise of U.S. aid, for Bao Dai. Bao Dai, whether he accepted the Bullitt canard or not, seemed to sense that the U.S. would inevitably be drawn into Southeast Asia, and apparently expected American involvement to be accompanied by U.S. pressure on France on behalf of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S., though it appreciated France's dilemma, was reluctant initially to endorse the Bao Dai solution until it became a reality. The following State Department messages indicate the U.S. position:

July 10, 1948 (Paris 3621 to State):

...France is faced with alternatives of unequivocally and promptly approving principle [of] Viet independence within French union and [the] union [of the] three parts of Vietnam or losing Indochina.

July 14, 1948 (State 2637 to Paris):

...Once [Bay of Ha Long] Agreement together with change in status [of] Cochinchina [is] approved, Department would be disposed [to] consider lending its support to extent of publicly approving French Government's action as forward looking step toward settlement of troubled situation [in] Indochina and toward realization of aspirations Vietnamese people. It appears to Department that above stated U.S. approval would materially assist in strengthening hands of nationalists as opposed to communists in Indochina

August 30, 1948 (State 3368 to Paris):

Department appreciates difficulties facing any French Government taking decisive action vis-a-vis Indochina, but can only see steadily deteriorating situation unless [there is] more positive approval [Bay of Ha Long] Agreement, enactment legislation or action permitting change Cochinchina status, and immediate commencement formal negotiations envisaged that Agreement. Department believes [that] nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups [in] Indochina and induce present

supporters [of the] Viet Minh [to] come to [the] side [of] that group. No such inducement possible unless that group can show concrete evidence [that] French [are] prepared [to] implement promptly creation Vietnamese free state [which is] associated [with the] French Union and with all attributes free state...

January 17, 1949 (State 145 to Paris):

While Department desirous French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has reasonable chance winning over preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irrevocably [sic] commit U.S. to support of native government which by failing develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually puppet government, separated from people, and existing only by presence French military forces...

The Elysee Agreement took place in March, 1949. At this juncture, the fall of China obtruded, and the U.S. began to view the "Bao Dai solution" with a greater sense of urgency:

May 10, 1949 (State 77 to Saigon):

Assumption . . . Department desires [the] success Bao Dai experiment entirely correct. Since [there] appears [to] be no other alternative to [established] Commie pattern [in] Vietnam, Department considers no effort should be spared by France, other Western powers, and non-Commie Asian nations to assure experiment best chance succeeding.

At proper time and under proper circumstances Department will be prepared [to] do its part by extending recognition [to the] Bao Dai Government and by exploring [the] possibility of complying with any request by such a Government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. [It] must be understood, however, [that] aid program this nature would require Congressional approval. Since U.S. could scarcely afford backing [a] government which would have color [of], and be likely [to suffer the] fate of, [a] puppet regime, it must first be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make Bao Dai solution attractive to nationalists.

This is [a] step of which French themselves must see urgency [and] necessity [in] view possibly short time remaining before Commie successes [in] China are felt [in] Indochina. Moreover, Bao Dai Government must through own efforts demonstrate capacity [to] organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to ensure maximum opportunity of obtaining requisite popular support, inasmuch as [any] government created in Indochina analogous [to the] Kuomintang would be foredoomed failure.

Assuming essential French concessions are forthcoming, best chance [of] success [for] Bao Dai would appear to be in persuading Vietnamese nationalists:

- (1) their patriotic aims may be realized promptly through French- Bao Dai agreement
- (2) Bao Dai government will be truly representative even to the extent of including outstanding non-Commie leaders now supporting Ho, and
- (3) Bao Dai solution [is the] only means [of] safeguarding Vietnam from aggressive designs [of the] Commie Chinese.

Through 1949, the southward march of Mao's legions continued, and the Viet Minh were obviously preparing to establish relations with them.

2. Recognition, 1950

The Elysee Agreements were eleven months old before the U.S. considered that France had taken the concrete steps toward Vietnamese autonomy which the U.S. had set as conditions for recognizing Bao Dai. In late January, 1950, events moved swiftly. Ho Chi Minh announced that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnam people" and indicated DRV willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." Mao responded promptly with recognition, followed by Stalin. In France there was an acrimonious debate in the National Assembly between leftist advocates of immediate truce with the Viet Minh and government supporters of the Elysee Agreement to proceed with the Bao Dai solution. René Pleven, Minister of National Defense, declared that:

It is necessary that the French people know that at the present time the only true enemy of peace in Viet Nam is the Communist Party. Because members of the Communist Party know that peace in Indochina will be established by the policy of independence that we are following.
("Peace with Viet Nam! Peace with Viet Nam!" shouted the Communists.)

Jean Letourneau arose to assert that:

It is not at all a question of approving or disapproving a government; we are very far beyond the transitory life of a government in an affair of this gravity. It is necessary that, on the international level, the vote that takes place tonight reveals truly the major importance that this event should have in the eyes of the entire world.

Frédéric Dupont said:

The Indochina war has always been a test of the French Union before international Communism. But since the arrival of the Chinese Communists on the frontier of Tonkin, Indochina has become the frontier of Western civilization and the war in Indochina is integrated into the cold war.

Premier Georges Bidault was the last speaker:

The choice is simple. Moreover there is no choice.

The National Assembly vote on January 29, 1950, was 396 to 193. From the extreme left there were cries of "Down with the war!" and Paul Coste-Floret replied: "Long live peace." On February 2, 1950, France's formal ratification of the independence of Vietnam was announced.

The U.S. assessment of the situation, and its action, is indicated in the following:

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington
February 2, 1950

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: U.S. Recognition of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia

1. The French Assembly (Lower House) ratified on 29 January by a large majority (396 - 193) the bill which, in effect, established Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as autonomous states within the French Union. The opposition consisted of 181 Communist votes with only 12 joining in from other parties. The Council of the Republic (Senate) is expected to pass the bills by the same approximate majority on or about February 3. President Auriol's signature is expected to follow shortly thereafter.

2. The French legislative and political steps thus taken will transform areas which were formerly governed as Protectorates or Colonies into states within the French Union, with considerably more freedom than they enjoyed under their prior status. The French Government has indicated that it hopes to grant greater degrees of independence to the three states as the security position in Indochina allows, and as the newly formed governments become more able to administer the areas following withdrawal of the French.

3. Within Laos and Cambodia there are no powerful movements directed against the governments which are relatively stable. However, Vietnam has been the battleground since the end of World War II of conflicting political parties and military forces. Ho Chi Minh, who under various aliases, has been a communist agent in various parts of the world since 1925 and was able to take over the anti-French nationalist movement in 1945. After failing to reach agreement with the French regarding the establishment of an autonomous state of Vietnam, he withdrew his forces to the jungle and hill areas of Vietnam and has harassed the French ever since. His followers who are estimated at approximately 75,000 armed men, with probably the same number unarmed. His headquarters are unknown.

The French counter efforts have included, on the military side, the deployment of approximately 130,000 troops, of whom the approximately 50,000 are local natives serving voluntarily, African colonials, and a hard core made up of French troops and Foreign Legion units. Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla tactics have been aimed at denying the French control of Vietnam. On March 8, 1949 the French President signed an agreement with Bao Dai as the Head of State, granting independence within the French Union to the Government of Vietnam. Similar agreements were signed with the King of Laos and the King of Cambodia.

Recent developments have included Chinese Communist victories bringing those troops to the Indochina border; recognition of Ho Chi Minh as the head of the legal Government of Vietnam by Communist China (18 January) and by Soviet Russia (30 January).

4. Recognition by the United States of the three legally constituted governments of Vietnam, Laos' and Cambodia appears desirable and in accordance with United States foreign policy for several reasons. Among them are: encouragement to national aspirations under non-Communist leadership for peoples of colonial areas in Southeast Asia; the establishment of stable non-Communist governments in areas adjacent to Communist China; support to a friendly country which is also a signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty; and as a demonstration of displeasure with Communist tactics which are obviously aimed at eventual domination of Asia, working under the guise of indigenous nationalism.

Subject to your approval, the Department of State recommends that the United States of America extend recognition to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, following ratification by the French Government.

(signed) DEAN ACHESON

Approved
(signed)
Harry S. Truman
February 3, 1950

3. U.S. Aid to Indochina

On February 16, 1950, France requested U.S. military and economic assistance in prosecuting the Indochina War. The Secretary of Defense in a Memorandum for the President on March 6 stated that:

The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward...

The same month, the State Department dispatched an aid survey mission under R. Allen Griffin to Indochina (and to Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaya). The Griffin Mission proposed (inter alia) aid for the Bao Dai government, since the State of Vietnam was considered:

...not secure against internal subversion, political infiltration, or military aggression.

The objective of each program is to assist as much as possible in building strength, and in so doing . . . to assure the several peoples that support of their governments and resistance to communist subversion will bring them direct and tangible benefits and well-

founded hope for an increase in living standards. Accordingly, the programs are of two main types: (1) technical and material aid to essential services and (2) economic rehabilitation and development, focused primarily on the provision of technical assistance and material aid in developing agricultural and industrial output. . . . These activities are to be carried on in a way best calculated to demonstrate that the local national governments are able to bring benefits to their own people and thereby build political support, especially among the rural population...

The aims of economic assistance to Southeast Asia . . . are to reinforce the non-Communist national governments in that region by quickly strengthening and expanding the economic life of the area, improve the conditions under which its people live, and demonstrate concretely the genuine interest of the United States in the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia.

In a strategic assessment of Southeast Asia in April, 1950, the JCS recommended military assistance for Indochina, provided:

...that United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs . . .
[[Doc. 3](#)]

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved \$10 million for urgently needed military assistance items for Indochina. The President's decision was taken in the context of the successful amphibious invasion of Nationalist-defended Hainan by a Communist Chinese army under General Lin Piao-with obvious implications for Indochina, and for Taiwan. One week later, on May 8, the Secretary of State announced U.S. aid for "the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." Sixteen days later, Bao Dai's government and France were notified on May 24 of the U.S. intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States. [[Doc. 6](#)] As the North Korean Army moved southward on June 27, 1950, President Truman announced that he had directed "acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina . . ." [[Doc. 8](#)]

The crucial issue presented by the American decision to provide aid to Indochina was who should be the recipient-Bao Dai or France-and, hence, whose policies would U.S. aid support?

4. French Intransigence

While the U.S. was deliberating over whether to provide economic and military assistance to Indochina in early 1950, negotiations opened at Pau, France, among France and the Associated States to set the timing and extent of granting autonomy. Had these talks led to genuine independence for Bao Dai's regime, the subsequent U.S.-French relationship would probably have been much less complex and significantly less acerbic. As it was, however, the Pau accords led to little more independence than had the Ha Long

Bay or Elysee Agreements. Moreover, France's reluctance to yield political or economic authority to Bao Dai was reinforced by its proclivity to field strong-willed commanders, suspicious of the U.S., determined on a military victory, and scornful of the Bao Dai solution. General Marcel Carpentier, Commander in Chief when the French applied for aid, was quoted in the *New York Times* on March 9, 1950, as follows:

I will never agree to equipment being given directly to the Vietnamese. If this should be done I would resign within twenty-four hours. The Vietnamese have no generals, no colonels, no military organization that could effectively utilize the equipment. It would be wasted, and in China, the United States has had enough of that.

a. 1950-1951: De Lattre and "Dynamisme"

Carpentier's successor, High Commissioner-Commander in Chief General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, arrived in December, 1950, following the severe setback of the autumn. De Lattre electrified the discouraged French forces like General Ridgway later enheartened U.S. forces in Korea. De Lattre saw himself as leading an anti-communist crusade. He calculated that he could win a decisive victory within fifteen months in Vietnam, and "save it from Peking and Moscow." He deprecated the idea that the French were still motivated by colonialism, and even told one U.S. newsman that France fought for the West alone:

We have no more interest here . . . We have abandoned all our colonial positions completely. There is little rubber or coal or rice we can any longer obtain. And what does it amount to compared to the blood of our sons we are losing and the three hundred and fifty million francs we spend a day in Indochina? The work we are doing is for the salvation of the Vietnamese people. And the propaganda you Americans make that we are still colonialists is doing us tremendous harm, all of us--the Vietnamese, yourselves, and us.

Moreover, De Lattre was convinced that the Vietnamese had to be brought into the fight. In a speech--"A Call to Vietnamese Youth"--he declared:

This war, whether you like it or not, is the war of Vietnam for Vietnam. And France will carry it on for you only if you carry it on with her...

Certain people pretend that Vietnam cannot be independent because it is part of the French Union. Not true! In our universe, and especially in our world of today, there can be no nations absolutely independent. There are only fruitful interdependencies and harmful dependencies. . . . Young men of Vietnam, to whom I feel as close as I do to the youth of my native land, the moment has come for you to defend your country.

Yet, General De Lattre regarded U.S. policy vis-a-vis Bao Dai with grave misgivings. Americans, he held, afflicted with "missionary zeal," were "fanning the fires of extreme nationalism . . . French traditionalism is vital here. You cannot, you must not destroy it.

No one can simply make a new nation overnight by giving out economic aid and arms alone." As adamantly as Carpentier, De Lattre opposed direct U.S. aid for Vietnamese forces, and allowed the Vietnamese military little real independence.

Edmund A. Gullion, U.S. Minister Counselor in Saigon from 1950 on, faulted De Lattre on his inability to stimulate in the Vietnamese National Army either the *elan vital* or *dynamisme* he communicated to the rest of the French Expeditionary Corps:

...It remained difficult to inculcate nationalist ardor in a native army whose officers and non-coms were primarily white Frenchmen . . . The Vietnamese units that went into action were rarely unsupported by the French. American contact with them was mainly through the French, who retained exclusive responsibility for their training. We felt we needed much more documentation than we had to assess the army's true potential. We needed battalion-by-battalion reports on the performance of the Vietnamese in training as well as in battle and a close contact with intelligence and command echelons, and we never got this. Perhaps the most significant and saddest manifestation of the French failure to create a really independent Vietnamese Army that would fight in the way de Lattre meant was the absence, at Dienbienphu, of any Vietnamese fighting elements. It was a French show.

Gullion is not altogether correct with respect to Dien Bien Phu; nonetheless, statistics on the ethnic composition of the defending garrison do reveal the nature of the problem. The 5th Vietnamese Parachute Battalion was dropped to reinforce the garrison so that as of May 6, 1954, the troops at Dien Bien Phu included:

GARRISON OF DIEN BIEN PHU

	<i>Officers</i>	<i>NCO's</i>	<i>EM's</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Vietnamese	11	270	5,119	5,480
Total	393	1,666	13,026	15,105
Viet % of Total	2.8	16.2	39.2	36.2

Thus, the Vietnamese comprised more than a third of the fighting forces (and nearly 40% of the enlisted troops); but among the leaders, they provided one-sixth of the non-commissioned officers and less than 3% of the officers.

The paucity of Viet officers at Dien Bien Phu reflected the general condition of the National Army: as of 1953, there were 2,600 native officers, of whom only a handful held rank above major, compared to 7,000 French officers in a force of 150,000 Vietnamese troops.

b. 1951-1953: Letourneau and "Dictatorship"

De Lattre's successor as High Commissioner, Jean Letourneau, was also the French Cabinet Minister for the Associated States. Letourneau was sent to Indochina to assume the same power and privilege in the "independent" State of Vietnam that any of France's Governor Generals had ever exercised from Saigon's Norodom Palace. In May, 1953, a French Parliamentary Mission of Inquiry accused the Minister-High Commissioner of "veritable dictatorship, without limitation or control":

The artificial life of Saigon, the temptations of power without control, the security of a judgment which disdains realities, have isolated the Minister and his entourage and have made them insensible to the daily tragedy of the war...

It is no longer up to us to govern, but to advise. The big thing was not to draw up plans irresponsibly, but to carry on daily a subtle diplomacy. In Saigon our representatives have allowed themselves to be inveigled into the tempting game of power and intrigue.

Instead of seeing the most important things and acting on them, instead of making on the spot investigations, of looking for inspiration in the village and in the ricefield, instead of informing themselves and winning the confidence of the most humble people, in order to deprive the rebels of their best weapon, the Norodom Palace clique has allowed itself the luxury of administering a la francaise and of reigning over a country where revolution is smouldering...

The press has not the right of criticism. To tell the truth, it has become official, and the principal newspaper in Saigon is at the disposition of the High Commissariat. Letters are censored. Propaganda seems to be issued just to defend the High Commissariat. Such a regime cannot last, unless we are to appear as people who are determined not to keep their promises.

The Parliamentary Mission described Saigon: "where gambling, depravity, love of money and of power finish by corrupting the morale and destroying willpower . . ."; and the Vietnamese government: "The Ministers [of the Bao Dai regime] appear in the eyes of their compatriots to be French officials . . ." The report did not hesitate to blame the French for Vietnamese corruption:

It is grave that after eight years of *laisser-aller* and of anarchy, the presence in Indochina of a resident Minister has not been able to put an end to these daily scandals in the life in regard to the granting of licenses, the transfer of piastres, war damages, or commercial transactions. Even if our administration is not entirely responsible for these abuses, it is deplorable that one can affirm that it either ignores them or tolerates them.

Commenting on this report, an influential French editor blamed the "natural tendency of the military proconsulate to perpetuate itself" and "certain French political groups who have found in the war a principal source of their revenues...through exchange operations, supplies to the expeditionary corps and war damages . . . He concluded that:

The generally accepted theory is that the prolongation of the war in Indochina is a fatality imposed by events, one of those dramas in history which has no solution. The theory of the skeptics is that the impotence or the errors of the men responsible for our policy in Indochina have prevented us from finding a way out of this catastrophic enterprise. The truth is that the facts now known seem to add up to a lucid plan worked out step by step to eliminate any possibility of negotiation in Indochina in order to assure the prolongation without limit of the hostilities and of the military occupation.

5. Bao Dai, Attentiste

Despite U.S. recognition of the grave imperfections of the French administration in Vietnam, the U.S. was constrained to deal with the Indochina situation through France both by the overriding importance of its European policy and by the impotence and ineptitude of the Bao Dai regime. The U.S. attempted to persuade Bao Dai to exercise more vigorous leadership, but the Emperor chose differently. For example, immediately after the Pau negotiations, the Department of State sent these instructions to Edmund Gullion:

OUTGOING TELEGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

OCT 18 1950

PRIORITY
AMLEGATION

SAIGON
384

DEPT wishes to have FOL MSG delivered to Bao Dai personally by MIN IMMEDIATE after Chief of State's arrival in Saigon. It SHOULD be delivered informally without submission written text with sufficient emphasis to leave no doubt in Emperor's mind that it represents DEPT'S studied opinion in matter now receiving ATTN highest auths US GOVT. Begin MSG:

Bao Dai will arrive in Saigon at moment when Vietnam is facing grave crisis outcome of which may decide whether country will be permitted develop independence status or pass in near future to one of Sino-Soviet dominated satellite, a new form of colony immeasurably worse than the old from which Vietnam has so recently separated herself.

The US GOVT is at present moment taking steps to increase the AMT of aid to FR Union and ASSOC States in their effort to defend the territorial integrity of IC and prevent the incorporation of the ASSOC States within the COMMIE-dominated bloc of slave states

but even the resources of US are strained by our present UN commitments in Korea, the need for aid in the defense of Western Europe and our own rearmament program. We sometimes find it impossible to furnish aid as we WLD wish in a given AMT at a given time and in a given place.

Leadership of Vietnam GOVT during this crucial period is a factor of preponderant importance in deciding ultimate outcome. GOVT must display unusually aggressive leadership and courage before a discouraged people, distraught and floundering in the wake of years of civil war. Lesser considerations concerning the modalities of relations between the States of the FR Union and the REP of FR must, for instance, be at least temporarily laid aside in face of serious threat to very existence of Vietnam as autonomous state, within FR Union or otherwise.

We are aware (as in Bao Dai) that present Vietnamese GOVT is so linked with person of Chief of State that leadership and example provided by latter takes on extraordinary importance in determining degree of efficiency in functioning of GOVT. Through circumstances of absence in FR of Bao Dai and other Vietnamese leaders for prolonged period, opportunity for progress in assumption of responsibilities from FR and extension authority and influence of GOVT with people was neglected. Many people, including great number AMERS, have been unable understand reasons for Emperor's GTE prolonged holiday UNQTE on Riviera and have misinterpreted it as an indication of lack of patriotic attachment to his role of Chief of State. DEPT is at least of opinion that his absence did not enhance the authority and prestige of his GOVT at home.

Therefore, DEPT considers it imperative Bao Dai give Vietnamese people evidence his determination personally take up reins of state and lead his country into IMMEDIATE and energetic opposition COMMUNIST menace. Specifically he SHOULD embark upon IMMEDIATE program of visits to all parts Vietnam making numerous speeches and public appearances in the process. Chief of State SHOULD declare his determination plunge into job of rallying people to support of GOVT and opposition to VM IMMEDIATE upon arrival Saigon. He SHOULD announce US, FR support for formation NATAL armies and his own intention assume role Commander in Chief. He SHOULD take full advantage of FR official declaration of intention to form NATAL armies (confirmed yesterday by MIN ASSC States Letourneau) and set up precise plan for such formation IMMEDIATE.

Finally, it SHOULD be tactfully suggested that any further display procrastination in facing realities in the form prolonged periods of seclusion at Dalat or otherwise WLD confirm impressions of those not as convinced of Emperor's seriousness of purpose as DEPT and LEG are and raise questions of the wisdom of continuing to support a Vietnamese GOVT which proves itself incapable of exercising the autonomy acquired by it at such a high price. End of MSG.

Endeavor obtain private interview soonest possible after arrival for DEPT regards timing as of prime importance. Simultaneously or IMMEDIATE FOL inform Letourneau and Pignon of action. Saigon advise Paris in advance to synchronize informing FONOFF

Whatever Bao Dai's response--probably polite and obscure--he did not act on the U.S. advice. He subsequently told Dr. Phan Quang Dan, aboard his imperial yacht, that his successive governments had been of little use, and added that it would be dangerous to expand the Vietnamese Army because it might defect en masse and go to the Viet Minh:

I could not inspire the troops with the necessary enthusiasm and fighting spirit, nor could Prime Minister Huu . . . Even if we had an able man, the present political conditions would make it impossible for him to convince the people and the troops that they have something worth while to fight for...

Dr. Dan agreed that the effectiveness of the National Army was a central issue; he pointed out that there were but three Viet generals, non of whom had ever held operational command, and neither they nor the 20 colonels or lieutenant colonels could exercise initiative of any sort. Dr. Dan held that: "The Vietnamese Army is without responsible Vietnamese leaders, without ideology, without objective, without enthusiasm, without fighting spirit, and without popular backing." But it was very clear that Bao Dai did not propose to alter the conditions of his army except by the long, slow process of "nibbling" at French military prerogative. On other vital issues Bao Dai was no more aggressive. For all practical purposes, the Emperor, in his own fashion, like Dr. Dan and Ngo Dinh Diem, assumed the posture of the *attentiste*--a spectator as the French and Americans tested their strength against each other, and against the Viet Minh.

6. The American Predicament

Among the American leaders who understood the vacuity of the Bao Dai solution, and recognized the pitfalls in French intransigence on genuine independence was the then Senator John F. Kennedy. Kennedy visited Vietnam in 1951 and evidently weighed Gullion's views heavily. In November, 1951, Kennedy declared that:

In Indochina we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of the French regime to hang on to the remnants of an empire. There is no broad general support of the native Vietnam Government among the people of that area.

In a speech to the U.S. Senate in June, 1953, he pointed out that:

Genuine independence as we understand it is lacking in Indochina local government is circumscribed in its functions . . . the government of Vietnam, the state which is of the greatest importance in this area, lacks popular support, that the degree of military, civil, political, and economic control maintained by the French goes well beyond what is necessary to fight a war . . . It is because we want the war to be brought to a successful conclusion that we should insist on genuine independence . . . Regardless of our united effort, it is a truism that the war can never be successful unless large numbers of the

people of Vietnam are won over from their sullen neutrality and open hostility to it and fully support its successful conclusion

...I strongly believe that the French cannot succeed in Indochina without giving concessions necessary to make the native army a reliable and crusading force.

Later, Kennedy criticized the French:

Every year we are given three sets of assurances: first, that the independence of the Associated States is now complete; second, that the independence of the Associated States will soon be completed under steps "now" being taken; and third, that military victory for the French Union forces is assured, or is just around the corner.

Another American knowledgeable concerning the U.S.-French difficulties and with the Bao Dai solution was Robert Blum, who headed the economic aid program extended to the Bao Dai regime in 1950. General De Lattre viewed U.S. economic aid as especially pernicious, and told Blum that: "Mr. Blum, you are the most dangerous man in Indochina." De Lattre resented the American intrusion. "As a student of history, I can understand it, but as a Frenchman I don't like it." In 1952, Blum analyzed the Bao Dai-French-American triangle as follows:

The attitude of the French is difficult to define. On the one hand are the repeated official affirmations that France has no selfish interests in Indochina and desires only to promote the independence of the Associated States and be relieved of the terrible drain of France's resources. On the other hand are the numerous examples of the deliberate continuation of French controls, the interference in major policy matters, the profiteering and the constant bickering and ill-feeling over the transfer of powers and the issues of independence . . . There is unquestionably a contradiction in French actions between the natural desire to be rid of this unpopular, costly and apparently fruitless war and the determination to see it through with honor while satisfying French pride and defending interests in the process. This distinction is typified by the sharp difference between the attitude toward General de Lattre in Indochina, where he is heralded as the political genius and military savior . . . and in France, where he is suspected as a person who for personal glory is drawing off France's resources on a perilous adventure...

It is difficult to measure what have been the results of almost two years of active American participation in the affairs of Indochina. Although we embarked upon a course of uneasy association with the "colonialist"-tainted but indispensable French, on the one hand, and the indigenous, weak and divided Vietnamese, on the other hand, we have not been able fully to reconcile these two allies in the interest of a single-minded fight against Communism. Of the purposes which we hoped to serve by our actions in Indochina, the one that has been most successful has been the strengthening of the French military position. On the other hand, the Vietnamese, many of whom thought that magical solutions to their advantage would result from our appearance on the scene, are chastened but disappointed at the evidence that America is not omnipotent and not prepared to make an undiluted effort to support their point of view . . . Our direct influence on political and

economic matters has not been great. We have been reluctant to become directly embroiled and, though the degree of our contribution has been steadily increasing, we have been content, if not eager, to have the French continue to have primary responsibility, and to give little, if any, advice.

Blum concluded that:

The situation in Indochina is not satisfactory and shows no substantial prospect of improving, that no decisive military victory can be achieved, that the Bao Dai government gives little promise of developing competence and winning the loyalty of the population . . . and that the attainment of American objectives is remote.

Shortly before his death in 1965, Blum held that a clash of French and U.S. interests was inevitable:

We wanted to strengthen the ability of the French to protect the area against Communist infiltration and invasion, and we wanted to capture the nationalist movement from the Communists by encouraging the national aspirations of the local populations and increasing popular support of their governments. We knew that the French were unpopular, that the war that had been going on since 1946 was not only a nationalist revolt against them but was an example of the awakening self-consciousness of the peoples of Asia who were trying to break loose from domination by the Western world. We recognized right away that two-pronged policy was beset with great difficulties. Because of the prevailing anti-French feeling, we knew that any bolstering by us of the French position would be resented by the local people. And because of the traditional French position, and French sensitivity at seeing any increase of American influence, we know they would look with suspicion upon the development of direct American relations with local administrations and peoples. Nevertheless, we were determined that our aid program would not be used as a means of forcing co-ordination upon unwilling governments, and we were equally determined that our emphasis would be on types of aid that would appeal to the masses of the population and not on aid that, while economically more sophisticated, would be less readily understood. Ours was a political program that worked with the people and it would obviously have lost most of its effectiveness if it had been reduced to a role of French-protected anonymity . . . [The program was] greatly handicapped and its beneficial psychological results were largely negated because the United States at the same time was pursuing a program of [military] support to the French . . . on balance, we came to be looked upon more as a supporter of colonialism than as a friend of the new nation.

In 1965, Edmund Gullion, who was also very close to the Bao Dai problem, took this retrospect:

We really should have pushed the French right after the Elysee agreements of March, 1949. We did not consider the exchange of letters carefully enough at the time. It was understandable. We obviously felt it was going to be a continuing process, and we hoped to be able to have some influence over it. But then we got involved in Korea, and since

the French were in trouble in Indochina, we pulled our punches . . . The French could have said unequivocally, as we did with regard to the Philippines, that in such-and-such a number of years Vietnam would be totally free, and that it could thereupon join the French Union or stay out, as it desired . . . An evolutionary solution was the obvious one, and it should have been confronted openly and honestly without all the impossible, protracted preliminary negotiations involving efforts to bring the three Associated States together, to get them to agree among each other, and with France, separately and collectively. The French, in arguing against any kind of bilateral agreements, claimed that their attempt at federation in Indochina was like our effort to build some sort of federated system in Europe. But their involvement and interest in Indochina was obviously different, and they used the formula they devised to avoid any real agreement on Vietnam. The problem grew more complex as the military and political aspects of the situation became unavoidably tied together, and the Korean War, of course, complicated it further. From the outset, the French sought to regard the war in Korea and the war in Indochina as related parts of one big fight against Communism, but it wasn't that simple. Actually, what the Korean War did do was make it more difficult for us to urge an evolutionary settlement in Vietnam. By 1951, it may have been too late for us to do anything about this, but we could still have tried much harder than we did. The trouble was the world by then had begun to close in on us. The E.D.C. formula in Europe was being rejected by the French, just as in 1965 they were rejecting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization concept. Our degree of leverage was being drastically reduced.

Had Bao Dai been willing or capable of more effective leadership, the U.S. role in the war might not have fallen into what Edmund Gullion called the "pattern of prediction and disappointment":

It can be timed almost to the month to coincide with the rainy season and the campaign season. Thus, in May or June, we usually get French estimates of success in the coming campaign season, based partly on an assessment of losses the Vietminh are supposed to have suffered in the preceding fall, which are typically claimed as the bright spot in an otherwise gloomy fighting season. The new set of estimates soon proves equally disappointing; by October, French Union troops are found bottled up in mountain defiles far from their bases . . . There are rumblings about late or lacking American aid and lack of American understanding. Some time around the first of the new year, special high-level United States-French conferences are called. We ask some questions about the military situation but only a few about the political situation. There is widespread speculation that the French may pull out of Indochina if we press them for explanations of their political and economic program. We promise the French more aid. The French make a stand: they claim great casualties inflicted on the enemy. They give us new estimates for the following campaign season-and the round begins once more.

In that bleak pattern, Bao Dai played only a passive role; the "Bao Dai solution" ultimately solved nothing. The outcome rested rather on France's military struggle with the Viet Minh, and its contest of leverage with the United States.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 2, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 75-107

II. LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

It is sometimes asserted that France could not have continued the war in Indochina without American aid, but that the United States failed to use its considerable leverage on the French to force them to take more positive steps towards granting complete independence to the Associated States. An examination of Franco-American relations between 1950-1954 suggests, however, that American leverage was severely limited and that, given the primacy accorded in U.S. policy to the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, French leverage on the United States was the stronger of the two.

A. AMERICAN LEVERAGE ON FRANCE

1. NATO and Marshall Plan

In the first postwar decade, France was relatively weak and depended upon the United States through NATO and the Marshall Plan for its military security and economic revival. But neither NATO nor the Marshall Plan offered usable fulcrums for influencing French policy on Indochina. Both were judged by the U.S. Government and public to be strongly in the American national interest at a time when the Soviet threat to Western Europe, either through overt aggression or internal subversion, was clearly recognizable. A communist take-over in France was a real possibility. (The French Communist Party was the largest political party in the nation, and, at the time, quite militant in character.) Thus, an American threat to withdraw military and economic support to metropolitan France if it did not alter its policies in Indochina was not plausible. To threaten France with sanctions in NATO or through the Marshall Plan would have jeopardized a U.S. interest in Europe more important than any in Indochina.

2. Military Assistance Program

The chief remaining source of influence was the military assistance program to the French in Indochina. Announced by President Truman on May 8, 1950, in response to an urgent French request of February 16, 1950, for military and economic assistance, the purpose of the aid was to help the French in the prosecution of the war against the Viet Minh. The American Ambassador in Paris was called to the Quay d'Orsay, following a determination by the French Government that "it should set forth to the United States

Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina from French point of view as a result of recent developments and the expectation that at least increased military aid will be furnished to Ho Chi Minh from Communist China." He was told:

...that the effort in Indochina was such a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise . . . it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina . . . looking into the future it was obvious . . . that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about...

Although the decision to extend aid to the French military effort in Indochina was taken before the outbreak of the Korean War, it clearly was heavily influenced by the fall of Nationalist China and the arrival of Communist Chinese troops on the Indochina border in December, 1949. The Ho Chi Minh regime was recognized as the legal government of Vietnam by the Chinese Communists on January 18, 1950, and twelve days later the Soviet Government similarly announced its recognition. The NSC was thereupon asked "to undertake a determination of all practicable United States measures to protect its security in Indochina and to prevent the expansion of communist aggression. in that area." In NSC 64 (February 27, 1950) it concluded that:

It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard. [[Doc. 1](#)]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring on April 5, 1950, to intelligence estimates indicating that the situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated, noted that "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." Therefore, the rationale for the decision to aid the French was to avert Indochina's sliding into the communist camp, rather than aid for France as a colonial power or a fellow NATO ally.

U.S. assistance, which began modestly with \$10 million in 1950, reached \$1,063 million in fiscal year 1954, at which time it accounted for 78% of the cost of the French war burden. The major portion of the increase came in the last year of the war, following the presentation in 1953 of the Navarre Plan, which called for the enlargement of Franco-Vietnamese forces and a dynamic strategy to recapture the initiative and pave the way for victory by 1955. The optimistic endorsement of the Navarre Plan by Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, head of the MAAG in Indochina, as being capable of turning the tide and leading to a decisive victory over the Viet Minh contributed to Washington's agreement

to substantially raise the level of assistance. But equally important, the Navarre Plan, by being a concrete proposal which held out the promise of ending the long war, put France in a position to pressure the United States for more funds to underwrite the training and equipping of nine additional French battalions and a number of new Vietnamese units.

3. U.S. Supports Independence for Associated States

Throughout the period of assistance to the French military effort, American policy makers kept in mind the necessity of encouraging the French to grant the Associated States full independence and to take practical measures in this direction, such as the training of Vietnamese officers and civil servants. Such active persuasion was delicate and difficult because of the high sensitivity of the French to any "interference" in their "internal" affairs.

A reading of the NSC memorandum and the France-American diplomatic dialogue of the time indicates that Washington kept its eyes on the ultimate goal of the de-colonialization of Indochina. Indeed, it was uncomfortable in finding itself forced by the greater necessity of resisting Viet Minh communism in the same bed as the French. American pressure may well have helped account for the public declaration of Premier Joseph Laniel of July 3, 1953, that the independence and sovereignty of the Associated States would be "perfected" by transferring to them various functions which had remained under French control, even though no final date was set for complete independence. At an NSC meeting on August 6, 1953 President Eisenhower stated that assistance to the French would be determined by three conditions:

- (1) A public French commitment to "a program which will insure the support and cooperation of the native Indochina";
- (2) A French invitation for "close [U.S.] military advice";
- (3) Renewed assurances on the passage of the EDC.

Consistent with these, Washington's decision of September 9, 1953, to grant \$385 million towards implementation of the Navarre Plan was made dependent upon a number of conditions. The American Ambassador was instructed to inform Prime Minister Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault that the United States Government would expect France to:

. . . continue pursue policy of perfecting independence of Associated States in conformity with July 3 declaration;
facilitate exchange information with American military authorities and take into account their views in developing and carrying out French military plans Indochina;
assure that no basic or permanent alteration of plans and programs for NATO forces will be made as result of additional effort Indochina...

4. *Limitation on American Leverage*

The United States attempted to use its military assistance program to gain leverage over French policies, but was severely constrained in what it could do. The U.S. military mission (MAAG) in Saigon was small and limited by the French in its functions to a supply-support group. Allocation of all U.S. aid to the Associated States had to be made, by agreement, solely through the French. Thus, MAAG was not allowed to control the dispensing of supplies once they arrived in Vietnam. MAAG officers were not given the necessary freedom to develop intelligence information on the course of the war; information supplied by the French was limited, and often unreliable or deliberately misleading. The French resisted repeated U.S. admonitions that the native armies of the Associated States be built up and consequently they did not create a true national Vietnamese army. With some minor exceptions, the French excluded American advisors from participating in the training for the use of the materials being furnished by the U.S.

General Navarre viewed any function of MAAG in Saigon beyond bookkeeping to be an intrusion upon internal French affairs. Even though it would have been difficult beyond 1952 to continue the war without American aid, the French never permitted participation by U.S. officials in strategic planning or policy making. Moreover, the French suspected the economic aid mission of being over-sympathetic to Vietnamese nationalism. The director of the economic aid program, Robert Blum, and the DCM of the American Embassy, Edmund Gullion, were subjected to French criticisms of their pro-Vietnamese views, although the American Ambassador, Donald Heath, remained staunchly pro-French. Thus, French officials insisted that American assistance be furnished with "no strings attached" and with virtually no control over its use. Underlying this attitude was a deep-seated suspicion that the United States desired to totally supplant the French, economically as well as politically, in Indochina.

B. FRENCH LEVERAGE ON THE UNITED STATES

French leverage over the United States was made possible by the conviction, apparently firmly held in Washington, that the maintenance of a non-Communist Indochina was vital to Western-and specifically American-interests.

1. Primarily It Was France's War

The most fundamental fact was that the French were carrying on a war which the United States considered, rightly or wrongly, to be essential. Thus, the French were always able to threaten simply to end the war by pulling out of Indochina. By the early 1950's, with the French nation tired of the "la sale guerre," this would not have been an unpopular decision within France. Paris was thereby able to hint-which it did-that if U.S. assistance was not forthcoming, it would simply withdraw from Indochina, leaving to the United States alone the task of the containment of communism in Southeast Asia. When the Laniel Government requested in the fall of 1953 a massive increase in American assistance, the State Department representative at an NSC meeting asserted that "if this French Government, which proposes reinforcing Indochina with our aid, is not supported by us at this time, it may be the last such government prepared to make a real effort to win in Indochina." In effect, then, because of the overriding importance given by

Washington to holding the communist line in Indochina, the French in being able to threaten to withdraw possessed an important instrument of blackmail.

The upshot of this was that U.S. leverage was quite minimal. Since the French were, in a way, fighting a U.S. battle as well as their own to prevent communist control of Indochina, any ham-fisted U.S. pressure was bound to weaken the French resolve and capability. Consequently, the leverage which the U.S. attained through its aid could be used for little more than to urge greater efficiency and determination on France. In other words, Washington could move Paris to formulate a Navarre type plan, but could not influence the way France conducted the war, nor could it move France on political issues in dispute.

2. Expectation of French Success

The temptation to "go along" with the French until the Viet Minh was defeated was all the more attractive because of the expectation of victory which pervaded official Washington. Before Dien Bien Phu, General O'Daniel consistently reported that victory was within reach if the United States continued its support. In November, 1953, General O'Daniel submitted a progress report on the Navarre Plan which summarized what the French had been doing and what remained to be accomplished. The report said that French Union forces held the initiative and would begin offensives in mid-January, 1954 in the Mekong Delta and in the region between Cape Varella and Da Nang. Meanwhile, a relatively small force would attempt to keep the Viet Minh off balance in the Tonkin Delta until October, 1954, when the French would begin a major offensive North of the 19th parallel. The report concluded by assessing that the Navarre Plan was basically sound and should be supported since it would bring a decisive victory.

O'Daniel's optimism was not duplicated by other observers. CINCPAC, for one, considered the report over-optimistic, stating that political and psychological factors were of such crucial importance that no victory would be possible until the Vietnamese were able to capture villages and until psychological warfare operations could be undertaken to win over the people. The Army attaché in Saigon was even less sanguine. He flatly stated that the French, after six months of the Navarre Plan, were still on the defensive and showed no sign of being able to win the war in the future. The attaché's views were, moreover, concurred in by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, who observed that other high U.S. military officers in Indochina agreed with the attaché and found O'Daniel's report unwarrantedly optimistic.

3. American Policy in Europe: The EDC

An important source of French leverage was to be found outside of Far Eastern affairs. A primary objective of American foreign policy in 1953-1954 was the creation of a European Defense Community (E.D.C.). The purpose of the EDC was to "envelope" a new West German Army into an integrated six nation army which would go a long way towards providing for the defense of Western Europe. Washington officials expected that the EDC would permit a reduction (but not complete elimination) of American ground

forces in Europe. The membership of France in the EDC-as a counter-weight to the proposed re-arming of Germany-was essential to its adoption by the five other European nations. Because of the high priority given to EDC in American planning, there was a strong reluctance to antagonize the French in Indochina. This was reinforced by knowledge that the French placed a far lower priority on EDC, in part because of the traditional French fear of an armed Germany, in part because the French estimate of Soviet intentions in Western Europe differed from that of the United States in that it placed a low probability on a direct Soviet intervention.

Apparently unnoticed at the time was an implicit contradiction in the American policy of pushing the French simultaneously on both adopting the EDC and on making a greater effort in Indochina. The latter required increased French forces in the Far East. But the French National Assembly would not adopt the EDC unless, at a minimum, it was assured that French forces in Europe would be on parity with those of Germany. Thus, the French argued that the possible coming into effect of the EDC prevented them from putting larger forces into Indochina. After the loss of North Vietnam and the French rejection of EDC, the Chairman of an Interdepartmental Working Group set up to formulate a new American policy on Indochina for the post-Geneva period observed that "our policies thus far have failed because we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both."

4. French Desire for Negotiations

French leverage was also demonstrated by their ability to have the Indochina problem placed on the agenda for the Geneva Conference at the time of the Quadripartite Foreign Minister's meeting in February 1954 in Berlin. The Geneva Conference had been called to work out a political settlement for the Korean War. Dulles did not wish to negotiate on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation of the French and they could negotiate from a position of far greater strength. But the Laniel Government was under mounting pressure from French public opinion to end the Indochinese war. At Berlin the French delegation insisted, despite American objections, that Indochina be inscribed on the Geneva agenda. Foreign Minister Bidault reportedly warned that if the United States did not acquiesce on this point, EDC would doubtlessly be scuttled.

Dulles did succeed in opposing Soviet efforts to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power at Geneva and forced the acceptance in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition would be implied in the Chinese invitation to the conference. In return for this concession, however, the French were able to give highly visible evidence of their interest in ending the war soon through negotiations. Ironically, this had a double-edged effect: in Paris the "peace faction" was mollified; but in Hanoi plans were made to step up the intensity of the war so as to make a show of strength prior to the beginning of the Geneva Conference. Thus, the coming battle of Dien Bien Phu came to have a crucial significance in large measure because of the very inclusion of the Indochina item for the Geneva Conference. As Ellen Hammer has written:

This was the last opportunity before the Geneva Conference for the Viet Minh to show its military strength, its determination to fight until victory. And there were those who thought that General Giap was resolved on victory, no matter the cost, not only to impress the enemy but also to convince his Communist allies that the Viet Minh by its own efforts had earned a seat at the conference table and the right to a voice in its own future. For the French . . . upon the outcome of the battle depended much of the spirit in which they would send their representatives to Geneva.

5. Conclusion: Incompatibility of American and French Objectives

In summary, one must take notice of the paradox of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the French with respect to Indochina, 1950-1954. American interests and objectives were basically different from those of the French. The United States was concerned with the containment of communism and restricting the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. The immediate U.S. objective was supporting a domino. France, on the other hand, was fighting primarily a colonial war designed to maintain the French presence in Southeast Asia and avoid the crumbling of the French Union. Despite occasional pledges to the "perfectionment" of independence for the Associated States--pledges which were usually given under circumstances which were forcing France to "justify" the war, in part to receive further American assistance--France was *not* fighting a long and costly war in order to thereafter completely pull out.

The fact that the American and French means--pushing for military victory--converged in 1950-1954 obscured the fact that the ends of the two nations were inherently incompatible. This further led to a basic incompatibility in the two strands of American policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the war and win, preferably .with American guidance and advice; and (2) having achieved success at great cost in what the French viewed at least initially as more a "colonial" than "anti-communist" war, Washington expected the French to withdraw magnanimously. (A Frenchman might have asked how France, even if it wished to, could have left Indochina without creating similar pressures for withdrawal from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, where over one million Frenchmen lived.) In this inherent inconsistency can be found much of the explanation for the lack of American leverage over France during the pre-Geneva years.

III. PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

Three major perceptions dominated U.S. thinking and policy-making on Indochina during the years 1950-1954. The first was the growing importance of Asia in world politics. The process of devolution from colonial empires to independent states, it was thought, would create power vacuums and conditions of instability which would make Asia susceptible to becoming a battleground in the growing East-West cold war conflict. Second, there was an undeniable tendency to view the worldwide "communist threat" in monolithic terms. This was perhaps understandable given the relatively extensive influence then exerted by the Soviet Union over other communist nations, and the communist parties in non-communist states. Moreover, the West, and especially the U.S., was challenged by

the expansionist policies openly proclaimed by leaders of virtually all the communist movements. Third, the attempt of the patently Communist Ho Chi Minh regime to evict the French from Indochina was seen as part of the Southeast Asian manifestation of the communist world-wide aggressive intent. The resistance of France to Ho, therefore, was seen as a crucial stand on the line along which the West would contain communism.

A. "DOMINO PRINCIPLE" BEFORE KOREA

These three perceptions help explain the widely held assumption in official Washington that if Indochina was "lost" to communism, the remaining nations of Southeast Asia would inexorably succumb to communist infiltration and be taken over in a chain reaction. This strategic conception of the communist threat to Southeast Asia pre-dated the outbreak in June 1950 of the Korean War. It probably had its period of gestation at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China. NSC 48/1 was the key document in framing this conception. Drawn up in June 1949, after Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had expressed concern at the course of events in Asia and had suggested a widening of the previous country-by-country memorandum approach to a regional plan, NSC 48/1 included the statements that "the extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us . . . If Southeast Asia is also swept by communism, we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia."

It was Russia rather than China that was seen in 1949 as being the principal source of the communist threat in Asia. Although it was conceded that in the course of time China (or Japan or India) may attempt to dominate Asia:

now and for the foreseeable future it is the USSR which threatens to dominate Asia through the complementary instruments of communist conspiracy and diplomatic pressure supported by military strength. For the foreseeable future, therefore, our immediate objective must be to contain and where feasible to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations.

NSC 48/1 also recognized that "the colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist movements, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target for a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin."

At this time, the NSC believed that the United States, as a Western power in any area where the bulk of the population had long been suspicious of Western influence, should insofar as possible refrain from taking any lead in Southeast Asia. The United States should instead "encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area," recognizing "that the non-communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against

communist expansion in Asia." NSC 48/2 pointed out that particular attention should be given to the problem of Indochina where "action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese."

B. IMPORTANCE OF INDOCHINA

Indochina was of special importance because it was the only area adjacent to China which contained a large European army which was in armed conflict with communist forces. The Chinese Communists were believed to be furnishing the Viet Minh with substantial material assistance. Official French sources reported that there were some Chinese troops in Tonkin, as well as large numbers ready for action against the French on the Chinese side of the border. The first NSC memorandum dealing solely with Indochina (NSC 64) [[Doc. 1](#)] was adopted as policy on February 27, 1950. This paper took note of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh and estimated that it was doubtful that the French Expeditionary forces, combined with Indochinese troops, could successfully contain Ho Chi Minh's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese troops crossing the border, or by communist-supplied arms and material in quantity.

NSC 64-written, it should be noted, by the Truman Administration and before the outbreak of the Korean War-observed that "the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia." It concluded with a statement of what came to be known as the "domino principle":

It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

C. IMPACT OF START OF KOREAN WAR

The outbreak of the Korean War, and the American decision to resist North Korean aggression, sharpened overnight our thoughts and actions with respect to Southeast Asia. The American military response symbolized in the most concrete manner possible the basic belief that holding the line in Southeast Asia was essential to American security interests. The French struggle in Indochina came far more than before to be seen as an integral part of the containment of communism in that region of the world. Accordingly, the United States intensified and enlarged its programs of aid in Indochina. Military aid shipments to Indochina acquired in 1951 the second highest priority, just behind the Korean war program.

A consequence of the Korean War, and particularly the Chinese intervention, was that China replaced the Soviet Union as the principal source of the perceived communist threat in Southeast Asia. This was made explicit in NSC 124/2 (June 1952) [[Doc. 13](#)] which stated that "the danger of an overt military attack against Southeast Asia is inherent in the existence of a hostile and aggressive Communist China."

The "domino principle" in its purest form was written into the "General Considerations" section of NSC 124/2. It linked the loss of any single state of Southeast Asia to the stability of Europe and the security of the United States:

2. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.
 - a. The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with communism of the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow. Such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.
 - b. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the U.S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U.S. security interests in the Far East.
 - c. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and India, all important areas of free Asia.
 - d. The loss of Southeast Asia, especially of Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to communism.

The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to the Chinese intervention in Korea, came to dominate the thinking of American policy-makers after the start of the Korean War. Such an intervention would not have been surprising given the larger numbers of Chinese troops massed along the Tonkin border and the material assistance being given to the Viet Minh. The NIE of December 1950 considered direct Chinese intervention to be "impending." The following year it was estimated that after an armistice in Korea the Chinese would be capable of intervention in considerable strength, but would be inhibited from acting overtly by a number of factors, including the risk of

American retaliation and the disadvantages attendant upon involvement in another protracted campaign. By early 1952, as the French position showed signs of deterioration, intelligence authorities believed that the Chinese would be content to continue aiding the Viet Minh without undertaking direct involvement (except for material aid) unless provoked into it. Thus, the intelligence community, after estimating a high risk of Chinese intervention at the start of the Korean War, gradually reduced its estimate of Indochina being broadened into a wider war as the Viet Minh showed signs of doing well enough on their own.

Nevertheless, the NSC undertook in 1952 to list a course of action for the "resolute defense" of Indochina in case of a large-scale Chinese intervention. It included the provision of air and naval forces; the interdiction of Chinese communication lines, including those in China proper; and a naval blockade of the China coast. If these "minimum courses of action" did not prove to be sufficient, the U.S. should take air and naval action "against all suitable military targets in China," when possible in conjunction with British and French forces.

In prescribing these recommended actions, the NSC focused on the less likely contingency of a Chinese intervention rather than the more likely contingency of the continued deterioration of the French position in Indochina itself. It did so despite the fact that NSC 124/2 conceded that the "primary threat" was the situation in Indochina itself (increasing subversive efforts by indigenous communist forces, increased guerrilla activity, and increased Viet Minh civil control over population and territory). Apparently, the NSC wanted to make clear that direct U.S. involvement in Indochina was to be limited to dealing with direct Chinese involvement. In the absence of this contingency, however, and to meet the existing situation in Indochina, the NSC recommended that the United States increase its level of aid to French Union forces but "without relieving the French authorities of their basic military responsibility for the defense of the Associated States."

D. REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATION AND FAR EAST

Two events in 1953 served to deepen the American commitment in Indochina. The first was the arrival of a Republican Administration following a long period in which the G.O.P. had persistently accused the Truman Administration of being responsible for the "loss" of China to communism. The writings and speeches of John Foster Dulles before the election left no doubt that he regarded Southeast Asia as a key region in the conflict with communist "imperialism," and that it was important to draw the line of containment north of the Rice Bowl of Asia--the Indochina peninsula. In his first State of the Union Message on February 3, 1953, President Eisenhower promised a "new, positive foreign policy." He went on to link the communist aggression in Korea and Malaya with Indochina. Dulles subsequently spoke of Korea and Indochina as two flanks, with the principal enemy--Red China--in the center. A special study mission headed by Representative Walter Judd, a recognized Republican spokesman on Asia, surveyed the Far East and reported on its view of the high stakes involved:

The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, Malaya, Singapore and even Indonesia would become more vulnerable to the Communist power drive. . . . Communism would then be in an exceptional position to complete its perversion of the political and social revolution that is spreading through Asia. . . . The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina.

The Republican Administration clearly intended to prevent the loss of Indochina by taking a more forthright, anti-communist stand.

E. IMPACT OF KOREAN ARMISTICE

Second, the armistice in Korea created apprehension that the Chinese Communists would now turn their attention to Indochina. President Eisenhower warned in a speech on April 16, 1953, that any armistice in Korea that merely released armed forces to pursue an attack elsewhere would be a fraud. Secretary Dulles continued this theme after the Korean armistice in a speech on September 2, 1953, on the war in Indochina. After noting that "a single Communist aggressive front extends from Korea on the north to Indochina in the south" he said:

Communist China has been and now is training, equipping and supplying the Communist forces in Indochina. There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own Army into Indochina. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina. I say this soberly . . . in the hope of preventing another aggressor miscalculation.

Underlying these warnings to China was the belief that the difference between success or failure in avoiding a takeover of all Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh probably depended upon the extent of Chinese assistance or direct participation. Signaling a warning to China was probably designed to deter further Chinese involvement. Implicit in the signals was the threat that if China came into the war, the United States would be forced to follow suit, preferably with allies but, if necessary, alone. Furthermore, the Eisenhower Administration implied that in keeping with its policy of massive retaliation the United States would administer a punishing nuclear blow to China without necessarily involving its land forces in an Asian war.

F. DEEPENING OF U.S. COMMITMENT TO CONTAINMENT

In addition to the new mood in Washington created by the strategic perceptions of a new Administration and the Korean armistice, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and the deepening war weariness in France served to strengthen those who favored a more assertive policy in Indochina. The United States rushed supplies to Laos and Thailand in May 1953 and provided six C-47's with civilian crews for the airlift into Laos. It increased substantially the volume and tempo of American military assistance to

French Union forces. For fiscal year 1954, \$460 million in military assistance was planned. Congress only appropriated \$400 million, but following the presentation by the French of the Navarre Plan an additional \$385 million was decided upon by the NSC. No objection was raised when France asked our views in August, 1953, on the transfer of its battalion in Korea to Indochina and subsequently took this action. The Navarre Plan, by offering a format for victory which promised success without the direct involvement of American military forces, tended, because of its very attractiveness, to have the effect of enlarging our commitment to assist the French towards achieving a military solution.

In the last NSC paper approved before the Indochina situation was totally transformed by the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, the "successful defense of Tonkin" was said to be the "keystone of the defense of mainland Southeast Asia except possibly Malaya." NSC 5405 [[Doc. 20](#)] took some, but probably not sufficient, account of the deterioration in the French position which had occurred since NSC 124/2 was approved eighteen months earlier. It, nevertheless, repeated the domino principle in detail, including the admonition that "such is the interrelation of the countries of the area that effective counteraction would be immediately necessary to prevent the loss of any single country from leading to submission to, or an alignment with, communism by the remaining countries of Southeast Asia and Indonesia." The document also noted that:

In the conflict in Indochina, the Communists and non-Communists worlds clearly confront one another in the field of battle: The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia and South Asia, would therefore have the most serious repercussions on U.S. and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere.

The subject of possible negotiations was broached in NSC 5405, following the observation that political pressures in France may impel the French Government to seek a negotiated rather than a military settlement. It was noted (before Dien Bien Phu) that if the Navarre Plan failed or appeared doomed to failure, the French might seek to negotiate simply for the best possible terms, irrespective of whether these offered any assurance of preserving a non-communist Indochina.

In this regard the NSC decided the U.S. should employ every feasible means to influence the French Government against concluding the struggle on terms "inconsistent" with the basic U.S. objectives. The French should be told that: (1) in the absence of a marked improvement in the military situation, there was no basis for negotiation on acceptable terms; (2) the U.S. would "flatly oppose any idea" of a cease-fire as a preliminary to negotiations, because such a cease-fire would result in an irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position in Indochina; (3) *a nominally non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh with no opportunity for the replacement of the French by the United States or the United Kingdom.* [Emphasis Added]

G. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, two comments can be made:

a. With the growing perception of a Chinese threat to Indochina, and, therefore, to all of Southeast Asia, the U.S. Government tended to concentrate on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. In consequence, American attention focused on (1) deterring external intervention from China, and (2) assisting the French in successfully prosecuting the war through the implementation of the Navarre Plan. The result of this was that the encouragement and support of the non-communist nationalist governments in the Associated States was almost inadvertently given lower priority. The United States was reluctant to press the French too strongly on taking measures to foster Vietnam nationalism because of its overriding interest in halting the potential sweep of communism through Southeast Asia. Moreover, it was easier to develop a policy for dealing with the external threat of intervention than to meet the internal threat of subversion, or the even more difficult process of finding and sustaining a genuine nationalist alternative to the Viet Minh.

b. The "domino theory" and the assumptions behind it were never questioned. The homogeneity of the nations of Southeast Asia was taken as a given, as was the linkage in their ability to remain democratic, or at an acceptable minimum, non-communist, nations. Undoubtedly, in the first decade of the cold war there existed an unfortunate stereotype of a monolithic communist expansionary bloc. It was reinforced by a somewhat emotional approach on the part of many Americans to communism in China and Asia. This "syndrome" was, in part, the result of the "fall" of China, which some felt could have been averted, and a few hoped would still be reversed.

Accordingly, not sufficient cognizance was taken of the individuality of the states of Southeast Asia and the separateness of their societies. Probably there was some lack of knowledge in depth on the part of Washington policy-makers about the area. No one before World War II had expected that the United States would be called upon to take a position of leadership in these remote colonial territories of our European allies. In hindsight, these shortcomings may have led to the fallacious belief that a neutralist or communist Indochina would inevitably draw the other states of Asia into the communist bloc or into neutralism. But the "fallacy" was neither evident then, nor is it demonstrable now in retrospect.

IV. THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

A. THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

The debate over the wisdom and manner of American intervention in Indochina was based primarily on the desirability of military involvement, not on questions concerning Indochina's value to United States security interests in the Far East. The Eisenhower Administration was in general agreement with the rationale for American interest in Indochina expressed by the Truman Administration. The United States Government first came to full grips with the question of intervention in late 1953-early 1954 as the fall of Indochina seemed to become imminent.

1. The Final Truman Program (NSC 124)

NSC 124 (February, 1952) considered imperative the prevention of a Communist take-over in Indochina. It recognized that even in the absence of "identifiable aggression" by Communist China, the U.S. might be forced to take some action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In case of overt Chinese intervention, NSC 124 recommended: (1) naval, air and logistical support of French Union forces; (2) naval blockade of Communist China; (3) attacks by land and carrier-based aircraft on military targets in Mainland China. It stopped short of recommending the commitment of U.S. ground forces in Indochina.

2. Eisenhower Administration's "Basic National Security Policy"

NSC 162/2 [[Doc. 18](#)], adopted in October, 1953, ten months after the Republican Administration took office, was the basic document of the "New Look." After commenting on U.S. and Soviet defense capabilities, the prospect of nuclear parity and the need to balance domestic economic policy with military expenditures, it urged a military posture based on the ability "to inflict massive retaliatory damage" on the enemy. Indochina was listed as an area of "strategic importance" to the U.S. An attack on such important areas "probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressor." The use of tactical nuclear weapons in conventional war situations was recommended, but they were not specifically suggested for use in Indochina.

B. THE QUESTION OF INTERVENTION WITH GROUND FORCES

1. The Problem Is Presented

In late 1953, the Army questioned prevalent assumptions that ground forces would not be required in Indochina if the area was as important to U.S. security interests as the NSC papers stated. The Army urged that the issue be faced squarely in order to provide the best possible preparation for whatever courses of action might be undertaken. The Plans Division of the Army General Staff pointed out that under current programs the Army did not have the capability of providing divisional forces for operations in Indochina while maintaining its existing commitments in Europe and the Far East. Army also suggested a "reevaluation of the importance of Indochina and Southeast Asia in relation to the possible cost of saving it."

With the deterioration of the French military situation in Indochina, the first serious attention came to be given to the manner and size of a U.S. intervention. The question to be faced was: how far was the U.S. prepared to go in terms of force commitments to ensure that Indochina stayed out of Communist hands? The Defense Department, though not of a single mind on this question, pressed for an early determination of the forces the U.S. would be willing to dispatch in an emergency situation. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert Anderson, proposed to Secretary of Defense Wilson on January 6, 1954, that the U.S. decide immediately to employ combat forces in Indochina on the "reasonable assurance of strong indigenous support of our forces," whether or not

the French Government approved. But Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in OSD, wrote:

...Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement--such as "Naval and Air units only." One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly.

Admiral Davis then went on:

Comment: If it is determined desirable to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed.

2. NSC: State and Defense Views

The evident disparity between, on the one hand, our high strategic valuation of Indochina, and on the other, our unwillingness to reach a firm decision on the forces required to defend the area became the subject of the NSC's 179th meeting on January 8, 1954. At this meeting the Council discussed NSC 177 on Southeast Asia, but it decided not to take up the Special Annex to NSC 177 which laid out a series of choices which might face the United States if the French military position in Indochina continued to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the NSC at that time did make some headway on the problem it had posed for itself.

According to summary notes taken of the meeting, State and Defense were at considerable variance on what should be done in either of two contingencies: first, French abandonment of the struggle; second, a French demand for substantial U.S. forces (ground, sea, and air). The State view considered the French position so critical already as (in the rapporteur's words) to "force the U.S. to decide now to utilize U.S. forces in the fighting in Southeast Asia." The Defense representative refused to underwrite U.S. involvement. He reportedly stated that the French could win by the spring of 1955 given U.S. aid and given "improved French political relations with the Vietnamese . . . The commitment of U.S. forces in a 'civil war' in Indochina will be an admission of the bankruptcy of our political policies re Southeast Asia and France and should be resorted to only in extremity." He urged that every step be taken to avoid a direct American commitment.

The Council meeting reached two important conclusions, both fully in keeping with the Defense position. First, it decided that a discussion of contingencies for U.S. involvement missed the essential point that the French were capable of winning provided they gained native political and military cooperation. Second, NSC 177 was, as Defense suggested,

inadequate in that the study failed to come to grips with the fact that eventual success in Indochina depended upon French ability to solve the problem of how to obtain Vietnamese support for the war effort.

3. The JCS View

The NSC meeting of January 8 still left open the question of U.S. action in the event troops were indisputably necessary to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept their options open. The Chiefs thought that the Navarre Plan was fundamentally sound, but was being steadily undercut by the gulf separating the French from the Vietnamese, by General Navarre's failure to implement U.S. recommendations, and by hesitancy in Paris over the necessary political concessions to the Bao Dai government. Yet JCS refused either to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces or to back unequivocally their employment.

4. Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina

Dissatisfaction with NSC 177 and the NSC's subsequent failure in NSC 5405 to resolve the ground force commitment issue led to the formation of a working group to evaluate the French military effort, to make recommendations concerning future U.S. contributions to it, and to devote attention to the various contingencies under which the U.S. might be called upon to intervene directly in the war. The working group, under the chairmanship of General G. B. Erskine (USMC, Ret.), was composed of representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and CIA. The group was responsible to NSC through General W. Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, who had been appointed by the Council to head the Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina.

5. The Erskine Report, Part I: Motivate the French

The first section of Erskine's two-part report, dated February 6, 1954, was based on the assumption that U.S. policy toward Indochina would not require resort to overt combat operations by U.S. forces. Within that framework, the report adhered closely to the Defense Department position that the French, if properly motivated, could win in Indochina, but that their failure to carry through on needed reforms would require U.S. consideration of active involvement. The report noted that:

There is in Indo-China, or programmed for Indo-China . . . , a sufficient amount of equipment and supplies and a potential manpower pool sufficient eventually to defeat the Communists decisively if properly utilized and maintained and if the situation continues to permit this manpower to be converted into military effectiveness. Success will ultimately be dependent upon the inspiration of the local population to fight for their own freedom from Communist domination and the willingness of the French both to take the measures to stimulate that inspiration and to more fully utilize the native potential.

The Erskine Report (Part I) recommended: (1) augmentation of the French air force, but not using American personnel; (2) additional U.S. military assistance support of \$124

million (supplementing FY 1954 commitments of \$1.115 billion); (3) elevation of MAAG's status to that of Military Mission, with expanded personnel and advisory authority over training and planning; (4) assignment of additional U.S. personnel with the mission of acting as instructors and performing other key duties within the French forces; (5) Presidential letters to the Heads of State of the Associated States reaffirming our support of their independence and explaining our motivations in assisting them through the French; (6) an effort be undertaken to persuade Bao Dai to take a more active part in the anti-Viet Minh struggle. The report concluded that the program of recommended changes could bring about victory over the Viet Minh if it received full French approval and barring Chinese intervention.

6. The Erskine Report, Part II: Intervention Only After Geneva?

The second part of the Erskine Report [[Doc. 24](#)] did not appear until March 17, 1954, and unlike the first, was the responsibility only of the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs, with the State Department position "reserved." The report confirmed previous determinations that the loss of Indochina would be a major military and political setback for the United States. It recommended that prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, the U.S. should inform Britain and France that it was interested only in military victory in Indochina and would not associate ourselves with any settlement which falls short of that objective. It further recommended that in the event of an unsatisfactory outcome at Geneva, the U.S. should pursue ways of continuing the struggle in concert with the Associated States, the United Kingdom, and other allies. The National Security Council was therefore requested to determine the extent of American willingness to commit combat forces to the region with or without French cooperation. But with the Dien Bien Phu siege just beginning, and the Geneva Conference six weeks away, the Erskine Report suggested that the United States influence and observe developments at the Geneva Conference before deciding on active involvement.

7. NSC 177 Annex Raises Intervention Question Anew

Following the second part of the Erskine Report, the President evidently decided that the Special Annex to NSC 177, which had been withdrawn in January 1954, should be redistributed for consideration by the Council's Planning Board. The Annex to NSC 177 posed the fundamental choice between (a) acceptance of the loss of Indochina, which would be followed by U.S. efforts to prevent further deterioration of our security position in Southeast Asia, or (b) direct military action to save Indochina before the French and Vietnamese became committed to an unacceptable political settlement at Geneva.

Among the alternative courses of action outlined in the Annex, two in particular—both geared to direct U.S. action prior to a Geneva settlement—were discussed. Under the first, based on French consent to continue fighting, the U.S. was urged to (1) seek a Franco-Vietnamese settlement of the independence issue, (2) insist upon a build-up of indigenous forces with U.S. advisory and material support, (3) demand the maintenance of French forces in the field at their then present level, and (4) prepare to provide sufficient U.S. forces to make possible the success of a joint effort. Full internationalization of the war

would be discussed with the French later, thereby discounting immediate action in concert with the British or Asian nations.

The second alternative assumed a French pull-out. In such a case the United States could either accept the loss of Indochina, or adopt an active policy while France gradually withdrew its troops. Should we accept the latter course, our "most positive" step offering "the greatest assurance of success" would be, NSC estimated, to join with indigenous forces in combatting the Viet Minh until they were reduced "to the status of scattered guerrilla bands." U.S. land, sea, and air forces would be involved.

The Annex was based upon assumptions that U.S. involvement against the Viet Minh would not provoke massive Chinese intervention, would not lead to direct Soviet involvement, and that there would be no resumption of hostilities in Korea. It acknowledged that any change in these assumptions would seriously jeopardize the success of the alternatives proposed. In particular, it noted that U.S. participation heightened the risk of Chinese intervention, and Chinese entry would alter radically both the immediate military situation and U.S. force requirements.

8. Army Questions Feasibility of Air-Naval intervention and Outlines Ground Forces Requirements

The principal result of the discussions on the NSC 177 Special Annex was to bring into the open the issue of the costs in manpower and materiel of a U.S. involvement. The Army was critical of contingency planning that was based on the assumption that U.S. air and naval forces could be used in Indochina without the commitment of ground combat forces. General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, later wrote in his Memoirs that he was quite disturbed at talk in high government circles about employing air-naval power alone in Indochina. An Army position paper [[Doc. 31](#)] submitted to the NSC in the first week of April, 1954, argued as follows:

1. U.S. intervention with combat forces in Indochina is not militarily desirable...
2. A victory in Indochina cannot be assured by U.S. intervention with air and naval forces alone.
3. The use of atomic weapons in Indochina would not reduce the number of ground forces required to achieve a victory in Indochina.
4. Seven U.S. divisions or their equivalent, with appropriate naval and air support, would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists do not intervene. However, U.S. intervention plans cannot be based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists will not intervene.
5. The equivalent of 12 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina, if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists intervene.
6. The equivalent of 7 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French remain and the Chinese Communists intervene.
7. Requirements for air and naval support for ground force operations are:

- a. Five hundred fighter-bomber sorties per day exclusive of interdiction and counter-air operations.
- b. An airlift capability of a one division drop.
- c. A division amphibious lift.

8. Two U.S. divisions can be placed in Indochina in 30 days, and an additional 5 divisions in the following 120 days. This could be accomplished without reducing U.S. ground strength in the Far East to an unacceptable degree, but the U.S. ability to meet its NATO commitment would be seriously affected for a considerable period. The amount of time required to place 12 divisions in Indochina would depend upon the industrial and personnel mobilization measures taken by the government .

9. Defense-JCS "Solution": Rectify French Deficiencies

Faced with estimates that U.S. air-naval action could not turn the tide, and that U.S. ground forces of appropriate size would impinge upon other commitments, DoD and the JCS took the position that an alternative military solution existed within the reach of the French which required no U.S. intervention. DoD argued that the three reasons for France's deteriorating position were (1) lack of the will to win; (2) reluctance to meet Indochinese demands for true independence; (3) refusal to train indigenous personnel for military leadership. Defense believed that premature U.S. involvement would therefore beg the basic question of whether the U.S. was prepared to apply the strongest pressure on France, primarily in the European context, to attempt to force the French in Paris and in Indochina to take appropriate measures to rectify these deficiencies. Only if these measures were forthcoming, DoD held, should the U.S. seriously consider committing ground forces in defense of the interests of France and the Associated States. The net effect of the Defense-JCS position was to challenge the notion that a quick U.S. military action in Indochina would be either feasible or necessary.

C. THE NEW APPROACH: "UNITED ACTION"

At this juncture the Eisenhower Administration began giving serious consideration to broadening any American military intervention in Indochina by making it part of a collective venture along with its European and Asian allies. Secretary of State Dulles in a speech on March 29 warned the public of the alarming situation in Indochina and called for "united action"--without defining it further--in these words:

Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today.

Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, to which the Erskine working group had reported, issued a study on April 2.

This report went beyond the question of holding Indochina and agreed that whatever that area's fate, the U.S. should begin developing a system of mutual defense for Southeast Asia. For the short term, the Smith Committee favored American sponsorship of a mutual defense treaty directed against Communist aggression in Indochina and Thailand. In the long run, it recommended promotion of a "regional and Asian mutual defense arrangement subscribed and underwritten by the major European powers with interests in the Pacific."

The State Department's thinking in early April 1954 was not greatly at variance from that of Defense and the Smith Committee. Perhaps more so than Defense, State was concerned about the Chinese reaction to a U.S. military intervention. It urged caution and suggested that in any type of "united action" the U.S. make clear to both the Chinese and the allies that the intervention would not be aimed at the overthrow or destruction of the Peking regime. State recommended: (1) no U.S. military intervention for the moment, nor should it be promised to the French; (2) planning for military intervention continue; (3) discussions with potential allies on possibility of forming a regional grouping in the event of an unacceptable settlement at Geneva.

1. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"

Meanwhile, the President decided, following a meeting of Secretary Duiles and Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with Congressional leaders on April 3, that the U.S. would not undertake a unilateral intervention. Any U.S. military involvement in Indochina would be contingent upon (1) formation of a coalition force with U.S. allies to pursue "united action"; (2) declaration of French intent to accelerate independence of Associated States; (3) Congressional approval of U.S. involvement (which was thought to be dependent upon (1) and (2)).

These policy guidelines undoubtedly influenced the NSC which, at a meeting on April 6, developed the somewhat incompatible objectives that the U.S. (a) "intervene if necessary to avoid the loss of Indochina, but advocate that no steps be left untaken to get the French to achieve a successful conclusion of the war on their own" and (b) support as the best alternative to U.S. intervention a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation.

The President accepted the NSC recommendations but decided that henceforth the Administration's primary efforts would be devoted toward: (1) organizing regional collective defense against Communist expansion; (2) gaining British support for U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia; (3) pressing France to accelerate its timetable for Indochinese independence. The President would seek Congressional approval for U.S. participation in a regional arrangement, if it could be put together, and meanwhile contingency planning for mobilization would commence.

2. Rejection of Unilateral Intervention

Thus, as the curtain began to fall on the French effort at Dien Bien Phu, and the question of what the U.S. would do became critical, the U.S. Government backed away from

unilateral intervention. The Defense Department was reluctant to intervene following the Army's presentation of the view that air-naval action alone would not do the job and ground forces would be needed. The very recent experience of the Korean War mitigated strongly against another American involvement in an Asian land war. Furthermore, the President was not willing to enter into such a venture unless it was cloaked with Congressional approval. Such approval, in turn, depended upon the participation of the allies. Hence, Secretary Dulles undertook the task of persuading Britain, France and the Asian allies to participate in a coalition for "united action" in Indochina.

V. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

A. *THE BERLIN CONFERENCE OF 1954*

Negotiations for a political settlement of the French-Viet Minh war were practically assured when it was decided at the Big Four meeting in Berlin in February 1954 that the Indochina question would be added to the agenda of an upcoming international conference at Geneva which was to discuss primarily a settlement of the Korean War. The period between the Berlin and Geneva conferences (i.e., between February and May 1954) unexpectedly witnessed a denouement of the Indochina drama with the siege and fall of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. decision not to intervene, and the unsuccessful U.S. attempt to rally its allies together in order to form a collective force in pursuance of "united action."

1. *Viet Minh Strategy and French Attitudes*

The half-year before the Berlin Foreign Ministers conference of February 1954 saw both a marked step up of Viet Minh military activity and the presentation of a peace feeler from Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnam Peoples Army (VPA) began to change its strategy against the French from guerrilla activities to conventional battle deployments. This was accompanied by an increase in the amount of Chinese military assistance, no doubt facilitated by the end of armed conflict in Korea. Thus, the Viet Minh appeared to be showing a newly found strength and confidence, although at the time the French refused to recognize this either publicly or to themselves.

Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh put out a peace feeler in late November 1953 in reply to a questionnaire submitted by a correspondent for the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*. The one pre-condition set by Ho for negotiations was French recognition of Vietnamese independence. In subsequent weeks, the peace feeler was repeated on several occasions, but each time it failed to indicate the place at which talks might be held, nor did it propose a scope for the talks.

Nothing resulted directly from these peace feelers, but indirectly they added to the mounting public and political sentiment in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The armistice agreement negotiated at Panmunjom in July 1953 served as an example which many Frenchmen hoped could be followed in the negotiation of a cease-fire with the DRV. A widespread disenchantment with the

Indochina war pervaded France. This was reflected in public statements by Prime Minister Laniel that Paris would be satisfied with an "honorable solution" to the war.

The French then adopted a policy toward the war of "keep fighting-keep talking." There was an increase in French military activity and confidence stimulated by the Navarre Plan, but this was offset by a growth in the size and influence of the peace faction in France, as indicated by the "dovish" votes of the National Assembly favoring an early settlement of the protracted war. Premier Laniel and French officials told the U.S. Embassy that they considered the Ho Chi Minh offer pure propaganda, but said also that Ho's move had produced the intended impact on public and military circles in France and Indochina. Laniel mentioned that President Vincent Auriol had become so excited by Ho's proposal that he told Laniel "to consult representatives of three Associated States immediately with view to seeking earliest possible opening of negotiations with representatives of Ho Chi Minh. Laniel had flatly refused . . ." But American officials were skeptical. The U.S. Embassy reported that a Laniel speech of November 24, 1953, "left considerable latitude for negotiations," and that Ho's offers had increased the pressure for a settlement.

2. Early U.S. Opposition to Negotiations

The consistent U.S. policy was to attempt to steer the French clear of the negotiating table pending substantial military gains on the battlefield. In bilateral U.S.-French talks in July, 1953, while the Korean armistice was being discussed at Panmunjom, Foreign Minister Bidault told Secretary Dulles that parallel talks should be pursued on Indochina. Bidault explained that the French public would never understand why negotiations were fit and honorable for Korea but were not for Indochina. A cease-fire in Korea, with nothing similar in prospect for Indochina, would make his government's position "absolutely impossible."

Secretary Dulles in reply stressed that "negotiations with no other alternative usually end in capitulation." In the Korean case, Dulles said, the alternative was the U.S. threat of "other and unpleasant measures" which the Communists realized we possessed. He urged the French to adopt the Navarre Plan, not only for military reasons, but because it would improve the French negotiating position. Dulles made it clear that the U.S. felt it was inadvisable to have the Indochina war inscribed on the agenda of a post-armistice political conference on Korea. The U.S. position at this time foreclosed negotiating on Indochina until after a Chinese decision to eliminate or cut down aid to the Viet Minh. In general, the U.S. sought to convince the French that military victory was the only guarantee of diplomatic success.

Dulles wished the French to continue the war because of his deep conviction that Indochina was a principal link in the line of the containment of Communism. In addition, Washington was undoubtedly influenced by optimistic reports on the progress of the war. General O'Daniel reported from Saigon that a French victory was likely if U.S. material support was forthcoming. On February 6, 1954, it was announced that forty B-26 bombers and 200 U.S. technicians to service them would be sent to Indochina. Admiral

Radford told a House Foreign Relations Subcommittee, a month before the siege of Dien Bien Phu began (March, 1954), that the Navarre Plan was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war."

At the Berlin Quadripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in February, however, Secretary Dulles was forced to give in on the French demand that Indochina be placed on the Geneva agenda. Bidault pressured the U.S. by threatening to scuttle the project for the European Defense Community which then was at the top of U.S. priorities. Dulles could not block Paris' determination to discuss Indochina at Geneva for it was, in the last analysis, France's war. He must have realized that the Laniel Government could not completely avoid negotiations without alienating itself from popular opinion and bringing about its downfall at the hands of the anti-war opposition parties.

The United States successfully opposed Soviet efforts at Berlin to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power, and successfully held out, furthermore, for the inclusion in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition, not already accorded, would be implied either in the invitation to, or the holding of, the Geneva Conference.

B. THE ELY MISSION (MARCH 20-24)

1. Dien Bien Phu Begins

On March 13, 1954, the VPA, under the direct command of General Giap, began its assault upon Dien Bien Phu. This fortress in Northern Vietnam was to take on a political and psychological importance far out of proportion to its actual strategic value because of the upcoming Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh correctly foresaw that a show of decisive force, not to mention a victory, would markedly strengthen their hand at the conference. Further, a defeat of the French Union forces would sap the will of the French nation to continue the struggle. The Viet Minh were greatly helped by a substantial increase in the level of Chinese military aid including artillery and radar. As the battle developed, the optimism which had pervaded Washington statements, public and private, on the war was replaced with the conviction that unless new steps were taken to deal with Chinese aid, the French were bound to go under.

General Paul Ely, French Chief of Staff, arrived in Washington on March 20 to confer with U.S. officials on the war situation. Ely's principal aims were to obtain American assurance of air intervention in the event of Chinese aerial attack, and to obtain further U.S. material assistance, especially B-26 bombers. Dulles told Ely that he could not then answer regarding U.S. response to Chinese air intervention. Ely subsequently contended in his *Mémoires* that he received a promise from Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to push for prompt American approval of interdiction should the contingency arise. As to the supply of bombers, twenty-five additional B-26's were promised.

2. Operation Vulture (Vautour)

According to subsequent French reports, General Ely was asked to stay 24 hours longer than planned in Washington, during which time Admiral Radford made an informal but major proposal to him. Radford is said to have suggested a nighttime raid against the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu by aircraft of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. The plan, named Operation Vulture, called for about sixty B-29's to take off from Clark Field near Manila, under escort of 150 fighters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, to conduct a massive strike against VPA positions on the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu.

Operation Vulture, according to French sources, was conceived by a joint American-French military staff in Saigon. It is admitted to have been an informal proposal which had not as yet received full U.S. Government backing as policy. No record of Operation Vulture has been found in files examined. In an interview in 1965, Admiral Radford stated that no plans for "Operation Vulture" existed, since planning to aid Dien Bien Phu by an air strike never proceeded beyond the conceptual stage. Nevertheless, such an operation probably was the subject of informal discussions both in Vietnam, and between Radford and Ely.

C. "UNITED ACTION" AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO EITHER NEGOTIATIONS OR TO UNILATERAL U.S. INTERVENTION

1. Formulation of U.S. Policy

By late March the internal debate within the Eisenhower Administration had reached the point where it was recognized that: (a) unilateral U.S. intervention in the Indochina War would not be effective without ground forces; (b) the involvement of U.S. ground forces was logistically and politically undesirable; (c) preferably, "free world" intervention in Indochina to save the area from communism would take the form of a collective operation by allied forces. This was the import of the NSC deliberations, the Ridgway Report, the Report of Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, and President Eisenhower's general train of thought.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in his discussions with General Ely went beyond the question of immediate assistance to the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu and broached the possible establishment of a regional defense arrangement for Southeast Asia.

This proposal was given public exposure in Secretary Dulles' speech of March 29 before the Overseas Press Club. Dulles described the importance of resisting communist aggression in Indochina in these words:

If the Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indo-China or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against the other free peoples in that area.

The propagandists of Red China and of Soviet Russia make it perfectly apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia.

Now Southeast Asia is an important part of the world. It is the so-called "rice bowl" . . . It is an area that is rich in many raw materials...

And in addition to these tremendous economic values, the area has great strategic value . . . Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand . . . The entire western Pacific area, including the so-called "offshore island chain," would be strategically endangered.

He then went on call for "united action," and after noting Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, prophesied that aggression would "lead to action in places by means of the free world's choosing, so that the aggression would surely cost more than it would gain."

In the following weeks the aim of U.S. diplomacy was to secure allied agreement to a collective defense pact consisting of ten nations: the U.S., France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the three Associated States. Secretary Dulles presented his proposal in discussions with British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins and French Ambassador Henri Bonnet. President Eisenhower addressed a personal message to Prime Minister Churchill explaining the proposed coalition. The President noted that:

Geneva is less than four weeks away. There the possibility of the Communists driving a wedge between us will, given the state of mind in France, be infinitely greater than at Berlin. I can understand the very natural desire of the French to seek an end to this war which has been bleeding them for eight years. But our painstaking search for a way out of the impasse has reluctantly forced us to the conclusion that there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in its essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement. The first alternative is too serious in its broad strategic implications for us and for you to be acceptable...

Somehow we must contrive to bring about the second alternative.

President Eisenhower went on to outline the need for a coalition willing to fight the Communists, if this proved necessary. He concluded with a historical question certain to appeal to Churchill:

If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unit and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson? .

In these discussions the United States sought generally to stiffen the will of the free nations in the Indochina crisis. It emphasized both the avowed intention of France to grant real independence to the Associated States, and the condition accepted by the French at Berlin for the United States' agreeing to discuss Indochina at Geneva. That condition was that France would not agree to any arrangement which would directly or indirectly result in the turnover of Indochina to the Communists. The United States sought solid support for this position, especially from the United Kingdom, Australia, and

New Zealand. Although the possibility was held out of future involvement of the United Nations in the Indochina problem, there was no thought of immediate UN action.

2. Initial Allied Reaction to "United Action"

Thailand and the Philippines gave a favorable response to the call for united action. The British response was one of caution and hesitancy. Churchill accepted Eisenhower's suggestion that Secretary Dulles go to London for further talks, but the British saw dangers in pressing for a defensive coalition before the Geneva conference. Eden was determined not to be "hustled into injudicious military decisions." As Eden later wrote:

I welcomed the American proposal for the organization of collective defence in South-East Asia, since this would contribute to the security of Malaya and Hong Kong and would remove the anomaly of our exclusion from the A.N.Z.U.S. Pact, to which the United States, Australia and New Zealand were party. But I felt that to form and proclaim a defensive coalition, before we went to the conference table, would be unlikely to help us militarily and would harm us politically, by frightening off important potential allies. By the beginning of May, the rains would be starting in Indo-China and extensive campaigning by either side would be impossible for several months. Since the complete collapse of the French military effort before then was improbable, I did not think that concern for the immediate military situation should be the guiding factor in our policy.

3. French Call for U.S. Intervention at Dien Bien Phu (April 4-5)

The French response to the proposal for united action was overtaken by military events at Dien Bien Phu. Foreign Minister Bidault contended on April 5 that the time for a coalition approach had passed and that the fate of Dien Bien Phu would be decided in the next ten days. The previous day Ambassador Douglas Dillon was called to an emergency Sunday cabinet meeting and was informed by Bidault, in the company of Laniel, that "immediate armed intervention of U.S. carrier aircraft at Dien Bien Phu is now necessary to save the situation." Bidault, reporting Navarre's desperate state in the field and the extent of Chinese intervention in support of General Giap's forces, asked the Ambassador point-blank for U.S. action, saying that "the fate of Southeast Asia now rested on Dien Bien Phu," and that "Geneva would be won or lost depending on outcome" of the battle. The United States was now being called upon to act quickly and unilaterally to save a local situation, rather than, as Dulles desired, in concert with Asian and Western Allies.

4. U.S. Decision Not to Intervene Unilaterally

In the first week of April it became clear that the question of U.S. intervention was now crucial. Fighting at Dien Bien Phu reached major proportions as Chinese-supplied artillery pounded the French and drove them backwards. Without an early intervention by an external power, or group of powers, the French position at Dien Bien Phu was likely to be overrun. In anticipation of the French request for intervention, the Eisenhower Administration decided to consult with Congressional leaders. The President appears to

have thought that Congressional support was vital for whatever active role the U.S. might now take in Indochina.

Available Government documents do not provide details of the two meetings to be described below. However, on the basis of seemingly reliable published sources, it appears that on April 3 Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford met with eight Congressmen (three Republicans and five Democrats) at the State Department. Radford apparently outlined a plan for an air strike on the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) at Dien Bien Phu using 200 planes from the aircraft carriers Essex and Boxer, stationed on maneuvers in the South China Sea. An unsuccessful air strike might need to be followed by a second air strike, but ground forces were not envisaged at this stage. It has been averred that there were atomic bombs on the aircraft carriers which could be delivered by the planes, but there is no indication that there was any serious consideration given to using nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu or elsewhere in Indochina. In the event of a massive Chinese troop intervention, however, it is quite possible that the U.S. would have retaliated with strategic nuclear weapons against targets in China.

The Congressional leaders raised questions about the amount of allied support for such an action, about the position of the other Joint Chiefs, about the need for ground forces if a second air strike also failed, and about the danger of a mammoth Chinese intervention which could transform Indochina into another Korean-type war. Radford apparently was forced to admit that he was the only one of the Joint Chiefs who favored the intervention plan. Dulles conceded that the allies had not as yet been consulted. In consequence, Dulles, who had been thinking of a joint Congressional resolution authorizing Presidential use of U.S. air-naval power in Indochina (which it is alleged he had ready in his pocket) left the meeting without the vital support he needed. The Congressional leaders laid down three conditions necessary for their support: (a) formation of an allied "coalition"-type force; (b) a French declaration indicating an intent to accelerate independence for the Associated States; (c) French agreement to continue their Expeditionary Corps in Indochina. Thus Congressional opposition put the brake on a possible unilateral U.S. intervention. According to a subsequent State Department Summary:

It was the sense of the meeting that the U.S. should not intervene alone but should attempt to secure the cooperation of other free nations concerned in Southeast Asia, and that if such cooperation could be assured, it was probable that the U.S. Congress would authorize U.S. participation in such "United Action."

The following day, April 4, Dulles and Radford met with the President at the White House. The President reached the decision to intervene only upon the satisfaction of the three conditions necessary for the U.S. "to commit belligerent acts" in Indochina. There would have to be a coalition "with active British Commonwealth participation"; a "full political understanding with France and other countries," and Congressional approval.

President Eisenhower clearly did not want the U.S. to intervene alone. He also was very concerned with having broad Congressional support for any step which might involve the U.S. in a war. As Sherman Adams later observed:

Having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea when he had United Nations support, he [Eisenhower] was in no mood to provoke another one in Indo-China by going it alone in a military action without the British and other Western Allies. He was also determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress. He had had trouble enough convincing some Senators that it was even necessary to send small groups of noncombatant Air Force technicians to Indo-China.

5. British Oppose "United Action"

From April 11 to 14, Secretary Dulles visited London and Paris to attempt to obtain British and French commitments to support his proposal for "United Action." According to President Eisenhower, Dulles felt that he had been given assurance of Congressional support for "United Action" if the allies approved his plan.

Dulles found the British opposed to any type of collective military action prior to the Geneva Conference. Dulles explained, according to Eden's account, that the U.S. had concluded that the French could no longer deal with the situation in Indochina, militarily or politically, alone. If the French position in Indochina collapsed, the consequences in the rest of Southeast Asia would be grave. U.S. air and naval forces were ready to intervene and some aircraft carriers had already been moved from Manila to the Indochina coast. On reflection, said Dulles, he had thought that the U.S. should not act alone in this matter and that an ad hoc coalition might be formed which might develop later into a Southeast Asia defense organization. This in itself would deter China from further interference in Indochina and would strengthen the western position at Geneva by giving evidence of solidarity.

Eden was not convinced. He drew a distinction between the long term issue of collective security in Southeast Asia--which might well be guaranteed by treaty after Geneva--and the more immediate question of "united action" in Indochina. He was opposed to any military action or warning announcement before Geneva. The British were willing to provide the French with full diplomatic support at Geneva, either as a guarantor of the final settlement or as a participant in multilateral talks if a settlement failed to materialize. In the latter case, the British were prepared to discuss a collective defense formula that would comprehend any non-Communist portion of Indochina formed as the result of the Geneva deliberations. But they would not, prior to Geneva, commit themselves to united action.

Britain's distinction between the appropriateness of a united approach after, as opposed to before, the Conference was founded on serious doubts about the true import of united action. As Dulles correctly judged, behind Britain's push for a settlement was the "fear that if fighting continues, we will in one way or another become involved, thereby

enhancing risk of Chinese intervention and possibility further expansion of war." Eden charged that action prior to the Conference would not only destroy chances for a peaceful settlement, but would critically raise the risk of a wider war. American planning admitted the strong possibility of direct Chinese intervention, and his own intelligence staff had concluded that Western involvement would bring on the Chinese by land and air once the Viet Minh effort became "seriously endangered."

Thus, while Dulles was angered at the way he felt the British were writing off Indochina, Eden was highly pessimistic about Dulles' militancy in an area of uncertain value for which the United States had ambiguous, high-risk plans. There was considerable difference, in Eden's mind, between warnings to Communist China against direct intervention before the fact (which the British went along with in mid-1953) and united action, which would, despite any allied assurances to Peking, be interpreted by the Chinese as provocative.

British suspicions, furthermore, were an extension of the belief that Indochina need not be entirely lost at Geneva in the absence of united action. London was apparently puzzled by American talk of the "loss" of Indochina, for to 10 Downing Street, "French cannot lose the war between now [April 1954] and the coming of the rainy season however badly they may conduct it." [\[Doc. 35\]](#) While Dulles kept telling the British that only united action through the formation of a coalition could ensure against a complete Communist diplomatic triumph at Geneva, Eden was equally convinced that the best way to assure continuation of the war would be united action, and that the French, even after Dien Bien Phu, were still strong enough to prevent the Communists from gaining all Indochina.

Even before Dulles' April flight to London to sound out the British on united action, the Churchill government was closely questioning American evaluations of Indochina. In an April 1 cable, for instance, Dulles vented his disturbance at Britain's refusal to accept the view that the loss of Indochina would ultimately affect their security interests in Malaya, Australia, and New Zealand. This was indeed the case, as Dulles discovered for himself once he talked to Eden in London and later at Geneva. Eden steadfastly refused to buy Dulles' analogy between Indochina and Malaya, retorting that the situation in Malaya was "well in hand" while that in Indochina was clearly not. Admiral Radford concluded in late April from talks with the British chiefs of staff that the U.K. policy seemed "to be on a very narrow basis strictly in terms of local U.K. interest without regard to other areas of the Far East such as Japan."

The British simply could not accept the domino principle even as they admitted Southeast Asia's security value to the free world. By the opening of the Geneva Conference, the U.S.-U.K. relations had reached a low point: Dulles was insisting that the British were the major roadblock to implementation of united action, while Eden was clinging to the notion that a negotiated settlement leading to partition would be the best outcome of an impossibly complex politico-military situation in Indochina.

6. French Oppose "United Action"

Secretary Dulles fared little better in selling "united action" in Paris than he did in London, but for somewhat different reasons. The French were seeking a quick action to avoid an imminent military defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Dulles, however, refused to be torn from a collective allied approach to the Indochina War. The French feared that a coalition arrangement would lead to an internationalization of the war and take control of it out of their hands. They, therefore, only desired local assistance at Dien Bien Phu along the lines of Operation Vulture.

Furthermore, another objection to "united action" from the French viewpoint was that it would only delay or impede the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. The U.S. objective was to keep alive the French determination to continue the war. Dulles feared that the French would use Geneva to find a face-saving formula for a French surrender. Premier Laniel reaffirmed to Dulles in Paris that his government would take no action which directly or indirectly turned Indochina over to the Communists. But he also called attention to the increasing desire on the part of many in France to get out of Indochina at any cost. The French stressed that it was necessary to await the results of the Geneva Conference and that they could not give the impression in advance that they believed Geneva would fail.

7. Aborted Working Group on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia (April 20)

Immediately upon returning to Washington on April 15 Secretary Dulles invited representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand to attend a meeting on the 20th to set up an ad hoc defense group for the Southeast Asia region. The delegates were to work on a draft for a future organization. The Secretary had been under the impression from his talk in London with Eden that the U.K., while rejecting immediate "united action" in Indochina, would have no objection to such a preliminary meeting.

On April 18, just two days before the scheduled meeting, the British Ambassador informed Dulles that there would be no British participation. The reasons: no understanding on the part of the British Foreign Secretary that the working group would go forward at once, and no agreement concerning membership. The Department expressed amazement, but in view of the British attitude the April 20 meeting was transformed into a general briefing for the nations comprising the allied side at the Geneva Conference. In a later explanation of the shift in British attitude, Foreign Secretary Eden said that in agreeing to informal working group talks he had overlooked the pending Colombo Conference and that he felt that it would have been most undesirable to give any public indication of membership in a program for united action before the end of the Colombo discussions. It is now clear that the British were restrained by India and by a fear that British attendance at the meeting would be construed as assent to "united action." Moreover, London could not have been reassured by a "trial balloon" speech of Vice President Nixon on April 17 in which he suggested that the U.S. might have to "take the risk by putting our boys in" in order to avoid "further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina."

8. Continued French Prodding for U.S. Intervention (April 21-25)

In preparation for the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference, tripartite discussions (U.S., U.K., France) took place in Paris in mid-April. In these discussions, the French contended that a successful Geneva settlement was dependent on a favorable outcome of the battle at Dien Bien Phu and that their participation in a Southeast Asian coalition might not be possible if Dien Bien Phu fell. There could be no guarantee what position France would take in the event of a collapse at Dien Bien Phu. The French argued that only large-scale United States air and naval intervention could retrieve the situation in Indochina. They made no formal request for intervention in the tripartite discussions, but on several occasions suggested or implied to the Americans that such action was necessary.

On April 21, Marc Jacquet, French Secretary of State for the Associated States, told the American Ambassador to Indochina, Donald Heath, then in Paris, that no French military authority still believed a victory was possible in Indochina without United States air and naval intervention, and that such action should be indicated after the impending failure of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference.

On April 22, Foreign Minister Bidault, with General Ely, suggested to Secretary Dulles that there should be emergency consultation between General Navarre and American military commanders in Indochina. The Foreign Minister indicated that, although he had been opposed to internationalizing the war, he would now favor it with United States participation if that would save Dien Bien Phu.

On April 23 the French Under Secretary of State, André Bougenot, in the presence of Premier Laniel, suggested to Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor of the Department of State, that the United States could commit its naval aircraft to the battle at Dien Bien Phu without risking American prestige or committing an act of belligerency by placing such aircraft, painted with French insignia and construed as part of the French Foreign Legion, under nominal French command for an isolated action consisting of air strikes lasting two or three days.

On the same day Foreign Minister Bidault showed the Secretary a message from General Navarre in which the French commander said that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was desperate and that he believed that the only alternatives were (1) Operation VAUTOUR, massive B-29 bombing (which Secretary Dulles understood would be a United States operation from bases outside Indochina), or (2) a French Union request for a cease-fire (which the Secretary assumed would be at Dien Bien Phu only, but which General Navarre, as it turned out, meant should apply to all of Indochina).

D. FINAL U.S. POSITION BEFORE GENEVA

1. Exchanges with the French

The American response to these various suggestions was to reiterate to the French the necessary preconditions for American intervention: (1) complete independence for the Associated States; (2) Congressional authorization; (3) a coalition that would include the United Kingdom. In relation to the need for a coalition, Secretary Dulles in Paris and Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith in Washington suggested to French officials that France, in the same way as it had asked for American air intervention in Indochina, should appeal for British intervention there.

Before leaving Paris for Geneva, Secretary Dulles gave Foreign Minister Bidault a letter replying to General Navarre's suggestion that United States air intervention at Dien Bien Phu was the sole alternative to a cease-fire. In this letter, the Secretary stated again the necessary preconditions for United States intervention, and contended that if Dien Bien Phu fell there was no reason that this should make it necessary to plead for a cease-fire. The French Foreign Minister, in a letter limited to the military consequences of United States intervention, replied that in the opinion of French military experts "a massive intervention of American aviation would still be able to save the garrison."

2. Exchanges with the U.K.

In the discussions with the British, meanwhile, the United States had tried both to induce the United Kingdom to participate in a joint Anglo-American air and naval intervention at Dien Bien Phu and to persuade the United Kingdom that the prompt organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia was necessary to bolster the French in Indochina.

But the British indicated that they would make no commitment to intervene militarily in Indochina and wished to postpone conversations on collective defense arrangements until after the Geneva Conference. Foreign Secretary Eden told Secretary Dulles on April 24 that the British did not want at this juncture to intervene in the Indochina War. Immediately afterward Eden returned to London for a special Cabinet meeting on the Indochina crisis which was held on April 25. Prime Minister Churchill reported to the House of Commons two days later that the British Government was "not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indochina in advance of the results of Geneva," and had "not entered into any new political or military commitments." Before addressing the Commons, Churchill had rejected a plea from French Ambassador René Massigli, made on behalf of Premier Laniel, for a statement that Great Britain would join the United States and France in defense of Dien Bien Phu.

The United Kingdom was willing, however, to participate in early military discussions to consider measures which might be taken in Southeast Asia if Indochina were lost. Along these lines, Foreign Secretary Eden and Secretary Dulles had discussed tentatively on April 22 the possibility of a secret military appraisal--by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand--of what could be done to bolster Thailand in the event of a French collapse in Indochina. The Foreign Secretary had returned to this proposition in another conversation with Secretary Dulles the next day.

On April 30, indicating that the British were prepared to defend the area outside Indochina, and possibly the free part of a partitioned Indochina, Eden proposed to Secretary Dulles "an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for Southeast Asia, namely: (a) nature and purpose; (b) membership; (c) commitments." He added that this examination should also cover immediate measures to strengthen Thailand.

Secretary Dulles raised the question of early military talks that might strengthen the French position at the Geneva Conference at a meeting in Geneva on May 2 with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, partners of the United States in the ANZUS organization. The three agreed at this meeting that there should be five-power military talks in Washington among the ANZUS powers, the United Kingdom, and France, with the possible participation of Thailand.

3. The Washington Viewpoint

In Washington in the meantime, the President on April 26, the opening date of the Geneva Conference, told a group of Republican leaders that it would be a "tragic error" for the United States to intervene unilaterally as a partner of France in the Indochina struggle. Two days later, in a discussion with Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith, Presidential Assistant Robert Cutler, and Admiral Radford (who had just been to London and had talked with the British Chiefs of Staff and Prime Minister Churchill), the President expressed disappointment over the British attitude of refraining from active participation in discussions on a Southeast Asian collective security arrangement before the end of the Geneva Conference. President Eisenhower, in this discussion, reiterated his firm decision that there would be no United States military intervention in Indochina by executive action. He urged his aides to provide help to the French in repairing three airfields in Indochina but to avoid any undue risk of involving the United States in combat operations.

The feasibility of American intervention at Dien Bien Phu was finally removed with the fall of that fortress on May 7. President Eisenhower sent messages to the President of France, René Coty, and to the Chief of State of Vietnam, Bao Dai, praising the defenders of Dien Bien Phu and stressing the determination of the free world to remain "faithful to the causes for which they fought."

E. REAPPRAISAL OF DOMINO THEORY AFTER DIEN BIEN PHU

The fall of Dien Bien Phu, and the failure to organize an intervention through "united action" prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference in late April, 1954, led to a reappraisal of the "domino theory" which had been at the center of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia since the late 1940's. The loss of Tonkin, or Vietnam, or perhaps even all of Indochina, was no longer considered to lead inexorably to the loss to Communism of all of Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in a press conference on May 11 (four days after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu) observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without perhaps Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." He went on to note that although he would not want to underestimate the importance of these countries he would not want either to give the impression that "if events that we could not control, and which we do not anticipate, should lead to their being lost that we would consider the whole situation hopeless and we would give up in despair . . ." In a remark at the press conference that was later deleted from the official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager populations.

Later, as the U.S. became reconciled to a political settlement at Geneva which would yield northern Vietnam to the Ho Chi Minh regime, the concept of "united action" was given a new twist. It now was transformed into an attempt to organize a long-range collective defense alliance which would offset the setback in Indochina and prevent further losses. That long-feared setback was now perceived to be less serious than had once been envisaged. The loss of Tonkin was no longer seen as leading necessarily to a Communist take-over of other territory between China and the American shore. Eventually, in SEATO, the U.S. sought to create an alliance which would be strong enough to withstand the fall of one such domino.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 3, "The Geneva Conference, May-July, 1954"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 1, pp. 108-146

I. BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

On February 18, 1954, a joint communiqué from Berlin issued by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France announced that in late April the Big Four and other parties concerned would meet at Geneva to seek a peaceful solution of the eight-year-old war in Indochina. Between those dates, the Western allies engaged in a series of discussions centered around American proposals for direct intervention, while the Communist side—the USSR, Communist China (CPR), and the Viet Minh—worked to ensure that they would enter the forthcoming Geneva Conference from a position of strength.

The Eisenhower Administration found as much difficulty in persuading France and Great Britain that fundamental changes in the war were necessary before the start of the conference as in accepting the notion of a negotiated solution in Indochina. The troubles with France had begun in mid-1953 when the U.S. Government gave its conditional

approval to the Navarre Plan, which provided for radically new French field tactics and a buildup of the Vietnamese National Army (VNA). American hopes that assistance in money and war materiel would elicit a French commitment to a program to attract native Indochinese into close military and political collaboration with the colonial governments, especially in Vietnam, were not fulfilled. Nor was France hospitable to American suggestions for greater involvement of the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) in French planning. As was to be the case almost throughout the Indochina crisis, France capitalized on American fears of National Assembly rejection of the European Defense Community (EDC) treaty and of a French pull-out from Indochina to gain U.S. aid without having to make commensurate concessions on Vietnamese independence or tactical planning. American attempts to tie aid to such concessions were never followed through, and whatever leverage on French policy-making in Indochina the United States possessed was left largely unexploited.

For the most part, France's rejection of American conditions and suggestions was based on the Laniel government's conviction, implemented zealously by French civil and military authorities in Indochina, that the United States would be intruding in France's domain. A policy of systematic restrictions on American officials in the field prevented the United States from making independent evaluations of the war's progress, with the result that the Government was for many months badly informed and unwarrantedly optimistic about the French Union army's chances against the Viet Minh. In late March and April 1954, when it became clear to Washington that the Navarre Plan had failed and that (in Secretary of State Dulles' words) "united action" was necessary to prevent Indochina from falling to the Communists, the French revealed that their distrust of American "interference" extended to any plans for overt American air-naval involvement. The Laniel government was perfectly amenable to localized American intervention at Dienbienphu to save the besieged French army from disaster; but it stood firmly opposed to Dulles' concept of collective (Western-Asian) defense in a security organization that would, if necessary, intervene to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. France's requests for assistance at Dienbienphu were entirely consistent with long-standing policy in Paris that looked to a negotiated settlement of the war on "honorable" terms at the same time as it hoped to be in the best possible military position at the time negotiations began.

Opposition to "united action" was no less stubborn in London. The British, like the French, were suspicious of American intentions in calling for that alternative, though for different reasons. To the Churchill government, the United States, even while proclaiming a strong desire to avoid open conflict with Communist China, was tending precisely in that direction by insisting on the formation of a collective security pact prior to the start of the Geneva Conference. Eisenhower's letter to Churchill on April 4, 1954, could only have reinforced those suspicions, for the President described united action as an attempt to make China stop supporting the Viet Minh rather than face the prospect of large-scale allied involvement in Vietnam. Although the British were not asked to make substantial ground troop commitments to a united action, they felt that their approval would ultimately condone a widening of the war that would risk bringing in the Chinese who, the British argued, could not possibly be expected to cease assistance they had been providing since 1950. London therefore told Dulles it would not approve united action

and preferred to await the outcome of the negotiations before deciding whether the Indochina situation warranted resort to military alternatives. The British were perfectly willing to talk about regional defense in the Far East, but only after the results were in on the negotiations. Until then, they said, they would limit themselves to providing full diplomatic support to the French in search of a peaceful solution.

Differences among the allies were therefore acute as the conference opened. The French had cleverly exploited the American assistance program without having brought in the Americans in full force, yet had also been unable to save Dienbienphu from being overrun on May 7. The British were felt in Washington to have been the primary obstacle to united action; they were accused of having been so blinded by their own self-interest in other areas of Southeast Asia that they failed to appreciate the vast strategic importance to the Free World of saving Indochina.

Contrasting Communist unity on the eve of the conference was more a matter of Sino-Soviet agreement on the desirability of negotiations than of complete accord among the three parties. In the aftermath of Stalin's death, Soviet foreign policy under Malenkov had altered considerably. Domestic priorities no doubt influenced the regime's proclaimed hopes for a reduction in international tension. Peking, more intimately involved in the Viet Minh cause, stepped up its assistance to General Giap's forces between February and April 1954, but also agreed with Moscow on the desirability of convening an international conference, which China would attend, to end the fighting. The limited available evidence suggests that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) alone among the three Communist parties considered the call for negotiations premature and urged that they be preceded by intensified military efforts. Ho's much-publicized offer in late November 1953 to talk with the French was intended more to influence French domestic and official opinion and to demoralize Franco-Vietnamese troops than to evince sincere interest in arriving at an equitable settlement. In ensuing months, DRV broadcasts showed a far greater interest in first achieving a clear-cut military victory in the Tonkin Delta and parts of Laos than in engaging in discussions while French forces remained scattered throughout Indochina.

These developments, in very broad outline, provided the backdrop to the Geneva Conference. Strength and weakness seemed to be the respective characteristics of the Communist and Western positions. Yet these terms are, as we shall see, not entirely accurate, for the interaction between and within the two sides was to make clear that the Geneva Conference would not be the setting for a victor's peace.

II. THE CONDUCT AND STRUCTURE OF DIPLOMACY

One of the first agreements reached at the Geneva Conference occurred in the course of a conversation between V. M. Molotov and Anthony Eden on May 5, when the Soviet foreign minister endorsed the foreign secretary's assertion that this negotiation was the most difficult he had ever encountered.* Indeed, it seems at first glance somewhat paradoxical that the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference (May 8-July 21) should have resulted in a settlement within less than a dozen weeks, given the unusual

difficulties facing the negotiators on both sides. (See Table 1) Key issues were postponed until the eleventh hour while debate wore endlessly on over relatively insignificant matters; contact among the delegations was limited by ideological prejudices and political antagonisms, forcing some delegates to act as mediators no less than as representatives of national interests; and major agreements were reached outside the special framework for discussions that the conferees had taken a month to build.

* A valuable source is Anthony Eden, *Memoirs: Full Circle*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1960.

TABLE 1

CHIEF NEGOTIATORS AT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINA

United Kingdom
Anthony Eden

United States
General Walter Bedell Smith
U. Alexis Johnson

Chinese People's Republic
Chou En-lai
Chang Wen-t'ien
Li K'e-nung

Viet Minh
Pham Van Dong

Laos
Phoui Sananikone

USSR
Vyacheslav Molotov

France
Georges Bidault
Jean Chauvel
Pierre Mendès-France

Vietnam
Dac Khe
Tran Van Do

Cambodia
Tep Phan
Sam Sary

A. THE REPRESENTATION QUESTION

The first major roadblock in the negotiations was the Communist claims concerning the representation of parties not present at the conference. Since the conference had already begun when these claims were forwarded, the chances of expanding the list of invited parties were very limited. Nevertheless, through fourteen restricted and seven plenary sessions,* bitter controversy raged over Communist insistence that the Viet Minh-led Free Cambodian (Khmer Issarak) and Free Laotian (Pathet Lao) forces were entitled to be seated beside representatives of the Royal Governments of Cambodia and Laos. Not until June 16, when Premier Chou En-lai, China's foreign minister and chief delegate, indicated to Eden that Viet Minh forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia and Laos, was the debate resolved and the way opened for serious efforts to bring about cease-fires throughout Indochina.

The time-consuming exchanges over the authenticity of Communist "resistance forces" in Laos and Cambodia were, interestingly enough, not duplicated when it came to determining the status of the DRV. The Berlin Conference final communiqué had specified that the Indochina deliberations would be attended by the United States, Great Britain, Communist China, the Soviet Union, France, "and other states concerned." Invitations to the participants would, it was further agreed, be issued only by the Berlin conferees, i.e., by the Big Four but not by Peking. Yet, as Molotov admitted at the first plenary session (May 8), Peking as well as Moscow invited the DRV, a move vigorously assailed by France and the United States. [Doc. 45] No attempt was made, however, to block the DRV's participation. Despite the antagonism of the Vietnamese government nominally headed by Bao Dai, (Bao Dai's consistent position, supported by Ngo Dinh Diem when he took over the premiership on June 18, was that his was the only legitimate government in Vietnam, while the Viet Minh were not political competitors but merely armed rebels.) the DRV was generally considered one of the principal combatants whose consent to a cease-fire, being indispensable, required its participation. Moreover, the Soviet Union indicated to the French that it would not accept the presence of delegates from the Associated States of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) unless the DRV was admitted to the conference. By the time of Dienbienphu's fall (May 7), all parties were agreed that there would be nine delegations (though not States) discussing Indochina; and on May 8 the first session got underway.

* In all, the Geneva Conference comprised eight plenary and twenty-two restricted sessions. These were quite apart from the Franco-Viet Minh military command conferences held after June 2, as well as from Viet Minh military staff talks with Laotian and Cambodian representatives that began in late June. Finally, during the latter half of the conference, French and Viet Minh delegation heads met secretly in so-called "underground" negotiations, the results of which were closely held, at least by the French.

B. THE COMMUNICATION GAPS

Nine delegations seated at a roundtable to exchange views, about every second day, obscured the fact that true bargaining was not taking place. Proposals were, of course, tabled and debated; but actual give-and-take was reserved for private discussions, usually in the absence of the pro-Western Indochinese parties. Even then, the Geneva talks on Indochina were hardly dominated by Big Power cabais; political and ideological differences were so intense, particularly between the American and Chinese representatives, that diplomacy had to be conducted circuitously, with Eden and Molotov frequently acting as mediators and messengers for delegates unwilling to be found together. (As one example of the American attitude, Duties told reporters just prior to the first session that the only way he could possibly meet with Chou En-lai was if their cars collided.)

Anthony Eden, whose persistence in the face of adverse developments throughout the conference was rewarded in the end, has provided this description of personal tribulation:

I was conscious that time was not on our side. Since neither the Americans nor the French had established any contacts with the Communist representatives [in mid-June], I had been compelled to adopt the role of intermediary between the Western powers and the Communists. My activities in this respect were open to every kind of misrepresentation. I was concerned about their effect on Anglo-American relations. On the other hand, I was encouraged by the close accord maintained throughout the conference between ourselves and the other members of the Commonwealth, including those, like Mr. Nehru, who were not represented at Geneva. They sent me messages of thanks and encouragement. I needed them, for I began to feel that we should never make effective headway. I had never known a conference of this kind. The parties would not make direct contact and we were in constant danger of one or another backing out of the door.

Not until the latter half of June did high-ranking French and Viet Minh delegates meet face-to-face, did Viet Minh military officials confer with Cambodian and Laotian representatives, and did French and Chinese heads-of-delegation privately exchange views. Communist and non-Communist Vietnamese, meanwhile, refused to talk to one another until July, when finally Tran Van Do and Pham Van Dong were persuaded to have private discussions. Most importantly, the American delegation (USDEL), under strict instructions to avoid contact with the Chinese, had to rely on second-hand information provided by the British, French, and Soviet representatives, a procedure that was repeated with respect to the Viet Minh.

The problem of contact was no more acutely felt than by the delegation of the State of Vietnam. Although finally granted complete independence by France under treaties initialed in Paris April 28 and approved by both governments June 4, Vietnam did not gain the concurrent power to negotiate its own fate. The French, clearly anxious lest the Vietnamese upset the delicate state of private talks with the Viet Minh, avoided Bao Dai's

representatives whenever possible and sought to exploit close Vietnamese-American relations in informing the Vietnamese only after agreements had been reached. During June, for instance, Jean Chauvel, head of the French delegation, on several occasions approached the Americans with information on the "underground" negotiations with the Viet Minh and with the hope that, once partition had been fixed, the United States would "sell" that solution to Saigon. [Doc. 60] In the same month, Chauvel, evincing complete understanding of American determination to avoid approving or acquiescing in a partition settlement, nevertheless asked if the United States would soften Vietnamese opposition to it by indicating it was the best solution obtainable. Chauvel described Diem and his predecessor, Buu Loc, as difficult, unrealistic, and unreasonable on the subject. [Doc. 66]

In an aide-memoire delivered to Duties and Eden on June 26 by Henri Bonnet, the French ambassador to Washington, Paris urged Washington not to encourage an adverse Vietnamese reaction to partition. The United States was also asked "to intervene with the Vietnamese to counsel upon them wisdom and self-control and to dissuade them from refusing an agreement which, if it is reached, is dictated not by the spirit of abandoning them, but on the contrary by the desire to save in Indochina all that can possibly be saved, and to give the Vietnamese state, under peaceful conditions, opportunities which have not always been possible heretofore because of the war." To these approaches, the United States consistently reacted negatively in the undoubtedly correct belief that the French were merely attempting to identify the United States in Vietnamese eyes with the partition concept. By refusing to act as intermediaries for the French, the American delegation kept free of association with a "French solution" to the Vietnam problem.

French aloofness from the Vietnamese continued into July. Despite American requests of the French delegation that the Vietnamese be kept informed of developments, the French demurred. Chauvel informed U. Alexis Johnson, chief deputy to the head of the USDEL, General Waiter Bedell Smith, that "he was handling this [liaison with the Vietnamese] through members of his staff and was avoiding direct contact with Vietnamese in order not to have to answer their questions." When Offroy, another member of the French delegation, suggested that the United States placate the Vietnamese with assurance of Free World political, economic, and military support after the settlement, Johnson replied that this was a matter for the French to handle. Not until late in the Conference did the Vietnamese government become aware of the strong possibility that partition would become part of the settlement; on this and other developments, as we shall see, the Vietnamese were kept in the dark, a circumstance that was to solidify Vietnamese hostility to and dissociation from the final terms.

But the Vietnamese loyal to Bao Dai were not alone in being denied important information, although they suffered worst from it. The United States delegation itself several times suspected that it was not receiving all the news the French were in a position to provide. The fault, however, lay as much with the ambiguous status under which the delegation operated as with the French who were to act as messengers. On the one hand, the Americans wanted to use their influence to ensure that the French not sell out Western interests for the sake of a quick settlement; on the other, they were determined not to become so involved in the bargaining process as to link the

Administration to the final terms. The resolution of these apparently conflicting aims was offered by Dulles on the eve of the conference in a background briefing to newsmen at Geneva. He said that primary responsibility for decisions taken at the conference belonged to the French and Vietnamese on one side, and to the Viet Minh on the other. The United States "would be inclined not to try to interpose [its] veto in any sense as against what they might want to do." As to whether this attitude applied equally to substantive provisions of any settlement, the Secretary indicated that the United States would, if necessary, refuse to acknowledge results contrary to American "interests":

I would think that [nonapplication of a veto] would be true up to the point at least where we felt that the issues involved had a pretty demonstrable interest to the United States itself. The United States does have pretty considerable interests in the Western Pacific, and there are some solutions there which we would regard as so disadvantageous that we would seek to prevent them. And if we failed in that respect, we would probably want to disassociate ourselves from it [the final settlement].

Thus, the United States would apply the tactic of "disassociation" should its influence not be sufficient to make the final terms compatible with American "interests." Yet the French, against whom the tactic was primarily directed, were probably (and quite naturally) averse to keeping their American colleagues so well informed of developments in the talks with the Viet Minh that the United States would have occasion to resort to "disassociation." Throughout the conference, in fact, the French aimed at exploiting the American presence for the strength they believed it provided their negotiators, and this policy meant pressuring Washington to retain a high-ranking delegation at the conference right up to the moment of the settlement.

Whatever the rationale for French behavior, the USDEL complained to Washington that it was not being kept fully informed of developments in the "underground" Franco-Viet Minh talks. The change in government in Paris during June from Laniel to Pierre Mendès-France helped matters somewhat. But though it was conceded that Mendès-France's representatives had done better than their predecessors in keeping the United States apprised, the United States still felt, as Dulles put it, that while Paris was not willfully concealing information, there remained a "certain lack of any intimacy..." [[Doc. 65](#)]

The British also felt locked out of news that vitally affected them. Particularly during May, when Washington and Paris were frequently in touch about possible military intervention, the British were highly disturbed to find newspapers their best source of information on the intentions of their foremost allies. Since London was no longer considered essential to "united action" (see Section IV), the Americans and the French had evidently agreed that their negotiations should be kept under wraps until such time as a decision was made. Only after Eden confronted Under Secretary Smith with the newspaper stories (which may have been deliberate "leaks" to influence the Geneva deliberations) did Dulles direct that the British, Australian, and New Zealand ambassadors be informed "in general terms" regarding U.S.-French talks. Diplomacy among the Western Big Three clearly reflected the rifts that had developed in the alliance

over intervention before the Dienbienphu disaster; as a result, secrecy and bilateral discussions tended to be the rule, thereby complicating the already mammoth task of presenting a united Western front against the Communist negotiators.

Thus far we have been dealing with diplomacy as it was conducted by the non-Communist delegations. What of the Communists? The available documentation limits the comments we may make, but still permits some remarks, both definite and speculative. First, the Chinese, Soviet, and Viet Minh delegations were in constant touch, as reported by their news agencies. Moreover, Chou En-lai was able to make three stopovers in Moscow during the conference that very likely heightened Sino-Soviet coordination. Finally, during a recess for heads of delegation, Chou and Ho Chi Minh held a three-day meeting in early July that may have provided the turning point in the Viet Minh's more conciliatory attitude thereafter. In brief, the Communists apparently were not plagued by the kinds of communication problems that hampered the Americans, British, and Vietnamese.

As will be argued in greater detail subsequently, the frequent meetings of the Communist delegations did not result in a uniformity of views. The Chinese and Soviets evidently worked independent of the Viet Minh whenever their separate interests dictated the need for advancement of progress in the negotiations. At times when the Viet Minh were intransigent, Chou and Molotov frequently took the initiative to break log jams that threatened to plunge the conference into irresolvable deadlock. Much like Eden, Chou and Molotov sometimes found themselves playing the role of mediator, a role which they, and particularly Chou, relished for what Fred Iklé has called the "side-effects" of negotiations-benefits deriving from, but incidental to, negotiations, such as enhanced prestige. In the end, the Viet Minh advantage of close rapport with Moscow and Peking did not prevent the Viet Minh from sharing with their non-Communist compatriots the ignominious distinction of having been undercut by allies.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BARGAINING POSITIONS

A. THE UNITED STATES AND THE NEGOTIATIONS

In underwriting the Navarre Plan and proceeding with utmost caution in urging France to improve its relationship with the non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists, the United States hoped to influence Paris to postpone a commitment to negotiations until French forces were at least on the threshold of military victory. While aware of the strong pressures on the Laniel government from the National Assembly and the French public for a peaceful settlement, the United States, clearly influenced by the experience at Panmunjom, sought to persuade the premier not to let the clamor for peace drive him to the bargaining table. As late as December 1953 Laniel agreed that Washington's aversion to premature negotiations was well-advised; but two months later, at Berlin, his government joined with the Soviet Union in calling for an international conference to end the Indochina conflict. The French government found it could no longer ignore anti-war sentiment at home without jeopardizing its survival, while the Americans, however strongly opposed to bringing the war to the conference table with victory nowhere in

sight and with Communist China as a negotiating opponent, felt compelled to approve the Berlin decision if only to blunt the French threat of scuttling EDC.

Forced to go along with French preference for negotiating with the Communists, the United States remained unalterably pessimistic about the probable results. This attitude was first set out fully by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1954. [[Doc. 23](#)] The Chiefs examined the alternatives to military victory and found them all infeasible or unacceptable to the United States. A ceasefire prior to a political settlement, the JCS paper states, "would, in all probability, lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position." A coalition government would lead to Communist control by keeping any outside assistance from preventing a seizure of power from within. Partition, on the other hand, would mean recognizing Communist success by force of arms, ceding the key Tonkin Delta to the communists, and, even if confined to only one of the three Indochinese states, undercutting our containment policy in Asia.

The Chiefs also commented at some length on the difficult question of elections in Vietnam. They took the position that even if elections could be held along democratic lines (which they doubted), a Communist victory would almost certainly result because of Communist territorial control, popular support, and superior tactics:

Such factors as the prevalence of illiteracy, the lack of suitable educational media, and the absence of adequate communications in the outlying areas would render the holding of a truly representative plebiscite of doubtful feasibility. The Communists, by virtue of their superior capability in the field of propaganda, could readily pervert the issue as being a choice between national independence and French Colonial rule. Furthermore, it would be militarily infeasible to prevent widespread intimidation of voters by Communist partisans. While it is obviously impossible to make a dependable forecast as to the outcome of a free election, current intelligence leads the Joint Chiefs to the belief that a settlement based upon free elections would be attended by almost certain loss of the Associated States to Communist control.

The JCS views, together with the recommendation that the United States not associate itself with any settlement that "would fail to provide reasonably adequate assurance of the future political and territorial integrity of Indochina . . .," were approved by the Secretary of Defense on March 23.

The JCS position reflected Government policy, for in the remaining months before the Conference the United States privately stood opposed to any course of action other than full prosecution of the war. Dulles, speaking with French Ambassador Henri Bonnet on April 3, reasoned that a negotiated settlement would lead only to face-saving formulae for either a French or a Viet Minh surrender. The Secretary termed a division of Indochina "impractical" and a coalition government the "beginning of disaster"; neither arrangement could prevent a French surrender. [[Doc. 27](#)] The President himself echoed this either-or approach. Writing to Churchill April 4, Eisenhower proposed: "There is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in essence would not be either a face-

saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement." And, as already observed, it was precisely to bring about the latter-China's "discreet disengagement" from support of the Viet Minh-that the President wanted British cooperation in united action.

Concomitantly, the United States was concerned that a disaster at Dienbienphu would propel the French into acceptance of an immediate, unsupervised cease-fire even before the conference was to begin. Dulles obtained assurances from Bidault that the French would not agree to such a cease-fire. But the Secretary found the British less inflexible, with Eden doubting the American view that a sudden cease-fire would lead either to a massacre of the French by the native people or to large-scale infiltration of French-held terrain by Viet Minh forces. [[Doc. 37](#)]

Thus assured by the French but mindful of both French and British preference for trying to bargain with the Communists. before resorting to further military steps, Washington, in late April and early May, sought to develop guidelines for the American delegation. The National Security Council, less than a week before the opening conference session, carefully examined American alternatives. Disturbed by what it regarded as peace-at-any-price thinking in Paris, the NSC urged the President to decide not to join the Geneva deliberations without assurance from France that it was not preparing to negotiate the surrender of Indochina. Again, the Korean example was foremost: Communist tactics at Geneva, the NSC forecast, would likely resemble those at Panmunjom; a cease-fire might be announced that the Communists would not comply with for lack of effective supervision; the French would wilt before the Communists' predictable dilatory tactics and end by accepting almost any terms.

The NSC therefore decided that the French had to be pressured into adopting a strong posture in the face of probable Communist intransigence. The President was urged to inform Paris that French acquiescence in a Communist takeover of Indochina would bear not only on France's future position in the Far East, but also on its status as one of the Big Three; that abandonment of Indochina would grievously affect both France's position in North Africa and Franco-U.S. relations in that region; that U.S. aid to France would automatically cease upon Paris' conclusion of an unsatisfactory settlement; and, finally, that Communist domination of Indochina would be of such serious strategic harm to U.S. interests as to produce "consequences in Europe as well as elsewhere [without] apparent limitation." In addition, the NSC recommended that the United States determine immediately whether the Associated States should be approached with a view to continuing the anti-Viet Minh struggle in some other form, including unilateral American involvement "if necessary." The NSC clearly viewed the Indochina situation with extreme anxiety, and its action program amounted to unprecedented proposals to threaten France with the serious repercussions of a sell-out in Southeast Asia.

Pessimism over the prospects for any meaningful progress in talks with the Communists was shared by Secretary Dulles. In a background briefing for newsmen at Geneva, Dulles gave the first official indication for public consumption that the United States would dissociate itself from any settlement rather than be party to unacceptable terms. As to the

acceptability of partition, the Secretary, in views that would change later, said he did not see how partition could be arranged with the fighting not confined to any single area. He as much as ruled out a territorial division when he commented that the United States would only agree to an arrangement in which all the Viet Minh troops would be placed in a small regroupment area out of harm's way. But that arrangement "might not be acceptable to them," Dulles said coyly.

American opinions on the likely ramifications of a settlement were also made known, and with greater precision, in private. On May 7, for instance, Livingston Merchant of the State Department presented the American view to the Ministers of New Zealand and Australia. Predicting that the French would finally settle for part of Vietnam and manage to salvage Cambodia and Laos, Merchant said the United States could not accept such a surrender of territory. While we could not prevent the French from making concessions, neither did we have to associate ourselves with the results. Thus, both publicly and privately, Administration leaders indicated at the outset of the conference that the United States would divorce itself from any settlement that resulted in less than a complete French-Vietnamese victory.

The first test of U.S. policy came May 5 when the French informed Washington of the proposals they intended to make in the opening round of the Geneva talks on May 8. The proposals included a separation of the "civil war" in Vietnam from the Communist aggressions in Cambodia and Laos; a cease-fire, supervised by a well-staffed international authority (but not the UN) and followed by political discussions leading to free elections; the regrouping of regular forces of the belligerents into defined zones (as Laniel had proposed in a speech on March 5) upon signature of a cease-fire agreement; the disarming of all irregular forces (i.e., the Viet Minh guerrillas); and a guarantee of the agreements by "the States participating in the Geneva Conference."

The JCS were first to react to the French plan. The Chiefs strongly felt that even if the Communists unexpectedly agreed to it, the likely outcomes would still be either rapid French capitulation in the wake of the cease-fire or virtual French surrender in the course of protracted political discussions. Once more, the Chiefs fell back on the Korean experience, which they said demonstrated the certainty that the Communists would violate any armistice controls, including those supervised by an international body. An agreement to refrain from new military activities during armistice negotiations would be a strong obstacle to Communist violations; but the Communists, the JCS concluded, would never agree to such an arrangement. On the contrary, they were far more likely to intensify military operations so as to enhance their bargaining position, precisely at the time the French would seek to reduce operations to avoid taking casualties. The Chiefs therefore urged that the United States not get trapped into backing a French armistice proposal that the Communists, by voicing approval, could use to bind us to a cease-fire while they themselves ignored it. The only way to get satisfactory results was through military success, and since the Navarre Plan was no longer tenable, the next best alternative was not to associate the United States with any cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory political settlement. The first step, the Chiefs believed, should be the

conclusion of a settlement that would "reasonably assure the political and territorial integrity of the Associated States . . . "; only thereafter should a cease-fire be entertained.

As previously, the Joint Chiefs' position became U.S. policy with only minor emendations. The President, reviewing the Chiefs' paper, agreed that the Government could not back the French proposal with its call for a supervised cease-fire that the Communists would never respect. Eisenhower further concurred with the Chiefs' insistence on priority to a political settlement, with the stipulation that French forces continue fighting while negotiations were in progress. He added that the United States would continue aiding the French during that period and would, in addition, work toward a coalition "for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia."

These statements of position paved the way for a National Security Council meeting on May 8, which set forth the guidelines of U.S. policy on negotiations for the delegation at Geneva. The decision taken at the meeting simply underscored what the President and the Chiefs had already stated:

The United States will not associate itself with any proposal from any source directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls. The United States could concur in the initiation of negotiations for such an armistice agreement. During the course of such negotiations, the French and the Associated States should continue to oppose the forces of the Viet Minh with all the means at their disposal. In the meantime, as a means of strengthening the hands of the French and the Associated States during the course of such negotiations, the United States will continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and promptly activate a Southeast Asian regional grouping for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia.

B. THE COMMUNIST PROPOSALS

Official American perspectives on the likely pattern of the Geneva negotiations were confirmed when the Viet Minh forwarded their first proposal "package" at the second plenary session on May 10. Pham Van Dong, then the DRV's vice-minister for foreign affairs and already a seasoned negotiator with the French, introduced his case with the argument that the Viet Minh were the "stronger" force in "more than three-fourths of the country." He went on to describe the successful administration of this territory by his government, which he said "represents the will of the entire Vietnamese nation. The opposition, the Bao Dai regime, characterized as "the government of the temporarily occupied zone," did not enjoy popular support and was merely the tool of the French.

Pham Van Dong did not, however, demand that France concede control of all Vietnam to the DRV. Instead, Dong urged that France recognize "the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam," a statement which amounted to a rejection of the Franco-Vietnamese treaties approved April 28 in Paris by Laniel and

Premier Nguyen Trung Vinh. The main points of Dong's proposal for a cease-fire and political settlement in Vietnam were as follows:

- (1) Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all "foreign" (i.e., French) troops from the Associated States, to be preceded by the relocation of those troops to regroupment areas
- (2) Convening of advisory conferences, to be composed of representatives of the "governments of both sides," in each country of Indochina, with the objective of holding general elections leading to the establishment of unified governments
- (3) Supervision of elections by local commissions
- (4) Prior to the establishment of unified governments, the carrying out by the opposing parties of "the administrative functions in the districts which will be [temporarily] under their administration . . ."
- (5) Cease-fire in all Indochina supervised by mixed commissions composed of the belligerents, *the cease-fire to take effect upon implementation of all other measures*. No new forces or military equipment to be introduced into Indochina during the armistice

To placate the French, Dong asserted the DRV's readiness "to examine the question of the entry of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam into the French Union..."

The meaning of Dong's proposal was clear. A political settlement would precede a military agreement to a cease-fire rather than the reverse, which the French preferred. Somewhat ironically, the Viet Minh position was in line with the American preference for giving priority to a political settlement; but the Viet Minh in effect proposed to stop fighting only when French troops had left Vietnam and a political process favorable to the Communists had been set up. By first getting rid of the French, and then substituting all-Vietnamese consultations for strict control and supervision of the cease-fire, the regroupment, and the general elections, the Viet Minh could legitimately expect a quick takeover of power from the relatively weak Vietnamese National Army, by then bereft of its French command structure. As Dong well knew, the relocation of French forces in the Tonkin Delta to a tighter perimeter was having, and would continue to have, major repercussions on VNA morale. Once the French could be persuaded to withdraw, the VNA would undoubtedly collapse under Viet Minh military pressure. Moreover, inasmuch as Dong's plan made no allowance for the disarming, much less the regrouping, of indigenous forces on either side, the Viet Minh would be militarily in a virtually unassailable position to control any general election that might be held. Dong's proposal, then, amounted to a request that the French abandon Vietnam to a certain fate.

In the same speech, Dong made clear that the DRV's concern extended beyond Vietnam to Cambodia and Laos. By 1954, Viet Minh coordination with the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer "resistance forces" had been going on for at least three years, or since the formal announcement on March 11, 1951, of formation of a Viet Minh-Free Khmer-Pathet Lao "National United Front." Viet Minh soldiers and cadres were active participants in the fighting there, where they provided the hard core of the "resistance." In addition, forces under General Vo Nguyen Giap had invaded Laos in April and December 1953, and Cambodia in April 1954 (a move which prompted a formal protest by the Royal Khmer

Government to the Secretary General of the UN on April 23). Viet Minh battalions were still active in both countries during May and June, with greater priority given operations in Laos. Thus, Dong's proposals on a settlement in Laos and Cambodia reflected not simply the DRV's assumption of the role of spokesman for the unrepresented Free Khmer and Pathet Lao movements, but also direct Viet Minh interests in those neighboring kingdoms.

Dong argued that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces enjoyed widespread popular support and controlled most of the territory of their respective countries. With considerable distortion of history (subsequently corrected by the Laotian and Cambodian delegates), Dong sought to demonstrate that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were de facto governments carrying out "democratic reforms" in the areas their armies had "liberated." France was therefore advised to recognize the "sovereignty and independence" of those movements no less than of the DRV. French forces alone were to withdraw from Cambodia and Laos; the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were not "foreign" troops. The same election procedure offered for Vietnam, without neutral or international supervision, would, Dong proposed, take place in Cambodia and Laos, thereby granting the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer a status equal to that of the lawful governments. And during the electoral process, Dong insisted on "conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations..." agreement to which would have permitted various Communist fronts to function with impunity. The inclusion of the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in the DRV's settlement plan-in particular, the demand that they merited political and territorial recognition-very quickly brought the conference to a standstill and, much later, compelled the Soviets and Chinese to work against Viet Minh ambitions.

C. THE AMERICAN REACTION

Pham Van Dong's opening gambit was clearly anathema to the Western delegations. Certainly, from the American standpoint, his proposals met none of the criteria for acceptability outlined by the National Security Council on May 8. Smith said as much at Geneva when he spoke on May 10 and again at the third plenary session May 12. Accordingly, Smith did not wholeheartedly embrace Bidault's proposals, for despite giving a general endorsement of the French plan, he departed from it at two important junctures. First, he declined to commit the United States in advance to a guarantee of the settlement despite Bidault's call for all the participants to make such a guarantee; second, he proposed that national elections in Vietnam be supervised specifically by an international commission "under United Nations auspices." As his speeches made clear, the United States believed the UN should have two separate functions-overseeing not only the cease-fire but the elections as well. Both these points in Smith's remarks were to remain cardinal elements of American policy throughout the negotiations despite French (and Communist) efforts to induce their alteration.

Entirely in keeping with Smith's position at the conference, as well as with the tenor of the Viet Minh proposals, Secretary Dulles, on May 12, sent Smith instructions intended to make the United States an influential, but unentangled and unobligated, participant. As

Dulles phrased it, the United States was to be "an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation." Its primary aim would be to:

help the nations of that area [Indochina] peacefully to enjoy *territorial integrity and political independence* under *stable and free governments* with the opportunity to expand their economies, to realize their legitimate national aspirations, and to develop security through individual and collective defense against aggression, from within and without. This implies that these people *should not be amalgamated* into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship.

Accordingly, Smith was told, the United States should not give its approval to any settlement or cease-fire "which would have the effect of *subverting* the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states or of *permanently impairing their territorial integrity* or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union of Indochina, or which otherwise contravened the principles stated . . . above." [[Doc. 47](#)]

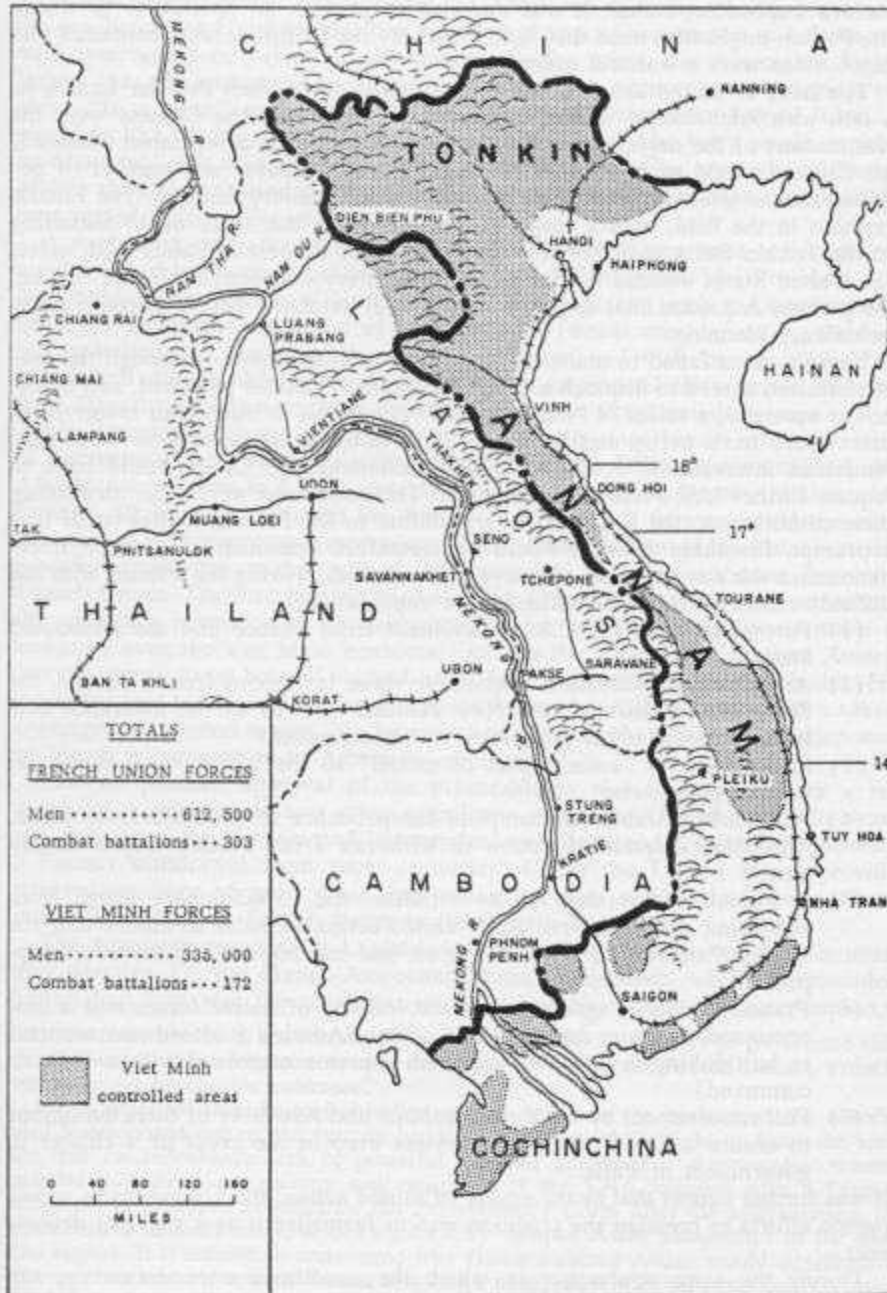
The NSC decision of May 8, Smith's comments at the second and third plenary sessions, and Dulles' instructions on May 12 reveal the rigidity of the American position on a Geneva settlement. The United States would not associate itself with any arrangement that failed to provide adequately for an internationally supervised cease-fire and national elections, that resulted in the partitioning of any of the Associated States, or that compromised the independence and territorial integrity of those States in any way. It would not interfere with French efforts to reach an agreement, but neither would it guarantee or otherwise be placed in the position of seeming to support it if contrary to policy. Bedell Smith was left free, in fact, to withdraw from the conference or to restrict the American role to that of observer. [[Doc. 47](#)] The rationale for this approach was clear enough: the United States, foreseeing inevitable protraction of negotiations by the Communists in the manner of Korea, would not be party to a French cession of territory that would be the end result of the Communists' waiting game already begun by Pham Van Dong. Rather than passively accept that result, the United States would withdraw from active involvement in the proceedings, thereby leaving it with at least the freedom to take steps to recapture the initiative (as by rolling back the Viet Minh at some future date) and the moral purity of having refused to condone the enslavement of more people behind the Iron Curtain. American policy toward negotiations at Geneva was therefore in perfect harmony with the Eisenhower-Dulles global approach to dealing with the Communist bloc.

Gloomy American conclusions about the conference, and no doubt the extravagant opening Communist demands, were intimately connected with events on the battlefield. After the debacle at Dienbienphu on May 7, the French gradually shifted their forces from Laos and Cambodia into the Tonkin Delta, leaving behind weak Laotian and Cambodian national armies to cope with veteran Viet Minh battalions. As the French sought to consolidate in northern Vietnam, the Viet Minh pressed the attack, moving several battalions eastward from Dienbienphu. U.S. Army intelligence reported in late May, on the basis of French evaluations, that the Viet Minh were redeploying much faster than anticipated, to the point where of 35,000 troops originally in northwestern Tonkin

only 2,000 remained. At the same time, two Viet Minh battalions stayed behind in Cambodia and another ten in Laos; and in both those countries, American intelligence concluded that the Viet Minh position was so strong as to jeopardize the political no less than the military stability of the royal governments.

To thwart the Communist military threat in Vietnam, the French chief of staff, General Paul Ely, told General J. H. Trapnell, the MAAG chief (on May 30), that French forces were forming a new defensive perimeter along the HanoiHaiphong axis; but Ely made no effort to hide the touch-and-go nature of French defensive capabilities during the rainy season already underway. This precarious situation was confirmed by General Valluy of the French command staff. In a report in early June to U.S., British, Australian, and New Zealand chiefs of staff assembled in Washington, Valluy held that the Delta was in danger of falling to the Communists, that neither Frenchmen nor Vietnamese would fight on in the south in that eventuality, and that only prompt allied intervention could save the situation. [Doc. 53] American assessments merely echoed those provided by the French. A National Intelligence Estimate published June 15 determined that French Union forces, despite a numerical advantage, faced defections on a mounting scale that could become very large if the Viet Minh scored major victories or if the French were believed (and Vietnamese suspicions were rife on this score in Hanoi and Saigon) about to abandon Hanoi and portions of the Delta. In sum, the tenor of intelligence reports by French and American sources during this period (from early May through mid-June) was that the Viet Minh armies were solidly entrenched in portions of Cambodia and Laos, were preparing for further advances in the Tonkin Delta, and, if the war were to continue beyond the rainy season, had the capability to destroy positions then being fortified by French Union forces throughout northern Vietnam.

The upshot of this military deterioration throughout much of Indochina was to reinforce the American conviction that the Communists, while making proposals at Geneva they knew would be unacceptable to the West, would drive hard for important battlefield gains that would thoroughly demoralize French Union troops and set the stage for their withdrawal southward, perhaps precipitating a general crisis of confidence in Indochina and a Viet Minh takeover by default. More clearly than earlier in the year, American officials now saw just how desperate the French really were, in part because French field commanders were being far more sincere about and open with information on the actual military situation. But the thickening gloom in Indochina no less than at Geneva did not give way to counsels of despair in Washington. The Government concluded *not* that the goals it had set for a settlement were unrealistic, but rather that the only way to attain them, as the President and the JCS had been saying, was through decisive military victory in conformity with the original united action proposal of March 29. While therefore maintaining its delegation at Geneva throughout the indecisive sessions of May and June, the United States once again alerted France to the possibility of a military alternative to defeat under the pressure of Communist talk-fight tactics.



Indochina, July 1954

IV. THE UNITED STATES AT GENEVA: THE STAGE OF FORCE AND DIPLOMACY, MAY TO MID-JUNE

In keeping open the option of united action, the Administration, no less during May and the first half of June than in April, carefully made direct involvement conditional on a range of French concessions and promises. This second go-round on united action was not designed to make further negotiations at Geneva impossible; rather, it was intended to provide an alternative to which the French might turn once they, and hopefully the British as well, conceded that negotiations were a wasteful exercise.

The issue of united action arose again in early May when Premier Laniel, in a talk with Ambassador Dillon, expressed the view that the Chinese were the real masters of the negotiations at Geneva. This being the case, Laniel reasoned, the Chinese would probably seek to drag out the talks over any number of peripheral issues while the Viet Minh pushed on for a military decision. The French position in the field, with a major redeployment on the order of 15 battalions to the Tonkin Delta probably very soon, would be desperate, Laniel said, unless the United States decided to give its active military cooperation. In the interim, the premier requested that an American general be dispatched to Paris to assist in military planning.

Laniel's views failed to make an impression in Washington. Although the Administration agreed to dispatch a general (Trapnell), Dulles proposed, and Eisenhower accepted, a series of "indispensable" conditions to American involvement that would have to be met by Paris. Even after those conditions were met, American intervention would not follow automatically; Laniel would have to request further U.S.-French consultations. The conditions were: (In forwarding these conditions to the Embassy for transmittal to the French, Dulles noted that a prompt, favorable decision would be premature inasmuch as it might internationalize the war in a way offensive to the British, leaving the French with the difficult choice of internationalization or capitulation.)

- (1) Formal requests for U.S. involvement from France and the Associated States
- (2) An immediate, favorable response to those invitations from Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the assurance that Britain "would either participate or be acquiescent"
- (3) Presentation of "some aspect of matter" to the UN by one of the involved Asian states
- (4) A French guarantee of complete independence to the Associated States, "including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time
- (5) A French undertaking not to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps from Indochina during the period of united action in order to ensure that the United States would be providing air and sea, but not combat-troop, support
- (6) Franco-American agreement on the training of native forces and a new command structure during united action (Admiral Radford was reported to be thinking in terms of a French supreme command with a U.S. air command)

(7) Full endorsement by the French cabinet and Assembly of these conditions to ensure a firm French commitment even in the event of a change in government in Paris

It was further agreed that *in the course of* united action, the United States would pursue efforts to broaden the coalition and to formalize it as a regional defense pact.

During the same conference in which the conditions were drawn up, top American officials went deeper into them. Eisenhower was insistent on collective action, but recognized that the British might not commit themselves initially and that the Australians, facing a general election later in May, could only give "evidence" of their willingness to participate. A second major problem was Indochinese independence. Dulles posed the American dilemma on this score: on the one hand, the United States had to avoid giving Asians reason to believe we were intervening on behalf of colonialism; on the other, the Associated States lacked the administrative personnel and leadership necessary to carrying on alone. "In a sense," said Dulles, "if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured." His solution was that the Associated States be granted (evidently, orally) the right to withdraw from the French Union after passage of a suitable time period, perhaps five or ten years.

A final point concerned Executive-Congressional relations once a French request, backed by Parliamentary assent, reached Washington. The President felt he should appear before a joint session of Congress and seek a Congressional resolution to use the armed forces in Indo-China [words missing] act on the formal invitation of France and the Associated States, and with the cooperation of friends and allies in the region. At Eisenhower's request, Dulles directed that the State Department begin working up a first draft of a Presidential message.

The American response to Laniel's requests set the stage for an extended series of discussions over the ensuing five weeks. In Paris, Dillon communicated the American conditions to Laniel and Maurice Schumann, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs; in a talk with the Ambassador May 14, they accepted the conditions, but with important reservations. First, Laniel indicated his dismay at the American insistence on the right of the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union. The premier predicted that the French public would never accept this condition inasmuch as the Associated States had themselves never made it and since even the Viet Minh envisioned joining the Union. The obvious American reluctance to go beyond air and naval forces also disturbed the premier. He requested that the United States additionally provide artillery forces and a token contingent of ground troops. But he indicated pleasure that UK participation was no longer a prerequisite to American involvement.

Laniel's qualified approval of the preconditions was accompanied by a request for a response to two other questions: could the United States in some way guarantee the borders and independence of Laos and Cambodia following a French withdrawal from those countries? Could the United States provide written assurance of prompt air

intervention to meet a possible Chinese Communist air attack on French forces in the Tonkin Delta?

The American response to Laniel's demurrers and requests was for the most part negative. On the French-Associated States relationship, which Ambassador Dillon had said was the chief barrier to a French request for intervention,* Dulles replied (through Dillon) that the United States might have some flexibility on the matter,

* Dillon commented: "I am certain that unless we can find some way to get around this requirement [that the Vietnamese have the option of leaving the French Union], French will never ask for outside assistance."

Dillon proposed that the real objection among Asians to the position of the Associated States rested not on the "purely juridical" problem of the right to leave the Union, but on Indochina's lack of powerful national armies. The Ambassador recommended that American training and equipping of the VNA, coupled with a French statement of intention to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps after the establishment of peace and a national army, would significantly dampen Asian antagonism to the Bao Dai regime. It is difficult to understand why Dillon assumed Asians would significantly change their attitude toward French Indochina when, even with an American takeover of the training and equipping of the VNA, French forces would still be on Vietnamese territory for a lengthy period.

but had to remain adamant on complete independence if it ever hoped to gain Thai and Filipino support. Next, on the question of the extent of American involvement, the Government was more flexible: It would not exclude anti-aircraft "and limited U.S. ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by U.S. naval and air forces." As to Laniel's questions, Washington answered that it saw no way, in view of the military and legal impracticalities, to guarantee the security of Laos and Cambodia; the alternative was that Laos and Cambodia join with Thailand in requesting the stationing of a UN Peace Observation Commission (POC) on their territories. The possibility of Chinese MIG intervention, considered extremely remote by the Defense Department, ruled out the need for a written commitment. The French were to be assured, however, that a collective defense arrangement would include protection against that contingency, and that prior to the formation of the organization, Chinese air involvement would prompt a Presidential request for Congressional authorization to respond with U.S. aircraft.

Although the setting up of several preconditions to involvement and the qualifications of the French reply by no means made intervention an immediate possibility, the Administration moved ahead on contingency planning. The State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took the lead by producing a hypothetical timetable based on the assumption of U.S.-French agreement in principle to the proposed conditions by May 21. FEA also outlined a full slate of urgent priority studies, including U.S. strategy under differing circumstances of Chinese involvement in the war. By May 24, FEA had

forwarded a contingency study from the Operations Planning Board that proposed, among other things, public and private communications to Peking to prevent, or at least reduce the effectiveness of, direct Chinese intervention.

The initiation of planning for intervention extended to more far-ranging discussions of the purposes, requirements, and make-up of a Southeast Asia collective defense organization. The framework of the discussions evidenced the Government's intention that united action be undertaken only *after* the Geneva Conference had reached a stalemate or, far less likely, a settlement. Three regional formulations were envisaged: the first would be designed for direct action, probably (it was felt) without British participation, either to defeat the Viet Minh or to prevent them from gaining control of Indochina; the second, formed after a settlement, would comprise the present SEATO members and functions, in particular active assistance to the participating Asian states resisting external attack or "Communist insurrection"; the third would have a broad Asian membership, but would be functionally limited to social and economic cooperation.

An important input to contingency planning on intervention came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On May 20, the JCS sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense entitled "U.S. Military Participation in Indochina." In the paper, the Chiefs requested formulation of a Defense Department position on the size of any American contributions and the nature of the command structure once united action began. They noted the "limited availability of U.S. forces for military action in Indochina" and the "current numerical advantage of the French Union forces over the enemy, i.e., approximately 5 to 3." Pointing out the disadvantages of either stationing large numbers of U.S. troops in Indochina or of basing U.S. aircraft on Indochina's limited facilities, the Chiefs considered "the current greatest need" to be an expanded, intensified training program for indigenous troops. They observed, moreover, that they were guided in their comments by the likely reaction of the CPR to U.S. involvement, as well as by the prescription: "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage."

In view of these problems and prospects, the JCS urged the limitation of United States involvement to strategic planning and the training of indigenous forces through an increase in MAAG from less than 150 to 2250 men. Its force commitment should be restricted, they advised, primarily to air-naval support directed from outside Indochina; even here, the Chiefs cautioned against making a "substantial" air force commitment. The Chiefs were also mindful of the Chinese. Since Viet Minh supplies came mainly from China, "the destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina."

The Chiefs were simply taking their traditional position that any major U.S. force commitment in the Far East should be reserved for a war against China in the event the President decided that such a conflict was necessary for the preservation of vital American interests. Recognizing the limitations of the "New Look" defense establishment for large-scale involvement in "brushfire" wars, the Chiefs were extremely hesitant, as had consistently been the case during the Indochina crisis, to favor action along the

periphery of China when the strategic advantages of American power lay in decisive direct blows against the major enemy. Thus, the JCS closed their memorandum with the admonition that air-naval commitments beyond those specified:

will involve maldeployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East. From the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.*

* These conclusions were *subsequently* confirmed when, at the direction of General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, a technical team of seven officers representing the Engineer, Transportation, and Signal Corps went to Indochina on a covert mission to determine military and military-related resources available there in the event U.S. intervention were implemented. The team spent the period May 31-June 22 in the field. Their conclusions were, in brief, that Indochina was devoid of the logistical, geographic, and related resources necessary to a substantial American ground effort. The group's findings are in a report from Col. David W. Heiman, its leader, to Ridgway, July 12, 1954.

The Chiefs' conclusions were disputed, however, by Everett Drumright of State (FEA) (in a memorandum to MacArthur, May 24, 1954). He argued that if, as everyone agreed, Indochina was vital to American security, the United States should not consider more than a token group troop commitment to be a serious diversion of our capabilities. While not arguing *for* a substantial troop commitment, Drumright suggested that the United States *plan for that* eventuality rather than count on defense with atomic weapons or non-nuclear strikes on Chinese territory. Somehow, however, Drumright's concern about the Chinese did not extend to the consideration that a massive troop commitment, which he stated elsewhere in the memorandum *might* prove necessary should token forces fail to do the job, also risked bringing in the Chinese.

The JCS evidently also decided to call a meeting of military representatives from the United States, France, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, the Chiefs suggested the downgrading of the representatives to below chief-of-staff level; but apparently on the strong protest of Under Secretary Smith at Geneva, and of the British too, the Chiefs acquiesced in a meeting at chief-of-staff level. But prior to the meeting, which began the first week of June, important developments occurred in the U.S.-France discussions of intervention.

The ticklish problem of bringing France to concede the critical importance of granting full independence to the Associated States occupied center stage once more. On May 27, the State Department, acknowledging France's hesitancy to go too far on this score, still insisted on certain "minimum measures," the most important of which was that France, during or immediately after formal approval of the April 28 draft treaties, announce its

willingness to withdraw all its forces from Indochina unless invited by the governments of the Associated States to maintain them or to establish bases. (The United States, the Department added, would be prepared to make a similar declaration if it committed forces.) Beyond that step, the French were also asked to permit Indochinese participation in the programming of economic aid and their direct receipt of all military aid, to find ways to broaden participation of the Vietnamese defense ministry and armed forces in national defense, and to push for the establishment of "representative and authentic nationalist governments" at the earliest possible date.

Transmitting these new proposals to the French, Dillon (incorrectly as it turned out) found them so well received that he reported on May 29, following a conversation with Laniel, that the two partners "had now reached accord in principle on political side." Laniel, he cabled Dulles, urged immediate military talks to complete arrangements on training of the Vietnamese, a new command structure, and war plans. Inasmuch as Ely and General John W. O'Daniel in Indochina had reached general agreement on American assumption of responsibility for training the VNA, [Doc. 52] the way was apparently cleared for bilateral military talks in Washington to take place simultaneously with, and therefore disguised by, the five-power staff negotiations.

Dillon's optimistic assessment proved premature, however, on several grounds. When he reported May 28 on talks with Schumann, he had added Schumann's and Defense Minister René Pleven's concern about Chinese air intervention, which they felt would be so damaging as to warrant a deterrent action in the form of a Presidential request to the Congress for discretionary authority to defend the Delta in case of CCAF attack. The French wanted a virtually instantaneous U.S. response, one that would be assured by a Presidential request before rather than after overt Chinese aerial intervention. The State Department's retort was that the French first had to satisfy the previously reported conditions before any such move by the President could be considered.

Dillon was no less disappointed by Washington's reply than the French. He cabled back that there apparently was an "extremely serious misunderstanding between U.S. and French":

French draw sharp distinction between (1) U.S. intervention in present circumstances with Viet Minh bolstered by Chinese Communist materiel, technicians and possibly scattered troops and (2) U.S. reaction against full-scale air attack mounted from Communist Chinese bases.

Dillon said that, for the French, Washington's preconditions *applied in the first case but not the second*, wherein only Congressional authorization was understood to stand in the way of direct American action. Ely, the Ambassador reported, had all along believed he had Radford's personal assurance of an American countermove against Chinese air attack in the Delta. Now, the French wanted to know if they could count on instant U.S. interdiction of a CCAF strike. The Ambassador closed by reminding the Department of the incalculable harm to NATO, to the whole U.S. role in Western Europe, and to the U.S. position against the Communists' world strategy if a Chinese attack was not met.

Despite Dillon's protestations the Department stuck by its initial position of May 15, namely, that Chinese air attack was unlikely and that the United States would meet that problem when it arose. Clearly, the Administration was unwilling to make any advance commitments which the French could seize upon for political advantage at Geneva without having to give a *quid pro quo* in their Indochina policy. Eisenhower affirmed this view and went beyond it: *The conditions for united action, he said, applied equally to Chinese direct and indirect involvement in Indochina. The United States would make no unilateral commitment against any contingency, including overt, unprovoked Chinese aggression, without firm, broad allied support.* *

* Eisenhower's unwavering attitude toward action in Asia only in concert with allies put him at odds with Dulles, who was prepared to act unilaterally in cases of overt aggression. When the issue of possible CPR air intervention came before the President, he is reported to have reacted sharply. Evidently supposing that conflict in the air would mean a Sino-American war, the President

said the United States would not intervene in China on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United States should in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese communist overt aggression.

See memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Robert Cutler, the President's special assistant, June 1, 1954.

The rationale for the President's difference of view with his Secretary was laid out more fully the next day. Eisenhower said that since direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including "new weapons") in reply, he would need to have much more than Congressional authorization. Thai, Filipino, French, and Indochinese support would be important but not sufficient; other nations, such as Australia, would have to give their approval, for otherwise he could not be certain the public would back a war against China. (Memorandum of conversation in the President's office, June 2, 1954, involving also Dulles, Anderson, Radford, MacArthur, and Cutler.) At its 200th meeting on June 3, the NSC received, considered, and agreed upon the President's views.

There were other obstacles to U.S.-French agreement, as brought into the open with a memorandum to the President from Foreign Minister Georges Bidault on June 1. One was the question of timing involved in American insistence on French Assembly approval of a government request for U.S. intervention. The French cabinet considered

that to present a program of allied involvement to the Assembly except under the circumstance of "a complete failure of the Geneva Conference" attributable to the Communists "would be literally to wish to overthrow the [French] Government." A second area of continuing disagreement concerned the maintenance of French forces in the field and the nature of a U.S. commitment. The French held that the United States could bypass Congress by committing perhaps one division of Marines without a declaration of war. Although assured by Washington that the Marines would not be excluded from a U.S. air-naval commitment, the French were not satisfied. In his memorandum, Bidault asked that the United States take account of France's defense obligations elsewhere, an indirect way of asking that Washington go beyond a token ground-troop commitment. Confronted by a war-weary Parliament on one side and opponents of EDC on the other, Bidault doubtless believed that the retention of French soldiers in Indochina without relief from American GIs was neither militarily nor politically acceptable.

A final but by no means negligible French objection to the American proposals concerned the independence issue. Far from having been settled, as Dillon supposed, the French were still unhappy about American pressure for concessions even after the State Department's May 27 revisions. The French were particularly disturbed (as Bidault implied) at the notion that the Associated States could leave the Union at any time, even while French fighting men were in the field on Indochina's behalf. "Such a formula," Bidault wrote, "is unacceptable to the French Government, first because it is incompatible with the French Constitution, and also because it would be extremely difficult to explain to French opinion that the forces of the French Union were continuing the war in Indochina for the benefit of States that might at any moment leave the Union." France was perfectly willing, Bidault remarked, to sign new treaties of association with the three Indochinese States, to allow them a larger voice in defense matters, and to work with them toward formation of truly national governments; but, to judge from his commentary, Paris would not go the whole route by committing itself in advance to Indochina's full freedom of action in the French Union. And while this and other issues remained unresolved, as Dulles observed June 4, Laniel's reported belief that the United States and France were politically agreed was a "serious overstatement."

By early June the unsettled issues separating the United States from France began to lose their relevance to the war. Even if they could be resolved, it was questionable whether American involvement could any longer be useful, much less decisive. On the matter of training the VNA, for instance, the United States was no longer certain that time would permit its training methods to take effect even if the French promptly removed themselves from responsibility in that area. The State Department now held that the Vietnam situation had deteriorated "to point where any commitment at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider U.S. training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for U.S. participation war Indochina." Morale of the Franco-Vietnamese forces, moreover, had dropped sharply, the whole Tonkin Delta was endangered, and the political situation in

Saigon was reported to be dangerously unstable. Faced with this uniformly black picture, the Administration determined that the grave but still retrievable military situation prevailing at the time united action was proposed and pursued had, in June, altered radically, to the point where united action might have to be withdrawn from consideration by the French.

By mid-June American diplomacy was therefore in an unenviable position. At Geneva, very little progress had been made of a kind that could lead any of the Allies to expect a satisfactory outcome. Yet the alternative which the United States had reopened no longer seemed viable either. As Dulles told Smith, any "final agreement" with the French would be "quite impossible," for Paris was moving farther than ever from a determination that united action was necessary. "They want, and in effect have, an option on our intervention," Dulles wrote, "but they do not want to exercise it and the date of expiry of our option is fast running out." [Doc. 57] From Paris, in fact, Ambassador Dillon urged the Secretary that "the time limit be now" on U.S. intervention. [Doc. 56] And Dulles was fast concluding that Dillon was correct.

In view of France's feeling that, because of strong Assembly pressure for a settlement, no request could be made of the United States until every effort to reach agreement at Geneva had been exhausted, Dulles in effect decided, on June 15, that united action was no longer tenable. In a conversation with Bonnet, in which the French Ambassador read a message from Bidault which indicated that the French no longer considered the United States bound to intervene on satisfaction of the seven conditions, the Secretary put forth the difficulty of the American position. He stated that the United States stood willing to respond to a French request under the conditions of May 11, but that time and circumstance might make future intervention "impracticable or so burdensome as to be out of proportion to the results obtainable." While this offer would be unsatisfactory to Bidault, especially in his dealings with the Communists at Geneva, Dulles "could not conceive that it would be expected that the United States would give a third power the option to put it into war at times and under conditions wholly of the other's choosing." With this, united action was shelved, and it never appeared again in the form and with the purpose originally proposed.

As a break with France on united action became likely, American interest focused on a collective defense arrangement after a Geneva settlement with British participation. The French and British roles in U.S. planning were in effect reversed; Paris, it was felt, could no longer be counted on as an active participant in regional security. As their delegate to Geneva, Jean Chauvel, told Smith, Bidault was still hopeful of getting "something" from the conference. [Doc. 54] On the other hand, Eden told Smith on June 9 of his extreme pessimism over the course of the negotiations. Eden believed a recess in the talks was likely within a few days (it came, in fact, ten days later), and proposed that the Cambodian and Laotian cases be brought before the United Nations immediately after the end of the conference, even if France opposed the move. Smith drew from the conversation the strong impression that Eden believed negotiations to have failed and would now follow the American lead on a coalition to guarantee Cambodia and Laos "under umbrella of some UN action" (Smith's words). [Doc. 54] Days later, Dulles

likewise anticipated a British shift when he observed sardonically that events at Geneva had probably "been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known. I would assume," Dulles went on, "that the departure of Eden [from Geneva] would be evidence that there was no adequate reason for further delaying collective talks on Southeast Asia defense." But whether the United States and Great Britain would see eye-to-eye on their post-settlement security obligations in the region, and whether joint diplomatic initiatives to influence the nature of the settlement could be decided upon, remained outstanding questions.

The rebirth and demise of united action was a rare case of history repeated almost immediately after it had been made. The United States, having failed to interest Britain and France in united action prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, refused to be relegated to an unimportant role and determined instead to plunge ahead without British participation. But the conditions for intervention which had been given the French before the fall of Dienbienphu were now stiffened, most importantly by a greater detailing of the process the French government would have to go through before the United States would consider direct involvement.

Even while the French pondered the conditions, urged their refinement and redefinition to suit French policies, and insisted in the end that they saw no political obstacles separating the United States and France, Washington anticipated that the French were very unlikely to forward a request for U.S. involvement. Having learned something of French government priorities from the futile diplomatic bargaining in April, Department of State representatives in Paris and Washington saw that what the French wanted above all was not the military advantages of active U.S. intervention but the political benefits that might be derived from bringing into the open the fact that the two allies were negotiating American participation in the fighting. Thus, Dillon correctly assessed in mid-May that French inquiries about American conditions for intervention represented a "wish to use possibility of our intervention primarily to strengthen their hand at Geneva." The French hoped they would not have to call on the United States for direct support; they did hope the Communists would sense the dangers of proposing unacceptable terms for a settlement. Dillon's sensitivity to the French position was proven accurate by Bidault's memorandum to the President: France would, in reality, only call on the United States if an "honorable" settlement could clearly not be obtained at Geneva, for only under that circumstance could the National Assembly be persuaded that the Laniel government had done everything possible to achieve peace.

Recognition of the game the French were playing did not keep the United States from posing intervention as an alternative for them; but by adhering tenaciously to the seven conditions, it ruled out either precipitous American action or an open-ended commitment to be accepted or rejected by Paris. The State Department, guided on the military side by strong JCS objections to promising the French American combat troops in advance of a new and satisfactory command structure and strategic plan, became increasingly distraught with and suspicious of French motivations. "We cannot grant French an indefinite option on us without regard to intervening deterioration" of the military

situation, Dulles wrote on June 8. As much as the Administration wanted to avoid a sell-out at Geneva, it was aware that events in Indochina might preclude effective U.S. action even if the French suddenly decided they wanted American support. Put another way, one of the primary differences between American diplomacy before and after the fall of Dienbienphu was its ability to project ahead-to weigh the factors of time and circumstance against the distasteful possibility that Vietnam, by French default at the negotiating table or defeat on the battlefield, might be lost. As the scales tipped against united action, American security planning began to focus on the future possibilities of collective defense in Southeast Asia, while the pattern of diplomacy shifted from disenchantment with the Geneva Conference to attempts to bring about the best possible settlement terms.

V. THE MAJOR ISSUES AT THE CONFERENCE, MAY-JUNE

Washington's sense that the conference had essentially gotten nowhere-a view which Smith and Dulles believed was shared by Eden, as already noted-was not entirely accurate; nor was it precisely the thinking of other delegations. Following the initial French and Viet Minh proposals of May 8 and 10, respectively, some progress had in fact been made, although certainly not of an order that could have led any of the chief negotiators to expect a quick settlement. As the conference moved ahead, three major areas of contention emerged: the separation of belligerent forces, the establishment of a framework for political settlements in the three Indochinese states, and provision for effective control and supervision of the cease-fire.

A. SEPARATION OF THE BELLIGERENTS

The question how best to disentangle the opposing armies was most acute in Vietnam, but was also hotly debated as it applied to Cambodia and Laos. In Vietnam, Viet Minh forces were concentrated in the Tonkin Delta, though large numbers had long been active in Annam (central Vietnam) and Cochinchina (the south). The original French and Viet Minh proposals sought to take account of this situation by dismissing (although for separate reasons) the concept of single regroupment areas and forwarding instead the idea of perhaps several concentration points to facilitate a cease-fire. To this point, the Vietnamese delegation was in agreement: regroupment of the belligerents should in no way have the effect of dividing the country into makeshift military zones that could have lasting political implications.

It was an entirely different matter where the regroupment areas should be located; whether "foreign" (i.e., French) troops should be withdrawn, and if so, from what areas and during what period; whether irregular troops (i.e., Viet Minh guerrillas) should be disarmed and disbanded, and if so, whether they and their comrades in the regular forces should be integrated (as the Bao Dai delegation proposed) into the VNA; and, of crucial importance, whether a cease-fire should be dependent upon success in the regroupment process or, as Pham Van Dong proposed, upon an overall political settlement.

This last question was tackled first by the negotiators. On Eden's initiative, the conference had moved in mid-May from plenary to restricted sessions, where fewer delegates were present, no verbatim record was systematically kept, and the press was barred. Eden's expectation that the opportunities for greater intimacy among the delegates would enhance the possibility of making some headway was partially fulfilled. At the first restricted session on May 17, Molotov responded to Bidault's implication that one cause of continuing irresolution in the negotiations was the Viet Minh's insistence on coupling a military with a political settlement, whereas the French proposal had been geared to dealing only with the military portion before going on to discuss the political side. The Soviet delegate argued that while military and political matters were obviously closely linked, the conference might do best to address the military settlement first, since it was a point common to the French and Viet Minh proposals. Dong objected that military and political matters were so closely knit that they could not be separated; however, he agreed (although, we may surmise, with some reluctance) that the two problems could be dealt with in that order.

With a basic procedural obstacle removed, it was finally agreed that a cease-fire should have priority in the conference's order of business.* Toward that goal, the

* On May 20, Chou En-lai told Eden that military and political matters should indeed be dealt with separately, and that priority should be given to the attainment of a cease-fire. (Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954.) The Communists were quick to point out thereafter, though, that a political settlement should not be dropped from consideration. In fact, at the fifth restricted session, Molotov returned to the issue of military versus political settlements by proposing that they be considered at alternate meetings. The Western side held fast to concentrating on the cease-fire and turning to political matters only when agreement had been reached on the military side; this position was tacitly adopted.

problem of regroupment and disarmament of certain forces was taken up. At the fifth restricted session on May 24, Foreign Minister Bidault proposed, among other things, that a distinction be admitted between "regular" and "irregular" forces. Regular troops, he said, included all permanently organized forces, which for the Viet Minh meant regional as well as regular units. These, he suggested, should be regrouped into demilitarized zones, whereas loosely organized irregulars should be disarmed under some form of control. Pham Van Dong, in his reply, agreed on the urgency of a cease-fire and on the importance of disarming irregulars; but, in contrast to Bidault's proposal, Dong asserted that inasmuch as each side would have responsibility for all forces in areas under its control after the cease-fire, disarmament would take place naturally. Dong implicitly rejected the idea of controlled disarmament, therefore, by placing the problem in the post-rather than pre-cess-fire period.

The issues of regroupment and disarmament might have brought the conference to a standstill had not Pham Van Dong, at the sixth restricted session (May 25), suddenly

reversed his position on regroupment and proposed what amounted to the partitioning of Indochina. Following only moments after the Vietnamese delegate, Nguyen Quoc Dinh, had offered a plan based on the maintenance of his country's territorial integrity,* Dong suggested that in the course of the regroupment, specific

* The GVN's position called for the disbandment and disarming of Viet Minh forces and their later integration into a national army under international control; international supervision of elections to be conducted by the Bao Dai government at an unspecified future date; and recognition of the integrity of the Vietnamese state. The GVN also insisted that the withdrawal of foreign forces come after all other issues had been resolved.

territorial jurisdictions be established such that each side would have complete economic and administrative, no less than military, control. So as not to be misunderstood, Dong further urged that a temporary line of demarcation be drawn that would be topographically suitable and appropriate for transportation and communication within each zone thus created. The American delegate, General Smith, immediately dismissed Dong's proposal and advised that the conferees return to discussion of the original cease-fire issues. But, as was to become clear very soon, Dong's new move struck a responsive chord among the French even as it confirmed to the Bao Dai delegation its worst fears.

What had prompted Dong to introduce a partition arrangement when, at previous sessions, the Viet Minh had pushed repeatedly for a settlement procedure that would facilitate their consolidation of control over the entire country? What evidence we have is circumstantial, but it suggests that the Viet Minh delegation may have come under Sino-Soviet pressure to produce an alternative to cease-fire proposals that were consistently being rejected by the West. The partition alternative, specifically at the 16th parallel, had been intimated to American officials as early as March 4 by a member of the Soviet Embassy in London, apparently out of awareness of Franco-American objections to a coalition arrangement for Vietnam. On the opening day of the conference, moreover, Soviet officials had again approached American officials on the subject, this time at Geneva, averring that the establishment of a buffer state to China's south would be sufficient satisfaction of China's security needs. While these events do not demonstrate that Dong's partition proposal * was the direct outgrowth of Sino-Soviet disposition toward a territorial division, they do reveal that

* The DRV, it should be added, refused to call its proposal one for partition. As the official newspaper, Nhan Dan (The People) put it, the proposal amounted merely to "zonal readjustment" necessary to achieving a cease-fire. The readjustment "is only a stage in preparation for free general elections with a view toward the realization of national unity." Vietnam News Agency (VNA) broadcast in English to Southeast Asia, June 7, 1954.

partition was a solution, albeit temporary, which Moscow, at least, early found agreeable.

Whatever lay behind Dong's gambit, the French were put in the position of being challenged on their prior commitments to the Vietnamese. At the time the conference began, Bao Dai's government, perhaps mindful of past instances of partition-type solutions in Korea and Germany, and almost certainly suspicious of ultimate French intentions in the face of Viet Minh territorial demands, urged Paris to provide written assurance it would neither seek nor accept a division of Vietnam at Geneva. To make his own position perfectly clear, Bao Dai, through his representatives in the French capital, issued a communique (in the name of the GVN cabinet) which took note of various plans in the air for partition. The communique stated that partition "would be in defiance of Vietnamese national sentiment which has asserted itself with so much strength for the unity as well as for the independence of the country. Neither the Chief of State nor the national government of Vietnam admits that the unity of the country can be severed legally...." The cabinet warned that an agreement compromising that unity would never receive Vietnam's approval:

...neither the Chief of State, nor the Vietnamese Government will consider themselves [sic] as bound by decisions running counter to the interests, i.e., independence and unity, of their country that would, at the same time, violate the rights of the peoples and offer a reward to aggression in opposition to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and democratic ideals.

In response to this clear-cut statement, the French came forward with both oral and written promises. On May 3, Maurice Dejean, the Commissioner General for Indochina, said in Saigon:

The French Government does not intend to seek a settlement of the Indochina problem on the basis of a partition of Vietnamese territory. .

Formal assurances were given on this subject last April 25 by the French minister for foreign affairs to the minister for foreign affairs of Vietnam, and they were confirmed to him on May 1.

Written assurance came from Bidault on May 6 when he wrote Bao Dai that the task of the French government was to establish peace in Indochina, not "to seek here [at Geneva] a definitive political solution." Therefore, the French goal would be, said Bidault, to obtain a cease-fire with guarantees for the Associated States, hopefully with general elections in the future. Bidault continued:

As of now, I am however in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing would be more contrary to the intentions of the French government than to prepare for the establishment, at the expense of the unity of Vietnam, two States having each an international calling (vocation).

Bidault's support of Vietnam's opposition to partition, which he repeated privately before Eden and Smith at Geneva, collapsed once the new government of Pierre Mendès-France

took over in mid-June. Mendès-France, keenly aware of the tenor of French public opinion, was far more disposed than the Laniel-Bidault administration to making every effort toward achieving a reasonable settlement. While by no means prepared for a sell-out, Mendès-France quickly foresaw that agreement with the Viet Minh was unlikely unless he accepted the concept of partition. His delegate at Geneva, who remained Chauvel, and the new Commissioner General for Indochina, General Ely, reached the same conclusion. At a high-level meeting in Paris on June 24, the new government thoroughly revised the French negotiating position. The objectives for subsequent talks, it was decided, would be: (1) the regroupment of forces of both sides, and their separation by a line about at the 18th parallel;* (2) the establishment of enclaves under neutral control in the two zones, one for the French in the area of the Catholic bishoprics at Phat Diem and

* French insistence on the 18th parallel originated in the recommendation of General Navarre, who was asked several questions by the French delegation at Geneva regarding the likely impact of the then-existing military situation on the French negotiatory position. Navarre's responses were sent April 21. On the demarcation line, Navarre said that the 18th parallel would leave "us" the ancient political capital of Hue as well as Tourane (Da Nang), and permit the retention of militarily valuable terrain. (See General Ely's *Mémoires: l'Indochine dans la Tourmente* [Paris: Plon, 1964], p. 112, and Lacouture and Devillers, *La fin d'une guerre*, p. 126.) Thus, the choice of the 18th parallel was based on military considerations, and apparently assumed a continuing French role in southern Vietnam after partition.

Bui Chu, one for the Viet Minh at an area to be determined; (3) the maintenance of Haiphong in French hands in order to assist in the regroupment. The meeting also decided that, for the purpose of psychological pressure on the Viet Minh if not military preparedness for future contingencies, France should break with past practice and announce plans to send a contingent of conscripts (later determined as two divisions) to Indochina. Thus, by late June, the French had come around to acceptance of the need to explore a territorial settlement without, as we have already observed, informing the Vietnamese that Bidault's and Dejean's assurances had been superseded. On June 26, Paris formally notified Washington and London that Chauvel would soon begin direct talks with Pham Van Dong on a partition arrangement that would provide the GVN with the firmest possible territorial base. [[Doc. 66](#)]

While ground had been broken on the cease-fire for Vietnam, debate continued on Laos and Cambodia. Prior to and after Dong's proposal of May 25, the delegates argued back and forth without progress over the relationship between the conflict in Vietnam and that in Cambodia and Laos. The Khmer and Laotian delegates insisted they represented free and independent governments which were being challenged by a handful of indigenous renegades assisted by the invading Viet Minh. Thus, the delegates reasoned, their situations were quite different from the "civil war" in Vietnam, and therefore cease-fires could readily be established in Laos and Cambodia by the simple expedient of removing

the aggressors. These delegates saw no reason--and they received solid support from the American, French and British representatives--for acceding to the Viet Minh demand that cease-fires in their two countries be contingent upon, and hence forced to occur simultaneously with, one in Vietnam.

The Communists' retorts left little room for compromise. Pham Van Dong held, as before, that he spoke for "governments" which were being refused admission to the conference. The Pathet Lao and the Free Khmer were separate, genuine "national liberation movements" whose stake in their respective countries, Dong implied, would have to be acknowledged before a cease-fire could be arranged anywhere in Indochina. Molotov buttressed this argument with the claim that Laos and Cambodia were no more "independent" than Vietnam. Using a common negotiating tactic, he excerpted from a public statement by Dulles to point out how France was still being urged by the United States in May to grant real independence to all three Indochinese states, not just Vietnam. Molotov's only retreat was on the extent of Pathet Lao and Free Khmer territorial control. He admitted that while the Viet Minh were dominant in Vietnam, the Khmer-Laotian resistance movements controlled some lesser amount of territory.

For a while it seemed that the conference would become inextricably bogged down on the question whether the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were creatures of the Viet Minh or genuine nationalist forces. Certainly the Viet Minh delegation remained steadfast. At the fourth restricted session (May 21), Pham Van Dong made his implication of the previous sessions clearer when he said he had always understood the French cease-fire proposal to have applied to all Indochina (an outright fabrication) inasmuch as the problems in the three states were different only in degree, not in nature. If Cambodia and Laos were detached from Vietnam in the discussions, Dong said, the cease-fire issue would be attacked in the wrong way and a satisfactory solution would not be reached. The warning of no cease-fire settlement for Cambodia and Laos without one for Vietnam was clear.

These last remarks by Dong, however, were no longer wholly in accord with what the Chinese were privately indicating. Chou En-lai, in the same conversation with Eden on May 20 in which Chou had agreed to separate military from political matters, also admitted that political settlements might be different for the three Indochinese states. Chou thus moved one step closer to the Western position, which held that the Laotian and Cambodian cases were substantially different from that in Vietnam and hence should be decided separately. The concession, however small, paved the way for agreement to Eden's proposal on May 25 that the problem of a cease-fire in Vietnam be dealt with separately and directly by having the Viet Minh and French military commands meet in Geneva and on the spot in Vietnam (later determined as Trung Gia) to discuss technical aspects of the regroupment. The military staffs would report their findings to the conferees. On June 2 formal agreement was reached between the commands to begin work; but it was not until June 10, apparently, that the Viet Minh actually consented that their secret talks with the French, like the discussions of the military commands, should be concerned only with Vietnam to the exclusion of Laotian and Cambodian problems. Thus, it would seem that the Viet Minh position on the indivisibility of the three Indochinese states for purposes of a settlement was undercut by the Chinese (doubtless

with Soviet support); yet for about three weeks following Chou's talk with Eden, the Viet Minh had privately refused to deal with the French on Vietnam alone.

B. POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

Communist agreement to treat Laos and Cambodia separately as well as to consider a territorial division did not, however, signal imminent progress on the substance of military or political settlements for those countries any more than for Vietnam. Several additional plenary and restricted sessions made no headway at all during late May and the first weeks of June. Eden's disappointment led him to state to his fellow delegates:

In respect . . . to the arrangements for supervision and to the future of Laos and Cambodia, the divergencies are at present wide and deep. Unless we can narrow them now without further delay, we shall have failed in our task. We have exhausted every expedient procedure which we could devise to assist us in our work. We all know now what the differences are. We have no choice but to resolve them or to admit our failure. For our part, the United Kingdom Delegation is still willing to attempt to resolve them here or in restricted session or by any other method which our colleagues may prefer.

But, gentlemen, if the positions remain as they are today, I think it is our clear-cut duty to say so to the world and to admit that we have failed.

Days later, his pessimism ran even deeper as the conference indeed seemed close to a breakdown. The Americans did not help matters, either: "Bedell Smith," Eden has since divulged, "showed me a telegram from President Eisenhower advising him to do everything in his power to bring the conference to an end as rapidly as possible, on the grounds that the Communists were only spinning things out to suit their own military purposes."

For reasons which will be speculated on subsequently, the Soviets and Chinese were not prepared to admit that the conference had failed and were willing to forestall that prospect by making concessions sufficient to justify its continuation. While the Americans may have wished to see a breakdown, Eden was not yet convinced that was inevitable. Again, his patience was rewarded. On June 16, Chou told the foreign secretary that the Cambodian resistance forces were small, making a political settlement with the Royal Government "easily" obtainable. In Laos, where those forces were larger, regroupment areas along the border with Vietnam (in Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces) would be required, Chou thought. Asked by Eden whether there might not be difficulty in gaining Viet Minh agreement to the withdrawal of their troops from the two countries, Chou replied it would "not be difficult" in the context of a withdrawal of all foreign forces. The CPR would even be willing to consider the royal governments as heading independent states that could maintain their ties to the French Union, provided no American bases were established in their territories. China's preeminent concern, Eden deduced, was that the United States might use Laos and Cambodia as jump-off points for an attack on the mainland.

From the conversation, Eden "received a strong impression that he [Chou wanted a settlement and I accordingly urged Georges Bidault to have a talk with him and to discuss this new offer." On the next day (June 17), Bidault met with Chou for the first time, as well as with Molotov, and reported the Communists' great concern over a break-up of the conference. Two days later a French redraft of a Chinese proposal to broaden the military staff conferences to include separate talks on Laos and Cambodia was accepted.

This first major breakthrough in the negotiations, with the Chinese making an overture that evidently had full Soviet backing,* seems not to have had Viet Minh

* When Molotov met with Smith on June 19, the Soviet representative said he saw the possibility of agreement on Laos and Cambodia so long as neither side (i.e., the French and Viet Minh) "adopted one-sided views or put forward extreme pretensions." Molotov said about 50 percent of Laotian territory was not controlled by the royal government (putting the Pathet Lao case in the negative), with a much smaller movement in Cambodia. The tone of Smith's report on this conversation suggests that Molotov saw no obstacles to Viet Minh withdrawal of its "volunteers." Smith tel. DULTE 202 from Geneva, June 19, 1954.

approval. At the same time as the Chinese were saying, for example in a New China News Agency (NCNA) broadcast of June 17, that all three Communist delegations had "all along maintained that the conditions in each of the three Indochinese countries are not exactly alike," and hence that "conditions peculiar to each of these countries should be taken into consideration," the Viet Minh were claiming that "the indivisibility of the three questions of Vietnam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao" was one of several "fundamental questions" which the conference had failed to resolve. In fact, of course, that question had been resolved; yet the Viet Minh continued to proclaim the close unity of the Viet Minh, Pathet Lao, and Free Khmer under the banner of their tri-national united front alliance formed in 1951. No doubt the Viet Minh were seeking to assure their cadres and soldiers in Cambodia and Laos that Pham Van Dong would not bargain away their fate at the conference table, but it may also be that the broadcasts were meant to imply Viet Minh exceptions to objectionable Sino-Soviet concessions.

Those concessions, first on the separability of Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam and subsequently on Viet Minh involvement there, compelled the DRV delegation to take a new tack. On the former questions Viet Minh representatives indicated on June 16 during "underground" discussions with the French that insofar as Vietnam was concerned, their minimum terms were absolute control of the Tonkin Delta, including Hanoi and Haiphong. While the French were reluctant to yield both cities, which they still controlled, a bargaining point had been established inasmuch as the Viet Minh were now willing to discuss specific geographic objectives. On the second question, the Viet Minh, apparently responding to Chou En-lai's "offer" of their withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos, indicated flexibility at least toward the latter country. A Laotian delegate reported June 23, following a meeting with Pham Van Dong in the garden of the Chinese

delegation's villa, that the Viet Minh were in apparent accord on the withdrawal of their "volunteers" and even on Laos' retention of French treaty bases. The Viet Minh's principal demand was that French military personnel in Laos be reduced to a minimum. Less clearly, Dong alluded to the creation in Laos of a government of "national union," Pathet Lao participation in 1955 elections for the national assembly, and a "temporary arrangement" governing areas dominated by Pathet Lao military forces. But these latter points were interpreted as being suggestive; Dong had come around to the Western view shared (now by the Soviets and Chinese) that the Pathet Lao not be accorded either military or political weight equal to that of the royal government. Later in the conference, Dong would make a similar retreat on Cambodia.

C. CONTROL AND SUPERVISION

Painstakingly slow progress toward cease-fires and political settlements for the Indochinese states also characterized the work of devising supervisory organs to oversee the implementation and preservation of the cease-fire. Yet here again, the Communist side was not so intransigent as to make agreement impossible.

Three separate but interrelated issues dominated the discussions of control and supervision at this stage of the conference and afterward. First, there was sharp disagreement over the structure of the supervisory organ: Should it consist solely of joint commissions composed of the belligerents, or should it have superimposed above an international authority possessing decisionmaking power? Second, the composition of any supervisory organ other than the joint commissions was also hotly disputed: Given agreement to have "neutral" nations observe the truce, which nations might be considered "neutral"? Finally, if it were agreed that there should be a neutral control body, how would it discharge its duties?

In the original Viet Minh proposals, implementation of the cease-fire was left to joint indigenous commissions, with no provision for higher, international supervision. Vehement French objections led to a second line of defense from the Communist side. At the fourth plenary session (May 14), Molotov suggested the setting up of a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) such as existed in Korea, and said he did not foresee any insurmountable problem in reaching agreement on its membership. But Molotov's revision left much to be determined and, from the Western standpoint, much to be desired too. Serious debate on the control and supervision problem did not get underway until early June. At that time, Molotov expressly rejected the American plan, supported by the Indochinese delegations and Great Britain, to have the United Nations supervise a cease-fire. He argued that the UN had nothing to do with the Geneva Conference, especially as most of the conferees were not UN members. Returning to his plan for an NNSC, Molotov reiterated his view that Communist countries could be as neutral as capitalist countries; hence, he said, the problem was simply one of choosing which countries should comprise the supervisory organ, and suggested that the yardstick be those having diplomatic and political relations with both France and the Viet Minh. As to that body's relationship to the joint commissions, Molotov shied away from the Western proposal to make them subordinate to the neutral commission. "It would be in

the interest of our work to recognize," Molotov said, "that these commissions should act in coordination and in agreement between each other, but should not be subordinate to each other." No such hierarchical relationship had existed in Korea, so why one in Indochina? Finally, the foreign minister saw no reason why an NNSC could not reach decisions by unanimous vote on "important" questions. Disputes among or within the commissions, Molotov concluded, would be referred to the states guaranteeing the settlement, which would, if necessary, take "collective measures" to resolve them.

The Western position was stated succinctly by Bidault. Again insisting on having "an authority remote from the heat of the fighting and which would have a final word to say in disputes," Bidault said the neutral control commission should have absolute responsibility for the armistice. It would have such functions as regrouping the regular forces, supervising any demilitarized zones, conducting the exchange of prisoners, and implementing measures for the non-introduction of war materiel into Indochina. While the joint commission would have an important role to play in these control processes, such as in working out agreement for the safe passage of opposing armies from one zone to another or for POW exchange, its functions would have to be subordinate to the undisputed authority of a neutral mechanism. Bidault did not specify which nations fitted his definition of "neutrality" and whether they would decide by majority or unanimous vote. These omissions were corrected by Eden a few days later when he suggested the Colombo Powers (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia), which he argued were all Asian, had all been actively discussing Indochina outside the conference, were five in number and hence impervious to obstruction by a two-to-two vote (as on the NNSC) or requirement for unanimity, and were truly impartial.

The basis for agreement on the vital question of supervising a cease-fire seemed at this stage nonexistent. The Communists had revised their position by admitting the feasibility of a neutral nations' control organ in addition to joint commissions of the belligerents. But they clearly hoped to duplicate in Indochina the ineffective machinery they had foisted on the United Nations command at Panmunjom, one in which effective peacekeeping action was basically proscribed by the built-in veto of a four-power authority evenly divided among Communist and non-Communist representatives. The West, on the other hand, absolutely refused to experiment again with an NNSC; a neutral organ was vital, but it could not include Communist representatives, who did not know the meaning of neutrality. If the United Nations was not acceptable to the Communists, the Colombo Powers should be.

However remote these positions, various kinds of trade-offs must have been apparent to the negotiators. Despite differing standards of "neutrality" and "impartiality," for instance, compromise on the membership problem seemed possible. The real dilemma was the authority of a neutral body. Unless superior to the joint commissions, it would never be able to resolve disputes, and unless it had the power to enforce its own decisions, it would never be more than an advisory organ. Whether some new formula could be found somewhere between the Communists' insistence on parallel authority and the West's preference for a hierarchical arrangement remained to be seen.

On June 19 the Korea phase of the conference ended without reaching a political settlement. The conferees at that point agreed to a prolonged recess by the delegation leaders on the understanding that the military committees would continue to meet at Geneva and in the field. Eden wrote to the Asian Commonwealth prime ministers that "if the work of the committees is sufficiently advanced, the Heads of Delegations will come back." Until that time, the work of the conference would go on in restricted session. Chauvel and Pham Van Dong remained at their posts; Molotov returned to Moscow; Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, made important stopovers in New Delhi, Rangoon, and Nanning that were to have important bearing on the conference. Smith remained in Geneva, but turned the delegation over to Johnson. It was questionable whether the Under Secretary would take over again; gloom was so thick in Washington over the perceived lack of progress in the talks and the conviction ' that the new Mendès-France government would reach a settlement as soon as the conference reconvened, that Dulles cabled Smith: "Our thinking at present is that our role at Geneva should soon be restricted to that of observer. . . ." [Doc. 65] As for Eden, he prepared to accompany Churchill on a trip to Washington for talks relating to the conference and prospects for a Southeast Asia defense pact.

VI. THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT

With its preconceptions of Communist negotiating strategy confirmed by the harshness of the first Viet Minh proposals, which Washington did not regard as significantly watered down by subsequent Sino-Soviet alterations, and with its military alternatives no longer considered relevant to the war, the United States began to move in the direction of becoming an influential actor at the negotiations. This move was not dictated by a sudden conviction that Western capacity for inducing concessions from the Communist side had increased; nor was the shift premised on the hope that we might be able to drive a wedge between the Viet Minh and their Soviet and Chinese friends. Rather, Washington believed that inasmuch as a settlement was certain to come about, and even though there was near-equal certainty it could not support the final terms, basic American and Western interests in Southeast Asia might still be preserved if France could be persuaded to toughen its stand. Were concessions still not forthcoming--were the Communists, in other words, to stiffen in response to French firmness--the Allies would be able to consult on their next moves with the confidence every reasonable effort to reestablish peace had been attempted.

As already observed, the American decision to play a more decisive role at the conference depended on gaining British support. The changing war situation now made alignment with the British necessary for future regional defense, especially as Washington was informed of the probability that a partition settlement (which London had foreseen months before) would place all Indochina in or within reach of Communist hands. The questions remained how much territory the Communists could be granted without compromising non-Communist Indochina's security, what measures were needed to guarantee that security, and what other military and political principles were vital to any settlement which the French would also be willing to adopt in the negotiations. When

the chief ministers of the United States and Great Britain met in Washington in late June, these were the issues they had to confront.

The British and American representatives-Eden, Churchill, Dulles, and Eisenhower-brought to the talks positions on partition and regional security that, for all the differences, left considerable room for a harmonization of viewpoints. The UK, as the Americans well knew, was never convinced either that Indochina's security was inextricably linked to the security of all Asia, or that the Franco-Viet Minh war would ever bring into question the surrender of all Indochina to the Communists. London considered partition a feasible solution, but was already looking beyond that to some more basic East-West understanding that would have the effect of producing a *laissez-faire* coexistence between the Communist and Western powers in the region. As Eden recalled his thinking at the time, the best way of keeping Communism out of Southeast Asia while still providing the necessary security within which free societies might evolve was to build a belt of neutral states assisted by the West. The Communists might not see any advantage to this arrangement, he admitted. But:

If we could bring about a situation where the Communists believed that there was a balance of advantage to them in arranging a girdle of neutral states, we might have the ingredients of a settlement.

Once the settlement was achieved, a system for guaranteeing the security of the neutral states thus formed would be required, Eden held. Collective defense, of the kind that would ensure action without unanimity among the contracting parties--a system "of the Locarno type"--seemed most reasonable to him. These points, in broad outline, were those presented by him and Churchill.

The United States had from the beginning dismissed the viability of a partition solution. Dulles' public position in his major speech of March 29 that Communist control even of part of Indochina would merely be the prelude to total domination was fully supported in private by both State and Defense. Nevertheless, the Government early recognized the possibility that partition, however distasteful, might be agreed to among the French and Communist negotiators. As a result, on May 5, the Defense Department drew up a settlement plan that included provision for a territorial division. As little of Vietnam as possible should be yielded, Defense argued, with the demarcation line fixed in the north and "defined by some defensible geographic boundary (i.e., the Red or Black Rivers, or the Annamite Mountains) In accord with the French position that evolved from the meeting of Mendès-France's cabinet on June 24, Defense urged provision for a Vietnamese enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area or, alternatively, internationalization of the port facilities there. Fairly well convinced, however, that partition would be fragile, Defense also called for "sanctions" against any form of Communist aggression in Laos, Cambodia, or Thailand, and for allied agreement to united action in the event the Communists violated a cease-fire by conducting subversive activities in the non-Communist area of Vietnam.

The Defense proposal amounted to containing the Communist forces above the 20th parallel while denying them sovereign access to the sea. This position went much further than that of the French, who also favored a demarcation line geared to military requirements but were willing to settle on roughly the 18th parallel. Moreover, when the five-power military staff conference met in Washington in early June, it reported (on the 9th) that a line midway between the 17th and 18th parallels (from Thakhek in Laos westward to Dong Hoi on the north Vietnam seacoast) would be defensible in the event partition came about. [Doc. 61] Undercutting the Defense plan still further was the French disposition to yield on an enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were the Viet Minh to press for their own enclave in southern Vietnam. As Chauvel told U. Alexis Johnson, should the choice come to a trade-off of enclaves or a straight territorial division, the French preferred the latter. [Doc. 62] Thus, by mid-June, a combination of circumstances made it evident to the Administration that some more flexible position on the location of the partition line would have to be, and could be, adopted.

American acceptance of partition as a workable arrangement put Washington and London on even terms. Similarly, on the matter of an overall security "umbrella" for Southeast Asia, the two allies also found common ground. While the United States found "Locarno" an unfortunate term, the Government did not dispute the need to establish a vigorous defense mechanism capable of acting despite objections by one or more members. It will be recalled that the NSC Planning Board, on May 19, had outlined three possible regional groupings dependent upon the nature and timing of a settlement at Geneva. Now, in late June, circumstances dictated the advisability of concentrating on the "Group 2" formula, in which the UK, the United States, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand would participate but not France (unless it was decided that the pact would apply to Indochina). The concerned states would exchange information, act as a united front against Communism, provide actual assistance to Asian members against external attack or "Communist insurrection," and make use of Asian facilities and/or forces in their defense assistance program.

American planning for what was to become SEATO evinced concern, however, about the commitment of American forces in cases of Communist infiltration and subversion. As the Planning Board's paper notes, the role of the United States and other countries should be limited to support of the country requesting assistance; *Asian* member nations would be expected to "contribute facilities and, if possible, at least token military contingents." The Board's paper did not represent a final policy statement; but it did reflect American reluctance, particularly on the part of the President and the Joint Chiefs, to have American forces drawn into the kind of local conflict the Administration had steered clear of in Vietnam. On this question of limiting the Western commitment, the British, to judge from their hostility toward involvement against the Viet Minh, were also in general agreement.

Aside from partition and regional security, a basis also existed for agreement to assisting the French in their diplomatic work by the device of some carefully worded warning to the Communists. The British, before as well as after Dienbienphu, were firmly against issuing threats to the Communists that involved military consequences. When united

action had first been broached, London rejected raising the threat of a naval blockade and carrying it out if the Chinese continued to assist the Viet Minh. Again, when united action came up in private U.S.-French discussions during May, the British saw no useful purpose in seeking to influence discussions at Geneva by making it known to the Communists that united action would follow a breakdown in negotiations. The situation was different now. Instead of threatening direct military action, London and Washington apparently agreed, the West could profit from an open-ended warning tied to a lack of progress at Geneva. When Eden addressed the House of Commons on June 23 prior to explaining for Washington, he said: "It should be clear to all that the hopes of agreement [at Geneva] would be jeopardized if active military operations in Indochina were to be intensified while negotiations for an armistice are proceeding at Geneva. If this reminder is needed, I hope that it may be heeded." Eden was specifically thinking of a renewed Viet Minh offensive in the Delta, but was not saying what might happen once negotiations were placed in jeopardy.

This type of warning was sounded again at the conclusion of the Anglo-American talks, and encouragement for it came from Paris. In the same aide-memoire of June 26 in which the French Government had requested that the United States counsel Saigon against a violent reaction to partition, Washington was also urged to join with London in a declaration. The declaration would "state in some fashion or other that, if it is not possible to reach a reasonable settlement at the Geneva Conference, a serious aggravation of international relations would result [[Doc. 66](#)]. The French suggestion was acted upon. Eisenhower and Churchill issued a statement on June 29 that "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated." In retrospect, the statement may have had an important bearing on the Communists' negotiating position--a point to which we shall return subsequently.

The joint statement referred to "an acceptable agreement," and indeed the ramifications of that phrase constituted the main subject of the U.S.-UK talks. In an unpublicized agreement, the two governments concurred on a common set of principles which, if worked into the settlement terms, would enable both to "respect" the armistice. These principles, known subsequently as the Seven Points, were communicated to the French. As reported by Eden, they were:

- (1) Preservation of the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia, and assurance of Viet Minh withdrawal from those countries
- (2) Preservation of at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta, with the line of demarcation no further south than one running generally west from Dong Hoi
- (3) No restrictions on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers"
- (4) No "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"

- (5) No provision that would "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means"
- (6) Provision for "the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam"
- (7) Provision for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement."

The Seven Points represented something of an American diplomatic victory when viewed in the context of the changed Administration position on partition. While any loss of territory to the Communists predetermined the official American attitude toward the settlement--Eden was told the United States would almost certainly be unable to guarantee it--the terms agreed upon with the British were sufficiently hard that, if pushed through by the French, they would bring about a tolerable arrangement for Indochina. The sticking point for Washington lay not in the terms but in the unlikelihood that the British, any more than the French, would actually stand by them against the Communists. Thus, Dulles wrote: ". . . we have the distinct impression that the British look upon this [memorandum of the Seven Points] merely as an optimum solution and that they would not encourage the French to hold out for a solution as good as this." The Secretary observed that the British, during the talks, were unhappy about finding Washington ready only to "respect" the final terms reached at Geneva. They had preferred a stronger word, yet they "wanted to express these 7 points merely as a 'hope' without any indication of firmness on our part." The United States, quite aside from what was said in the Seven Points, "would not want to be associated in any way with a settlement which fell materially short of the 7 point memorandum." [Doc. 70] Thus, the seven points, while having finally bound the United States and Great Britain to a common position on the conference, did not allay Washington's anxiety over British and French readiness to conclude a less-than-satisfactory settlement. The possibility of a unilateral American withdrawal from the conference was still being "given consideration," Dulles reported, even as the Seven Points were agreed upon.

Despite reservations about our Allies' adherence to the Seven Points, the United States still hoped to get French approval of them. On July 6, Dillon telegraphed the French reaction as given him by Parodi, the secretary-general of the cabinet. With the exception of Point 5, denoting national elections, the French were in agreement. They were confused about an apparent conflict between the elections provision and Point 4, under which political provisions, which would include elections, were not to risk loss of retained Vietnam. In addition, they, too, felt American agreement merely to "respect" any agreement was too weak a term, and requested clarification of its meaning.

Dulles responded the next day (July 7) to both matters. Points 4 and 5 were not in conflict, he said. It was quite possible that an agreement in line with the Seven Points might still not prevent Indochina from going Communist. The important thing, therefore, was to arrange for national elections in a way that would give the South Vietnamese a liberal breathing spell:

since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after

cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements [in South Vietnam] best chance. We believe important that no date should be set now and especially that no conditions should be accepted by French which would have direct or indirect effect of preventing effective international supervision of agreement ensuring political as well as military guarantees.

And so far as "respect" of that agreement was concerned, the United States and Britain meant they "would not oppose a settlement which conformed to Seven Points. . . . It does not of course mean we would guarantee such settlement or that we would necessarily support it publicly. We consider 'respect' as strong a word as we can possibly employ in the circumstances. . . . 'Respect' would also mean that we would not seek directly or indirectly to upset settlement by force." *

* Dulles to American Embassy, Paris, tel. No. 77, July 7, 1954 (Secret). [[Doc. 64](#)] Regarding the U.S. view of a Ho Chi Minh electoral victory, we not only have the well-known comment of Eisenhower that Ho, at least in early 1954, would have garnered 80 percent of the vote. (See [Mandate for Change](#) [[Garden City, New York: Doubleday](#)], pp. [337-38](#).) In addition, there is a Department of State memorandum of conversation of May 31, 1954, in which Livingston Merchant reportedly "recognized the possibility that in Viet Nam Ho might win a plebiscite, if held today."

Dulles' clarification of the American position on elections in Vietnam, together with his delimitation of the nation's obligation towards a settlement, did not satisfy the French completely but served the important purpose of enlightening them as to American intentions. Placed beside the discussions with Eden and Churchill, the thrust of American diplomacy at this time clearly was to leave no question in the minds of our allies as to what we considered the elements in a reasonable Indochina settlement and what we would likely do once a settlement were achieved.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 3, "The Geneva Conference, May-July, 1954"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 146-178

VII. TOWARD A SETTLEMENT: THE LAST THIRTY DAYS

A. *THE BARGAINING CONTINUES*

While the French and British pondered the implications of the Seven Points, bargaining continued behind the scenes against a background of further military advance by the Viet Minh. At about the same time the Viet Minh made their first specific partition proposal, their forces in the field completed their deployment from the Dienbienphu area. By mid-June, according to American intelligence, the Viet Minh were believed prepared for a massive attack in the Delta. Another report spoke of their renewed attention to southern Annam and of an apparent buildup of military strength there. Not surprisingly in light of these developments, the Viet Minh, in late June, responded to the French proposal of a division at the 18th parallel with a plan for a line in southern Annam running northwest from the 13th to the 14th parallel, i.e., from Tuy Hoa on the coast through Pleiku to the Cambodian border. Moreover, in secret talks with the French, the Viet Minh's vice-minister for national defense, Ta Quang Buu, also insisted on French withdrawal from the Delta within two months of a cease-fire, in contrast to French demands for a four-month interval. [Doc. 69] As suggested by Lacouture and Devillers, the Viet Minh may have been seeking to capitalize not only on their improved military position in the Delta, where French Union forces were still in retreat, but also on Mendès-France's reputation as a man of peace obviously desirous of a settlement.

This resurgence of Viet Minh toughness on terms for a cessation of hostilities applied also to Laos and Cambodia. In the military staff conferences that had begun separately on those two countries in late June, no progress was made. The Viet Minh indicated, in the Laotian case, that they had already withdrawn; if forces opposing the royal government remained (as in fact some 15,000 did), negotiations with the resistance groups would have to be undertaken. Thus, despite Chou En-lai's claim that Viet Minh withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia could easily be accomplished, the Viet Minh were hardly ready to move out unless they received substantial guarantees (such as a permanent regroupment area), which the royal governments refused to give.

Whether because of or in spite of Viet Minh intransigence, the Chinese forcefully made known their earnest desire to keep the conference moving. In an important encounter at Bern on June 23, Chou En-lai several times emphasized to Mendès-France that the main thing was a cease-fire, on which he hoped progress could be made before all the heads of delegation returned to Geneva. Regarding Laos and Cambodia, Chou thought regroupment areas for the insurgents would be necessary, but reiterated that national unity was the affair of the royal governments; he hoped the resistance elements might find a place in the national life of their respective countries. Chou told the French premier, as he had told Eden previously, that no American bases could be permitted in those countries; yet Chou spoke sympathetically of the French Union. Turning finally to the Viet Minh, Chou urged that direct contact be established between them and the Vietnamese. He promised that for his part, he would see that the Viet Minh were thoroughly prepared for serious discussions on a military settlement. Clearly, the Chinese were far more interested in moving forward toward a cease-fire than were their Viet Minh counterparts.

Even though the Viet Minh were making demands that the French, Cambodians, and Laotians could not accept, the debate was narrowing to specifics. The question when

national elections in Vietnam should be held is illustrative. The Viet Minh did not budge from their insistence that elections occur six months after the cease-fire. But the French, attempting to make some headway in the talks, retreated from insistence on setting no date (a position the Vietnamese had supported) and offered to hold elections 18 months after completion of the regroupment process, or between 22 and 23 months after the cessation of hostilities. [Doc. 69] The French now admitted that while they still looked forward to retaining Haiphong and the Catholic bishoprics as long as possible, perhaps in some neutral environment, total withdrawal from the north would probably be necessary to avoid cutting up Vietnam into enclaves. [Doc. 66] But partition in any manner faced the French with hostile Vietnamese, and it was for this reason that Chauvel not only suggested American intervention to induce Vietnamese self-control, but also received Pham Van Dong's approval, in a conversation July 6, to having the military commands rather than governments sign the final armistice so as to avoid having to win Vietnamese consent. As Ngo Dinh Diem, who became prime minister June 18, suspected, the French were prepared to pull out of Tonkin as part of the cease-fire arrangements.

On the matter of control and supervision, the debate also became more focused even as the gulf between opposing views remained wide. The chief points of contention were, as before, the composition and authority of the neutral supervisory body; but the outlines of an acceptable arrangement were beginning to form. Thus, on composition, the Communist delegations, in early July, began speaking in terms of an odd-numbered (three or five) neutral commission chaired by India, with pro-Communist and pro-Western governments equally sharing the remaining two or four places. Second, on the powers of that body, dispute persisted as to whether it would have separate but parallel authority with the joint commissions or supreme authority; whether and on what questions it would make judgments by unanimous vote; and whether it would (as the French proposed) be empowered to issue majority and minority reports in case of disagreement. These were all fundamental issues, but the important point is that the Communist side refused to consider them irremovable obstacles to agreement. As Molotov's understudy, Kuznetsov (the deputy foreign minister), put it, the Soviet and French proposals on control and supervision revealed "rapprochement in the points of view on certain questions. It is true with respect to the relationships between the mixed commission and the international supervisory commission. This rapprochement exists also in regard to the question of the examination of the functions and duties of the commission..." In fact, a "rapprochement" did not exist; but the Soviets, interestingly, persisted in their optimism that a solution could be found.

B. CHINESE DIPLOMACY

While the negotiations went on among the second-string diplomats, a different kind of diplomacy was being carried on elsewhere. Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, advanced Communist China's effort, actually begun in late 1952, to woo its Asian neighbors with talk of peaceful coexistence. This diplomatic offensive, which was to have an important bearing on the outcome at Geneva, had borne its first fruit in April 1954, when Chou reached agreement with Nehru over Tibet. At that time, the Chinese first introduced the "five principles" they vowed to follow in their relations with other nations. The five

principles are: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

Chou's first stopover was in New Delhi, the scene of his initial success. On June 28 he and Nehru reaffirmed the five principles and expressed the hope that a peaceful settlement in Indochina would be concluded in conformity with them. Similar sentiments appeared in a joint statement from Rangoon, scene of talks with Prime Minister U Nu. Promises were exchanged, moreover, for the maintenance of close contact between China and Burma, and support was voiced for the right of countries having different social systems to coexist without interference from outside. "Revolution cannot be exported," the joint statement proclaimed; "at the same time outside interference with the common will expressed by the people of any nation should not be permitted."

Peking made full use of these diplomatic achievements by contrasting them with the American policy of ruthless expansionism, which Peking said was carried out by Washington under the label of opposing Communism. Peking proclaimed that the era of colonialism which the United States was seeking to perpetuate in Indochina had come to an end. "A new era has dawned in which Asian countries can coexist peacefully and establish friendly relations on the basis of respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty and mutual nonaggression," said *Jen-min jih-pao*. Another newspaper, *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, offered similar testimony to the inspirational effect of the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese agreements, considering them to conform to the interests of all Asian peoples. The daily castigated the American "policy of strength" as being totally incompatible with the five principles. Clearly, China was exploiting its gains through diplomacy not simply to acquire Asian support (and thus detract from pro-Westernism in the region), but more broadly to muster recognition for China as the leading Asian power in the fight against "imperialism" and "colonialism."

Chou's diplomatic efforts took a different turn, it seems, when he met with Ho Chi Minh at Nanning, on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, from July 3-5. Although the final communique merely stated that the two leaders "had a full exchange of views on the Geneva Conference with respect to the question of the restoration of peace in Indochina and related questions," it subsequently appeared that much more may have taken place. According to observers in Hong Kong, Chou pressed for the meeting out of fear that the Viet Minh might engage in intensified military action that would destroy chances for an armistice and upset China's budding role as an Asian peacemaker. Conceivably, Chou sought to persuade Ho that his territorial gains were about as much as he could expect at that juncture without risking an end to negotiations and renewed American attempts to forge a military alliance for intervention. To judge from the Viet Minh reaction to the talks, Ho was not completely satisfied with Chou's proposed tactics.

Momentarily leaving aside Chou's motivations, it is vital to note the impact of the talks on the Geneva negotiations. On July 9, Chauvel dined with Li K'enung and Chang Wen-t'ien, a vice-minister for foreign affairs and CPR ambassador to the Soviet Union. Chauvel opened the conversation--as he later recounted to Johnson--by complaining that discussions with the Viet Minh were not going well, that Viet Minh demands were

exorbitant and well beyond Chou En-lai's stated position. The Chinese delegates evinced surprise but said nothing in direct reply. However, Chang did report that Chou had had a "very good meeting" with Ho Chi Minh, the results of which "would be helpful to French." Chauvel received the impression--one which seems, in retrospect, to have been accurate--that the Viet Minh had been given a free hand by the Soviets and Chinese up to the point where their demands were unacceptable to the French, at which time the Soviets and/or Chinese felt compelled to intervene. [Doc. 66] If such was the case, Chou's talk with Ho, coming after Mendès-France and his negotiators showed no sign of being more compromising than their predecessors, Laniel and Bidault, may have been intended to inform the Viet Minh that the "point" had been reached and that they had to soften their demands if a settlement were ever to be attained.

C. THE FRANCO-AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING

Precisely how Chou's stopover in Nanning would be "helpful" to the French did not become apparent until four days after Chauvel's conversation with Li and Chang. By that time, the French had been engaged in intensive conversations with the Americans, the aim of which was to convince Washington that the United States, to be truly influential at the conference--to realize, in other words, a settlement in line with the Seven Points--had to back the French with a high-level representative in Geneva. Unless the United States did more than offer its views from afar on an acceptable settlement, Mendès-France argued, France could not be expected to present a strong front when Molotov and Chou resumed their places. As though to prove his determination to stand fast against Communist demands, Mendès-France told Ambassador Dillon in Paris that if a cease-fire was not agreed to by July 20, the premier would approve the dispatch of conscripts to Indochina and would introduce a law into Parliament to that effect on July 21. His government would not resign until that law passed; the ships would be prepared to transport the conscripts to Indochina beginning July 25. {Doc. 62]

Despite Mendès-France's willingness to establish a deadline and, for the first time in the history of French involvement in Indochina, to conscript soldiers for service there, Washington remained opposed to upgrading its Geneva delegation. Sensitive as much to any proposal that might implicate the United States in the final settlement terms as to Mendès-France's difficulties at the conference table, Dulles believed the French would end by accepting a settlement unsatisfactory to the United States whether or not the USDEL were upgraded. As he explained to Dillon, were he (the Secretary) or Smith to return to Geneva only to find the French compelled to negotiate an unacceptable agreement anyway, the United States would be required to dissociate itself in a manner "which would be deeply resented by the French as an effort on our part to block at the last minute a peace which they ardently desire," with possible "irreparable injury to Franco-American relations. The least embarrassing alternative, Dulles felt, was to avoid the probability of having to make a "spectacular disassociation" by staying away from the conference altogether. [Doc. 65]

When Dulles' position was reported to Mendès-France, the premier said he understood the Americans' reluctance but considered it misplaced. The American fear of in some way

becoming committed to the settlement, he said, was precisely his dilemma, for he had no idea what the Communists would propose in the crucial days ahead. The French negotiating position was the Seven Points, he went on, and would not deviate substantially from them. With great feeling, Mendès-France told a member of the American Embassy that the presence of Dulles or Smith was "absolutely essential and necessary"; without either of them, the Communists would sense and seek to capitalize on a lack of unity in the allied camp. "Mendès indicated that our high-level presence at Geneva had direct bearing on where Communists would insist on placing line of demarcation or partition in Vietnam."

These arguments did not prove convincing to Washington. On July 10, Dulles wrote Mendès-France a personal message reiterating that his or General Smith's presence would serve no useful purpose. And Dulles again raised doubts that France, Britain, and the United States were really agreed on a single negotiating position:

What now concerns us is that we are very doubtful as to whether there is a united front in relation to Indochina, and we do not believe that the mere fact that the high representatives of the three nations physically reappear together at Geneva will serve as a substitute for a clear agreement on a joint position which includes agreement as to what will happen if that position is not accepted by the Communists. We fear that unless there is the reality of such a united front, the events at Geneva will expose differences under conditions which will only serve to accentuate them with consequent strain upon the relations between our two countries greater than if the US does not reappear at Geneva, in the person of General Smith or myself. [[Doc. 67](#)]

The Secretary questioned whether the Seven Points truly represented a common "minimum acceptable solution" which the three Allies were willing to fight for in the event the Communists rejected them. Charging that the Seven Points were actually "merely an optimum solution" for Paris no less than for London, Dulles sought to demonstrate that the French were already moving away from the Seven Points. He cited apparent French willingness to permit Communist forces to remain in northern Laos, to accept a demarcation line "considerably south of Donghoi," to neutralize and demilitarize Laos and Cambodia, and to permit "elections so early and so ill-prepared and ill-supervised as to risk the loss of the entire area to Communism" as evidences of a "whittling-away process" which, cumulatively, could destroy the intent of the Seven Points. [[Doc. 67](#)] Unquestionably, the Secretary's firm opposition to restoring to the American delegation its high rank was grounded in intense suspicion of an ultimate French sell-out, yet suspicion based on apparent misinformation concerning both the actual French position and the degree of French willingness to stand firm.

Thus believing that the French had already gone far toward deflating some of the major provisions of the U.S.-UK memorandum, Dulles reiterated the Administration's position that it had the right "not to endorse a solution which would seem to us to impair seriously certain principles which the US believes must, as far as it is concerned, be kept unimpaired, if our own struggle against Communism is to be successfully pursued." Perhaps seeking to rationalize the impact of his rejection, Dulles wrote in closing that the

American decision might actually assist the French: "If our conduct creates a certain uncertainty in the minds of the Communists, this might strengthen your hand more than our presence at Geneva [[Doc. 67](#)] Mendès-France had been rebuffed, however, and while Dulles left the door slightly ajar for his or Smith's return if "circumstances" should change, it seemed more probable that France would have to work for a settlement with only the British along side.

The Dulles-Mendès-France exchanges were essentially an exercise in credibility, with the French premier desperately seeking to persuade the Secretary that Paris really did support and really would abide by the Seven Points. When Mendès-France read Dulles' letter, he protested that France would accept nothing unacceptable to the United States, and went so far as to say that Dulles' presence at the conference would give him a veto power, in effect, on the decisions taken. Beyond that, Mendès-France warned of the catastrophic impact of an American withdrawal on the American position in Europe no less than in the Far East; withdrawal, he said, was sure to be interpreted as a step toward isolationism. Asked what alternative his government had in mind if the conference failed even with an American high-level presence, Mendès-France replied there would have to be full internationalization of the war.*

* Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 134, July 11, 1954. [[Doc. 68](#)] The same day, Mendès-France had told Dillon again of France's intention to send conscripts, with parliamentary approval, by July 25, with two divisions ready for action by about September 15. The premier said that while he could not predict how the Assembly would react, he personally saw the need for direct American involvement in the war once negotiations broke down and the conscripts were sent. Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 133, July 11, 1954.

Mendès-France's persistence was sufficiently persuasive to move Dulles, on July 13, to fly to Paris to document the premier's support of the Seven Points. On the 14th, the Secretary and the premier signed a memorandum which duplicated that agreed to by the United States and Great Britain. In addition, a position paper was drawn up the same day reiterating that the United States was at the conference as "a friendly nation" whose role was subordinate to that of the primary non-Communist parties, the Associated States and France. The Seven Points were described, as they had been some two weeks earlier, as those acceptable to the "primarily interested nations" and which the United States could "respect." However, should terms ultimately be concluded which differed markedly from the Seven Points, France agreed that the United States would neither be asked nor expected to accept them, and "may publicly disassociate itself from such differing terms" by a unilateral or multilateral statement.

One of Dulles' objections had been that a true united front did not exist so long as agreement was lacking on allied action in the event of no settlement. On this point, too, the French were persuaded to adopt the American position. In the event of a settlement, it was agreed in the position paper that the United States would "seek, with other interested nations, a collective defense association designed to preserve, against direct and indirect

aggression, the integrity of the non-Communist areas of Southeast Asia Should no settlement be forthcoming, U.S.-France consultations would take place; but these would not preclude the United States from bringing "the matter" before the UN as a threat to the peace. Previous obstacles to French objections to UN involvement were nonexistent, for France reaffirmed in the position paper its commitment under the June 4 treaty of independence with Vietnam that Saigon, as well as Vientiane and Phnom Penh, was an "equal and voluntary" partner in the French Union, and hence no longer subject in its foreign policy to French *diktat*.

On all but one matter, now, the United States and France were in complete accord on a negotiating strategy. That matter was, of course, the American delegation. Mendès-France had formally subscribed to the Seven Points and had agreed to American plans for dealing with the aftermath of the conference; yet he had gained nothing for the French delegation. Writing to the Secretary, the premier pointed out again:

In effect, I have every reason to think that your absence would be precisely interpreted as demonstrating, before the fact, that you disapproved of the conference and of everything which might be accomplished. Not only would those who are against us find therein the confirmation of the ill will which they attribute to your government concerning the reestablishment of peace in Indochina; but many others would read in it a sure sign of a division of the western powers. [[Doc. 70](#)]

Once more, Mendès-France was putting forth the view that a high-level American representation at the conference would do more to ensure a settlement in conformity with the Seven Points than private U.S.-French agreement to them.

For reasons not entirely clear, but perhaps the consequence of Eisenhower's personal intervention, Mendès-France's appeal was now favorably received in Washington. Dulles was able to inform the premier on July 14: "In the light of what you say and after consultation with President Eisenhower, I am glad to be able to inform you that the President and I are asking the Under Secretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith, to prepare to return at his earliest convenience to Geneva to share in the work of the conference on the basis of the understanding which we have arrived at." [[Doc. 70](#)] For the first time since late 1953, the United States and France were solidly joined in a common front on Indochina policy.

In accordance with the understandings reached with France, Smith was sent new instructions on July 16 based upon the Seven Points. After reiterating the passive formal role the United States was to play at the conference, Dulles informed his Under Secretary he was to issue a unilateral (or, if possible, multilateral) statement should a settlement be reached that "conforms substantially" to the Seven Points. "The United States will not, however, become cosignatory with the Communists in any Declaration," Dulles wrote with reference to the procedure then being discussed at Geneva of drafting military accords and a final declaration on a political settlement. Nor should the United States, Smith's instructions went on, be put in a position where it could be held responsible for guaranteeing the results of the conference. Smith's efforts should be directed, Dulles

summed up, toward forwarding ideas to the "active negotiators," France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

This last point of guidance referred to the possibility of a breakdown in the negotiations. Should no settlement be reached, the United States delegation was to avoid permitting the French to believe that outcome was the result of American advice or pressure, and that in some way the United States was morally obligated to intervene militarily in Indochina. The United States, Dulles wrote, was "not prepared at the present time to give any commitment that it will intervene in the war if the Geneva Conference fails..." While this stricture almost certainly reflected the President's and the Joint Chiefs' extreme reluctance to become committed, in advance, to a war already past the point of return, it was also doubtless a reaction to Mendès-France's intimations to Dillon of French willingness to reconsider active American involvement if the conference failed.

With French and British adherence to the Seven Points promised by written agreement, the United States had gone about as far as it could toward ensuring an acceptable settlement without becoming tied to it. The Administration still apparently believed that the final terms would violate the Seven Points in several significant respects;* but by making clear in advance that any settlement would be met with a unilateral American declaration rather than Bedell Smith's signature, the United

* Thus, on July 15 (one day *after* the Franco-American agreements), the National Security Council, after being briefed on the Geneva situation, decided that the likely settlement would go against the Seven Points. The NSC was told the Communists would: (1) seek partition of Vietnam somewhere between the 14th and 18th parallels; (2) demand control of some part of Laos, neutralization of the remainder, and agreement on the formation of a coalition government; (3) ask neutralization of Cambodia and some form of recognition for the Free Khmer movement. Were the Communists to accept the Dong Hoi line for Vietnam, they would then demand an enclave in southern Vietnam plus part of Laos, or simply extend the Dong Hoi line through Laos.

States had at least guaranteed its retention of a moral advantage, useful particularly in placating domestic public opinion. In the event of an unsatisfactory settlement, Washington would be in a position to say that it had stood steadfastly by principle only to be undercut by "soft" Allies and Communist territorial ambitions.

D. THE FINAL WEEK OF BARGAINING

Prior to Smith's return, positions had tended to harden rather than change at Geneva, although the Viet Minh had yielded a trifle on partition. Chang Wen-t'ien's encouraging remark to Chauvel of July 9 had been fulfilled four days later, as already indicated. The final signal was Chou's comment to Mendès-France on the 13th that both sides, French and Viet Minh, had to make concessions on the demarcation problem, but that this "does

not signify that each must take the same number of steps." That same day, Pham Van Dong told the French premier the Viet Minh were willing to settle on the 16th parallel.

Dong's territorial concession meant little to the French, however, and, as the negotiations continued, it became plain that the Viet Minh were not concerned about Mendès-France's July 20 deadline. Yet the Chinese remained optimistic, at least publicly. Jen-min jih-pao's Geneva reporter, for instance, wrote July 12 that while no solution had yet been worked out on the control and supervision problem, "there seems no reason why agreement cannot be reached." As for defining the regroupment areas, the correspondent asserted that "speedy agreement would seem probable after the return of the Foreign Ministers of the Big Powers..." So long as all parties were "sincere," he wrote, agreement would indeed come about.

The minuscule progress made on settling the Vietnam problem loomed large in comparison with the seemingly unbreakable log jam that had developed over Laos and Cambodia. Since the major Communist concessions of mid-June, which had at least paved the way for separating Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam for discussion purposes, virtually nothing had been accomplished toward cease-fires. Debate on Laos and Cambodia occupied the spotlight again on July 9 when, from the remarks of the Chinese delegate (Li K'e-nung), it quickly became apparent that for all their willingness to discuss the withdrawal of Viet Minh troops, the Chinese remained greatly concerned about possible Laotian and Cambodian rearmament and alignment. Simply put, the Chinese were negotiating for their own security, not for Viet Minh territorial advantage.

As Chou had pointed out to Eden in June, the CPR's major concern was that Cambodia and Laos might, after a settlement, be left free to negotiate for a permanent American military presence. In his presentation, therefore, Li K'e-nung insisted that the two countries not be permitted to acquire fresh troops, military personnel, arms, and ammunition except as might be strictly required for self-defense; nor should they, he held, allow foreign military bases to be established. Li formalized Chou's passing remark to Eden that China was not much disturbed by French Union (as opposed to American) technicians. Li allowed that French military personnel to assist the training of the Laotian and Cambodian armies was a matter that "can be studied."

The Cambodian case, presented by Foreign Minister Sam Sary, revealed a stubborn independence that was to assist the country greatly in the closing days of the conference. Sam Sary said that foreign bases would indeed not be authorized on Khmer soil "only as far as there is no menace against Cambodia. . . . If our security is imperiled, Cambodia will keep its legitimate right to defend itself by all means." As for foreign instructors and technicians, his government wished to retain those Frenchmen then in Cambodia; he was pleased to note Li K'e-nung's apparent acceptance of this arrangement. Finally, with regard to the importation of arms, Sam Sary differentiated between a limitation on quantity (which his government accepted) and on quality (which his government wished to have a free hand in determining).

While the Chinese publicly castigated the Cambodians for working with the Americans to threaten "the security of Cambodia's neighboring countries under the pretext of self-defense," the Americans gave the Cambodians encouragement. In Washington, Phnom Penh's ambassador, Nong Kimny, met with Dulles on July 10. Nong Kimny said his Government would oppose the neutralization and demilitarization of the country; Dulles replied that hopefully Cambodia would become a member of the collective security arrangement envisaged in American-British plans. Cambodia, the Secretary said, possessed a kind of independence superior to that in Vietnam and Laos, and as such should indeed oppose Communist plans to neutralize and demilitarize her. As an independent state, Cambodia was entitled to seek outside military and economic assistance.

The Laotian delegation was also experiencing difficulties, though with the Viet Minh rather than the Chinese. The Viet Minh negotiators, in the military command conferences, insisted on making extraneous demands concerning the Pathet Lao. The Laotians were concerned not so much with the demands as with the possibility of a private French deal with the Viet Minh that would subvert the Laotian position. A member of the royal government's delegation went to Johnson to be assured that a behind-the-scenes deal would not occur. The delegate said Laos hoped to be covered by and to participate in a Southeast Asia collective security pact. Johnson did not guarantee that this arrangement could be worked out; but as the conference drew to a close, as we shall see, the United States made it clear to the Cambodians and Laotians that their security would in some fashion be taken care of under the SEATO treaty.

Irresolution over Cambodia and Laos, a continuing wide gap between French and Viet Minh positions on the partition line, and no progress on the control and supervision dilemma were the highlights of the generally dismal scene that greeted General Smith on his return July 16 to the negotiating wars. Smith apparently took heart, however, in the steadfastness of Mendès-France, although the Under Secretary also observed that the Communists had reacted to this by themselves becoming unmoving. Smith attributed Communist intransigence to the probability that "Mendès-France has been a great disappointment to the Communists both as regards the relatively firm position he has taken on Indochina and his attitude toward EDC. They may therefore wish to force him out of the government by making settlement here impossible."

Actually, what had disturbed the Communists most was not so much Mendès-France's firmness as Smith's return. That became clear following a private meeting requested by a member of the CPR delegation, Huang Hua, with Seymour Topping, the *New York Times* correspondent at Geneva. Topping, as the Chinese must have expected, reported the conversation to the American delegation. He said Huang Hua, speaking in deadly earnest and without propagandistic overtones, had interpreted Smith's return as an American attempt to prevent a settlement. Indeed, according to Huang Hua, the Paris talks between Dulles and Mendès-France on July 13 and 14 had been primarily responsible for Mendès-France's stubbornness; the French premier had obviously concluded a deal with the United States in which he agreed to raise the price for a settlement. [[Doc. 78](#)]

Overt Chinese statements in this period lent credence to Topping's report. First, Peking was far from convinced that continued discussions on the restoration of peace in Indochina removed the possibility of dramatic new military moves by the United States. Washington was accused, as before the conference, of desiring to intervene in Indochina so as to extend the war there into "a new military venture on China's southern borders. In support of this contention, Peking cited such provocative moves as trips during April and June by General James A. Van Fleet ("the notorious butcher of the Korean War") to Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, for the purpose of establishing a North Pacific military alliance; American intentions of concluding a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan as the first step in Chiang Kai-shek's invasion plans; American efforts, through the five-power and later Eisenhower-Churchill talks, to create a Southeast Asia alliance for a military thrust into Indochina; and stepped-up U.S. military assistance, including training, for the Thai armed forces.

Second, Peking was clearly disturbed that the French were still heeding American advice when the path to a settlement lay before them. In a People's Daily editorial of July 14, for instance, the French people and National Assembly were said to be strongly desirous of peace. Thus: "A policy running counter to French interests cannot work. France is a major world power. She should have her own independent and honorable path. This means following an independent foreign policy consistent with French national interests and the interests of world peace." The American alternative--a Southeast Asia coalition with French participation--should be rejected, the editorial intoned, and a settlement conforming to the five principles achieved instead. In keeping with its line of previous months, Peking was attempting to demonstrate--for Asian no less than for French ears--that it had a keen interest in resolving the Indochina problem rather than seeing the conference give way to new American military pressures and a possibly wider war.

Finally, Peking paid considerable attention to Duties' stay in Paris and to his dispatch of Smith to Geneva. Duties' sudden trip to the French capital was said to reveal American determination to obstruct progress in the negotiations by pressuring Mendès-France not to grasp the settlement that lay just around the corner. Duties originally had no intention of upgrading the American delegation, according to Peking. "But Bedell Smith had to be sent back to Geneva because of strong criticism in the Western press, and Washington was fearful lest agreement could be reached quickly despite American boycotting of the conference." Yet China's optimism over a settlement did not diminish: "Chinese delegation circles," NCNA reported, "see no reason whatsoever why the Geneva Conference should play up to the U.S. policy and make no efforts towards achieving an agreement which is acceptable and satisfactory to all parties concerned and which is honorable for the two belligerent sides." If Smith's return, then, was viewed from Peking as a challenge to its diplomatic ingenuity, the Chinese (and, we may surmise, the Soviets) were prepared to accept it.

In doing so, however, the Chinese evidently were not about to sacrifice in those areas of dispute where they had a special interest, namely, Laos and Cambodia. On July 14, Chou called on Nong Kimny to state China's position. The premier said first that, in accord with his recent talks with Nehru, U Nu, and Ho Chi Minh, he could report a unanimous

desire for peace in Indochina, for the unity of each of the three Associated States, and for their future cordial relationship with the Colombo Powers. Chou then asked about the status of Cambodian talks with the Viet Minh. When Nong Kimny replied that Pham Van Dong, in two recent get-togethers, had insisted on interjecting political problems into discussions of a military settlement--as by requesting Cambodia's retention of certain provincial officials appointed by the Free Khmers, and by suggesting the royal government's preservation of a Free Khmer youth movement--Chou is said to have laughed off these claims and to have replied that these were indeed matters for Cambodia to handle by herself.

Chou had his own views on what Cambodia should and should not do; however, Khmer sovereignty should not mean discrimination against the resistance elements, the establishment of foreign military bases in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, or the conclusion of military alliances with other states. Chou was less adamant only on the subject of Cambodia's importation of arms and military personnel; when Nong Kimny flatly stated that Phnom Penh would absolutely reject any limitations inasmuch as these would be incompatible with Cambodian sovereignty, Chou did not contradict him. Instead, he promised to study the matter further and asked to know precisely what quantities of arms and personnel the royal government had in mind. Later on, he became a bit more flexible by saying that a prohibition on arms and personnel should apply only to the armistice period, not permanently. Only in Vietnam, Chou said, would there be a flat proscription against military equipment and troops.

Chou and Nong Kimny met again three days later, on July 17. On this occasion, Chou was obviously less conciliatory (as Nong Kimny reported), stating China's position more in terms of demands than suggestions. He urged the Cambodian government to incorporate resistance elements into the army, police, and civil service. But he reserved his emphasis for Cambodia's future security position. In a thinly-veiled warning, Chou said that should Cambodia join the pact, permit foreign bases on its territory, or accept American military instructors, "the consequences would be very serious and would aggravate the situation with unfortunate consequences for Cambodian independence and territorial integrity" (Smith's paraphrase). Cambodia could have French or British instructors, Chou said. But his three-fold limitation, obviously directed at assuring against future Cambodia-U.S. defense ties, remained-and, he added, it applied to Laos and Vietnam as well.

The Chinese were clearly out to get from the conference what they could, without Russian assistance, before a settlement was concluded. Chou did not stop at warning Nong Kimny, either. On July 17 he took his case to Eden, telling the foreign secretary that while the CPR stood ready to join in guaranteeing the freedom and independence of all three Indochinese states, membership in a Southeast Asia pact would change everything. Evidently intent on removing what he may have sensed was a possible last-minute obstacle, Eden implied that he knew of no proposal for including the United States in the pact, although he did not deny American interest in forming a defense organization for Southeast Asia. Chou said he had no objections to ANZUS (it was

directed against Japan, he thought), but he went into a lengthy discourse on the danger to China of having foreign bases in Indochina.

Eden's assurances evidently did not [words illegible] Chou deeply. On July 18 Chou met with the Laotian foreign minister and presented "unofficial" but extravagant demands which the latter found totally unacceptable. Laos was willing to provide the resistance elements with [words illegible] zones in the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua; Chou proposed, additionally, portions of Luang Prabang and Xien Khouang provinces. The royal government was further willing to concede the insurgents freedom of movement in those zones, but Chou demanded administration by joint royal-insurgent committees and a supervisory joint committee in Vientiane until the general elections of August 1955. Finally, where the Laotians thought the issue of French Union bases had been resolved in their favor, Chou now said the bases should be completely eliminated even though established by Franco-Laotian treaty.

Chou's obsession with foreign military bases and related issues led to an effort to make a settlement contingent upon Western acceptance of Chinese neutralization plans. A Chinese informant (probably Huang Hua) told Seymour Topping that Western willingness to bar foreign military bases from Indochina and to deny the Associated States admission to any military blocs would assure agreement by July 20. More than that, the informant said, the United States had also to subscribe to and guarantee the final settlement, evidently in the belief that America's signature would make Indochinese participation in SEATO illegal. [\[Doc. 74\]](#) A more direct statement was made by NCNA's "special correspondent" in Geneva, who drew a harsh characterization of a cease-fire agreement that left the door open to Indochinese involvement in a military alliance:

If efforts are made at the same time negotiations for peace are taking place to drag the three Indochinese countries into an aggressive military bloc whose purpose is to unleash war, then the cease-fire would mean nothing other than a respite for adjusting battle lines and dispositions of strength in order to start the fighting again on an even larger scale. In such circumstances, the armistice agreement would become no more than a scrap of paper.

Whether the Chinese seriously believed that the United States would sign the accords in order to achieve a settlement, or that Laos and Cambodia [words missing] Out of the Southeast Asia collective defense is at best debatable. There seems little doubt, however, that Peking sincerely considered a written prohibition on the accords against Indochinese alliances or foreign bases as a major step toward the neutralization of Southeast Asia and the area's eventual dissociation from the American defense system.

General Smith felt that Topping's report dovetailed with growing Communist intransigence in the past few days, particularly on the part of Molotov. He believed that Molotov, who had urgently requested a restricted session for the 18th, would likewise raise the question of explicit American acquiescence in a final settlement. [\[Doc. 74\]](#) When the meeting came, however, Molotov did not reiterate Huang Hua's implication

that American failure to sign the accords might scuttle the conference. Perhaps aware that a warning of that kind would not work, Molotov instead limited himself to talking of the conference's achievements to date. He complimented those who had been engaged in private negotiations, and went so far as to voice confidence that a settlement of outstanding problems relating to Laos and Cambodia could be achieved. He closed by pointing out that two drafts were before the conference relating to the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam and Laos, two on Cambodia, and two on a final declaration dealing with political matters. That ended Molotov's contribution, leaving the Americans, and probably others, wondering why the Soviet foreign minister had hastily summoned the meeting. [[Doc. 76](#)]

E. AGREEMENT

If Molotov's refusal at the July 18 restricted session to warn the conference of failure signaled renewed Communist efforts toward agreement, his subsequent actions proved the point. Between July 18 and 21, the conferees were able to iron out their differences sufficiently to produce agreements now commonly referred to as the Geneva "accords." In fact, the accords consist of military agreements for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to fulfill the conference's primary task of restoring peace to Indochina, and a Final Declaration designed to establish the conditions for future political settlements throughout Indochina. The nature of the eleventh-hour compromises reached, and a broad outline of the settlement, are treated below.

Vietnam

The Geneva accords temporarily established two zones of Vietnam separated by a line running roughly along the 17th parallel and further divided by a demilitarized zone. Agreement to the demarcation line was apparently the work of Molotov, who gained French acceptance of the 17th parallel when he found the French flatly opposed to the 16th, a late Viet Minh compromise perhaps prompted by Molotov himself. [[Doc. 72](#)] Precisely what motivated Molotov to make his proposal is not clear. Speculatively, he may simply have traded considerable territorial advantage which the Viet Minh enjoyed for a specific election date he, Chou, and Pham Van Dong wanted from the outset. The Western negotiators certainly recognized the trade-off possibility: Eden considered a line between the 17th and 18th parallels worth exchanging for a mutually acceptable position on elections; and Mendès-France observed in a conversation with Mob-toy that the election and demarcation questions might be linked in the sense that each side could yield on one of the questions. [[Doc. 72](#)]

Whether or not a trade-off actually took place, the fact remains that the French came off much better in the matter of partition than on elections, which they had insisted not be given a specific date. On July 16, Molotov had proposed holding elections in 1955, with the exact date to be decided between Vietnamese and Viet Minh authorities. [[Doc. 72](#)] The Chinese were more flexible. In a talk with a member of the British delegation, Li K'e-nung argued for a specific date, but said his government was willing to set it within two or three years of the ceasefire. [[Doc. 76](#)] The compromise formula was

reportedly worked out by Molotov, who, at a meeting July 19 attended also by Eden, Mendès-France, Chou, and Dong, drew the line at two years. It was agreed in the Final Declaration that the Vietnamese of the two zones would consult together in July 1955 and reunify Vietnam by national plebiscite one year later. Importantly for the Viet Minh, the demarcation line was said to be "provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary." Representatives of the member states on the ICC would act as a commission to supervise the national elections, which were to be freely conducted by secret ballot. As shall be pointed out later, however, the evident intention of all the conferees (including the United States and the Government of South Vietnam) to see Vietnam reunified was to a large extent undercut by the nature of the military and political settlements.

The military accords on Vietnam also stipulated that the Joint Commission, which was to take over the work of the military commission that had met at Trung Gia, would have general responsibility for working out the disengagement of forces and implementation of the cease-fire. French Union soldiers were to be removed from North Vietnam in stages within 300 days (article 15), a lengthy period in keeping with French demands. Thereafter, the introduction into the two zones of fresh arms, equipment, and personnel was prohibited with the exception of normal troop rotation and replacement of damaged or destroyed materiel (articles 16 and 17). The establishment of new military bases in Vietnam, and the adherence of either zone to military alliances, were also proscribed under articles 18 and 19.

The membership and powers of the International Control Commission were finally resolved (Chapter VI of the accords). Apparently through Chou En-lai's efforts, agreement was reached that India, Poland, and Canada should be the member states of the ICC. The ICC was empowered to form fixed and mobile inspection teams and to have full freedom of movement in both zones of Vietnam. In the performance of these tasks, the ICC was to expect complete cooperation from local civil and military officials. Its functions extended to control of the movement of armed forces and the release of prisoners of war, and to supervision of the demarcation line, frontiers, ports, and airfields.

Less clearly decided was the delicate question of the ICC's relationship to the Joint Commission. Generally, the plan adopted was close to that originally submitted by the French in early July, wherein the ICC's supremacy was tacitly admitted. The ICC was to be informed by the Joint Commission of disputes arising out of differences of interpretation, either of a provision or of fact, that the Joint Commission could not resolve. The ICC would then (article 40) have the power of recommendation; but, quite aside from the limited effectiveness of a recommendation, there remained the problem of majority or unanimous voting by the ICC in reaching agreement to recommend. Under article 42, the rule of unanimity was to apply to "questions concerning violations, or threats of violations, which might lead to a resumption of hostilities," namely, a refusal to regroup is provided in the accords, or an armed violation by one party of the territory of the other. The West, which had pushed hard for majority rule, had to settle for its application to those less volatile questions that would not be considered threats to the peace. Furthermore, under article 43, recognition was taken of possible splits among the

three members by providing for majority and minority reports; but these, like ICC decisions, could be no more than suggestive, and as such wholly dependent upon the cooperativeness of the conference members who had created it.

Cambodia and Laos

In conflict with the wishes of the Cambodian and Laotian delegations, cease-fires in their countries occurred simultaneously with the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam. Nevertheless, in most other respects, their persistence was largely responsible for settlements highly favorable to their respective interests.

In the first place, the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Cambodia called for the removal of nonnative Free Khmer troops, whether Communist Vietnamese or Cambodians, ninety days from the cease-fire date (July 20). (French Union units, but not instructors, were also scheduled for departure.) As the Cambodian delegation had promised, those insurgents still in the country would be guaranteed the right to rejoin the national community and to participate, as electors or candidates, in elections scheduled under the constitution for 1955; but the agreement assured their demobilization within one month of the cease-fire. Separate joint and international supervisory commissions for Cambodia were established, as Phnom Penh had demanded. Finally, a declaration issued July 21 by the Cambodian delegation was incorporated into the accord proclaiming, in effect, Phnom Penh's inherent right of self-defense. The royal government vowed not to enter into military alliances "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"; nor, so long as its security was not threatened, would Cambodia permit the establishment of foreign military bases. As for war materiel and military personnel, the delegation made clear that these would not be solicited during the period July 20, 1954, to the election date in 1955 "except for the purpose of the effective defence of the territory." Thus, after the elections, Cambodia proclaimed itself free to take any steps it considered necessary for its security, whether or not such steps were absolutely necessary for self-defense.

Cambodia's acquisition of considerable latitude was entirely in keeping with the royal government's expressed insistence on not being either neutralized or demilitarized. On this point, the Cambodians received indirect assurance from the United States that their security would in some way be covered by the Southeast Asian pact despite their unilateral declaration. Toward the end of the conference, Philip Bonsal of the State Department and the American delegation, told Sam Sary that he (Bonsal) "was confident U.S. and other interested countries looked forward to discussing with Cambodian government" the security problem upon implementation of a cease-fire. When Sam Sary called a few days later on Smith in the company of Nong Kimny, the Under Secretary recommended that Phnom Penh, at the conference, state its intention not to have foreign bases on its territory and not to enter into military alliances. At the same time, though, Cambodia would be free to import arms and to employ French military instructors and technicians. Cambodia might not be able to join SEATO under this arrangement, Smith said, but it could still benefit from it. Smith:

assured the Cambodian Foreign Minister that, in our view, any aggression overt or covert against Cambodian territory would bring pact into operation even though Cambodia not a member. I took position that French Union membership afforded Cambodia adequate desirable means of securing through France necessary arms some of which would be American as well as necessary instructors and technicians some of which might well be American trained.

Nong Kimmy replied that Cambodia relied heavily on the United States for protection against future aggression. The way was thus cleared for the subsequent inclusion of Cambodia in the Protocol to the SEATO treaty.

The cease-fire agreement on Laos followed lines similar to those drawn for Cambodia. A separate joint commission was set up to supervise the withdrawal of Pathet Lao units, although provision was made for their prior regroupment in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua.* Although Laos was prohibited from seeking to

* The Laotian delegation also issued a declaration averring the government's willingness to integrate former insurgents into the national community without reprisal. Elections in Laos were scheduled for September 1955, and former Pathet Lao were promised the right to participate in the balloting as electors or candidates.

augment its military establishment, the royal government was specifically permitted a maximum of 1,500 French training instructors. Moreover, the prohibition against the establishment of foreign military bases on Laotian territory did not apply to two French bases in operation under a 1949 treaty, and employing 3,500 Frenchmen. Laos, like Cambodia, was allowed to import arms and other military equipment essential for self-defense; but Vientiane also issued a unilateral declaration on July 21 making clear, in terms that nearly duplicated those used in Cambodia's declaration, that its refrainment from alliances and foreign military bases was limited to situations in which Laotian security was not threatened. In view of Vientiane's expressed hope for American protection, its delegates had succeeded admirably in getting a settlement containing terms that restricted, but did not eliminate, Laotian control over their security requirements.

F. DISSENTING VIEWS: THE AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE POSITIONS

No delegate at the final plenary session on Indochina July 21 should have been surprised when Under Secretary Smith issued a unilateral statement of the American position. The United States had frequently indicated, publicly and privately, directly and indirectly, that it would not be cosignatory with the Communist powers to any agreement and that, at best, it would agree only to "respect" the final settlement. At the restricted session of July 18, Smith had, moreover, indicated the points which were to become basic features of his final statement. Despite the fact that the accords were in line with the Seven Points in nearly every particular, it would have been presumptuous of any delegation to believe that the United States, given the implacable hostility of Administration leaders to

Communist China and to any agreement that would imply American approval of a territorial cession to the Communists, would formally sign the Geneva accords.

Bedell Smith, revealing a considerably more pliant approach to dealing with the Communist world, was able to exact from Washington agreement to partial American acceptance of the Final Declaration. On July 19 he had been approached by Mendès-France, who from the beginning had sought to identify the United States as closely as possible with the final terms, with the proposal that Washington not simply respect any military agreements reached, but in addition take note of them and the political statements that comprised the first nine paragraphs of the proposed conference declaration. Mendès-France indicated the French would be sharply disappointed if the United States could not at least take note of those portions of the declaration. Smith, apparently swayed by the premier's views, recommended to Washington that his instructions be amended to provide for taking note in the event the Final Declaration was substantially as the French had indicated. [Doc. 80] Dulles gave his approval, demurring only on the second part of paragraph 9 (in the final version, paragraph 13), which the Secretary said "seems to imply a multilateral engagement with Communists which would be inconsistent with our basic approach and which subsequently might enable Communist China to charge us with alleged violations of agreement to which it might claim both governments became parties." [Doc. 81] When Smith, therefore, issued his unilateral statement, note was taken only of the first twelve paragraphs of the Final Declaration; but this was much more than had been called for in his revised instructions of July 16.

In line with his instructions, Smith declared on behalf of the Government that the United States would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the accords. Moreover, the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Finally, Smith reiterated a U.S. policy declaration of June 29, made during the visit of Eden and Churchill, that registered Washington's support of UN supervision of free elections to reunify countries "now divided against their will Smith mentioned on this point that the United States could not associate itself with any arrangement that would hinder "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future..."

Smith's caution against "any renewal of aggression" deserves additional comment inasmuch as it was cited by President Kennedy (in a letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem on December 14, 1961) as the basis for the American commitment to South Vietnam's defense. Viewed in the context of the conference, the statement does not seem to have been intended as an open-ended American commitment to South Vietnam against possible aggression from the North. Rather, the Administration apparently intended the statement as a warning to the Viet Minh that should they, within the two-year interval before general elections, "renew" what Washington and Saigon regarded as their "aggression" since 1946, the United States would be gravely concerned. Smith's statement, in short, seems to have been limited to the period July 1954 to July 1956.

That part of Smith's unilateral statement dealing with United Nations supervision of elections is also noteworthy. Coming in the wake of Dulles' expressed concern over provision in the accords for ICC supervision, [[Doc. 81](#)] Smith's reference to the UN may have forecast American unwillingness to back an electoral process not supervised by the Organization. Inasmuch as the United States delegation had consistently pushed at Geneva for United Nations rather than any other form of international machinery, Smith may have meant to give an advance signal of American displeasure with free Vietnamese elections that the UN would be prevented from overseeing.

American qualifications to the Geneva accords paled beside those made by the South Vietnam delegation. However naively, the "South" Vietnamese refused to accept a divided country and believed, to the end of the conference, that the French had brazenly and illegally sold out Vietnamese interests. Vietnam's anger at French manipulation of its political future was reflected in a note handed to the French delegation on July 17 by Nguyen Huu Chau. [[Doc. 73](#)] The note maintained that not until the day before (an exaggeration by about three weeks, it would appear) did Vietnam learn that at the very time the French High Command had ordered the evacuation of troops from important areas in the Tonkin Delta, the French had also "accepted abandoning to the Viet Minh all of that part situated north of the eighteenth parallel and that the delegation of the Viet Minh might claim an even more advantageous demarcation line." The Vietnamese delegation protested against having been left "in complete ignorance" of French proposals, which were said not to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people."

While it may have been absurd for the Vietnamese to believe that partition was avoidable given Viet Minh strength, their rationale for keeping the country united was, as matters developed, eminently clear-sighted. In speeches during June and July, their leaders had warned that partition would be merely a temporary interlude before the renewal of fighting. When the Viet Minh first proposed a temporary division of territory, the Defense Minister, Phan Huy Quat, said in Saigon on June 2 that partition would "risk reviving the drama of the struggle between the North and the South." Diem, in his investiture speech of early July, warned against a cease-fire that would mean partition, for that arrangement "can only be the preparation for another more deadly war..." And General Nguyen Van Hinh, head of the Vietnamese National Army, declared:

To realize a cease-fire by partition of Vietnamese territory can be only a temporary measure to stop the bloodshed but not to end the war. And it is possible that we shall have to face a cold war as in Korea where both sides' troops have their fingers on the triggers of their guns all the time, and people are thinking only of recovering what has been given up under the pressure of the circumstances.

Although their struggle against partition, which reached a climax in the aftermath of the signing of the accords with huge rallies in the major cities, proved futile, the Vietnamese early gave notice that they would accept neither partition nor a fixed date for national elections. We need only recall the statements by Bao Dai's cabinet in Paris on the eve of the conference to find evidence of Vietnam's early determination that it would not be

party to a sell-out of its own territory. When partition became certain in July with the circulation of draft final declarations, the Vietnamese delegation became more vocal. At the final plenary session, Tran Van Do said: ". . . the Government of the State of VietNam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom." When asked to consent to the military accords and the Final Declaration, Do requested insertion of the following text into the Declaration:

The conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Viet-Nam undertaking:

to make and support every effort to reestablish a real and lasting peace in Viet-Nam;

not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the ceasefire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Viet-Nam has expressed, especially in its final statement.

The request was denied.

As for elections, the Vietnamese believed that the war situation compelled the postponement of elections until the country had achieved a measure of internal stability. As early as May, Diem indicated his opposition to elections for a National Assembly, much less to national elections for the presidency. In its note to the French delegation, moreover, the Vietnamese asserted that a cease-fire without disarmament was incompatible with elections; the regroupment of the armed forces of the belligerents into separate zones was said to compromise their freedom in advance. In Vietnam's view, elections could only be considered after security and peace had been established, thereby excluding a set time interval of two years. [[Doc. 73](#)]

Having taken these positions, the Vietnamese could hardly adhere to the Final Declaration. At the same time, they protested against the "hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Vietminh High Commanders only . . ." (as Tran Van Do put it at the July 21 session). Inasmuch as the military accords, by prearrangement, were signed by French and Viet Minh commanders precisely to avoid seeking Vietnamese consent, there was nothing Saigon could do but protest. Nevertheless, by having protested, they were asserting that the treaties with France of June 4 had indeed made Vietnam a sovereign state, that the interests of non-Communist Vietnamese were deeply involved in the settlement, and that France's by-passing of the Bao Dai government only made the settlement possible, not legal. Despite article 27 of the agreement on Vietnam, which bound "successors" (such as Vietnam) to the signatories to respect and enforce the agreement, Vietnam was in a legally persuasive position to argue that France could not assume liabilities in its behalf, least of all to the political provisions contained in the Final Declaration, which was an unsigned document.

*

* Article 27, which is frequently cited to demonstrate that Vietnam was bound to abide by the accords, and particularly the elections provision, refers to "signatories of the present [*military*] Agreement..." Hence, the article would seem not to obligate France's "successor" with respect to any provisions of the Final Declaration, a document to which South Vietnam did not adhere.

G. SUMMARY

Throughout the rapid series of compromises in the last thirty days of the Geneva Conference, American diplomacy revealed a constancy of purpose fully in line with the Eisenhower Administration's global foreign policy. Based largely on the unfortunate experiences at Panmunjom, the Administration could not reconcile itself to the notion that Sino-Soviet negotiating tactics in the post-Stalin period of peaceful coexistence had changed. Consequently, even as the realization dawned that the Communists could not be expelled from Indochina and that some compromise with them by France was inevitable, the Administration stuck fast to the position that the United States delegation to the conference would only assist, but not take an active part, in bringing about an acceptable settlement. From June on, the delegation was under instructions to remain clear of any involvement in the negotiations such as might implicate or commit the United States to the final terms reached, yet simultaneously was to maintain an influential role in making the best of difficult circumstances. British and French agreement to the Seven Points proved a diplomatic victory, not because their acceptance of them assured a reasonable settlement but because, quite contrary to American expectations, they returned to Geneva prepared to hold the line against exorbitant Communist demands. Allied agreement to future discussions of a regional defense system for Southeast Asia was really a hedge against a French sell-out at Geneva; in the event Vietnam, and parts of Cambodia and Laos, were ceded to the Communist insurgents, the United States would at least have Anglo-French consent to protect the security of what remained of Indochina and its neighbors.

The Seven Points represented principles, not American objectives. They constituted not a statement of goals to be achieved by the United States, but of principles to be adopted by the British and French negotiators toward concluding a satisfactory settlement. In this manner, the Administration could preserve its dignity before anticipated Vietnamese outrage at partition and domestic displeasure at further Communist inroads in the Far East without losing its ability to influence the terms. Under Secretary Smith's final statement taking note of the agreements and vowing not to disturb them thus culminated a careful policy that rejected an American commitment to the accords such as might identify the Administration with a cession of territory and people to the Communist bloc.

The Geneva Conference left much work undone, especially on a political settlement for Vietnam. The State of Vietnam, like the United States, had refused to adhere to the Final Declaration and was not signatory to the military accord that partitioned the country. In the next section, the focus is therefore on the practical effect of the Geneva accords, the

expectations of the conferees concerning them, and the extent to which the major powers, in reaching a settlement, achieved the objectives they had set for themselves.

VIII. THE MEANING OF GENEVA

Much of the controversy surrounding the American involvement in Vietnam relates to the post-Geneva period, in particular to the two-year interval before national elections were to bring about Vietnam's reunification. To address the question whether the United States instigated or colluded with the Government of Vietnam to defy the Final Declaration's stipulation for national elections would broaden this paper beyond its intended scope. What is relevant, however, are the documented or presumed expectations and objectives of the major participants concerning Vietnam, as well as Cambodia and Laos, at the time the conference closed. How had the accords met the aims of the participants, and to what extent were objectives intertwined with, or perhaps divorced from, expectations? To anticipate, the present argument over the failure to hold elections in July 1956 overlooks the relative unimportance of them, for a variety of reasons, to the five major powers at the Geneva Conference; their objectives only secondarily took into account the expectations of the Vietnamese, north and south.

An assessment of the hopes and goals of the Geneva conferees in the immediate aftermath of the conference should, in the first place, be differentiated from the practical effect of the accords they drew up. The distinction not often made, yet highly important to an understanding of the conference and its achievements, is between the intent of the parties regarding Vietnam and the seemingly contradictory consequences of their agreement.

A. THE PRACTICAL NATURE OF THE ACCORDS

With the exception of South Vietnam, every nation represented at the conference came to believe that partition was the only way to separate the combatants, settle the widely disparate military and political demands of the French and Viet Minh, and conclude an armistice. It might further be argued (although the evidence available does not actually permit a definitive statement one way or the other) that these eight delegations intended the partition line to be temporary inasmuch as they all desired Vietnamese elections in 1956. But what needs to be pointed out is that the accords themselves did not further that intent. By creating two regimes responsible for "civil administration" (article 14-a of the Vietnam armistice agreement), by providing for the regroupment of forces to two zones and for the movement of persons to the zone of their choice, and by putting off national elections for two years, the conferees had actually made a future political settlement for Vietnam extremely unlikely. Certainly, the separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel was designed to facilitate the armistice, not to create political subdivisions; but its unintended effect was to allow time for the development of two *governments*, headed by totally divergent personalities and committed to antithetical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems. Thus, the call for elections in the Final Declaration had as little chance of implementation in Vietnam as previously in Korea and Germany, a point brought home by Vietnamese officials and reinforced by the failure of the same

Geneva conferees to agree on a political settlement in Korea. "Elections," Victor Bator has commented "can, indeed, decide secondary problems of coexistence in circumstances where some measurable minimum basis for political agreement exists. But they are incapable of acceptance by two opposing states, or parts of a state, when diametrically opposite philosophies are involved." If the intent of the Geneva accords was subverted, the subverters were the conferees themselves, who aspired to an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam on July 21, 1954.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE COMMUNIST SIDE

Whether or not one accepts the view offered here that the central political provision of the Final Declaration was decisively undercut by provisions of the military accords and the Declaration itself, an examination of the objectives of the Soviet Union and Communist China can go far toward determining, albeit by surmises, the importance they, as distinct from the DRV, attached to Vietnamese unity. For it is the conclusion here that Vietnamese unity, whether achieved by free elections or the disintegration of South Vietnam, was not a priority objective of Moscow or Peking even though both powers may well have anticipated an all-Communist Vietnam by July 1956. If this is so, we may ask, what were the primary aims of Moscow and Peking in supporting a settlement? Why did the Communists apparently strive for a settlement, and why did Molotov in particular, who was not personally identified in Western eyes at the time as a vigorous proponent of détente, play such a key role in keeping the conference from the brink of failure?

Although it would appear that, on the major issues at least, the Soviet Union coordinated its actions with Communist China, the two Communist powers were clearly pursuing separate national interests in working toward a settlement of the war. The reconciliation of those interests seems to have been achieved not so much through Soviet ability (which did exist) to compel Chinese acquiescence as through a common desire for a settlement.

Soviet Objectives at the Conference

In retrospect, the Soviet Union seems to have had four major objectives at the conference: (1) to avert a major war crisis over Indochina that would stimulate Western unity, enable the United States to gain support it previously lacked for "united action," and conceivably force Moscow into a commitment to defend the Chinese; (2) to reduce the prospects for successful passage of EDC in the French National Assembly; (3) to heighten the prestige of the Soviet Union as a world peacemaker; (4) to bolster the prestige of Communist China, probably more as an adjunct to the Soviet drive for leadership of the "peaceful coexistence" movement than as a means of supporting any Chinese claim to unrivaled leadership in Asia.

On the first point, the Soviets were surely aware that the United States, under certain conditions, was prepared to consider active involvement in the war. While united action was a dead issue in Washington by mid-June, the Soviets (and the Chinese as well) could not have known this. Moreover, newspaper reports of the time added both credence and

uncertainty to American military plans. In the course of private discussions at Geneva, Molotov indicated his concern that a breakdown of the conference might lead to continued fighting right up to the point of World War III. The French and British did nothing to dispel those fears. Chauvel, for instance, told the Russian delegate, Kuznetsov, that France's proposed division of Vietnam at the 18th parallel would be more acceptable to the other conferees than the unreasonable Viet Minh demand for the 13th parallel, and that a settlement along the French line would thereby avert the risk of an internationalization of the conflict. And Mendès-France vowed to back his call for conscripts by informing Molotov he "did not intend Geneva would turn into a Panmunjom."

The possibility of renewed fighting leading to a wider war was particularly influential on the Soviets, it would seem, as a consequence of Moscow's inner debate during 1953 and 1954 over American strategic intentions and their meaning for the Soviet defense system. The views of the so-called Khrushchev wing apparently won out in the spring of 1954: The United States was considered fully capable of initiating a nuclear exchange and a new world war. Free-wheeling discussion in the Western press on the foreign policy implications of Eisenhower's "New Look" and Dulles' "massive retaliation" speech of January 12, 1954, was closely followed by the Soviets, who may have been persuaded in their pessimistic assumptions regarding American strategy by the very ambiguity of American "reliance" on nuclear weapons to combat Communist aggression. In fact, it can be argued that even though the United States and its allies went to the conference table from a position of diplomatic weakness, their hands were considerably strengthened because of Soviet uncertainty over what the West might do in the event the conference failed. Inasmuch as Soviet analyses by no means excluded American recklessness with nuclear weapons, Moscow might have been highly reluctant to press too vigorously for the West's acceptance of exorbitant Viet Minh demands. Soviet awareness that the United States had seriously considered active involvement in Indochina prior to the fall of Dienbienphu may therefore have been a significant lever for the West in the Geneva negotiations. Had the opposite perception been true-had the Soviets, that is, been confident that the American Administration would be highly sober, conservative, and cautious in responding to war situations-Molotov might have been instructed to play a far more audacious game while the Viet Minh intensified their military operations. Dulles' reputation as a militant anti-Communist with tremendous influence on Eisenhower probably served the Western cause well at Geneva.

As a result, to conclude on this point, one of the Soviets' principal aims at the conference was to diminish the possibility of American unilateral or multilateral intervention in the likely belief that intervention would have built up tremendous pressure on Moscow to make new commitments in Southeast Asia. While this outlook did not prevent the Soviets from at first seeking to capitalize on the change in government in Paris from Laniel to Mendès-France, it did work in the general direction of a reasonable settlement that would be honorable for the French and still valuable to the Viet Minh. The Russians evidently believed that so long as the French (and the British) were kept interested in a settlement, the Americans would be hard-pressed to disregard their allies and intervene.

That Moscow may have been anxious about a wider war does not, however, address the *incentives* it may have had in concluding the cease-fire. Here, the European Defense Community treaty must have been uppermost in Molotov's mind. No evidence has been found to support the contention that Molotov explicitly baited Mendès-France with a lenient Indochina settlement in return for Assembly rejection of EDC. But Molotov need not have been that obtrusive. Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interests to pressure the Viet Minh for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby probably offset their need for an EDC. Soviet interests thus dictated the sacrifice of Viet Minh goals if necessary to prevent German remilitarization. Given Moscow's belated attention to the Indochina war, it appears that the consolidation of Viet Minh gains short of complete reunification of Vietnam was more than sufficient to justify termination of the struggle in Soviet eyes--and this perception, it might be added, dovetailed with what seems to have been the Chinese outlook.

Thirdly, the worldwide Soviet peace offensive which gained priority in the aftermath of Stalin's death could be given added impetus through vigorous Soviet support of an Indochina settlement. This point, in fact, was the theme of Molotov's closing remarks to the conference on July 21. He called the accords "a major victory for the forces of peace and a major step towards a reduction of international tensions." Considering that the conference had demonstrated the value of international negotiations to settle dangerous disputes, Molotov said: "The results of the Geneva Conference have confirmed the rightness of the principle which is fundamental to the whole foreign policy of the Soviet Union, namely, that there are no issues in the contemporary international situation which cannot be solved and settled through negotiations and by agreements designed to consolidate peace." At a time when the United States was alleged to be jeopardizing world peace with its "policy of strength," the Soviet Union could lay claim to sparing no effort in the struggle for ways to avoid a nuclear holocaust.

In this light, Communist China was important to the USSR as a partner in the peace offensive. While Moscow could not have wished to see China so gain in prestige as to rival the Soviet Union in Asia or elsewhere, the Russians do seem, in 1954, to have considered a gain in Chinese influence highly desirable if only because the United States would be bound to suffer a corresponding loss. As Molotov phrased it on July 21:

...the Geneva Conference indicated the great positive importance that the participation of the People's Republic of China has in the settlement of urgent international problems. The course of work at this Conference has shown that any artificial obstacles on the road to China's participation in the settlement of international affairs, which are still being put up by aggressive circles of some countries, are being swept away by life itself.

Noteworthy is Molotov's omission of the additional claim made at the time by Peking that China's participation was absolutely essential to the solution of Asian problems. While the Soviet foreign minister was perhaps thinking in terms of CPR admission to the United Nations, the Chinese apparently were looking beyond the UN to

the kind of full-scale diplomatic effort that would earn them Asia's respect as founders of what was later termed the "Bandung spirit." Nor did Molotov assert that China's work at the conference had earned it a status equivalent to one of the major powers. The Soviets were willing to admit that Peking had gained a new importance as a result of the conference, but they refused to go as far as the Chinese in asserting China's first-rank status either in Asia or worldwide.

The Soviets, then, had much to gain from an honorable settlement of the Indochina war and much to risk in permitting the talks to drag on inconclusively. The Viet Minh had proven their strength as a national liberation movement and had been amply rewarded with a firm territorial base assured by international agreement. With overriding interests in Western Europe, Moscow no doubt found great appeal in giving the French a face-saving "out" from Indochina. That EDC was eventually defeated in the National Assembly (in August) was testimony not to the cleverness of any Soviet "deal" with Mendès-France, but simply to a low-cost Soviet diplomatic gamble that paid off handsomely.

Chinese Objectives

For Peking, a negotiated settlement of the Indochina war represented an important opportunity to propel China forward as a major Asian power whose voice in Asian councils could not be ignored. When the Berlin Conference decided in February 1954 to hold an international conference on Indochina, the Chinese applauded the move and prophesied then that the People's Republic, as an invitee, would thereby gain recognition of its major role in Asian affairs. With the Geneva Conference coming at a time of vigorous Chinese diplomatic activity in India and Burma, Peking probably considered a settlement short of a complete Viet Minh victory acceptable, since it would prove China's sincere commitment to peace. Had the CPR spurred the Viet Minh on, it not only would have been in conflict with the Soviets, whose aid was vital to China's economic recovery plans, but would also have lost considerable ground in the support Chou En-lai's travels had earned. The war in Indochina had become, for China, a demonstration test of its sincerity in promoting peaceful coexistence. From the tactical standpoint, devotion to peaceful coexistence may also have been seen as reducing the prospects of widespread Asian support of, or participation in, the American plan for a regional alliance. With the conference ended, China was in a position to offer Asian nations an alternative to alliance with the United States—the concept of "collective peace and security," sustained by mutual agreement to foster the five principles.

The motive force behind China's drive for Asian leadership during the period of the Geneva Conference was the theme that negotiated solutions were possible for all outstanding world problems. By the time of Geneva, Peking had already been party to the armistice in Korea, to agreement with India over Tibet, and to statements of mutual respect issued bilaterally with India and Burma. Moreover, China had joined with Moscow in supporting negotiations of the Indochina war as early as September 1953, while the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese statements also contained calls for an early settlement. The major role played by Chou En-Lai at Geneva therefore not simply

affirmed China's interest in peace, but as importantly established China's reputation as a flexible bargainer willing to negotiate disputes and make concessions to resolve them. Indeed, once the conference ended, Peking declared that the conference had proved that negotiations could resolve such other East-West problems as a final Korea settlement, arms control, nuclear weapons proliferation, German unification, and European security.

Relatedly, China urged that the Geneva Conference was a benchmark in the rise of the People's Republic to new prominence on the international scene. "The great significance of the convening of the Geneva Conference," the *People's Daily* proclaimed before its close, "lies in the fact that the Chinese People's Republic is participating in the settlement of Asian questions as one of the Great Powers, thus putting an end to the era when the Asian peoples were denied their say in their own problems." China stood not only for a resurgent, decolonialized Asia, but also as a Great Power. As stated by the authoritative *World Culture*:

The contributions of the CPR at the Geneva Conference to the search for peace, and its efforts to establish collective security in Asia, have received the universal recognition and trust of the world's peace-loving peoples and nations. Because of this, the position of the CPR as one of the world's great nations has been even more affirmed and its international prestige greatly elevated. The Chinese people feel extraordinary glory because of this.

The fact that China had, in Indochina and as was not the case in Korea, been invited to join with the Big Four in discussing measures for the restoration of peace was considered by Peking to have given the CPR still more international authority.

Augmentation of Chinese prestige in Asia and throughout the world was a benefit due to the conference; but it does not fully explain why China apparently pressed for a settlement when she did rather than prolong the talks until better terms were available. Having negotiated at Panmunjom for two years, why did she take less than three months to conclude a cease-fire in Indochina? There seem to have been three reasons for China's reluctance to engage in extended discussions: (1) agreement with the Soviets that the United States could intervene to spark a wider war; (2) consideration that Laos and Cambodia had been effectively neutralized; (3) satisfaction that a communist state had been established on China's southern flank.

In the first place, Peking was convinced, to judge from its published comments on the war, that influential men in Washington, including Secretary Dulles and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were quite prepared to move directly against China if circumstances permitted. Washington's warnings to Peking in 1953 left room for the continuation of Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, but Peking could never be certain when that aid might become the pretext for active American intervention. By 1954, moreover, the Chinese had evinced greater concern than before over the military effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Having been through a costly war in Korea, and having decided as early as the fall of 1952 to give priority to "socialist reconstruction" at home, Peking had nothing to gain from provoking the United States. Were the Viet Minh encouraged to strive for the maximum territorial advantage, the United States-Peking may have calculated-might withdraw from the

conference and change the nature of the war. Once those events occurred, the Chinese advocacy of peace through diplomacy would have been irreparably undercut.

Peking, moreover, was made clearly aware of the dangers inherent in continued fighting. At the conference, Eden used the implied threat of American involvement against Chou in much the same way as Chauvel had used it against Kuznetsov. During late May, for example, Eden warned Chou "again" of the dangers in the Indochina situation; unpredictable and serious results could come about. When Chou said he was counting on Britain to prevent these from happening, the foreign secretary replied Chou was mistaken, since Britain would stand by the United States in a showdown. Furthermore, with the Eisenhower-Churchill warning of June 28 that unacceptable demands made against France would "seriously aggravate" the international situation, with Dulles' perceived pressure on Mendès-France at the Paris meeting of mid-July, and with the return of Smith to the conference table, the Chinese were given unmistakable signs that Western unity had finally been achieved and some kind of coordination worked out on the settlement. At that juncture, the outstanding issue for Peking was not how much territory the DRV would ultimately obtain, but how far Cambodia and Laos could be pressed before the July 20 deadline passed.

By the deadline, as we have seen, Chou En-lai's hardened attitude in conversations with the Cambodian and Laotian delegates had not swayed them from their hope of eventual security coverage by the United States. From China's standpoint, however, the vital agreement had been secured: None of the Indochinese states was permitted to join a military alliance or to allow the establishment of foreign military bases on their soil. Whether the Chinese recognized the alternative for the three states of obtaining protection through a device such as the SEATO Protocol is not known. When the accords were signed, Peking greeted them with the remark that the restrictions upon Indochina's military ties to the West had dealt a severe blow to American regional security ambitions. So long as the United States was not permitted to establish bases in the three countries and to introduce military personnel there, China's security requirements were fulfilled even though, in their internal political make-up, the three states might take a strong anti-Communist line. It was perhaps because the CPR had emerged with these advantages that a Chinese journalist confided on July 23: "We have won the first campaign for the neutralization of all Southeast Asia."

The supposed "neutralization" of Cambodia and Laos was coupled with the securance of a solid territory for the DRV along China's southern frontier. Further territorial gains by the Viet Minh would augment DRV resources, but would not significantly enhance China's security. With agreement by the conference to stabilize the military assets of both zones of Vietnam and to forbid their military alignment with other nations, China could feel some confidence that a divided Vietnam would not present an immediate threat. Thus, the agreements on Cambodia and Laos complemented the Vietnam accord in bolstering China's security from the south even as it also meant a sacrifice of the Viet Minh's capability for overrunning all Vietnam.

The argument here is, in summary, that the Soviet Union and Communist China were less concerned with the specific terms of the settlement than with attaining it once their basic objectives had been achieved. A settlement along lines that would satisfy the Viet Minh need for territory, give France the satisfaction that it had not sold out, go far toward fulfilling Chinese security requirements and political ambitions in Southeast Asia, and reduce the possibility of a precipitate American withdrawal from the conference was, to Moscow and Peking, acceptable and even desirable. They saw advantages to themselves in an early equitable agreement that clearly conflicted with Viet Minh terms, but not with their own objectives.

Precisely how Chou and Molotov reasoned with Ho Chi Minh-by threat, persuasion, or a combination of the two-will likely never be known; but it seems reasonable to suppose that, given the precarious political situation in South Vietnam, the multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to the Saigon government, the continued exacerbating presence of the French, and the economic and social vulnerabilities of a society wracked by war, Peking and Moscow could argue convincingly that South Vietnam would never cohere sufficiently to pose a viable alternative to the DRV. It may thus have been the Communists' expectation that the DRV would as likely assume control of the entire country by default as by an election victory in 1956. The Chinese, to be sure, accepted the notion that the Geneva accords had, temporarily at least, created two Vietnamese governments rather than simply divided the country administratively. [\[Doc. 64\]](#) But it is improbable that either they or the Soviets anticipated that even an American-supported South Vietnam could survive. Put another way, the possibility of a prospering, anti-Communist South Vietnam may simply not have been a serious, and certainly was not an immediate, concern for either Communist power. The Geneva Conference had created French goodwill for Moscow and added security for Peking; what might happen in South Vietnam may, in 1954, have seemed inconsequential.

Viet Minh Objectives

The Viet Minh did not emerge as "losers" in the negotiations. They received the territorial benefits of the settlement without having to cede the French or any neutral body control of enclaves in northern Vietnam. In addition, the DRV was promised an opportunity within two years to gain full control of the country through a ballot box victory, although it appears that Viet Minh leaders put more stock in a collapse of the southern regime before the election date as the path to complete control of the country. In Laos, the Pathet Lao had not been disarmed immediately; instead, they were permitted to regroup over a wide expanse of terrain that would make disarmament difficult to accomplish. And in both Laos and Cambodia, the resistance elements were to be accorded full political rights to participate, as individuals, in the 1955 elections.

In their public commentaries on the Geneva accords, Viet Minh leaders displayed full satisfaction. Military victories had gained political recognition, they said, thanks to the support rendered by the Soviet and Chinese delegations. Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity were admitted by Paris, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed. Moreover, the regroupment to two zones in Vietnam was, as he put it, "a temporary action, a transitional

step in the realization of a cease-fire, toward restoring peace and attaining the unification of our country by means of general elections." No "administrative partition" was intended; nor would the "zonal arrangements" be permitted to interfere with Vietnam's future unification:

North, Central and South Viet Nam are territories of ours. Our country will certainly be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated. Our compatriots in the South were the first to wage the war of Resistance. They possess a high political consciousness. I am confident that they will place national interests above local interests, permanent interests above temporary interests, and join their efforts with the entire people in strengthening peace, achieving unity, independence and democracy all over the country . . . our people, army men and cadres from North to South must unite closely. They must be at one in thought and deed.

And Ton Duc Thang vowed: "The Vietnam State will undoubtedly be unified through general elections."

Despite these protestations of satisfaction and confidence, Tillman Durdin's report from Geneva that members of the Viet Minh delegation were sharply disappointed by the results and vexed at pressure applied by their Chinese and Russian comrades seems on the mark. The Viet Minh command evidently believed--and no French authority on the spot doubted this--that they could eliminate the French from Tonkin with one major offensive and proceed from there against a weakened, demoralized Franco-Vietnamese army in Annam. Surely Ho Chi Minh must have considered the possibility of American intervention--although this concern does not emerge as clearly from Viet Minh public commentaries as it does from the official Moscow and Peking organs. But the Viet Minh looked to the Korea experience as having demonstrated that fighting and talking simultaneously was, as put by a mid-May VNA broadcast, a tactic they could pursue for two years (like the Chinese during the Panmunjom talks) in order to maximize territorial gains. Whether the Viet Minh ultimately envisaged the conquest of all Vietnam before reaching agreement with the French to cease fire is debatable; at the least, they, like the French, probably regarded maximum control of population and territory as insurance against future elections. Thus, to the Viet Minh, a settlement at the 17th parallel could only have been regarded as a tactical blunder in violation of the guerrilla war theory and practice they had mastered.

Forfeiture of considerable territory in Vietnam was undoubtedly not the only ground for the Viet Minh's displeasure. Their frequent pronouncements on the "indivisibility" of the Viet Minh, Free Khmer, and Pathet Lao were largely ignored by Chou and Molotov, whose agreement on Laos and Cambodia seems to have given priority to Chinese interests. Account had been taken, as Chou insisted, of the desirability of integrating the resistance forces into the national Khmer and Laotian communities, but those forces were eventually to be disarmed and disbanded, or withdrawn. Conceivably, the Viet Minh leaders never intended to leave Laos, or were assured by the Chinese and Soviets that the agreements reached regarding the Pathet Lao were not meant to exclude future North Vietnamese support. Nevertheless, any future Viet Minh contacts with the rebels would

be a clear violation of the Geneva accords and provide the occasion for intensified Laotian ties to the West.

The Viet Minh also yielded ground on national elections. Their hopes for an all-Vietnamese political settlement soon after the cease-fire were quashed by the Soviets and Chinese, who were disposed to accept a longer waiting period. Furthermore, the political settlement itself was not given the priority the Viet Minh had originally demanded; it would be achieved, as phrased in the Final Declaration, "in the near future," as the result of rather than as the precondition to, a military (cease-fire) settlement. Finally, when the time for a political settlement was at hand, the Declaration specified that an international body would supervise it rather than the Viet Minh and "South" Vietnamese alone. The overriding interests of the Soviets and Chinese had taken the heart out of the initial Viet Minh proposals of May 10 and, in addition, had considerably undercut their "fallback" positions expressed in late May and June. Jean Chauvel was apparently correct when he perceived, after private talks with the Chinese, that the Viet Minh were really on the end of a string being manipulated from Moscow and Peking. When they moved forward too quickly, Chou and Molotov were always at hand to pull them back to a more accommodating position. Briefly put, the Viet Minh very likely felt they had been compelled to give away much of what they had earned even as they acquired the attributes of sovereignty for which they had fought.

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE WESTERN BIG THREE

The British

For Great Britain, the accords signalled the end of a war that more than once threatened to involve the United States and risk a regional conflagration. Had the point of direct American intervention been reached, the Churchill government would have been faced with an extraordinarily difficult decision: whether to join with an old ally in a war venture that Britain considered politically wrong and militarily foolish, or to break with Washington and thereby throw into question the Anglo-American alliance. Britain's consistent advice to delay irreversible military steps, including formation of a Southeast Asia defense organization, until the Communists had been given an opportunity to make good on their proclaimed devotion to a peaceful solution over Indochina had been grudgingly accepted by the United States; the choice of following or ignoring American leadership was averted.

A diplomatic untangling of the Indochina problem, as Britain's first hope, also became in large measure its responsibility. If the allies were not to be pressed into a military response, it was as much up to Eden as to Bidault (and, later, Mendès-France), to establish the grounds for a settlement. Although final agreement at the conference required Soviet and Chinese preparedness to offer equitable terms, Eden's own contributions cannot be exaggerated. Working closely with Molotov and Chou, Eden apparently earned their respect as a forthright, flexible, but firm negotiator. That the accords were drawn up testified to Eden's persistence. They were a triumph of British diplomacy to the extent that the Chinese and Soviets, in press commentaries immediately

following the close of the Conference, accorded the UK delegation the unusual accolade of having, along with their delegations, rendered the most important services in the agonizing process of reaching agreement.

At the same time as the British successfully pushed through a settlement by diplomatic rather than military means, they also reserved the right to join with the United States in a regional security arrangement immediately after the conference. As Eden had told Chou, the formation of a SEATO would not be put off, even though the Associated States would not become members. British membership in SEATO represented another significant diplomatic victory. They had on several occasions informed the United States that a Southeast Asia pact formed in advance of or during the Geneva deliberations might be interpreted as provocative by the Chinese and reduce, if not eliminate, chances for a settlement. The British never opposed the concept of SEATO, but they cautioned against poor timing. SEATO's establishment in September 1954 was thus doubly welcomed by London: It satisfied Britain's conviction that a much-needed regional organization should be formed to preserve what remained of Indochina, not to take action to recover it all from the Viet Minh.

Britain's opposition to forming SEATO before or during the conference so as, in part, not to provoke the Chinese fitted with London's aspirations for better Sino-British relations. Quite unlike the dominant voices in Washington, Churchill and Eden were amenable to attempting to achieve some kind of working relationship with Peking, particularly in view of the ongoing guerrilla war in Malaya. The conference, as Eden noted in his June 23 speech to the Commons, had resulted in an improvement of Sino-British relations, demonstrated by Peking's agreement on June 17, after four years of silence, to exchange charges d'affaires. In the remaining month of the conference, moreover, British youth delegations traveled to China, and there were hopeful comments from both countries on the possibilities for stepped up trade and the exchange of cultural delegations. Thus, in sharp contrast to the United States, Great Britain fully exploited this period of harmony through diplomacy to change, rather than preserve, its pattern of contact with Peking.

The French

France probably had as much cause for satisfaction with the outcome at Geneva as any other party to the conference. Paris had extricated itself from la sale guerre with honor, yet had also retained a foothold in South Vietnam and a close relationship with Cambodia and Laos. The French Union lost much of its strength, but not all of its appeal, in Indochina. At least in mid-1954, it appeared that French cultural and economic interests in all three former colonies would be substantially preserved; and even the DRV had indicated, at the close as well as at the beginning of the negotiations, that it aspired to membership in the Union. French military power would have to be surrendered, of course;* but French influence could (and did) remain in all three countries.

* Even as most French troops were withdrawn, a French military presence remained for some time. The last troops did not leave Vietnam until February 1956 while, under the

military accords, French instructors remained in Laos and Cambodia and two bases continued to function in Laos.

While the British were ready to join with the United States and other interested nations in SEATO, the French clearly intended, as evidenced by their concern over the location of the demarcation line, that South Vietnam have a defensible territory within which to establish a stable regime competitive with the DRV. * * As already

** French interest was not confined to South Vietnam after July 21, 1954. Soon thereafter, Paris dispatched Jean Sainteny, its former chief negotiator with the Viet Minh at Fontainebleau and Dalat in 1946, to Hanoi to represent French interests without conferring recognition on the DRV. France recognized only one Vietnam but in fact dealt with two.

observed, Paris was not motivated by altruism alone; a substantial territorial base was as much for the preservation of French economic holdings in the South as for the future security of the Saigon government. To judge from the French attitude, the Paris government, no less than the American administration, looked forward to participating fully in the consolidation and rehabilitation of the GVN at least in the two years before nationwide elections.

The Americans

The United States viewed the conference results with mixed emotions. On the one hand, the terms of the settlement conformed surprisingly well to those the Administration had agreed with the French and British would be acceptable. Even as the Administration could not do more than agree to "respect" and "take note" of the Geneva accords, it had to concede that they represented a reasonable outcome given the chaotic state of Allied relations before the conference, the rejection by France of a possible military alternative, and the undeniable military superiority of the Viet Minh beyond as well as within Vietnam. On the other hand, the settlement, viewed through the special lenses of the Eisenhower-Dulles Administration, also contained the elements of defeat. Part of the Free World's "assets" in the Far East had been "lost" to the Sino-Soviet bloc (much as China had been "lost" to Mao Tse-tung's forces); our allies had begged off when offered a chance to deal with the Communists by force of arms and, later, by an Asian-Western anti-Communist alliance ready for action; and the United States had been compelled to attend an international conference which not only confirmed to the Communists by diplomacy what they had gained by force, but also enhanced their image elsewhere in Asia and worldwide as standard-bearers of peace.

The view that Geneva had come out better than could have been expected was the one offered publicly. The President, at a July 21 news conference, declined to criticize the accords. He said they contained "features which we do not like, but a great deal depends

on how they work in practice." He announced the Government's intention to establish permanent missions in Laos and Cambodia, and said the United States was actively "pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area."

Under Secretary Smith likewise was very guarded in remarks two days later. Denying that Geneva was another "Munich," Smith said: "I am . . . convinced that the results are the best that we could possibly have obtained in the circumstances," adding that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield." When Dulles spoke (also on July 23), he was much less interested in the past than in the future. Referring to "the loss in Northern Vietnam," the Secretary expressed the hope that much would be learned from the experience toward preventing further Communist inroads in Asia. Two lessons could be culled, he observed. First, popular support was essential against Communist subversion; "the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions." Second, collective defense should precede rather than come during the aggression—a pointed criticism of British policy during the crisis. A collective security system now in Southeast Asia, he concluded, would check both outright aggression and subversion.

A point-by-point comparison of the Seven Points with the provisions of the accords indicates that quite apart from what had happened to American interests in Southeast Asia as a consequence of the conference, American diplomacy had, on balance, succeeded:

- (1) The integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia were preserved, and Viet Minh forces were to be withdrawn or disarmed and disbanded.
- (2) Southern Vietnam was retained, although without an enclave in the North and with the partition line somewhat south of Dong Hoi.
- (3) Laos, Cambodia, and "retained" Vietnam were not prevented from forming "non-Communist regimes" (in the case of Vietnam, within the two-year preelection period); nor were they expressly forbidden "to maintain adequate forces for internal security." Vietnam's right to import arms and other war materiel was, however, restricted to piece-by-piece replacement, and its employment of foreign advisers to the number in the country at the war's close.
- (4-5) Recalling Dulles' interpretation of July 7 that elections should "be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance," the accords did not "contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"; nor did they "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means." Although Dulles and Mendès-France preferred that no date be set for the elections, the compromise two-year hiatus gave the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese a considerable breathing spell. The first priority, therefore, was to "give democratic elements best chance"; as was subsequently determined by Washington, this meant providing South Vietnam with economic assistance and political support. Elections, as Dulles indicated then, and as the OCB concurred in August, were agreeable to the United States; but they

were two years away, and *the immediate, primary task* was "to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam..." Thus, the corollary objective (stated by the NSC in August and approved by the President) "to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections" did *not* connote American intention to subvert the accords; read in context, the phrase meant that American influence would aim at assuring that the Communists not gain an electoral victory through deceitful, undemocratic methods in violation of the Final Declaration's stipulation that they be "free."

(6) The accords expressly provided for the transfer of individuals desiring to move from one zone to another.

(7) The accords did seem, *at the time*, to have basically fulfilled the precondition of providing "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement." Although the machinery would be the ICC's rather than the UN's, Under Secretary Smith noted that the ICC would have a veto power on important questions (referring, evidently, to the unanimity rule); would be composed of one genuine neutral (India) and one pro-Western government (Canada); and would be permitted full freedom of movement into demilitarized zones and frontier and coastal areas. Smith gave this assessment:

Taking everything into consideration, I strongly feel this [the control and supervision arrangement] is satisfactory and much better than we were able to obtain in Korea. French feel, and Eden and I agree, that with such composition built-in veto will work to our advantage. This setup is best French or anybody else could get, and I feel it is within spirit of point 7. [[Doc. 79](#)]

Despite the overall concordance of major provisions of the accords with the Seven Points, the fact that another piece of territory had been formally ceded to the Communists obviously weighed heavily on the Administration. When, in August, papers were drawn up for the National Security Council, the Geneva Conference was evaluated as a major defeat for United States diplomacy and a potential disaster for United States security interests in the Far East. The Operations Control Board, in its progress report on the then-current NSC paper 5405, stated that the Final Declaration of the conference "completed a major forward stride of communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia. It therefore recorded a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC 5405 and a serious loss for the free world, the psychological and political effects of which will be felt throughout the Far East and around the globe." In a separate report, the NSC was somewhat more specific concerning the extent of the damage, but no less restrained. The Communists had acquired "an advance salient" in Vietnam for use in military and nonmilitary ways; the United States had lost prestige as a leader in Asia capable of stemming Communist expansion; the Communist peace line had gained at America's expense; and Communist military and political prestige had been enhanced as the result of their proven ability to exploit unstable situations in Southeast Asian countries without resort to armed attack.

The conclusion that emerges from the obvious contrast between the public and private comments of Administration officials and organs is that where American diplomacy fell down was not at the conference but during the Indochina crisis as a whole. Nearly all the revised American negotiatory *principles* had emerged unscathed; but American *objectives* in Indochina--the elimination of the Viet Minh threat, preservation of the

strategically vital Tonkin Delta, and obstruction of Communist political and military expansionist policies in the region (all of which were enumerated in NSC 5405--had still been defeated. The United States had admirably maneuvered at Geneva in its self-limited role of interested party; but the Administration, convinced that any attrition of what had been regarded as "Free World" territory and resources was inimical to American global interests, could only view the settlement as the acceptance of terms from the Communist victors. The task in Vietnam in the two years ahead was therefore to work with what had been "retained" in the hope, by no means great, that the Diem government could pull the country up by its bootstraps in time to present a meaningful alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 3, "The Geneva Conference, May-July, 1954"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 1, pp. 108-146

I. BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

On February 18, 1954, a joint communiqué from Berlin issued by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France announced that in late April the Big Four and other parties concerned would meet at Geneva to seek a peaceful solution of the eight-year-old war in Indochina. Between those dates, the Western allies engaged in a series of discussions centered around American proposals for direct intervention, while the Communist side--the USSR, Communist China (CPR), and the Viet Minh--worked to ensure that they would enter the forthcoming Geneva Conference from a position of strength.

The Eisenhower Administration found as much difficulty in persuading France and Great Britain that fundamental changes in the war were necessary before the start of the conference as in accepting the notion of a negotiated solution in Indochina. The troubles with France had begun in mid-1953 when the U.S. Government gave its conditional approval to the Navarre Plan, which provided for radically new French field tactics and a buildup of the Vietnamese National Army (VNA). American hopes that assistance in money and war materiel would elicit a French commitment to a program to attract native Indochinese into close military and political collaboration with the colonial governments, especially in Vietnam, were not fulfilled. Nor was France hospitable to American suggestions for greater involvement of the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) in French planning. As was to be the case almost throughout the Indochina crisis, France capitalized on American fears of National Assembly rejection of the European Defense Community (EDC) treaty and of a French pull-out from Indochina to gain U.S. aid without having to make commensurate concessions on Vietnamese independence or tactical planning. American attempts to tie aid to such concessions were never followed

through, and whatever leverage on French policy-making in Indochina the United States possessed was left largely unexploited.

For the most part, France's rejection of American conditions and suggestions was based on the Laniel government's conviction, implemented zealously by French civil and military authorities in Indochina, that the United States would be intruding in France's domain. A policy of systematic restrictions on American officials in the field prevented the United States from making independent evaluations of the war's progress, with the result that the Government was for many months badly informed and unwarrantedly optimistic about the French Union army's chances against the Viet Minh. In late March and April 1954, when it became clear to Washington that the Navarre Plan had failed and that (in Secretary of State Dulles' words) "united action" was necessary to prevent Indochina from falling to the Communists, the French revealed that their distrust of American "interference" extended to any plans for overt American air-naval involvement. The Laniel government was perfectly amenable to localized American intervention at Dienbienphu to save the besieged French army from disaster; but it stood firmly opposed to Dulles' concept of collective (Western-Asian) defense in a security organization that would, if necessary, intervene to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. France's requests for assistance at Dienbienphu were entirely consistent with long-standing policy in Paris that looked to a negotiated settlement of the war on "honorable" terms at the same time as it hoped to be in the best possible military position at the time negotiations began.

Opposition to "united action" was no less stubborn in London. The British, like the French, were suspicious of American intentions in calling for that alternative, though for different reasons. To the Churchill government, the United States, even while proclaiming a strong desire to avoid open conflict with Communist China, was tending precisely in that direction by insisting on the formation of a collective security pact prior to the start of the Geneva Conference. Eisenhower's letter to Churchill on April 4, 1954, could only have reinforced those suspicions, for the President described united action as an attempt to make China stop supporting the Viet Minh rather than face the prospect of large-scale allied involvement in Vietnam. Although the British were not asked to make substantial ground troop commitments to a united action, they felt that their approval would ultimately condone a widening of the war that would risk bringing in the Chinese who, the British argued, could not possibly be expected to cease assistance they had been providing since 1950. London therefore told Dulles it would not approve united action and preferred to await the outcome of the negotiations before deciding whether the Indochina situation warranted resort to military alternatives. The British were perfectly willing to talk about regional defense in the Far East, but only after the results were in on the negotiations. Until then, they said, they would limit themselves to providing full diplomatic support to the French in search of a peaceful solution.

Differences among the allies were therefore acute as the conference opened. The French had cleverly exploited the American assistance program without having brought in the Americans in full force, yet had also been unable to save Dienbienphu from being overrun on May 7. The British were felt in Washington to have been the primary obstacle to united action; they were accused of having been so blinded by their own self-interest in

other areas of Southeast Asia that they failed to appreciate the vast strategic importance to the Free World of saving Indochina.

Contrasting Communist unity on the eve of the conference was more a matter of Sino-Soviet agreement on the desirability of negotiations than of complete accord among the three parties. In the aftermath of Stalin's death, Soviet foreign policy under Malenkov had altered considerably. Domestic priorities no doubt influenced the regime's proclaimed hopes for a reduction in international tension. Peking, more intimately involved in the Viet Minh cause, stepped up its assistance to General Giap's forces between February and April 1954, but also agreed with Moscow on the desirability of convening an international conference, which China would attend, to end the fighting. The limited available evidence suggests that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) alone among the three Communist parties considered the call for negotiations premature and urged that they be preceded by intensified military efforts. Ho's much-publicized offer in late November 1953 to talk with the French was intended more to influence French domestic and official opinion and to demoralize Franco-Vietnamese troops than to evince sincere interest in arriving at an equitable settlement. In ensuing months, DRV broadcasts showed a far greater interest in first achieving a clear-cut military victory in the Tonkin Delta and parts of Laos than in engaging in discussions while French forces remained scattered throughout Indochina.

These developments, in very broad outline, provided the backdrop to the Geneva Conference. Strength and weakness seemed to be the respective characteristics of the Communist and Western positions. Yet these terms are, as we shall see, not entirely accurate, for the interaction between and within the two sides was to make clear that the Geneva Conference would not be the setting for a victor's peace.

II. THE CONDUCT AND STRUCTURE OF DIPLOMACY

One of the first agreements reached at the Geneva Conference occurred in the course of a conversation between V. M. Molotov and Anthony Eden on May 5, when the Soviet foreign minister endorsed the foreign secretary's assertion that this negotiation was the most difficult he had ever encountered.* Indeed, it seems at first glance somewhat paradoxical that the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference (May 8-July 21) should have resulted in a settlement within less than a dozen weeks, given the unusual difficulties facing the negotiators on both sides. (See Table 1) Key issues were postponed until the eleventh hour while debate wore endlessly on over relatively insignificant matters; contact among the delegations was limited by ideological prejudices and political antagonisms, forcing some delegates to act as mediators no less than as representatives of national interests; and major agreements were reached outside the special framework for discussions that the conferees had taken a month to build.

* A valuable source is Anthony Eden, *Memoirs: Full Circle*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1960.

TABLE 1

CHIEF NEGOTIATORS AT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINA

United Kingdom
Anthony Eden

United States
General Walter Bedell Smith
U. Alexis Johnson

Chinese People's Republic
Chou En-lai
Chang Wen-t'ien
Li K'e-nung

Viet Minh
Pham Van Dong

Laos
Phoui Sananikone

USSR
Vyacheslav Molotov

France
Georges Bidault
Jean Chauvel
Pierre Mendès-France

Vietnam
Dac Khe
Tran Van Do

Cambodia
Tep Phan
Sam Sary

A. THE REPRESENTATION QUESTION

The first major roadblock in the negotiations was the Communist claims concerning the representation of parties not present at the conference. Since the conference had already begun when these claims were forwarded, the chances of expanding the list of invited parties were very limited. Nevertheless, through fourteen restricted and seven plenary sessions,* bitter controversy raged over Communist insistence that the Viet Minh-led Free Cambodian (Khmer Issarak) and Free Laotian (Pathet Lao) forces were entitled to

be seated beside representatives of the Royal Governments of Cambodia and Laos. Not until June 16, when Premier Chou En-lai, China's foreign minister and chief delegate, indicated to Eden that Viet Minh forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia and Laos, was the debate resolved and the way opened for serious efforts to bring about cease-fires throughout Indochina.

The time-consuming exchanges over the authenticity of Communist "resistance forces" in Laos and Cambodia were, interestingly enough, not duplicated when it came to determining the status of the DRV. The Berlin Conference final communiqué had specified that the Indochina deliberations would be attended by the United States, Great Britain, Communist China, the Soviet Union, France, "and other states concerned." Invitations to the participants would, it was further agreed, be issued only by the Berlin conferees, i.e., by the Big Four but not by Peking. Yet, as Molotov admitted at the first plenary session (May 8), Peking as well as Moscow invited the DRV, a move vigorously assailed by France and the United States. [Doc. 45] No attempt was made, however, to block the DRV's participation. Despite the antagonism of the Vietnamese government nominally headed by Bao Dai, (Bao Dai's consistent position, supported by Ngo Dinh Diem when he took over the premiership on June 18, was that his was the only legitimate government in Vietnam, while the Viet Minh were not political competitors but merely armed rebels.) the DRV was generally considered one of the principal combatants whose consent to a cease-fire, being indispensable, required its participation. Moreover, the Soviet Union indicated to the French that it would not accept the presence of delegates from the Associated States of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) unless the DRV was admitted to the conference. By the time of Dienbienphu's fall (May 7), all parties were agreed that there would be nine delegations (though not States) discussing Indochina; and on May 8 the first session got underway.

* In all, the Geneva Conference comprised eight plenary and twenty-two restricted sessions. These were quite apart from the Franco-Viet Minh military command conferences held after June 2, as well as from Viet Minh military staff talks with Laotian and Cambodian representatives that began in late June. Finally, during the latter half of the conference, French and Viet Minh delegation heads met secretly in so-called "underground" negotiations, the results of which were closely held, at least by the French.

B. THE COMMUNICATION GAPS

Nine delegations seated at a roundtable to exchange views, about every second day, obscured the fact that true bargaining was not taking place. Proposals were, of course, tabled and debated; but actual give-and-take was reserved for private discussions, usually in the absence of the pro-Western Indochinese parties. Even then, the Geneva talks on Indochina were hardly dominated by Big Power cabais; political and ideological differences were so intense, particularly between the American and Chinese representatives, that diplomacy had to be conducted circuitously, with Eden and Molotov frequently acting as mediators and messengers for delegates unwilling to be found

together. (As one example of the American attitude, Duties told reporters just prior to the first session that the only way he could possibly meet with Chou En-lai was if their cars collided.)

Anthony Eden, whose persistence in the face of adverse developments throughout the conference was rewarded in the end, has provided this description of personal tribulation:

I was conscious that time was not on our side. Since neither the Americans nor the French had established any contacts with the Communist representatives [in mid-June], I had been compelled to adopt the role of intermediary between the Western powers and the Communists. My activities in this respect were open to every kind of misrepresentation. I was concerned about their effect on Anglo-American relations. On the other hand, I was encouraged by the close accord maintained throughout the conference between ourselves and the other members of the Commonwealth, including those, like Mr. Nehru, who were not represented at Geneva. They sent me messages of thanks and encouragement. I needed them, for I began to feel that we should never make effective headway. I had never known a conference of this kind. The parties would not make direct contact and we were in constant danger of one or another backing out of the door.

Not until the latter half of June did high-ranking French and Viet Minh delegates meet face-to-face, did Viet Minh military officials confer with Cambodian and Laotian representatives, and did French and Chinese heads-of-delegation privately exchange views. Communist and non-Communist Vietnamese, meanwhile, refused to talk to one another until July, when finally Tran Van Do and Pham Van Dong were persuaded to have private discussions. Most importantly, the American delegation (USDEL), under strict instructions to avoid contact with the Chinese, had to rely on second-hand information provided by the British, French, and Soviet representatives, a procedure that was repeated with respect to the Viet Minh.

The problem of contact was no more acutely felt than by the delegation of the State of Vietnam. Although finally granted complete independence by France under treaties initialed in Paris April 28 and approved by both governments June 4, Vietnam did not gain the concurrent power to negotiate its own fate. The French, clearly anxious lest the Vietnamese upset the delicate state of private talks with the Viet Minh, avoided Bao Dai's representatives whenever possible and sought to exploit close Vietnamese-American relations in informing the Vietnamese only after agreements had been reached. During June, for instance, Jean Chauvel, head of the French delegation, on several occasions approached the Americans with information on the "underground" negotiations with the Viet Minh and with the hope that, once partition had been fixed, the United States would "sell" that solution to Saigon. [Doc. 60] In the same month, Chauvel, evincing complete understanding of American determination to avoid approving or acquiescing in a partition settlement, nevertheless asked if the United States would soften Vietnamese opposition to it by indicating it was the best solution obtainable. Chauvel described Diem and his predecessor, Buu Loc, as difficult, unrealistic, and unreasonable on the subject. [Doc. 66]

In an aide-memoire delivered to Duties and Eden on June 26 by Henri Bonnet, the French ambassador to Washington, Paris urged Washington not to encourage an adverse Vietnamese reaction to partition. The United States was also asked "to intervene with the Vietnamese to counsel upon them wisdom and self-control and to dissuade them from refusing an agreement which, if it is reached, is dictated not by the spirit of abandoning them, but on the contrary by the desire to save in Indochina all that can possibly be saved, and to give the Vietnamese state, under peaceful conditions, opportunities which have not always been possible heretofore because of the war." To these approaches, the United States consistently reacted negatively in the undoubtedly correct belief that the French were merely attempting to identify the United States in Vietnamese eyes with the partition concept. By refusing to act as intermediaries for the French, the American delegation kept free of association with a "French solution" to the Vietnam problem.

French aloofness from the Vietnamese continued into July. Despite American requests of the French delegation that the Vietnamese be kept informed of developments, the French demurred. Chauvel informed U. Alexis Johnson, chief deputy to the head of the USDEL, General Waiter Bedell Smith, that "he was handling this [liaison with the Vietnamese] through members of his staff and was avoiding direct contact with Vietnamese in order not to have to answer their questions." When Offroy, another member of the French delegation, suggested that the United States placate the Vietnamese with assurance of Free World political, economic, and military support after the settlement, Johnson replied that this was a matter for the French to handle. Not until late in the Conference did the Vietnamese government become aware of the strong possibility that partition would become part of the settlement; on this and other developments, as we shall see, the Vietnamese were kept in the dark, a circumstance that was to solidify Vietnamese hostility to and dissociation from the final terms.

But the Vietnamese loyal to Bao Dai were not alone in being denied important information, although they suffered worst from it. The United States delegation itself several times suspected that it was not receiving all the news the French were in a position to provide. The fault, however, lay as much with the ambiguous status under which the delegation operated as with the French who were to act as messengers. On the one hand, the Americans wanted to use their influence to ensure that the French not sell out Western interests for the sake of a quick settlement; on the other, they were determined not to become so involved in the bargaining process as to link the Administration to the final terms. The resolution of these apparently conflicting aims was offered by Duties on the eve of the conference in a background briefing to newsmen at Geneva. He said that primary responsibility for decisions taken at the conference belonged to the French and Vietnamese on one side, and to the Viet Minh on the other. The United States "would be inclined not to try to interpose [its] veto in any sense as against what they might want to do." As to whether this attitude applied equally to substantive provisions of any settlement, the Secretary indicated that the United States would, if necessary, refuse to acknowledge results contrary to American "interests":

I would think that [nonapplication of a veto] would be true up to the point at least where we felt that the issues involved had a pretty demonstrable interest to the United States

itself. The United States does have pretty considerable interests in the Western Pacific, and there are some solutions there which we would regard as so disadvantageous that we would seek to prevent them. And if we failed in that respect, we would probably want to disassociate ourselves from it [the final settlement].

Thus, the United States would apply the tactic of "disassociation" should its influence not be sufficient to make the final terms compatible with American "interests." Yet the French, against whom the tactic was primarily directed, were probably (and quite naturally) averse to keeping their American colleagues so well informed of developments in the talks with the Viet Minh that the United States would have occasion to resort to "disassociation." Throughout the conference, in fact, the French aimed at exploiting the American presence for the strength they believed it provided their negotiators, and this policy meant pressuring Washington to retain a high-ranking delegation at the conference right up to the moment of the settlement.

Whatever the rationale for French behavior, the USDEL complained to Washington that it was not being kept fully informed of developments in the "underground" Franco-Viet Minh talks. The change in government in Paris during June from Laniel to Pierre Mendès-France helped matters somewhat. But though it was conceded that Mendès-France's representatives had done better than their predecessors in keeping the United States apprised, the United States still felt, as Dulles put it, that while Paris was not willfully concealing information, there remained a "certain lack of any intimacy..." [[Doc. 65](#)]

The British also felt locked out of news that vitally affected them. Particularly during May, when Washington and Paris were frequently in touch about possible military intervention, the British were highly disturbed to find newspapers their best source of information on the intentions of their foremost allies. Since London was no longer considered essential to "united action" (see Section IV), the Americans and the French had evidently agreed that their negotiations should be kept under wraps until such time as a decision was made. Only after Eden confronted Under Secretary Smith with the newspaper stories (which may have been deliberate "leaks" to influence the Geneva deliberations) did Dulles direct that the British, Australian, and New Zealand ambassadors be informed "in general terms" regarding U.S.-French talks. Diplomacy among the Western Big Three clearly reflected the rifts that had developed in the alliance over intervention before the Dienbienphu disaster; as a result, secrecy and bilateral discussions tended to be the rule, thereby complicating the already mammoth task of presenting a united Western front against the Communist negotiators.

Thus far we have been dealing with diplomacy as it was conducted by the non-Communist delegations. What of the Communists? The available documentation limits the comments we may make, but still permits some remarks, both definite and speculative. First, the Chinese, Soviet, and Viet Minh delegations were in constant touch, as reported by their news agencies. Moreover, Chou En-lai was able to make three stopovers in Moscow during the conference that very likely heightened Sino-Soviet coordination. Finally, during a recess for heads of delegation, Chou and Ho Chi Minh

held a three-day meeting in early July that may have provided the turning point in the Viet Minh's more conciliatory attitude thereafter. In brief, the Communists apparently were not plagued by the kinds of communication problems that hampered the Americans, British, and Vietnamese.

As will be argued in greater detail subsequently, the frequent meetings of the Communist delegations did not result in a uniformity of views. The Chinese and Soviets evidently worked independent of the Viet Minh whenever their separate interests dictated the need for advancement of progress in the negotiations. At times when the Viet Minh were intransigent, Chou and Molotov frequently took the initiative to break log jams that threatened to plunge the conference into irresolvable deadlock. Much like Eden, Chou and Molotov sometimes found themselves playing the role of mediator, a role which they, and particularly Chou, relished for what Fred Iklé has called the "side-effects" of negotiations—benefits deriving from, but incidental to, negotiations, such as enhanced prestige. In the end, the Viet Minh advantage of close rapport with Moscow and Peking did not prevent the Viet Minh from sharing with their non-Communist compatriots the ignominious distinction of having been undercut by allies.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BARGAINING POSITIONS

A. THE UNITED STATES AND THE NEGOTIATIONS

In underwriting the Navarre Plan and proceeding with utmost caution in urging France to improve its relationship with the non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists, the United States hoped to influence Paris to postpone a commitment to negotiations until French forces were at least on the threshold of military victory. While aware of the strong pressures on the Laniel government from the National Assembly and the French public for a peaceful settlement, the United States, clearly influenced by the experience at Panmunjom, sought to persuade the premier not to let the clamor for peace drive him to the bargaining table. As late as December 1953 Laniel agreed that Washington's aversion to premature negotiations was well-advised; but two months later, at Berlin, his government joined with the Soviet Union in calling for an international conference to end the Indochina conflict. The French government found it could no longer ignore anti-war sentiment at home without jeopardizing its survival, while the Americans, however strongly opposed to bringing the war to the conference table with victory nowhere in sight and with Communist China as a negotiating opponent, felt compelled to approve the Berlin decision if only to blunt the French threat of scuttling EDC.

Forced to go along with French preference for negotiating with the Communists, the United States remained unalterably pessimistic about the probable results. This attitude was first set out fully by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1954. [Doc. 23] The Chiefs examined the alternatives to military victory and found them all infeasible or unacceptable to the United States. A ceasefire prior to a political settlement, the JCS paper states, "would, in all probability, lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position." A coalition government would lead to Communist control by keeping any outside assistance

from preventing a seizure of power from within. Partition, on the other hand, would mean recognizing Communist success by force of arms, ceding the key Tonkin Delta to the communists, and, even if confined to only one of the three Indochinese states, undercutting our containment policy in Asia.

The Chiefs also commented at some length on the difficult question of elections in Vietnam. They took the position that even if elections could be held along democratic lines (which they doubted), a Communist victory would almost certainly result because of Communist territorial control, popular support, and superior tactics:

Such factors as the prevalence of illiteracy, the lack of suitable educational media, and the absence of adequate communications in the outlying areas would render the holding of a truly representative plebiscite of doubtful feasibility. The Communists, by virtue of their superior capability in the field of propaganda, could readily pervert the issue as being a choice between national independence and French Colonial rule. Furthermore, it would be militarily infeasible to prevent widespread intimidation of voters by Communist partisans. While it is obviously impossible to make a dependable forecast as to the outcome of a free election, current intelligence leads the Joint Chiefs to the belief that a settlement based upon free elections would be attended by almost certain loss of the Associated States to Communist control.

The JCS views, together with the recommendation that the United States not associate itself with any settlement that "would fail to provide reasonably adequate assurance of the future political and territorial integrity of Indochina . . .," were approved by the Secretary of Defense on March 23.

The JCS position reflected Government policy, for in the remaining months before the Conference the United States privately stood opposed to any course of action other than full prosecution of the war. Dulles, speaking with French Ambassador Henri Bonnet on April 3, reasoned that a negotiated settlement would lead only to face-saving formulae for either a French or a Viet Minh surrender. The Secretary termed a division of Indochina "impractical" and a coalition government the "beginning of disaster"; neither arrangement could prevent a French surrender. [\[Doc. 27\]](#) The President himself echoed this either-or approach. Writing to Churchill April 4, Eisenhower proposed: "There is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement." And, as already observed, it was precisely to bring about the latter-China's "discreet disengagement" from support of the Viet Minh-that the President wanted British cooperation in united action.

Concomitantly, the United States was concerned that a disaster at Dienbienphu would propel the French into acceptance of an immediate, unsupervised cease-fire even before the conference was to begin. Dulles obtained assurances from Bidault that the French would not agree to such a cease-fire. But the Secretary found the British less inflexible, with Eden doubting the American view that a sudden cease-fire would lead either to a

massacre of the French by the native people or to large-scale infiltration of French-held terrain by Viet Minh forces. [\[Doc. 37\]](#)

Thus assured by the French but mindful of both French and British preference for trying to bargain with the Communists, before resorting to further military steps, Washington, in late April and early May, sought to develop guidelines for the American delegation. The National Security Council, less than a week before the opening conference session, carefully examined American alternatives. Disturbed by what it regarded as peace-at-any-price thinking in Paris, the NSC urged the President to decide not to join the Geneva deliberations without assurance from France that it was not preparing to negotiate the surrender of Indochina. Again, the Korean example was foremost: Communist tactics at Geneva, the NSC forecast, would likely resemble those at Panmunjom; a cease-fire might be announced that the Communists would not comply with for lack of effective supervision; the French would wilt before the Communists' predictable dilatory tactics and end by accepting almost any terms.

The NSC therefore decided that the French had to be pressured into adopting a strong posture in the face of probable Communist intransigence. The President was urged to inform Paris that French acquiescence in a Communist takeover of Indochina would bear not only on France's future position in the Far East, but also on its status as one of the Big Three; that abandonment of Indochina would grievously affect both France's position in North Africa and Franco-U.S. relations in that region; that U.S. aid to France would automatically cease upon Paris' conclusion of an unsatisfactory settlement; and, finally, that Communist domination of Indochina would be of such serious strategic harm to U.S. interests as to produce "consequences in Europe as well as elsewhere [without] apparent limitation." In addition, the NSC recommended that the United States determine immediately whether the Associated States should be approached with a view to continuing the anti-Viet Minh struggle in some other form, including unilateral American involvement "if necessary." The NSC clearly viewed the Indochina situation with extreme anxiety, and its action program amounted to unprecedented proposals to threaten France with the serious repercussions of a sell-out in Southeast Asia.

Pessimism over the prospects for any meaningful progress in talks with the Communists was shared by Secretary Dulles. In a background briefing for newsmen at Geneva, Dulles gave the first official indication for public consumption that the United States would dissociate itself from any settlement rather than be party to unacceptable terms. As to the acceptability of partition, the Secretary, in views that would change later, said he did not see how partition could be arranged with the fighting not confined to any single area. He as much as ruled out a territorial division when he commented that the United States would only agree to an arrangement in which all the Viet Minh troops would be placed in a small regroupment area out of harm's way. But that arrangement "might not be acceptable to them," Dulles said coyly.

American opinions on the likely ramifications of a settlement were also made known, and with greater precision, in private. On May 7, for instance, Livingston Merchant of the State Department presented the American view to the Ministers of New Zealand and

Australia. Predicting that the French would finally settle for part of Vietnam and manage to salvage Cambodia and Laos, Merchant said the United States could not accept such a surrender of territory. While we could not prevent the French from making concessions, neither did we have to associate ourselves with the results. Thus, both publicly and privately, Administration leaders indicated at the outset of the conference that the United States would divorce itself from any settlement that resulted in less than a complete French-Vietnamese victory.

The first test of U.S. policy came May 5 when the French informed Washington of the proposals they intended to make in the opening round of the Geneva talks on May 8. The proposals included a separation of the "civil war" in Vietnam from the Communist aggressions in Cambodia and Laos; a cease-fire, supervised by a well-staffed international authority (but not the UN) and followed by political discussions leading to free elections; the regrouping of regular forces of the belligerents into defined zones (as Laniel had proposed in a speech on March 5) upon signature of a cease-fire agreement; the disarming of all irregular forces (i.e., the Viet Minh guerrillas); and a guarantee of the agreements by "the States participating in the Geneva Conference."

The JCS were first to react to the French plan. The Chiefs strongly felt that even if the Communists unexpectedly agreed to it, the likely outcomes would still be either rapid French capitulation in the wake of the cease-fire or virtual French surrender in the course of protracted political discussions. Once more, the Chiefs fell back on the Korean experience, which they said demonstrated the certainty that the Communists would violate any armistice controls, including those supervised by an international body. An agreement to refrain from new military activities during armistice negotiations would be a strong obstacle to Communist violations; but the Communists, the JCS concluded, would never agree to such an arrangement. On the contrary, they were far more likely to intensify military operations so as to enhance their bargaining position, precisely at the time the French would seek to reduce operations to avoid taking casualties. The Chiefs therefore urged that the United States not get trapped into backing a French armistice proposal that the Communists, by voicing approval, could use to bind us to a cease-fire while they themselves ignored it. The only way to get satisfactory results was through military success, and since the Navarre Plan was no longer tenable, the next best alternative was not to associate the United States with any cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory political settlement. The first step, the Chiefs believed, should be the conclusion of a settlement that would "reasonably assure the political and territorial integrity of the Associated States . . ."; only thereafter should a cease-fire be entertained.

As previously, the Joint Chiefs' position became U.S. policy with only minor emendations. The President, reviewing the Chiefs' paper, agreed that the Government could not back the French proposal with its call for a supervised cease-fire that the Communists would never respect. Eisenhower further concurred with the Chiefs' insistence on priority to a political settlement, with the stipulation that French forces continue fighting while negotiations were in progress. He added that the United States would continue aiding the French during that period and would, in addition, work toward

a coalition "for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia."

These statements of position paved the way for a National Security Council meeting on May 8, which set forth the guidelines of U.S. policy on negotiations for the delegation at Geneva. The decision taken at the meeting simply underscored what the President and the Chiefs had already stated:

The United States will not associate itself with any proposal from any source directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls. The United States could concur in the initiation of negotiations for such an armistice agreement. During the course of such negotiations, the French and the Associated States should continue to oppose the forces of the Viet Minh with all the means at their disposal. In the meantime, as a means of strengthening the hands of the French and the Associated States during the course of such negotiations, the United States will continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and promptly activate a Southeast Asian regional grouping for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia.

B. THE COMMUNIST PROPOSALS

Official American perspectives on the likely pattern of the Geneva negotiations were confirmed when the Viet Minh forwarded their first proposal "package" at the second plenary session on May 10. Pham Van Dong, then the DRV's vice-minister for foreign affairs and already a seasoned negotiator with the French, introduced his case with the argument that the Viet Minh were the "stronger" force in "more than three-fourths of the country." He went on to describe the successful administration of this territory by his government, which he said "represents the will of the entire Vietnamese nation. The opposition, the Bao Dai regime, characterized as "the government of the temporarily occupied zone," did not enjoy popular support and was merely the tool of the French.

Pham Van Dong did not, however, demand that France concede control of all Vietnam to the DRV. Instead, Dong urged that France recognize "the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam," a statement which amounted to a rejection of the Franco-Vietnamese treaties approved April 28 in Paris by Laniel and Premier Nguyen Trung Vinh. The main points of Dong's proposal for a cease-fire and political settlement in Vietnam were as follows:

- (1) Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all "foreign" (i.e., French) troops from the Associated States, to be preceded by the relocation of those troops to regroupment areas
- (2) Convening of advisory conferences, to be composed of representatives of the "governments of both sides," in each country of Indochina, with the objective of holding general elections leading to the establishment of unified governments
- (3) Supervision of elections by local commissions
- (4) Prior to the establishment of unified governments, the carrying out by the opposing

parties of "the administrative functions in the districts which will be [temporarily] under their administration . . .

(5) Cease-fire in all Indochina supervised by mixed commissions composed of the belligerents, *the cease-fire to take effect upon implementation of all other measures*. No new forces or military equipment to be introduced into Indochina during the armistice

To placate the French, Dong asserted the DRV's readiness "to examine the question of the entry of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam into the French Union..."

The meaning of Dong's proposal was clear. A political settlement would precede a military agreement to a cease-fire rather than the reverse, which the French preferred. Somewhat ironically, the Viet Minh position was in line with the American preference for giving priority to a political settlement; but the Viet Minh in effect proposed to stop fighting only when French troops had left Vietnam and a political process favorable to the Communists had been set up. By first getting rid of the French, and then substituting all-Vietnamese consultations for strict control and supervision of the cease-fire, the regroupment, and the general elections, the Viet Minh could legitimately expect a quick takeover of power from the relatively weak Vietnamese National Army, by then bereft of its French command structure. As Dong well knew, the relocation of French forces in the Tonkin Delta to a tighter perimeter was having, and would continue to have, major repercussions on VNA morale. Once the French could be persuaded to withdraw, the VNA would undoubtedly collapse under Viet Minh military pressure. Moreover, inasmuch as Dong's plan made no allowance for the disarming, much less the regrouping, of indigenous forces on either side, the Viet Minh would be militarily in a virtually unassailable position to control any general election that might be held. Dong's proposal, then, amounted to a request that the French abandon Vietnam to a certain fate.

In the same speech, Dong made clear that the DRV's concern extended beyond Vietnam to Cambodia and Laos. By 1954, Viet Minh coordination with the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer "resistance forces" had been going on for at least three years, or since the formal announcement on March 11, 1951, of formation of a Viet Minh-Free Khmer-Pathet Lao "National United Front." Viet Minh soldiers and cadres were active participants in the fighting there, where they provided the hard core of the "resistance." In addition, forces under General Vo Nguyen Giap had invaded Laos in April and December 1953, and Cambodia in April 1954 (a move which prompted a formal protest by the Royal Khmer Government to the Secretary General of the UN on April 23). Viet Minh battalions were still active in both countries during May and June, with greater priority given operations in Laos. Thus, Dong's proposals on a settlement in Laos and Cambodia reflected not simply the DRV's assumption of the role of spokesman for the unrepresented Free Khmer and Pathet Lao movements, but also direct Viet Minh interests in those neighboring kingdoms.

Dong argued that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces enjoyed widespread popular support and controlled most of the territory of their respective countries. With considerable distortion of history (subsequently corrected by the Laotian and Cambodian delegates), Dong sought to demonstrate that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were de

facto governments carrying out "democratic reforms" in the areas their armies had "liberated." France was therefore advised to recognize the "sovereignty and independence" of those movements no less than of the DRV. French forces alone were to withdraw from Cambodia and Laos; the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were not "foreign" troops. The same election procedure offered for Vietnam, without neutral or international supervision, would, Dong proposed, take place in Cambodia and Laos, thereby granting the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer a status equal to that of the lawful governments. And during the electoral process, Dong insisted on "conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations..." agreement to which would have permitted various Communist fronts to function with impunity. The inclusion of the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in the DRV's settlement plan-in particular, the demand that they merited political and territorial recognition-very quickly brought the conference to a standstill and, much later, compelled the Soviets and Chinese to work against Viet Minh ambitions.

C. THE AMERICAN REACTION

Pham Van Dong's opening gambit was clearly anathema to the Western delegations. Certainly, from the American standpoint, his proposals met none of the criteria for acceptability outlined by the National Security Council on May 8. Smith said as much at Geneva when he spoke on May 10 and again at the third plenary session May 12. Accordingly, Smith did not wholeheartedly embrace Bidault's proposals, for despite giving a general endorsement of the French plan, he departed from it at two important junctures. First, he declined to commit the United States in advance to a guarantee of the settlement despite Bidault's call for all the participants to make such a guarantee; second, he proposed that national elections in Vietnam be supervised specifically by an international commission "under United Nations auspices." As his speeches made clear, the United States believed the UN should have two separate functions-overseeing not only the cease-fire but the elections as well. Both these points in Smith's remarks were to remain cardinal elements of American policy throughout the negotiations despite French (and Communist) efforts to induce their alteration.

Entirely in keeping with Smith's position at the conference, as well as with the tenor of the Viet Minh proposals, Secretary Dulles, on May 12, sent Smith instructions intended to make the United States an influential, but unentangled and unobligated, participant. As Dulles phrased it, the United States was to be "an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation." Its primary aim would be to:

help the nations of that area [Indochina] peacefully to enjoy *territorial integrity and political independence* under *stable and free governments* with the opportunity to expand their economies, to realize their legitimate national aspirations, and to develop security through individual and collective defense against aggression, from within and without. This implies that these people *should not be amalgamated* into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship.

Accordingly, Smith was told, the United States should not give its approval to any settlement or cease-fire "which would have the effect of *subverting* the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states or of *permanently impairing their territorial integrity* or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union of Indochina, or which otherwise contravened the principles stated . . . above." [[Doc. 47](#)]

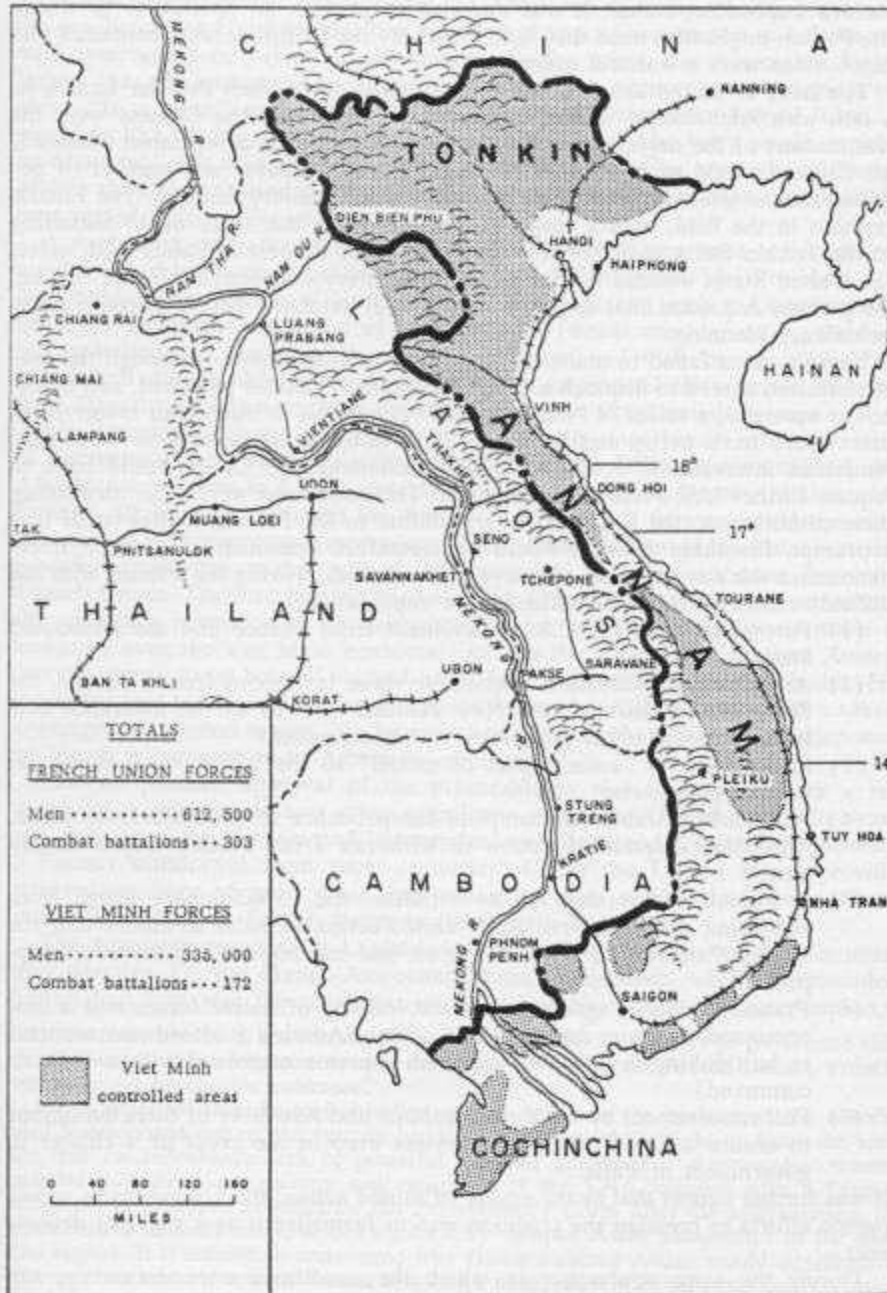
The NSC decision of May 8, Smith's comments at the second and third plenary sessions, and Dulles' instructions on May 12 reveal the rigidity of the American position on a Geneva settlement. The United States would not associate itself with any arrangement that failed to provide adequately for an internationally supervised cease-fire and national elections, that resulted in the partitioning of any of the Associated States, or that compromised the independence and territorial integrity of those States in any way. It would not interfere with French efforts to reach an agreement, but neither would it guarantee or otherwise be placed in the position of seeming to support it if contrary to policy. Bedell Smith was left free, in fact, to withdraw from the conference or to restrict the American role to that of observer. [[Doc. 47](#)] The rationale for this approach was clear enough: the United States, foreseeing inevitable protraction of negotiations by the Communists in the manner of Korea, would not be party to a French cession of territory that would be the end result of the Communists' waiting game already begun by Pham Van Dong. Rather than passively accept that result, the United States would withdraw from active involvement in the proceedings, thereby leaving it with at least the freedom to take steps to recapture the initiative (as by rolling back the Viet Minh at some future date) and the moral purity of having refused to condone the enslavement of more people behind the Iron Curtain. American policy toward negotiations at Geneva was therefore in perfect harmony with the Eisenhower-Dulles global approach to dealing with the Communist bloc.

Gloomy American conclusions about the conference, and no doubt the extravagant opening Communist demands, were intimately connected with events on the battlefield. After the debacle at Dienbienphu on May 7, the French gradually shifted their forces from Laos and Cambodia into the Tonkin Delta, leaving behind weak Laotian and Cambodian national armies to cope with veteran Viet Minh battalions. As the French sought to consolidate in northern Vietnam, the Viet Minh pressed the attack, moving several battalions eastward from Dienbienphu. U.S. Army intelligence reported in late May, on the basis of French evaluations, that the Viet Minh were redeploying much faster than anticipated, to the point where of 35,000 troops originally in northwestern Tonkin only 2,000 remained. At the same time, two Viet Minh battalions stayed behind in Cambodia and another ten in Laos; and in both those countries, American intelligence concluded that the Viet Minh position was so strong as to jeopardize the political no less than the military stability of the royal governments.

To thwart the Communist military threat in Vietnam, the French chief of staff, General Paul Ely, told General J. H. Trapnell, the MAAG chief (on May 30), that French forces were forming a new defensive perimeter along the HanoiHaiphong axis; but Ely made no effort to hide the touch-and-go nature of French defensive capabilities during the rainy season already underway. This precarious situation was confirmed by General Valluy of

the French command staff. In a report in early June to U.S., British, Australian, and New Zealand chiefs of staff assembled in Washington, Valluy held that the Delta was in danger of falling to the Communists, that neither Frenchmen nor Vietnamese would fight on in the south in that eventuality, and that only prompt allied intervention could save the situation. [[Doc. 53](#)] American assessments merely echoed those provided by the French. A National Intelligence Estimate published June 15 determined that French Union forces, despite a numerical advantage, faced defections on a mounting scale that could become very large if the Viet Minh scored major victories or if the French were believed (and Vietnamese suspicions were rife on this score in Hanoi and Saigon) about to abandon Hanoi and portions of the Delta. In sum, the tenor of intelligence reports by French and American sources during this period (from early May through mid-June) was that the Viet Minh armies were solidly entrenched in portions of Cambodia and Laos, were preparing for further advances in the Tonkin Delta, and, if the war were to continue beyond the rainy season, had the capability to destroy positions then being fortified by French Union forces throughout northern Vietnam.

The upshot of this military deterioration throughout much of Indochina was to reinforce the American conviction that the Communists, while making proposals at Geneva they knew would be unacceptable to the West, would drive hard for important battlefield gains that would thoroughly demoralize French Union troops and set the stage for their withdrawal southward, perhaps precipitating a general crisis of confidence in Indochina and a Viet Minh takeover by default. More clearly than earlier in the year, American officials now saw just how desperate the French really were, in part because French field commanders were being far more sincere about and open with information on the actual military situation. But the thickening gloom in Indochina no less than at Geneva did not give way to counsels of despair in Washington. The Government concluded *not* that the goals it had set for a settlement were unrealistic, but rather that the only way to attain them, as the President and the JCS had been saying, was through decisive military victory in conformity with the original united action proposal of March 29. While therefore maintaining its delegation at Geneva throughout the indecisive sessions of May and June, the United States once again alerted France to the possibility of a military alternative to defeat under the pressure of Communist talk-fight tactics.



Indochina, July 1954

IV. THE UNITED STATES AT GENEVA: THE STAGE OF FORCE AND DIPLOMACY, MAY TO MID-JUNE

In keeping open the option of united action, the Administration, no less during May and the first half of June than in April, carefully made direct involvement conditional on a range of French concessions and promises. This second go-round on united action was not designed to make further negotiations at Geneva impossible; rather, it was intended to provide an alternative to which the French might turn once they, and hopefully the British as well, conceded that negotiations were a wasteful exercise.

The issue of united action arose again in early May when Premier Laniel, in a talk with Ambassador Dillon, expressed the view that the Chinese were the real masters of the negotiations at Geneva. This being the case, Laniel reasoned, the Chinese would probably seek to drag out the talks over any number of peripheral issues while the Viet Minh pushed on for a military decision. The French position in the field, with a major redeployment on the order of 15 battalions to the Tonkin Delta probably very soon, would be desperate, Laniel said, unless the United States decided to give its active military cooperation. In the interim, the premier requested that an American general be dispatched to Paris to assist in military planning.

Laniel's views failed to make an impression in Washington. Although the Administration agreed to dispatch a general (Trapnell), Dulles proposed, and Eisenhower accepted, a series of "indispensable" conditions to American involvement that would have to be met by Paris. Even after those conditions were met, American intervention would not follow automatically; Laniel would have to request further U.S.-French consultations. The conditions were: (In forwarding these conditions to the Embassy for transmittal to the French, Dulles noted that a prompt, favorable decision would be premature inasmuch as it might internationalize the war in a way offensive to the British, leaving the French with the difficult choice of internationalization or capitulation.)

- (1) Formal requests for U.S. involvement from France and the Associated States
- (2) An immediate, favorable response to those invitations from Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the assurance that Britain "would either participate or be acquiescent"
- (3) Presentation of "some aspect of matter" to the UN by one of the involved Asian states
- (4) A French guarantee of complete independence to the Associated States, "including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time
- (5) A French undertaking not to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps from Indochina during the period of united action in order to ensure that the United States would be providing air and sea, but not combat-troop, support
- (6) Franco-American agreement on the training of native forces and a new command structure during united action (Admiral Radford was reported to be thinking in terms of a French supreme command with a U.S. air command)

(7) Full endorsement by the French cabinet and Assembly of these conditions to ensure a firm French commitment even in the event of a change in government in Paris

It was further agreed that *in the course of* united action, the United States would pursue efforts to broaden the coalition and to formalize it as a regional defense pact.

During the same conference in which the conditions were drawn up, top American officials went deeper into them. Eisenhower was insistent on collective action, but recognized that the British might not commit themselves initially and that the Australians, facing a general election later in May, could only give "evidence" of their willingness to participate. A second major problem was Indochinese independence. Dulles posed the American dilemma on this score: on the one hand, the United States had to avoid giving Asians reason to believe we were intervening on behalf of colonialism; on the other, the Associated States lacked the administrative personnel and leadership necessary to carrying on alone. "In a sense," said Dulles, "if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured." His solution was that the Associated States be granted (evidently, orally) the right to withdraw from the French Union after passage of a suitable time period, perhaps five or ten years.

A final point concerned Executive-Congressional relations once a French request, backed by Parliamentary assent, reached Washington. The President felt he should appear before a joint session of Congress and seek a Congressional resolution to use the armed forces in Indo-China [words missing] act on the formal invitation of France and the Associated States, and with the cooperation of friends and allies in the region. At Eisenhower's request, Dulles directed that the State Department begin working up a first draft of a Presidential message.

The American response to Laniel's requests set the stage for an extended series of discussions over the ensuing five weeks. In Paris, Dillon communicated the American conditions to Laniel and Maurice Schumann, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs; in a talk with the Ambassador May 14, they accepted the conditions, but with important reservations. First, Laniel indicated his dismay at the American insistence on the right of the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union. The premier predicted that the French public would never accept this condition inasmuch as the Associated States had themselves never made it and since even the Viet Minh envisioned joining the Union. The obvious American reluctance to go beyond air and naval forces also disturbed the premier. He requested that the United States additionally provide artillery forces and a token contingent of ground troops. But he indicated pleasure that UK participation was no longer a prerequisite to American involvement.

Laniel's qualified approval of the preconditions was accompanied by a request for a response to two other questions: could the United States in some way guarantee the borders and independence of Laos and Cambodia following a French withdrawal from those countries? Could the United States provide written assurance of prompt air

intervention to meet a possible Chinese Communist air attack on French forces in the Tonkin Delta?

The American response to Laniel's demurrers and requests was for the most part negative. On the French-Associated States relationship, which Ambassador Dillon had said was the chief barrier to a French request for intervention,* Dulles replied (through Dillon) that the United States might have some flexibility on the matter,

* Dillon commented: "I am certain that unless we can find some way to get around this requirement [that the Vietnamese have the option of leaving the French Union], French will never ask for outside assistance."

Dillon proposed that the real objection among Asians to the position of the Associated States rested not on the "purely juridical" problem of the right to leave the Union, but on Indochina's lack of powerful national armies. The Ambassador recommended that American training and equipping of the VNA, coupled with a French statement of intention to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps after the establishment of peace and a national army, would significantly dampen Asian antagonism to the Bao Dai regime. It is difficult to understand why Dillon assumed Asians would significantly change their attitude toward French Indochina when, even with an American takeover of the training and equipping of the VNA, French forces would still be on Vietnamese territory for a lengthy period.

but had to remain adamant on complete independence if it ever hoped to gain Thai and Filipino support. Next, on the question of the extent of American involvement, the Government was more flexible: It would not exclude anti-aircraft "and limited U.S. ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by U.S. naval and air forces." As to Laniel's questions, Washington answered that it saw no way, in view of the military and legal impracticalities, to guarantee the security of Laos and Cambodia; the alternative was that Laos and Cambodia join with Thailand in requesting the stationing of a UN Peace Observation Commission (POC) on their territories. The possibility of Chinese MIG intervention, considered extremely remote by the Defense Department, ruled out the need for a written commitment. The French were to be assured, however, that a collective defense arrangement would include protection against that contingency, and that prior to the formation of the organization, Chinese air involvement would prompt a Presidential request for Congressional authorization to respond with U.S. aircraft.

Although the setting up of several preconditions to involvement and the qualifications of the French reply by no means made intervention an immediate possibility, the Administration moved ahead on contingency planning. The State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took the lead by producing a hypothetical timetable based on the assumption of U.S.-French agreement in principle to the proposed conditions by May 21. FEA also outlined a full slate of urgent priority studies, including U.S. strategy under differing circumstances of Chinese involvement in the war. By May 24, FEA had

forwarded a contingency study from the Operations Planning Board that proposed, among other things, public and private communications to Peking to prevent, or at least reduce the effectiveness of, direct Chinese intervention.

The initiation of planning for intervention extended to more far-ranging discussions of the purposes, requirements, and make-up of a Southeast Asia collective defense organization. The framework of the discussions evidenced the Government's intention that united action be undertaken only *after* the Geneva Conference had reached a stalemate or, far less likely, a settlement. Three regional formulations were envisaged: the first would be designed for direct action, probably (it was felt) without British participation, either to defeat the Viet Minh or to prevent them from gaining control of Indochina; the second, formed after a settlement, would comprise the present SEATO members and functions, in particular active assistance to the participating Asian states resisting external attack or "Communist insurrection"; the third would have a broad Asian membership, but would be functionally limited to social and economic cooperation.

An important input to contingency planning on intervention came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On May 20, the JCS sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense entitled "U.S. Military Participation in Indochina." In the paper, the Chiefs requested formulation of a Defense Department position on the size of any American contributions and the nature of the command structure once united action began. They noted the "limited availability of U.S. forces for military action in Indochina" and the "current numerical advantage of the French Union forces over the enemy, i.e., approximately 5 to 3." Pointing out the disadvantages of either stationing large numbers of U.S. troops in Indochina or of basing U.S. aircraft on Indochina's limited facilities, the Chiefs considered "the current greatest need" to be an expanded, intensified training program for indigenous troops. They observed, moreover, that they were guided in their comments by the likely reaction of the CPR to U.S. involvement, as well as by the prescription: "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage."

In view of these problems and prospects, the JCS urged the limitation of United States involvement to strategic planning and the training of indigenous forces through an increase in MAAG from less than 150 to 2250 men. Its force commitment should be restricted, they advised, primarily to air-naval support directed from outside Indochina; even here, the Chiefs cautioned against making a "substantial" air force commitment. The Chiefs were also mindful of the Chinese. Since Viet Minh supplies came mainly from China, "the destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina."

The Chiefs were simply taking their traditional position that any major U.S. force commitment in the Far East should be reserved for a war against China in the event the President decided that such a conflict was necessary for the preservation of vital American interests. Recognizing the limitations of the "New Look" defense establishment for large-scale involvement in "brushfire" wars, the Chiefs were extremely hesitant, as had consistently been the case during the Indochina crisis, to favor action along the

periphery of China when the strategic advantages of American power lay in decisive direct blows against the major enemy. Thus, the JCS closed their memorandum with the admonition that air-naval commitments beyond those specified:

will involve maldeployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East. From the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.*

* These conclusions were *subsequently* confirmed when, at the direction of General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, a technical team of seven officers representing the Engineer, Transportation, and Signal Corps went to Indochina on a covert mission to determine military and military-related resources available there in the event U.S. intervention were implemented. The team spent the period May 31-June 22 in the field. Their conclusions were, in brief, that Indochina was devoid of the logistical, geographic, and related resources necessary to a substantial American ground effort. The group's findings are in a report from Col. David W. Heiman, its leader, to Ridgway, July 12, 1954.

The Chiefs' conclusions were disputed, however, by Everett Drumright of State (FEA) (in a memorandum to MacArthur, May 24, 1954). He argued that if, as everyone agreed, Indochina was vital to American security, the United States should not consider more than a token group troop commitment to be a serious diversion of our capabilities. While not arguing *for* a substantial troop commitment, Drumright suggested that the United States *plan for that* eventuality rather than count on defense with atomic weapons or non-nuclear strikes on Chinese territory. Somehow, however, Drumright's concern about the Chinese did not extend to the consideration that a massive troop commitment, which he stated elsewhere in the memorandum *might* prove necessary should token forces fail to do the job, also risked bringing in the Chinese.

The JCS evidently also decided to call a meeting of military representatives from the United States, France, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, the Chiefs suggested the downgrading of the representatives to below chief-of-staff level; but apparently on the strong protest of Under Secretary Smith at Geneva, and of the British too, the Chiefs acquiesced in a meeting at chief-of-staff level. But prior to the meeting, which began the first week of June, important developments occurred in the U.S.-France discussions of intervention.

The ticklish problem of bringing France to concede the critical importance of granting full independence to the Associated States occupied center stage once more. On May 27, the State Department, acknowledging France's hesitancy to go too far on this score, still insisted on certain "minimum measures," the most important of which was that France, during or immediately after formal approval of the April 28 draft treaties, announce its

willingness to withdraw all its forces from Indochina unless invited by the governments of the Associated States to maintain them or to establish bases. (The United States, the Department added, would be prepared to make a similar declaration if it committed forces.) Beyond that step, the French were also asked to permit Indochinese participation in the programming of economic aid and their direct receipt of all military aid, to find ways to broaden participation of the Vietnamese defense ministry and armed forces in national defense, and to push for the establishment of "representative and authentic nationalist governments" at the earliest possible date.

Transmitting these new proposals to the French, Dillon (incorrectly as it turned out) found them so well received that he reported on May 29, following a conversation with Laniel, that the two partners "had now reached accord in principle on political side." Laniel, he cabled Dulles, urged immediate military talks to complete arrangements on training of the Vietnamese, a new command structure, and war plans. Inasmuch as Ely and General John W. O'Daniel in Indochina had reached general agreement on American assumption of responsibility for training the VNA, [Doc. 52] the way was apparently cleared for bilateral military talks in Washington to take place simultaneously with, and therefore disguised by, the five-power staff negotiations.

Dillon's optimistic assessment proved premature, however, on several grounds. When he reported May 28 on talks with Schumann, he had added Schumann's and Defense Minister René Pleven's concern about Chinese air intervention, which they felt would be so damaging as to warrant a deterrent action in the form of a Presidential request to the Congress for discretionary authority to defend the Delta in case of CCAF attack. The French wanted a virtually instantaneous U.S. response, one that would be assured by a Presidential request before rather than after overt Chinese aerial intervention. The State Department's retort was that the French first had to satisfy the previously reported conditions before any such move by the President could be considered.

Dillon was no less disappointed by Washington's reply than the French. He cabled back that there apparently was an "extremely serious misunderstanding between U.S. and French":

French draw sharp distinction between (1) U.S. intervention in present circumstances with Viet Minh bolstered by Chinese Communist materiel, technicians and possibly scattered troops and (2) U.S. reaction against full-scale air attack mounted from Communist Chinese bases.

Dillon said that, for the French, Washington's preconditions *applied in the first case but not the second*, wherein only Congressional authorization was understood to stand in the way of direct American action. Ely, the Ambassador reported, had all along believed he had Radford's personal assurance of an American countermove against Chinese air attack in the Delta. Now, the French wanted to know if they could count on instant U.S. interdiction of a CCAF strike. The Ambassador closed by reminding the Department of the incalculable harm to NATO, to the whole U.S. role in Western Europe, and to the U.S. position against the Communists' world strategy if a Chinese attack was not met.

Despite Dillon's protestations the Department stuck by its initial position of May 15, namely, that Chinese air attack was unlikely and that the United States would meet that problem when it arose. Clearly, the Administration was unwilling to make any advance commitments which the French could seize upon for political advantage at Geneva without having to give a *quid pro quo* in their Indochina policy. Eisenhower affirmed this view and went beyond it: *The conditions for united action, he said, applied equally to Chinese direct and indirect involvement in Indochina. The United States would make no unilateral commitment against any contingency, including overt, unprovoked Chinese aggression, without firm, broad allied support.* *

* Eisenhower's unwavering attitude toward action in Asia only in concert with allies put him at odds with Dulles, who was prepared to act unilaterally in cases of overt aggression. When the issue of possible CPR air intervention came before the President, he is reported to have reacted sharply. Evidently supposing that conflict in the air would mean a Sino-American war, the President

said the United States would not intervene in China on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United States should in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese communist overt aggression.

See memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Robert Cutler, the President's special assistant, June 1, 1954.

The rationale for the President's difference of view with his Secretary was laid out more fully the next day. Eisenhower said that since direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including "new weapons") in reply, he would need to have much more than Congressional authorization. Thai, Filipino, French, and Indochinese support would be important but not sufficient; other nations, such as Australia, would have to give their approval, for otherwise he could not be certain the public would back a war against China. (Memorandum of conversation in the President's office, June 2, 1954, involving also Dulles, Anderson, Radford, MacArthur, and Cutler.) At its 200th meeting on June 3, the NSC received, considered, and agreed upon the President's views.

There were other obstacles to U.S.-French agreement, as brought into the open with a memorandum to the President from Foreign Minister Georges Bidault on June 1. One was the question of timing involved in American insistence on French Assembly approval of a government request for U.S. intervention. The French cabinet considered

that to present a program of allied involvement to the Assembly except under the circumstance of "a complete failure of the Geneva Conference" attributable to the Communists "would be literally to wish to overthrow the [French] Government." A second area of continuing disagreement concerned the maintenance of French forces in the field and the nature of a U.S. commitment. The French held that the United States could bypass Congress by committing perhaps one division of Marines without a declaration of war. Although assured by Washington that the Marines would not be excluded from a U.S. air-naval commitment, the French were not satisfied. In his memorandum, Bidault asked that the United States take account of France's defense obligations elsewhere, an indirect way of asking that Washington go beyond a token ground-troop commitment. Confronted by a war-weary Parliament on one side and opponents of EDC on the other, Bidault doubtless believed that the retention of French soldiers in Indochina without relief from American GIs was neither militarily nor politically acceptable.

A final but by no means negligible French objection to the American proposals concerned the independence issue. Far from having been settled, as Dillon supposed, the French were still unhappy about American pressure for concessions even after the State Department's May 27 revisions. The French were particularly disturbed (as Bidault implied) at the notion that the Associated States could leave the Union at any time, even while French fighting men were in the field on Indochina's behalf. "Such a formula," Bidault wrote, "is unacceptable to the French Government, first because it is incompatible with the French Constitution, and also because it would be extremely difficult to explain to French opinion that the forces of the French Union were continuing the war in Indochina for the benefit of States that might at any moment leave the Union." France was perfectly willing, Bidault remarked, to sign new treaties of association with the three Indochinese States, to allow them a larger voice in defense matters, and to work with them toward formation of truly national governments; but, to judge from his commentary, Paris would not go the whole route by committing itself in advance to Indochina's full freedom of action in the French Union. And while this and other issues remained unresolved, as Dulles observed June 4, Laniel's reported belief that the United States and France were politically agreed was a "serious overstatement."

By early June the unsettled issues separating the United States from France began to lose their relevance to the war. Even if they could be resolved, it was questionable whether American involvement could any longer be useful, much less decisive. On the matter of training the VNA, for instance, the United States was no longer certain that time would permit its training methods to take effect even if the French promptly removed themselves from responsibility in that area. The State Department now held that the Vietnam situation had deteriorated "to point where any commitment at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider U.S. training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for U.S. participation war Indochina." Morale of the Franco-Vietnamese forces, moreover, had dropped sharply, the whole Tonkin Delta was endangered, and the political situation in

Saigon was reported to be dangerously unstable. Faced with this uniformly black picture, the Administration determined that the grave but still retrievable military situation prevailing at the time united action was proposed and pursued had, in June, altered radically, to the point where united action might have to be withdrawn from consideration by the French.

By mid-June American diplomacy was therefore in an unenviable position. At Geneva, very little progress had been made of a kind that could lead any of the Allies to expect a satisfactory outcome. Yet the alternative which the United States had reopened no longer seemed viable either. As Dulles told Smith, any "final agreement" with the French would be "quite impossible," for Paris was moving farther than ever from a determination that united action was necessary. "They want, and in effect have, an option on our intervention," Dulles wrote, "but they do not want to exercise it and the date of expiry of our option is fast running out." [Doc. 57] From Paris, in fact, Ambassador Dillon urged the Secretary that "the time limit be now" on U.S. intervention. [Doc. 56] And Dulles was fast concluding that Dillon was correct.

In view of France's feeling that, because of strong Assembly pressure for a settlement, no request could be made of the United States until every effort to reach agreement at Geneva had been exhausted, Dulles in effect decided, on June 15, that united action was no longer tenable. In a conversation with Bonnet, in which the French Ambassador read a message from Bidault which indicated that the French no longer considered the United States bound to intervene on satisfaction of the seven conditions, the Secretary put forth the difficulty of the American position. He stated that the United States stood willing to respond to a French request under the conditions of May 11, but that time and circumstance might make future intervention "impracticable or so burdensome as to be out of proportion to the results obtainable." While this offer would be unsatisfactory to Bidault, especially in his dealings with the Communists at Geneva, Dulles "could not conceive that it would be expected that the United States would give a third power the option to put it into war at times and under conditions wholly of the other's choosing." With this, united action was shelved, and it never appeared again in the form and with the purpose originally proposed.

As a break with France on united action became likely, American interest focused on a collective defense arrangement after a Geneva settlement with British participation. The French and British roles in U.S. planning were in effect reversed; Paris, it was felt, could no longer be counted on as an active participant in regional security. As their delegate to Geneva, Jean Chauvel, told Smith, Bidault was still hopeful of getting "something" from the conference. [Doc. 54] On the other hand, Eden told Smith on June 9 of his extreme pessimism over the course of the negotiations. Eden believed a recess in the talks was likely within a few days (it came, in fact, ten days later), and proposed that the Cambodian and Laotian cases be brought before the United Nations immediately after the end of the conference, even if France opposed the move. Smith drew from the conversation the strong impression that Eden believed negotiations to have failed and would now follow the American lead on a coalition to guarantee Cambodia and Laos "under umbrella of some UN action" (Smith's words). [Doc. 54] Days later, Dulles

likewise anticipated a British shift when he observed sardonically that events at Geneva had probably "been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known. I would assume," Dulles went on, "that the departure of Eden [from Geneva] would be evidence that there was no adequate reason for further delaying collective talks on Southeast Asia defense." But whether the United States and Great Britain would see eye-to-eye on their post-settlement security obligations in the region, and whether joint diplomatic initiatives to influence the nature of the settlement could be decided upon, remained outstanding questions.

The rebirth and demise of united action was a rare case of history repeated almost immediately after it had been made. The United States, having failed to interest Britain and France in united action prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, refused to be relegated to an unimportant role and determined instead to plunge ahead without British participation. But the conditions for intervention which had been given the French before the fall of Dienbienphu were now stiffened, most importantly by a greater detailing of the process the French government would have to go through before the United States would consider direct involvement.

Even while the French pondered the conditions, urged their refinement and redefinition to suit French policies, and insisted in the end that they saw no political obstacles separating the United States and France, Washington anticipated that the French were very unlikely to forward a request for U.S. involvement. Having learned something of French government priorities from the futile diplomatic bargaining in April, Department of State representatives in Paris and Washington saw that what the French wanted above all was not the military advantages of active U.S. intervention but the political benefits that might be derived from bringing into the open the fact that the two allies were negotiating American participation in the fighting. Thus, Dillon correctly assessed in mid-May that French inquiries about American conditions for intervention represented a "wish to use possibility of our intervention primarily to strengthen their hand at Geneva." The French hoped they would not have to call on the United States for direct support; they did hope the Communists would sense the dangers of proposing unacceptable terms for a settlement. Dillon's sensitivity to the French position was proven accurate by Bidault's memorandum to the President: France would, in reality, only call on the United States if an "honorable" settlement could clearly not be obtained at Geneva, for only under that circumstance could the National Assembly be persuaded that the Laniel government had done everything possible to achieve peace.

Recognition of the game the French were playing did not keep the United States from posing intervention as an alternative for them; but by adhering tenaciously to the seven conditions, it ruled out either precipitous American action or an open-ended commitment to be accepted or rejected by Paris. The State Department, guided on the military side by strong JCS objections to promising the French American combat troops in advance of a new and satisfactory command structure and strategic plan, became increasingly distraught with and suspicious of French motivations. "We cannot grant French an indefinite option on us without regard to intervening deterioration" of the military

situation, Dulles wrote on June 8. As much as the Administration wanted to avoid a sell-out at Geneva, it was aware that events in Indochina might preclude effective U.S. action even if the French suddenly decided they wanted American support. Put another way, one of the primary differences between American diplomacy before and after the fall of Dienbienphu was its ability to project ahead-to weigh the factors of time and circumstance against the distasteful possibility that Vietnam, by French default at the negotiating table or defeat on the battlefield, might be lost. As the scales tipped against united action, American security planning began to focus on the future possibilities of collective defense in Southeast Asia, while the pattern of diplomacy shifted from disenchantment with the Geneva Conference to attempts to bring about the best possible settlement terms.

V. THE MAJOR ISSUES AT THE CONFERENCE, MAY-JUNE

Washington's sense that the conference had essentially gotten nowhere-a view which Smith and Dulles believed was shared by Eden, as already noted-was not entirely accurate; nor was it precisely the thinking of other delegations. Following the initial French and Viet Minh proposals of May 8 and 10, respectively, some progress had in fact been made, although certainly not of an order that could have led any of the chief negotiators to expect a quick settlement. As the conference moved ahead, three major areas of contention emerged: the separation of belligerent forces, the establishment of a framework for political settlements in the three Indochinese states, and provision for effective control and supervision of the cease-fire.

A. SEPARATION OF THE BELLIGERENTS

The question how best to disentangle the opposing armies was most acute in Vietnam, but was also hotly debated as it applied to Cambodia and Laos. In Vietnam, Viet Minh forces were concentrated in the Tonkin Delta, though large numbers had long been active in Annam (central Vietnam) and Cochinchina (the south). The original French and Viet Minh proposals sought to take account of this situation by dismissing (although for separate reasons) the concept of single regroupment areas and forwarding instead the idea of perhaps several concentration points to facilitate a cease-fire. To this point, the Vietnamese delegation was in agreement: regroupment of the belligerents should in no way have the effect of dividing the country into makeshift military zones that could have lasting political implications.

It was an entirely different matter where the regroupment areas should be located; whether "foreign" (i.e., French) troops should be withdrawn, and if so, from what areas and during what period; whether irregular troops (i.e., Viet Minh guerrillas) should be disarmed and disbanded, and if so, whether they and their comrades in the regular forces should be integrated (as the Bao Dai delegation proposed) into the VNA; and, of crucial importance, whether a cease-fire should be dependent upon success in the regroupment process or, as Pham Van Dong proposed, upon an overall political settlement.

This last question was tackled first by the negotiators. On Eden's initiative, the conference had moved in mid-May from plenary to restricted sessions, where fewer delegates were present, no verbatim record was systematically kept, and the press was barred. Eden's expectation that the opportunities for greater intimacy among the delegates would enhance the possibility of making some headway was partially fulfilled. At the first restricted session on May 17, Molotov responded to Bidault's implication that one cause of continuing irresolution in the negotiations was the Viet Minh's insistence on coupling a military with a political settlement, whereas the French proposal had been geared to dealing only with the military portion before going on to discuss the political side. The Soviet delegate argued that while military and political matters were obviously closely linked, the conference might do best to address the military settlement first, since it was a point common to the French and Viet Minh proposals. Dong objected that military and political matters were so closely knit that they could not be separated; however, he agreed (although, we may surmise, with some reluctance) that the two problems could be dealt with in that order.

With a basic procedural obstacle removed, it was finally agreed that a cease-fire should have priority in the conference's order of business.* Toward that goal, the

* On May 20, Chou En-lai told Eden that military and political matters should indeed be dealt with separately, and that priority should be given to the attainment of a cease-fire. (Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954.) The Communists were quick to point out thereafter, though, that a political settlement should not be dropped from consideration. In fact, at the fifth restricted session, Molotov returned to the issue of military versus political settlements by proposing that they be considered at alternate meetings. The Western side held fast to concentrating on the cease-fire and turning to political matters only when agreement had been reached on the military side; this position was tacitly adopted.

problem of regroupment and disarmament of certain forces was taken up. At the fifth restricted session on May 24, Foreign Minister Bidault proposed, among other things, that a distinction be admitted between "regular" and "irregular" forces. Regular troops, he said, included all permanently organized forces, which for the Viet Minh meant regional as well as regular units. These, he suggested, should be regrouped into demilitarized zones, whereas loosely organized irregulars should be disarmed under some form of control. Pham Van Dong, in his reply, agreed on the urgency of a cease-fire and on the importance of disarming irregulars; but, in contrast to Bidault's proposal, Dong asserted that inasmuch as each side would have responsibility for all forces in areas under its control after the cease-fire, disarmament would take place naturally. Dong implicitly rejected the idea of controlled disarmament, therefore, by placing the problem in the post-rather than pre-cess-fire period.

The issues of regroupment and disarmament might have brought the conference to a standstill had not Pham Van Dong, at the sixth restricted session (May 25), suddenly

reversed his position on regroupment and proposed what amounted to the partitioning of Indochina. Following only moments after the Vietnamese delegate, Nguyen Quoc Dinh, had offered a plan based on the maintenance of his country's territorial integrity,* Dong suggested that in the course of the regroupment, specific

* The GVN's position called for the disbandment and disarming of Viet Minh forces and their later integration into a national army under international control; international supervision of elections to be conducted by the Bao Dai government at an unspecified future date; and recognition of the integrity of the Vietnamese state. The GVN also insisted that the withdrawal of foreign forces come after all other issues had been resolved.

territorial jurisdictions be established such that each side would have complete economic and administrative, no less than military, control. So as not to be misunderstood, Dong further urged that a temporary line of demarcation be drawn that would be topographically suitable and appropriate for transportation and communication within each zone thus created. The American delegate, General Smith, immediately dismissed Dong's proposal and advised that the conferees return to discussion of the original cease-fire issues. But, as was to become clear very soon, Dong's new move struck a responsive chord among the French even as it confirmed to the Bao Dai delegation its worst fears.

What had prompted Dong to introduce a partition arrangement when, at previous sessions, the Viet Minh had pushed repeatedly for a settlement procedure that would facilitate their consolidation of control over the entire country? What evidence we have is circumstantial, but it suggests that the Viet Minh delegation may have come under Sino-Soviet pressure to produce an alternative to cease-fire proposals that were consistently being rejected by the West. The partition alternative, specifically at the 16th parallel, had been intimated to American officials as early as March 4 by a member of the Soviet Embassy in London, apparently out of awareness of Franco-American objections to a coalition arrangement for Vietnam. On the opening day of the conference, moreover, Soviet officials had again approached American officials on the subject, this time at Geneva, averring that the establishment of a buffer state to China's south would be sufficient satisfaction of China's security needs. While these events do not demonstrate that Dong's partition proposal * was the direct outgrowth of Sino-Soviet disposition toward a territorial division, they do reveal that

* The DRV, it should be added, refused to call its proposal one for partition. As the official newspaper, Nhan Dan (The People) put it, the proposal amounted merely to "zonal readjustment" necessary to achieving a cease-fire. The readjustment "is only a stage in preparation for free general elections with a view toward the realization of national unity." Vietnam News Agency (VNA) broadcast in English to Southeast Asia, June 7, 1954.

partition was a solution, albeit temporary, which Moscow, at least, early found agreeable.

Whatever lay behind Dong's gambit, the French were put in the position of being challenged on their prior commitments to the Vietnamese. At the time the conference began, Bao Dai's government, perhaps mindful of past instances of partition-type solutions in Korea and Germany, and almost certainly suspicious of ultimate French intentions in the face of Viet Minh territorial demands, urged Paris to provide written assurance it would neither seek nor accept a division of Vietnam at Geneva. To make his own position perfectly clear, Bao Dai, through his representatives in the French capital, issued a communique (in the name of the GVN cabinet) which took note of various plans in the air for partition. The communique stated that partition "would be in defiance of Vietnamese national sentiment which has asserted itself with so much strength for the unity as well as for the independence of the country. Neither the Chief of State nor the national government of Vietnam admits that the unity of the country can be severed legally...." The cabinet warned that an agreement compromising that unity would never receive Vietnam's approval:

...neither the Chief of State, nor the Vietnamese Government will consider themselves [sic] as bound by decisions running counter to the interests, i.e., independence and unity, of their country that would, at the same time, violate the rights of the peoples and offer a reward to aggression in opposition to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and democratic ideals.

In response to this clear-cut statement, the French came forward with both oral and written promises. On May 3, Maurice Dejean, the Commissioner General for Indochina, said in Saigon:

The French Government does not intend to seek a settlement of the Indochina problem on the basis of a partition of Vietnamese territory. .

Formal assurances were given on this subject last April 25 by the French minister for foreign affairs to the minister for foreign affairs of Vietnam, and they were confirmed to him on May 1.

Written assurance came from Bidault on May 6 when he wrote Bao Dai that the task of the French government was to establish peace in Indochina, not "to seek here [at Geneva] a definitive political solution." Therefore, the French goal would be, said Bidault, to obtain a cease-fire with guarantees for the Associated States, hopefully with general elections in the future. Bidault continued:

As of now, I am however in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing would be more contrary to the intentions of the French government than to prepare for the establishment, at the expense of the unity of Vietnam, two States having each an international calling (vocation).

Bidault's support of Vietnam's opposition to partition, which he repeated privately before Eden and Smith at Geneva, collapsed once the new government of Pierre Mendès-France

took over in mid-June. Mendès-France, keenly aware of the tenor of French public opinion, was far more disposed than the Laniel-Bidault administration to making every effort toward achieving a reasonable settlement. While by no means prepared for a sell-out, Mendès-France quickly foresaw that agreement with the Viet Minh was unlikely unless he accepted the concept of partition. His delegate at Geneva, who remained Chauvel, and the new Commissioner General for Indochina, General Ely, reached the same conclusion. At a high-level meeting in Paris on June 24, the new government thoroughly revised the French negotiating position. The objectives for subsequent talks, it was decided, would be: (1) the regroupment of forces of both sides, and their separation by a line about at the 18th parallel;* (2) the establishment of enclaves under neutral control in the two zones, one for the French in the area of the Catholic bishoprics at Phat Diem and

* French insistence on the 18th parallel originated in the recommendation of General Navarre, who was asked several questions by the French delegation at Geneva regarding the likely impact of the then-existing military situation on the French negotiatory position. Navarre's responses were sent April 21. On the demarcation line, Navarre said that the 18th parallel would leave "us" the ancient political capital of Hue as well as Tourane (Da Nang), and permit the retention of militarily valuable terrain. (See General Ely's *Mémoires: l'Indochine dans la Tourmente* [Paris: Plon, 1964], p. 112, and Lacouture and Devillers, *La fin d'une guerre*, p. 126.) Thus, the choice of the 18th parallel was based on military considerations, and apparently assumed a continuing French role in southern Vietnam after partition.

Bui Chu, one for the Viet Minh at an area to be determined; (3) the maintenance of Haiphong in French hands in order to assist in the regroupment. The meeting also decided that, for the purpose of psychological pressure on the Viet Minh if not military preparedness for future contingencies, France should break with past practice and announce plans to send a contingent of conscripts (later determined as two divisions) to Indochina. Thus, by late June, the French had come around to acceptance of the need to explore a territorial settlement without, as we have already observed, informing the Vietnamese that Bidault's and Dejean's assurances had been superseded. On June 26, Paris formally notified Washington and London that Chauvel would soon begin direct talks with Pham Van Dong on a partition arrangement that would provide the GVN with the firmest possible territorial base. [[Doc. 66](#)]

While ground had been broken on the cease-fire for Vietnam, debate continued on Laos and Cambodia. Prior to and after Dong's proposal of May 25, the delegates argued back and forth without progress over the relationship between the conflict in Vietnam and that in Cambodia and Laos. The Khmer and Laotian delegates insisted they represented free and independent governments which were being challenged by a handful of indigenous renegades assisted by the invading Viet Minh. Thus, the delegates reasoned, their situations were quite different from the "civil war" in Vietnam, and therefore cease-fires could readily be established in Laos and Cambodia by the simple expedient of removing

the aggressors. These delegates saw no reason--and they received solid support from the American, French and British representatives--for acceding to the Viet Minh demand that cease-fires in their two countries be contingent upon, and hence forced to occur simultaneously with, one in Vietnam.

The Communists' retorts left little room for compromise. Pham Van Dong held, as before, that he spoke for "governments" which were being refused admission to the conference. The Pathet Lao and the Free Khmer were separate, genuine "national liberation movements" whose stake in their respective countries, Dong implied, would have to be acknowledged before a cease-fire could be arranged anywhere in Indochina. Molotov buttressed this argument with the claim that Laos and Cambodia were no more "independent" than Vietnam. Using a common negotiating tactic, he excerpted from a public statement by Dulles to point out how France was still being urged by the United States in May to grant real independence to all three Indochinese states, not just Vietnam. Molotov's only retreat was on the extent of Pathet Lao and Free Khmer territorial control. He admitted that while the Viet Minh were dominant in Vietnam, the Khmer-Laotian resistance movements controlled some lesser amount of territory.

For a while it seemed that the conference would become inextricably bogged down on the question whether the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were creatures of the Viet Minh or genuine nationalist forces. Certainly the Viet Minh delegation remained steadfast. At the fourth restricted session (May 21), Pham Van Dong made his implication of the previous sessions clearer when he said he had always understood the French cease-fire proposal to have applied to all Indochina (an outright fabrication) inasmuch as the problems in the three states were different only in degree, not in nature. If Cambodia and Laos were detached from Vietnam in the discussions, Dong said, the cease-fire issue would be attacked in the wrong way and a satisfactory solution would not be reached. The warning of no cease-fire settlement for Cambodia and Laos without one for Vietnam was clear.

These last remarks by Dong, however, were no longer wholly in accord with what the Chinese were privately indicating. Chou En-lai, in the same conversation with Eden on May 20 in which Chou had agreed to separate military from political matters, also admitted that political settlements might be different for the three Indochinese states. Chou thus moved one step closer to the Western position, which held that the Laotian and Cambodian cases were substantially different from that in Vietnam and hence should be decided separately. The concession, however small, paved the way for agreement to Eden's proposal on May 25 that the problem of a cease-fire in Vietnam be dealt with separately and directly by having the Viet Minh and French military commands meet in Geneva and on the spot in Vietnam (later determined as Trung Gia) to discuss technical aspects of the regroupment. The military staffs would report their findings to the conferees. On June 2 formal agreement was reached between the commands to begin work; but it was not until June 10, apparently, that the Viet Minh actually consented that their secret talks with the French, like the discussions of the military commands, should be concerned only with Vietnam to the exclusion of Laotian and Cambodian problems. Thus, it would seem that the Viet Minh position on the indivisibility of the three Indochinese states for purposes of a settlement was undercut by the Chinese (doubtless

with Soviet support); yet for about three weeks following Chou's talk with Eden, the Viet Minh had privately refused to deal with the French on Vietnam alone.

B. POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

Communist agreement to treat Laos and Cambodia separately as well as to consider a territorial division did not, however, signal imminent progress on the substance of military or political settlements for those countries any more than for Vietnam. Several additional plenary and restricted sessions made no headway at all during late May and the first weeks of June. Eden's disappointment led him to state to his fellow delegates:

In respect . . . to the arrangements for supervision and to the future of Laos and Cambodia, the divergencies are at present wide and deep. Unless we can narrow them now without further delay, we shall have failed in our task. We have exhausted every expedient procedure which we could devise to assist us in our work. We all know now what the differences are. We have no choice but to resolve them or to admit our failure. For our part, the United Kingdom Delegation is still willing to attempt to resolve them here or in restricted session or by any other method which our colleagues may prefer.

But, gentlemen, if the positions remain as they are today, I think it is our clear-cut duty to say so to the world and to admit that we have failed.

Days later, his pessimism ran even deeper as the conference indeed seemed close to a breakdown. The Americans did not help matters, either: "Bedell Smith," Eden has since divulged, "showed me a telegram from President Eisenhower advising him to do everything in his power to bring the conference to an end as rapidly as possible, on the grounds that the Communists were only spinning things out to suit their own military purposes."

For reasons which will be speculated on subsequently, the Soviets and Chinese were not prepared to admit that the conference had failed and were willing to forestall that prospect by making concessions sufficient to justify its continuation. While the Americans may have wished to see a breakdown, Eden was not yet convinced that was inevitable. Again, his patience was rewarded. On June 16, Chou told the foreign secretary that the Cambodian resistance forces were small, making a political settlement with the Royal Government "easily" obtainable. In Laos, where those forces were larger, regroupment areas along the border with Vietnam (in Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces) would be required, Chou thought. Asked by Eden whether there might not be difficulty in gaining Viet Minh agreement to the withdrawal of their troops from the two countries, Chou replied it would "not be difficult" in the context of a withdrawal of all foreign forces. The CPR would even be willing to consider the royal governments as heading independent states that could maintain their ties to the French Union, provided no American bases were established in their territories. China's preeminent concern, Eden deduced, was that the United States might use Laos and Cambodia as jump-off points for an attack on the mainland.

From the conversation, Eden "received a strong impression that he [Chou wanted a settlement and I accordingly urged Georges Bidault to have a talk with him and to discuss this new offer." On the next day (June 17), Bidault met with Chou for the first time, as well as with Molotov, and reported the Communists' great concern over a break-up of the conference. Two days later a French redraft of a Chinese proposal to broaden the military staff conferences to include separate talks on Laos and Cambodia was accepted.

This first major breakthrough in the negotiations, with the Chinese making an overture that evidently had full Soviet backing,* seems not to have had Viet Minh

* When Molotov met with Smith on June 19, the Soviet representative said he saw the possibility of agreement on Laos and Cambodia so long as neither side (i.e., the French and Viet Minh) "adopted one-sided views or put forward extreme pretensions." Molotov said about 50 percent of Laotian territory was not controlled by the royal government (putting the Pathet Lao case in the negative), with a much smaller movement in Cambodia. The tone of Smith's report on this conversation suggests that Molotov saw no obstacles to Viet Minh withdrawal of its "volunteers." Smith tel. DULTE 202 from Geneva, June 19, 1954.

approval. At the same time as the Chinese were saying, for example in a New China News Agency (NCNA) broadcast of June 17, that all three Communist delegations had "all along maintained that the conditions in each of the three Indochinese countries are not exactly alike," and hence that "conditions peculiar to each of these countries should be taken into consideration," the Viet Minh were claiming that "the indivisibility of the three questions of Vietnam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao" was one of several "fundamental questions" which the conference had failed to resolve. In fact, of course, that question had been resolved; yet the Viet Minh continued to proclaim the close unity of the Viet Minh, Pathet Lao, and Free Khmer under the banner of their tri-national united front alliance formed in 1951. No doubt the Viet Minh were seeking to assure their cadres and soldiers in Cambodia and Laos that Pham Van Dong would not bargain away their fate at the conference table, but it may also be that the broadcasts were meant to imply Viet Minh exceptions to objectionable Sino-Soviet concessions.

Those concessions, first on the separability of Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam and subsequently on Viet Minh involvement there, compelled the DRV delegation to take a new tack. On the former questions Viet Minh representatives indicated on June 16 during "underground" discussions with the French that insofar as Vietnam was concerned, their minimum terms were absolute control of the Tonkin Delta, including Hanoi and Haiphong. While the French were reluctant to yield both cities, which they still controlled, a bargaining point had been established inasmuch as the Viet Minh were now willing to discuss specific geographic objectives. On the second question, the Viet Minh, apparently responding to Chou En-lai's "offer" of their withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos, indicated flexibility at least toward the latter country. A Laotian delegate reported June 23, following a meeting with Pham Van Dong in the garden of the Chinese

delegation's villa, that the Viet Minh were in apparent accord on the withdrawal of their "volunteers" and even on Laos' retention of French treaty bases. The Viet Minh's principal demand was that French military personnel in Laos be reduced to a minimum. Less clearly, Dong alluded to the creation in Laos of a government of "national union," Pathet Lao participation in 1955 elections for the national assembly, and a "temporary arrangement" governing areas dominated by Pathet Lao military forces. But these latter points were interpreted as being suggestive; Dong had come around to the Western view shared (now by the Soviets and Chinese) that the Pathet Lao not be accorded either military or political weight equal to that of the royal government. Later in the conference, Dong would make a similar retreat on Cambodia.

C. CONTROL AND SUPERVISION

Painstakingly slow progress toward cease-fires and political settlements for the Indochinese states also characterized the work of devising supervisory organs to oversee the implementation and preservation of the cease-fire. Yet here again, the Communist side was not so intransigent as to make agreement impossible.

Three separate but interrelated issues dominated the discussions of control and supervision at this stage of the conference and afterward. First, there was sharp disagreement over the structure of the supervisory organ: Should it consist solely of joint commissions composed of the belligerents, or should it have superimposed above an international authority possessing decisionmaking power? Second, the composition of any supervisory organ other than the joint commissions was also hotly disputed: Given agreement to have "neutral" nations observe the truce, which nations might be considered "neutral"? Finally, if it were agreed that there should be a neutral control body, how would it discharge its duties?

In the original Viet Minh proposals, implementation of the cease-fire was left to joint indigenous commissions, with no provision for higher, international supervision. Vehement French objections led to a second line of defense from the Communist side. At the fourth plenary session (May 14), Molotov suggested the setting up of a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) such as existed in Korea, and said he did not foresee any insurmountable problem in reaching agreement on its membership. But Molotov's revision left much to be determined and, from the Western standpoint, much to be desired too. Serious debate on the control and supervision problem did not get underway until early June. At that time, Molotov expressly rejected the American plan, supported by the Indochinese delegations and Great Britain, to have the United Nations supervise a cease-fire. He argued that the UN had nothing to do with the Geneva Conference, especially as most of the conferees were not UN members. Returning to his plan for an NNSC, Molotov reiterated his view that Communist countries could be as neutral as capitalist countries; hence, he said, the problem was simply one of choosing which countries should comprise the supervisory organ, and suggested that the yardstick be those having diplomatic and political relations with both France and the Viet Minh. As to that body's relationship to the joint commissions, Molotov shied away from the Western proposal to make them subordinate to the neutral commission. "It would be in

the interest of our work to recognize," Molotov said, "that these commissions should act in coordination and in agreement between each other, but should not be subordinate to each other." No such hierarchical relationship had existed in Korea, so why one in Indochina? Finally, the foreign minister saw no reason why an NNSC could not reach decisions by unanimous vote on "important" questions. Disputes among or within the commissions, Molotov concluded, would be referred to the states guaranteeing the settlement, which would, if necessary, take "collective measures" to resolve them.

The Western position was stated succinctly by Bidault. Again insisting on having "an authority remote from the heat of the fighting and which would have a final word to say in disputes," Bidault said the neutral control commission should have absolute responsibility for the armistice. It would have such functions as regrouping the regular forces, supervising any demilitarized zones, conducting the exchange of prisoners, and implementing measures for the non-introduction of war materiel into Indochina. While the joint commission would have an important role to play in these control processes, such as in working out agreement for the safe passage of opposing armies from one zone to another or for POW exchange, its functions would have to be subordinate to the undisputed authority of a neutral mechanism. Bidault did not specify which nations fitted his definition of "neutrality" and whether they would decide by majority or unanimous vote. These omissions were corrected by Eden a few days later when he suggested the Colombo Powers (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia), which he argued were all Asian, had all been actively discussing Indochina outside the conference, were five in number and hence impervious to obstruction by a two-to-two vote (as on the NNSC) or requirement for unanimity, and were truly impartial.

The basis for agreement on the vital question of supervising a cease-fire seemed at this stage nonexistent. The Communists had revised their position by admitting the feasibility of a neutral nations' control organ in addition to joint commissions of the belligerents. But they clearly hoped to duplicate in Indochina the ineffective machinery they had foisted on the United Nations command at Panmunjom, one in which effective peacekeeping action was basically proscribed by the built-in veto of a four-power authority evenly divided among Communist and non-Communist representatives. The West, on the other hand, absolutely refused to experiment again with an NNSC; a neutral organ was vital, but it could not include Communist representatives, who did not know the meaning of neutrality. If the United Nations was not acceptable to the Communists, the Colombo Powers should be.

However remote these positions, various kinds of trade-offs must have been apparent to the negotiators. Despite differing standards of "neutrality" and "impartiality," for instance, compromise on the membership problem seemed possible. The real dilemma was the authority of a neutral body. Unless superior to the joint commissions, it would never be able to resolve disputes, and unless it had the power to enforce its own decisions, it would never be more than an advisory organ. Whether some new formula could be found somewhere between the Communists' insistence on parallel authority and the West's preference for a hierarchical arrangement remained to be seen.

On June 19 the Korea phase of the conference ended without reaching a political settlement. The conferees at that point agreed to a prolonged recess by the delegation leaders on the understanding that the military committees would continue to meet at Geneva and in the field. Eden wrote to the Asian Commonwealth prime ministers that "if the work of the committees is sufficiently advanced, the Heads of Delegations will come back." Until that time, the work of the conference would go on in restricted session. Chauvel and Pham Van Dong remained at their posts; Molotov returned to Moscow; Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, made important stopovers in New Delhi, Rangoon, and Nanning that were to have important bearing on the conference. Smith remained in Geneva, but turned the delegation over to Johnson. It was questionable whether the Under Secretary would take over again; gloom was so thick in Washington over the perceived lack of progress in the talks and the conviction ' that the new Mendès-France government would reach a settlement as soon as the conference reconvened, that Dulles cabled Smith: "Our thinking at present is that our role at Geneva should soon be restricted to that of observer. . . ." [Doc. 65] As for Eden, he prepared to accompany Churchill on a trip to Washington for talks relating to the conference and prospects for a Southeast Asia defense pact.

VI. THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT

With its preconceptions of Communist negotiating strategy confirmed by the harshness of the first Viet Minh proposals, which Washington did not regard as significantly watered down by subsequent Sino-Soviet alterations, and with its military alternatives no longer considered relevant to the war, the United States began to move in the direction of becoming an influential actor at the negotiations. This move was not dictated by a sudden conviction that Western capacity for inducing concessions from the Communist side had increased; nor was the shift premised on the hope that we might be able to drive a wedge between the Viet Minh and their Soviet and Chinese friends. Rather, Washington believed that inasmuch as a settlement was certain to come about, and even though there was near-equal certainty it could not support the final terms, basic American and Western interests in Southeast Asia might still be preserved if France could be persuaded to toughen its stand. Were concessions still not forthcoming--were the Communists, in other words, to stiffen in response to French firmness--the Allies would be able to consult on their next moves with the confidence every reasonable effort to reestablish peace had been attempted.

As already observed, the American decision to play a more decisive role at the conference depended on gaining British support. The changing war situation now made alignment with the British necessary for future regional defense, especially as Washington was informed of the probability that a partition settlement (which London had foreseen months before) would place all Indochina in or within reach of Communist hands. The questions remained how much territory the Communists could be granted without compromising non-Communist Indochina's security, what measures were needed to guarantee that security, and what other military and political principles were vital to any settlement which the French would also be willing to adopt in the negotiations. When

the chief ministers of the United States and Great Britain met in Washington in late June, these were the issues they had to confront.

The British and American representatives-Eden, Churchill, Dulles, and Eisenhower-brought to the talks positions on partition and regional security that, for all the differences, left considerable room for a harmonization of viewpoints. The UK, as the Americans well knew, was never convinced either that Indochina's security was inextricably linked to the security of all Asia, or that the Franco-Viet Minh war would ever bring into question the surrender of all Indochina to the Communists. London considered partition a feasible solution, but was already looking beyond that to some more basic East-West understanding that would have the effect of producing a *laissez-faire* coexistence between the Communist and Western powers in the region. As Eden recalled his thinking at the time, the best way of keeping Communism out of Southeast Asia while still providing the necessary security within which free societies might evolve was to build a belt of neutral states assisted by the West. The Communists might not see any advantage to this arrangement, he admitted. But:

If we could bring about a situation where the Communists believed that there was a balance of advantage to them in arranging a girdle of neutral states, we might have the ingredients of a settlement.

Once the settlement was achieved, a system for guaranteeing the security of the neutral states thus formed would be required, Eden held. Collective defense, of the kind that would ensure action without unanimity among the contracting parties--a system "of the Locarno type"--seemed most reasonable to him. These points, in broad outline, were those presented by him and Churchill.

The United States had from the beginning dismissed the viability of a partition solution. Dulles' public position in his major speech of March 29 that Communist control even of part of Indochina would merely be the prelude to total domination was fully supported in private by both State and Defense. Nevertheless, the Government early recognized the possibility that partition, however distasteful, might be agreed to among the French and Communist negotiators. As a result, on May 5, the Defense Department drew up a settlement plan that included provision for a territorial division. As little of Vietnam as possible should be yielded, Defense argued, with the demarcation line fixed in the north and "defined by some defensible geographic boundary (i.e., the Red or Black Rivers, or the Annamite Mountains) In accord with the French position that evolved from the meeting of Mendès-France's cabinet on June 24, Defense urged provision for a Vietnamese enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area or, alternatively, internationalization of the port facilities there. Fairly well convinced, however, that partition would be fragile, Defense also called for "sanctions" against any form of Communist aggression in Laos, Cambodia, or Thailand, and for allied agreement to united action in the event the Communists violated a cease-fire by conducting subversive activities in the non-Communist area of Vietnam.

The Defense proposal amounted to containing the Communist forces above the 20th parallel while denying them sovereign access to the sea. This position went much further than that of the French, who also favored a demarcation line geared to military requirements but were willing to settle on roughly the 18th parallel. Moreover, when the five-power military staff conference met in Washington in early June, it reported (on the 9th) that a line midway between the 17th and 18th parallels (from Thakhek in Laos westward to Dong Hoi on the north Vietnam seacoast) would be defensible in the event partition came about. [Doc. 61] Undercutting the Defense plan still further was the French disposition to yield on an enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were the Viet Minh to press for their own enclave in southern Vietnam. As Chauvel told U. Alexis Johnson, should the choice come to a trade-off of enclaves or a straight territorial division, the French preferred the latter. [Doc. 62] Thus, by mid-June, a combination of circumstances made it evident to the Administration that some more flexible position on the location of the partition line would have to be, and could be, adopted.

American acceptance of partition as a workable arrangement put Washington and London on even terms. Similarly, on the matter of an overall security "umbrella" for Southeast Asia, the two allies also found common ground. While the United States found "Locarno" an unfortunate term, the Government did not dispute the need to establish a vigorous defense mechanism capable of acting despite objections by one or more members. It will be recalled that the NSC Planning Board, on May 19, had outlined three possible regional groupings dependent upon the nature and timing of a settlement at Geneva. Now, in late June, circumstances dictated the advisability of concentrating on the "Group 2" formula, in which the UK, the United States, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand would participate but not France (unless it was decided that the pact would apply to Indochina). The concerned states would exchange information, act as a united front against Communism, provide actual assistance to Asian members against external attack or "Communist insurrection," and make use of Asian facilities and/or forces in their defense assistance program.

American planning for what was to become SEATO evinced concern, however, about the commitment of American forces in cases of Communist infiltration and subversion. As the Planning Board's paper notes, the role of the United States and other countries should be limited to support of the country requesting assistance; *Asian* member nations would be expected to "contribute facilities and, if possible, at least token military contingents." The Board's paper did not represent a final policy statement; but it did reflect American reluctance, particularly on the part of the President and the Joint Chiefs, to have American forces drawn into the kind of local conflict the Administration had steered clear of in Vietnam. On this question of limiting the Western commitment, the British, to judge from their hostility toward involvement against the Viet Minh, were also in general agreement.

Aside from partition and regional security, a basis also existed for agreement to assisting the French in their diplomatic work by the device of some carefully worded warning to the Communists. The British, before as well as after Dienbienphu, were firmly against issuing threats to the Communists that involved military consequences. When united

action had first been broached, London rejected raising the threat of a naval blockade and carrying it out if the Chinese continued to assist the Viet Minh. Again, when united action came up in private U.S.-French discussions during May, the British saw no useful purpose in seeking to influence discussions at Geneva by making it known to the Communists that united action would follow a breakdown in negotiations. The situation was different now. Instead of threatening direct military action, London and Washington apparently agreed, the West could profit from an open-ended warning tied to a lack of progress at Geneva. When Eden addressed the House of Commons on June 23 prior to explaining for Washington, he said: "It should be clear to all that the hopes of agreement [at Geneva] would be jeopardized if active military operations in Indochina were to be intensified while negotiations for an armistice are proceeding at Geneva. If this reminder is needed, I hope that it may be heeded." Eden was specifically thinking of a renewed Viet Minh offensive in the Delta, but was not saying what might happen once negotiations were placed in jeopardy.

This type of warning was sounded again at the conclusion of the Anglo-American talks, and encouragement for it came from Paris. In the same aide-memoire of June 26 in which the French Government had requested that the United States counsel Saigon against a violent reaction to partition, Washington was also urged to join with London in a declaration. The declaration would "state in some fashion or other that, if it is not possible to reach a reasonable settlement at the Geneva Conference, a serious aggravation of international relations would result [[Doc. 66](#)]. The French suggestion was acted upon. Eisenhower and Churchill issued a statement on June 29 that "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated." In retrospect, the statement may have had an important bearing on the Communists' negotiating position--a point to which we shall return subsequently.

The joint statement referred to "an acceptable agreement," and indeed the ramifications of that phrase constituted the main subject of the U.S.-UK talks. In an unpublicized agreement, the two governments concurred on a common set of principles which, if worked into the settlement terms, would enable both to "respect" the armistice. These principles, known subsequently as the Seven Points, were communicated to the French. As reported by Eden, they were:

- (1) Preservation of the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia, and assurance of Viet Minh withdrawal from those countries
- (2) Preservation of at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta, with the line of demarcation no further south than one running generally west from Dong Hoi
- (3) No restrictions on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers"
- (4) No "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"

- (5) No provision that would "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means"
- (6) Provision for "the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam"
- (7) Provision for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement."

The Seven Points represented something of an American diplomatic victory when viewed in the context of the changed Administration position on partition. While any loss of territory to the Communists predetermined the official American attitude toward the settlement--Eden was told the United States would almost certainly be unable to guarantee it--the terms agreed upon with the British were sufficiently hard that, if pushed through by the French, they would bring about a tolerable arrangement for Indochina. The sticking point for Washington lay not in the terms but in the unlikelihood that the British, any more than the French, would actually stand by them against the Communists. Thus, Dulles wrote: ". . . we have the distinct impression that the British look upon this [memorandum of the Seven Points] merely as an optimum solution and that they would not encourage the French to hold out for a solution as good as this." The Secretary observed that the British, during the talks, were unhappy about finding Washington ready only to "respect" the final terms reached at Geneva. They had preferred a stronger word, yet they "wanted to express these 7 points merely as a 'hope' without any indication of firmness on our part." The United States, quite aside from what was said in the Seven Points, "would not want to be associated in any way with a settlement which fell materially short of the 7 point memorandum." [Doc. 70] Thus, the seven points, while having finally bound the United States and Great Britain to a common position on the conference, did not allay Washington's anxiety over British and French readiness to conclude a less-than-satisfactory settlement. The possibility of a unilateral American withdrawal from the conference was still being "given consideration," Dulles reported, even as the Seven Points were agreed upon.

Despite reservations about our Allies' adherence to the Seven Points, the United States still hoped to get French approval of them. On July 6, Dillon telegraphed the French reaction as given him by Parodi, the secretary-general of the cabinet. With the exception of Point 5, denoting national elections, the French were in agreement. They were confused about an apparent conflict between the elections provision and Point 4, under which political provisions, which would include elections, were not to risk loss of retained Vietnam. In addition, they, too, felt American agreement merely to "respect" any agreement was too weak a term, and requested clarification of its meaning.

Dulles responded the next day (July 7) to both matters. Points 4 and 5 were not in conflict, he said. It was quite possible that an agreement in line with the Seven Points might still not prevent Indochina from going Communist. The important thing, therefore, was to arrange for national elections in a way that would give the South Vietnamese a liberal breathing spell:

since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after

cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements [in South Vietnam] best chance. We believe important that no date should be set now and especially that no conditions should be accepted by French which would have direct or indirect effect of preventing effective international supervision of agreement ensuring political as well as military guarantees.

And so far as "respect" of that agreement was concerned, the United States and Britain meant they "would not oppose a settlement which conformed to Seven Points. . . . It does not of course mean we would guarantee such settlement or that we would necessarily support it publicly. We consider 'respect' as strong a word as we can possibly employ in the circumstances. . . . 'Respect' would also mean that we would not seek directly or indirectly to upset settlement by force." *

* Dulles to American Embassy, Paris, tel. No. 77, July 7, 1954 (Secret). [[Doc. 64](#)] Regarding the U.S. view of a Ho Chi Minh electoral victory, we not only have the well-known comment of Eisenhower that Ho, at least in early 1954, would have garnered 80 percent of the vote. (See [Mandate for Change](#) [[Garden City, New York: Doubleday](#)], pp. [337-38](#).) In addition, there is a Department of State memorandum of conversation of May 31, 1954, in which Livingston Merchant reportedly "recognized the possibility that in Viet Nam Ho might win a plebiscite, if held today."

Dulles' clarification of the American position on elections in Vietnam, together with his delimitation of the nation's obligation towards a settlement, did not satisfy the French completely but served the important purpose of enlightening them as to American intentions. Placed beside the discussions with Eden and Churchill, the thrust of American diplomacy at this time clearly was to leave no question in the minds of our allies as to what we considered the elements in a reasonable Indochina settlement and what we would likely do once a settlement were achieved.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 3, "The Geneva Conference, May-July, 1954"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 146-178

VII. TOWARD A SETTLEMENT: THE LAST THIRTY DAYS

A. *THE BARGAINING CONTINUES*

While the French and British pondered the implications of the Seven Points, bargaining continued behind the scenes against a background of further military advance by the Viet Minh. At about the same time the Viet Minh made their first specific partition proposal, their forces in the field completed their deployment from the Dienbienphu area. By mid-June, according to American intelligence, the Viet Minh were believed prepared for a massive attack in the Delta. Another report spoke of their renewed attention to southern Annam and of an apparent buildup of military strength there. Not surprisingly in light of these developments, the Viet Minh, in late June, responded to the French proposal of a division at the 18th parallel with a plan for a line in southern Annam running northwest from the 13th to the 14th parallel, i.e., from Tuy Hoa on the coast through Pleiku to the Cambodian border. Moreover, in secret talks with the French, the Viet Minh's vice-minister for national defense, Ta Quang Buu, also insisted on French withdrawal from the Delta within two months of a cease-fire, in contrast to French demands for a four-month interval. [Doc. 69] As suggested by Lacouture and Devillers, the Viet Minh may have been seeking to capitalize not only on their improved military position in the Delta, where French Union forces were still in retreat, but also on Mendès-France's reputation as a man of peace obviously desirous of a settlement.

This resurgence of Viet Minh toughness on terms for a cessation of hostilities applied also to Laos and Cambodia. In the military staff conferences that had begun separately on those two countries in late June, no progress was made. The Viet Minh indicated, in the Laotian case, that they had already withdrawn; if forces opposing the royal government remained (as in fact some 15,000 did), negotiations with the resistance groups would have to be undertaken. Thus, despite Chou En-lai's claim that Viet Minh withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia could easily be accomplished, the Viet Minh were hardly ready to move out unless they received substantial guarantees (such as a permanent regroupment area), which the royal governments refused to give.

Whether because of or in spite of Viet Minh intransigence, the Chinese forcefully made known their earnest desire to keep the conference moving. In an important encounter at Bern on June 23, Chou En-lai several times emphasized to Mendès-France that the main thing was a cease-fire, on which he hoped progress could be made before all the heads of delegation returned to Geneva. Regarding Laos and Cambodia, Chou thought regroupment areas for the insurgents would be necessary, but reiterated that national unity was the affair of the royal governments; he hoped the resistance elements might find a place in the national life of their respective countries. Chou told the French premier, as he had told Eden previously, that no American bases could be permitted in those countries; yet Chou spoke sympathetically of the French Union. Turning finally to the Viet Minh, Chou urged that direct contact be established between them and the Vietnamese. He promised that for his part, he would see that the Viet Minh were thoroughly prepared for serious discussions on a military settlement. Clearly, the Chinese were far more interested in moving forward toward a cease-fire than were their Viet Minh counterparts.

Even though the Viet Minh were making demands that the French, Cambodians, and Laotians could not accept, the debate was narrowing to specifics. The question when

national elections in Vietnam should be held is illustrative. The Viet Minh did not budge from their insistence that elections occur six months after the cease-fire. But the French, attempting to make some headway in the talks, retreated from insistence on setting no date (a position the Vietnamese had supported) and offered to hold elections 18 months after completion of the regroupment process, or between 22 and 23 months after the cessation of hostilities. [Doc. 69] The French now admitted that while they still looked forward to retaining Haiphong and the Catholic bishoprics as long as possible, perhaps in some neutral environment, total withdrawal from the north would probably be necessary to avoid cutting up Vietnam into enclaves. [Doc. 66] But partition in any manner faced the French with hostile Vietnamese, and it was for this reason that Chauvel not only suggested American intervention to induce Vietnamese self-control, but also received Pham Van Dong's approval, in a conversation July 6, to having the military commands rather than governments sign the final armistice so as to avoid having to win Vietnamese consent. As Ngo Dinh Diem, who became prime minister June 18, suspected, the French were prepared to pull out of Tonkin as part of the cease-fire arrangements.

On the matter of control and supervision, the debate also became more focused even as the gulf between opposing views remained wide. The chief points of contention were, as before, the composition and authority of the neutral supervisory body; but the outlines of an acceptable arrangement were beginning to form. Thus, on composition, the Communist delegations, in early July, began speaking in terms of an odd-numbered (three or five) neutral commission chaired by India, with pro-Communist and pro-Western governments equally sharing the remaining two or four places. Second, on the powers of that body, dispute persisted as to whether it would have separate but parallel authority with the joint commissions or supreme authority; whether and on what questions it would make judgments by unanimous vote; and whether it would (as the French proposed) be empowered to issue majority and minority reports in case of disagreement. These were all fundamental issues, but the important point is that the Communist side refused to consider them irremovable obstacles to agreement. As Molotov's understudy, Kuznetsov (the deputy foreign minister), put it, the Soviet and French proposals on control and supervision revealed "rapprochement in the points of view on certain questions. It is true with respect to the relationships between the mixed commission and the international supervisory commission. This rapprochement exists also in regard to the question of the examination of the functions and duties of the commission..." In fact, a "rapprochement" did not exist; but the Soviets, interestingly, persisted in their optimism that a solution could be found.

B. CHINESE DIPLOMACY

While the negotiations went on among the second-string diplomats, a different kind of diplomacy was being carried on elsewhere. Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, advanced Communist China's effort, actually begun in late 1952, to woo its Asian neighbors with talk of peaceful coexistence. This diplomatic offensive, which was to have an important bearing on the outcome at Geneva, had borne its first fruit in April 1954, when Chou reached agreement with Nehru over Tibet. At that time, the Chinese first introduced the "five principles" they vowed to follow in their relations with other nations. The five

principles are: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

Chou's first stopover was in New Delhi, the scene of his initial success. On June 28 he and Nehru reaffirmed the five principles and expressed the hope that a peaceful settlement in Indochina would be concluded in conformity with them. Similar sentiments appeared in a joint statement from Rangoon, scene of talks with Prime Minister U Nu. Promises were exchanged, moreover, for the maintenance of close contact between China and Burma, and support was voiced for the right of countries having different social systems to coexist without interference from outside. "Revolution cannot be exported," the joint statement proclaimed; "at the same time outside interference with the common will expressed by the people of any nation should not be permitted."

Peking made full use of these diplomatic achievements by contrasting them with the American policy of ruthless expansionism, which Peking said was carried out by Washington under the label of opposing Communism. Peking proclaimed that the era of colonialism which the United States was seeking to perpetuate in Indochina had come to an end. "A new era has dawned in which Asian countries can coexist peacefully and establish friendly relations on the basis of respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty and mutual nonaggression," said *Jen-min jih-pao*. Another newspaper, *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, offered similar testimony to the inspirational effect of the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese agreements, considering them to conform to the interests of all Asian peoples. The daily castigated the American "policy of strength" as being totally incompatible with the five principles. Clearly, China was exploiting its gains through diplomacy not simply to acquire Asian support (and thus detract from pro-Westernism in the region), but more broadly to muster recognition for China as the leading Asian power in the fight against "imperialism" and "colonialism."

Chou's diplomatic efforts took a different turn, it seems, when he met with Ho Chi Minh at Nanning, on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, from July 3-5. Although the final communique merely stated that the two leaders "had a full exchange of views on the Geneva Conference with respect to the question of the restoration of peace in Indochina and related questions," it subsequently appeared that much more may have taken place. According to observers in Hong Kong, Chou pressed for the meeting out of fear that the Viet Minh might engage in intensified military action that would destroy chances for an armistice and upset China's budding role as an Asian peacemaker. Conceivably, Chou sought to persuade Ho that his territorial gains were about as much as he could expect at that juncture without risking an end to negotiations and renewed American attempts to forge a military alliance for intervention. To judge from the Viet Minh reaction to the talks, Ho was not completely satisfied with Chou's proposed tactics.

Momentarily leaving aside Chou's motivations, it is vital to note the impact of the talks on the Geneva negotiations. On July 9, Chauvel dined with Li K'enung and Chang Wen-t'ien, a vice-minister for foreign affairs and CPR ambassador to the Soviet Union. Chauvel opened the conversation--as he later recounted to Johnson--by complaining that discussions with the Viet Minh were not going well, that Viet Minh demands were

exorbitant and well beyond Chou En-lai's stated position. The Chinese delegates evinced surprise but said nothing in direct reply. However, Chang did report that Chou had had a "very good meeting" with Ho Chi Minh, the results of which "would be helpful to French." Chauvel received the impression--one which seems, in retrospect, to have been accurate--that the Viet Minh had been given a free hand by the Soviets and Chinese up to the point where their demands were unacceptable to the French, at which time the Soviets and/or Chinese felt compelled to intervene. [Doc. 66] If such was the case, Chou's talk with Ho, coming after Mendès-France and his negotiators showed no sign of being more compromising than their predecessors, Laniel and Bidault, may have been intended to inform the Viet Minh that the "point" had been reached and that they had to soften their demands if a settlement were ever to be attained.

C. THE FRANCO-AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING

Precisely how Chou's stopover in Nanning would be "helpful" to the French did not become apparent until four days after Chauvel's conversation with Li and Chang. By that time, the French had been engaged in intensive conversations with the Americans, the aim of which was to convince Washington that the United States, to be truly influential at the conference--to realize, in other words, a settlement in line with the Seven Points--had to back the French with a high-level representative in Geneva. Unless the United States did more than offer its views from afar on an acceptable settlement, Mendès-France argued, France could not be expected to present a strong front when Molotov and Chou resumed their places. As though to prove his determination to stand fast against Communist demands, Mendès-France told Ambassador Dillon in Paris that if a cease-fire was not agreed to by July 20, the premier would approve the dispatch of conscripts to Indochina and would introduce a law into Parliament to that effect on July 21. His government would not resign until that law passed; the ships would be prepared to transport the conscripts to Indochina beginning July 25. {Doc. 62]

Despite Mendès-France's willingness to establish a deadline and, for the first time in the history of French involvement in Indochina, to conscript soldiers for service there, Washington remained opposed to upgrading its Geneva delegation. Sensitive as much to any proposal that might implicate the United States in the final settlement terms as to Mendès-France's difficulties at the conference table, Dulles believed the French would end by accepting a settlement unsatisfactory to the United States whether or not the USDEL were upgraded. As he explained to Dillon, were he (the Secretary) or Smith to return to Geneva only to find the French compelled to negotiate an unacceptable agreement anyway, the United States would be required to dissociate itself in a manner "which would be deeply resented by the French as an effort on our part to block at the last minute a peace which they ardently desire," with possible "irreparable injury to Franco-American relations. The least embarrassing alternative, Dulles felt, was to avoid the probability of having to make a "spectacular disassociation" by staying away from the conference altogether. [Doc. 65]

When Dulles' position was reported to Mendès-France, the premier said he understood the Americans' reluctance but considered it misplaced. The American fear of in some way

becoming committed to the settlement, he said, was precisely his dilemma, for he had no idea what the Communists would propose in the crucial days ahead. The French negotiating position was the Seven Points, he went on, and would not deviate substantially from them. With great feeling, Mendès-France told a member of the American Embassy that the presence of Dulles or Smith was "absolutely essential and necessary"; without either of them, the Communists would sense and seek to capitalize on a lack of unity in the allied camp. "Mendès indicated that our high-level presence at Geneva had direct bearing on where Communists would insist on placing line of demarcation or partition in Vietnam."

These arguments did not prove convincing to Washington. On July 10, Dulles wrote Mendès-France a personal message reiterating that his or General Smith's presence would serve no useful purpose. And Dulles again raised doubts that France, Britain, and the United States were really agreed on a single negotiating position:

What now concerns us is that we are very doubtful as to whether there is a united front in relation to Indochina, and we do not believe that the mere fact that the high representatives of the three nations physically reappear together at Geneva will serve as a substitute for a clear agreement on a joint position which includes agreement as to what will happen if that position is not accepted by the Communists. We fear that unless there is the reality of such a united front, the events at Geneva will expose differences under conditions which will only serve to accentuate them with consequent strain upon the relations between our two countries greater than if the US does not reappear at Geneva, in the person of General Smith or myself. [[Doc. 67](#)]

The Secretary questioned whether the Seven Points truly represented a common "minimum acceptable solution" which the three Allies were willing to fight for in the event the Communists rejected them. Charging that the Seven Points were actually "merely an optimum solution" for Paris no less than for London, Dulles sought to demonstrate that the French were already moving away from the Seven Points. He cited apparent French willingness to permit Communist forces to remain in northern Laos, to accept a demarcation line "considerably south of Donghoi," to neutralize and demilitarize Laos and Cambodia, and to permit "elections so early and so ill-prepared and ill-supervised as to risk the loss of the entire area to Communism" as evidences of a "whittling-away process" which, cumulatively, could destroy the intent of the Seven Points. [[Doc. 67](#)] Unquestionably, the Secretary's firm opposition to restoring to the American delegation its high rank was grounded in intense suspicion of an ultimate French sell-out, yet suspicion based on apparent misinformation concerning both the actual French position and the degree of French willingness to stand firm.

Thus believing that the French had already gone far toward deflating some of the major provisions of the U.S.-UK memorandum, Dulles reiterated the Administration's position that it had the right "not to endorse a solution which would seem to us to impair seriously certain principles which the US believes must, as far as it is concerned, be kept unimpaired, if our own struggle against Communism is to be successfully pursued." Perhaps seeking to rationalize the impact of his rejection, Dulles wrote in closing that the

American decision might actually assist the French: "If our conduct creates a certain uncertainty in the minds of the Communists, this might strengthen your hand more than our presence at Geneva [[Doc. 67](#)] Mendès-France had been rebuffed, however, and while Dulles left the door slightly ajar for his or Smith's return if "circumstances" should change, it seemed more probable that France would have to work for a settlement with only the British along side.

The Dulles-Mendès-France exchanges were essentially an exercise in credibility, with the French premier desperately seeking to persuade the Secretary that Paris really did support and really would abide by the Seven Points. When Mendès-France read Dulles' letter, he protested that France would accept nothing unacceptable to the United States, and went so far as to say that Dulles' presence at the conference would give him a veto power, in effect, on the decisions taken. Beyond that, Mendès-France warned of the catastrophic impact of an American withdrawal on the American position in Europe no less than in the Far East; withdrawal, he said, was sure to be interpreted as a step toward isolationism. Asked what alternative his government had in mind if the conference failed even with an American high-level presence, Mendès-France replied there would have to be full internationalization of the war.*

* Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 134, July 11, 1954. [[Doc. 68](#)] The same day, Mendès-France had told Dillon again of France's intention to send conscripts, with parliamentary approval, by July 25, with two divisions ready for action by about September 15. The premier said that while he could not predict how the Assembly would react, he personally saw the need for direct American involvement in the war once negotiations broke down and the conscripts were sent. Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 133, July 11, 1954.

Mendès-France's persistence was sufficiently persuasive to move Dulles, on July 13, to fly to Paris to document the premier's support of the Seven Points. On the 14th, the Secretary and the premier signed a memorandum which duplicated that agreed to by the United States and Great Britain. In addition, a position paper was drawn up the same day reiterating that the United States was at the conference as "a friendly nation" whose role was subordinate to that of the primary non-Communist parties, the Associated States and France. The Seven Points were described, as they had been some two weeks earlier, as those acceptable to the "primarily interested nations" and which the United States could "respect." However, should terms ultimately be concluded which differed markedly from the Seven Points, France agreed that the United States would neither be asked nor expected to accept them, and "may publicly disassociate itself from such differing terms" by a unilateral or multilateral statement.

One of Dulles' objections had been that a true united front did not exist so long as agreement was lacking on allied action in the event of no settlement. On this point, too, the French were persuaded to adopt the American position. In the event of a settlement, it was agreed in the position paper that the United States would "seek, with other interested nations, a collective defense association designed to preserve, against direct and indirect

aggression, the integrity of the non-Communist areas of Southeast Asia Should no settlement be forthcoming, U.S.-France consultations would take place; but these would not preclude the United States from bringing "the matter" before the UN as a threat to the peace. Previous obstacles to French objections to UN involvement were nonexistent, for France reaffirmed in the position paper its commitment under the June 4 treaty of independence with Vietnam that Saigon, as well as Vientiane and Phnom Penh, was an "equal and voluntary" partner in the French Union, and hence no longer subject in its foreign policy to French *diktat*.

On all but one matter, now, the United States and France were in complete accord on a negotiating strategy. That matter was, of course, the American delegation. Mendès-France had formally subscribed to the Seven Points and had agreed to American plans for dealing with the aftermath of the conference; yet he had gained nothing for the French delegation. Writing to the Secretary, the premier pointed out again:

In effect, I have every reason to think that your absence would be precisely interpreted as demonstrating, before the fact, that you disapproved of the conference and of everything which might be accomplished. Not only would those who are against us find therein the confirmation of the ill will which they attribute to your government concerning the reestablishment of peace in Indochina; but many others would read in it a sure sign of a division of the western powers. [[Doc. 70](#)]

Once more, Mendès-France was putting forth the view that a high-level American representation at the conference would do more to ensure a settlement in conformity with the Seven Points than private U.S.-French agreement to them.

For reasons not entirely clear, but perhaps the consequence of Eisenhower's personal intervention, Mendès-France's appeal was now favorably received in Washington. Dulles was able to inform the premier on July 14: "In the light of what you say and after consultation with President Eisenhower, I am glad to be able to inform you that the President and I are asking the Under Secretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith, to prepare to return at his earliest convenience to Geneva to share in the work of the conference on the basis of the understanding which we have arrived at." [[Doc. 70](#)] For the first time since late 1953, the United States and France were solidly joined in a common front on Indochina policy.

In accordance with the understandings reached with France, Smith was sent new instructions on July 16 based upon the Seven Points. After reiterating the passive formal role the United States was to play at the conference, Dulles informed his Under Secretary he was to issue a unilateral (or, if possible, multilateral) statement should a settlement be reached that "conforms substantially" to the Seven Points. "The United States will not, however, become cosignatory with the Communists in any Declaration," Dulles wrote with reference to the procedure then being discussed at Geneva of drafting military accords and a final declaration on a political settlement. Nor should the United States, Smith's instructions went on, be put in a position where it could be held responsible for guaranteeing the results of the conference. Smith's efforts should be directed, Dulles

summed up, toward forwarding ideas to the "active negotiators," France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

This last point of guidance referred to the possibility of a breakdown in the negotiations. Should no settlement be reached, the United States delegation was to avoid permitting the French to believe that outcome was the result of American advice or pressure, and that in some way the United States was morally obligated to intervene militarily in Indochina. The United States, Dulles wrote, was "not prepared at the present time to give any commitment that it will intervene in the war if the Geneva Conference fails..." While this stricture almost certainly reflected the President's and the Joint Chiefs' extreme reluctance to become committed, in advance, to a war already past the point of return, it was also doubtless a reaction to Mendès-France's intimations to Dillon of French willingness to reconsider active American involvement if the conference failed.

With French and British adherence to the Seven Points promised by written agreement, the United States had gone about as far as it could toward ensuring an acceptable settlement without becoming tied to it. The Administration still apparently believed that the final terms would violate the Seven Points in several significant respects;* but by making clear in advance that any settlement would be met with a unilateral American declaration rather than Bedell Smith's signature, the United

* Thus, on July 15 (one day *after* the Franco-American agreements), the National Security Council, after being briefed on the Geneva situation, decided that the likely settlement would go against the Seven Points. The NSC was told the Communists would: (1) seek partition of Vietnam somewhere between the 14th and 18th parallels; (2) demand control of some part of Laos, neutralization of the remainder, and agreement on the formation of a coalition government; (3) ask neutralization of Cambodia and some form of recognition for the Free Khmer movement. Were the Communists to accept the Dong Hoi line for Vietnam, they would then demand an enclave in southern Vietnam plus part of Laos, or simply extend the Dong Hoi line through Laos.

States had at least guaranteed its retention of a moral advantage, useful particularly in placating domestic public opinion. In the event of an unsatisfactory settlement, Washington would be in a position to say that it had stood steadfastly by principle only to be undercut by "soft" Allies and Communist territorial ambitions.

D. THE FINAL WEEK OF BARGAINING

Prior to Smith's return, positions had tended to harden rather than change at Geneva, although the Viet Minh had yielded a trifle on partition. Chang Wen-t'ien's encouraging remark to Chauvel of July 9 had been fulfilled four days later, as already indicated. The final signal was Chou's comment to Mendès-France on the 13th that both sides, French and Viet Minh, had to make concessions on the demarcation problem, but that this "does

not signify that each must take the same number of steps." That same day, Pham Van Dong told the French premier the Viet Minh were willing to settle on the 16th parallel.

Dong's territorial concession meant little to the French, however, and, as the negotiations continued, it became plain that the Viet Minh were not concerned about Mendès-France's July 20 deadline. Yet the Chinese remained optimistic, at least publicly. Jen-min jih-pao's Geneva reporter, for instance, wrote July 12 that while no solution had yet been worked out on the control and supervision problem, "there seems no reason why agreement cannot be reached." As for defining the regroupment areas, the correspondent asserted that "speedy agreement would seem probable after the return of the Foreign Ministers of the Big Powers..." So long as all parties were "sincere," he wrote, agreement would indeed come about.

The minuscule progress made on settling the Vietnam problem loomed large in comparison with the seemingly unbreakable log jam that had developed over Laos and Cambodia. Since the major Communist concessions of mid-June, which had at least paved the way for separating Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam for discussion purposes, virtually nothing had been accomplished toward cease-fires. Debate on Laos and Cambodia occupied the spotlight again on July 9 when, from the remarks of the Chinese delegate (Li K'e-nung), it quickly became apparent that for all their willingness to discuss the withdrawal of Viet Minh troops, the Chinese remained greatly concerned about possible Laotian and Cambodian rearmament and alignment. Simply put, the Chinese were negotiating for their own security, not for Viet Minh territorial advantage.

As Chou had pointed out to Eden in June, the CPR's major concern was that Cambodia and Laos might, after a settlement, be left free to negotiate for a permanent American military presence. In his presentation, therefore, Li K'e-nung insisted that the two countries not be permitted to acquire fresh troops, military personnel, arms, and ammunition except as might be strictly required for self-defense; nor should they, he held, allow foreign military bases to be established. Li formalized Chou's passing remark to Eden that China was not much disturbed by French Union (as opposed to American) technicians. Li allowed that French military personnel to assist the training of the Laotian and Cambodian armies was a matter that "can be studied."

The Cambodian case, presented by Foreign Minister Sam Sary, revealed a stubborn independence that was to assist the country greatly in the closing days of the conference. Sam Sary said that foreign bases would indeed not be authorized on Khmer soil "only as far as there is no menace against Cambodia. . . . If our security is imperiled, Cambodia will keep its legitimate right to defend itself by all means." As for foreign instructors and technicians, his government wished to retain those Frenchmen then in Cambodia; he was pleased to note Li K'e-nung's apparent acceptance of this arrangement. Finally, with regard to the importation of arms, Sam Sary differentiated between a limitation on quantity (which his government accepted) and on quality (which his government wished to have a free hand in determining).

While the Chinese publicly castigated the Cambodians for working with the Americans to threaten "the security of Cambodia's neighboring countries under the pretext of self-defense," the Americans gave the Cambodians encouragement. In Washington, Phnom Penh's ambassador, Nong Kimny, met with Dulles on July 10. Nong Kimny said his Government would oppose the neutralization and demilitarization of the country; Dulles replied that hopefully Cambodia would become a member of the collective security arrangement envisaged in American-British plans. Cambodia, the Secretary said, possessed a kind of independence superior to that in Vietnam and Laos, and as such should indeed oppose Communist plans to neutralize and demilitarize her. As an independent state, Cambodia was entitled to seek outside military and economic assistance.

The Laotian delegation was also experiencing difficulties, though with the Viet Minh rather than the Chinese. The Viet Minh negotiators, in the military command conferences, insisted on making extraneous demands concerning the Pathet Lao. The Laotians were concerned not so much with the demands as with the possibility of a private French deal with the Viet Minh that would subvert the Laotian position. A member of the royal government's delegation went to Johnson to be assured that a behind-the-scenes deal would not occur. The delegate said Laos hoped to be covered by and to participate in a Southeast Asia collective security pact. Johnson did not guarantee that this arrangement could be worked out; but as the conference drew to a close, as we shall see, the United States made it clear to the Cambodians and Laotians that their security would in some fashion be taken care of under the SEATO treaty.

Irresolution over Cambodia and Laos, a continuing wide gap between French and Viet Minh positions on the partition line, and no progress on the control and supervision dilemma were the highlights of the generally dismal scene that greeted General Smith on his return July 16 to the negotiating wars. Smith apparently took heart, however, in the steadfastness of Mendès-France, although the Under Secretary also observed that the Communists had reacted to this by themselves becoming unmoving. Smith attributed Communist intransigence to the probability that "Mendès-France has been a great disappointment to the Communists both as regards the relatively firm position he has taken on Indochina and his attitude toward EDC. They may therefore wish to force him out of the government by making settlement here impossible."

Actually, what had disturbed the Communists most was not so much Mendès-France's firmness as Smith's return. That became clear following a private meeting requested by a member of the CPR delegation, Huang Hua, with Seymour Topping, the *New York Times* correspondent at Geneva. Topping, as the Chinese must have expected, reported the conversation to the American delegation. He said Huang Hua, speaking in deadly earnest and without propagandistic overtones, had interpreted Smith's return as an American attempt to prevent a settlement. Indeed, according to Huang Hua, the Paris talks between Dulles and Mendès-France on July 13 and 14 had been primarily responsible for Mendès-France's stubbornness; the French premier had obviously concluded a deal with the United States in which he agreed to raise the price for a settlement. [[Doc. 78](#)]

Overt Chinese statements in this period lent credence to Topping's report. First, Peking was far from convinced that continued discussions on the restoration of peace in Indochina removed the possibility of dramatic new military moves by the United States. Washington was accused, as before the conference, of desiring to intervene in Indochina so as to extend the war there into "a new military venture on China's southern borders. In support of this contention, Peking cited such provocative moves as trips during April and June by General James A. Van Fleet ("the notorious butcher of the Korean War") to Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, for the purpose of establishing a North Pacific military alliance; American intentions of concluding a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan as the first step in Chiang Kai-shek's invasion plans; American efforts, through the five-power and later Eisenhower-Churchill talks, to create a Southeast Asia alliance for a military thrust into Indochina; and stepped-up U.S. military assistance, including training, for the Thai armed forces.

Second, Peking was clearly disturbed that the French were still heeding American advice when the path to a settlement lay before them. In a People's Daily editorial of July 14, for instance, the French people and National Assembly were said to be strongly desirous of peace. Thus: "A policy running counter to French interests cannot work. France is a major world power. She should have her own independent and honorable path. This means following an independent foreign policy consistent with French national interests and the interests of world peace." The American alternative--a Southeast Asia coalition with French participation--should be rejected, the editorial intoned, and a settlement conforming to the five principles achieved instead. In keeping with its line of previous months, Peking was attempting to demonstrate--for Asian no less than for French ears--that it had a keen interest in resolving the Indochina problem rather than seeing the conference give way to new American military pressures and a possibly wider war.

Finally, Peking paid considerable attention to Duties' stay in Paris and to his dispatch of Smith to Geneva. Duties' sudden trip to the French capital was said to reveal American determination to obstruct progress in the negotiations by pressuring Mendès-France not to grasp the settlement that lay just around the corner. Duties originally had no intention of upgrading the American delegation, according to Peking. "But Bedell Smith had to be sent back to Geneva because of strong criticism in the Western press, and Washington was fearful lest agreement could be reached quickly despite American boycotting of the conference." Yet China's optimism over a settlement did not diminish: "Chinese delegation circles," NCNA reported, "see no reason whatsoever why the Geneva Conference should play up to the U.S. policy and make no efforts towards achieving an agreement which is acceptable and satisfactory to all parties concerned and which is honorable for the two belligerent sides." If Smith's return, then, was viewed from Peking as a challenge to its diplomatic ingenuity, the Chinese (and, we may surmise, the Soviets) were prepared to accept it.

In doing so, however, the Chinese evidently were not about to sacrifice in those areas of dispute where they had a special interest, namely, Laos and Cambodia. On July 14, Chou called on Nong Kimny to state China's position. The premier said first that, in accord with his recent talks with Nehru, U Nu, and Ho Chi Minh, he could report a unanimous

desire for peace in Indochina, for the unity of each of the three Associated States, and for their future cordial relationship with the Colombo Powers. Chou then asked about the status of Cambodian talks with the Viet Minh. When Nong Kimny replied that Pham Van Dong, in two recent get-togethers, had insisted on interjecting political problems into discussions of a military settlement--as by requesting Cambodia's retention of certain provincial officials appointed by the Free Khmers, and by suggesting the royal government's preservation of a Free Khmer youth movement--Chou is said to have laughed off these claims and to have replied that these were indeed matters for Cambodia to handle by herself.

Chou had his own views on what Cambodia should and should not do; however, Khmer sovereignty should not mean discrimination against the resistance elements, the establishment of foreign military bases in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, or the conclusion of military alliances with other states. Chou was less adamant only on the subject of Cambodia's importation of arms and military personnel; when Nong Kimny flatly stated that Phnom Penh would absolutely reject any limitations inasmuch as these would be incompatible with Cambodian sovereignty, Chou did not contradict him. Instead, he promised to study the matter further and asked to know precisely what quantities of arms and personnel the royal government had in mind. Later on, he became a bit more flexible by saying that a prohibition on arms and personnel should apply only to the armistice period, not permanently. Only in Vietnam, Chou said, would there be a flat proscription against military equipment and troops.

Chou and Nong Kimny met again three days later, on July 17. On this occasion, Chou was obviously less conciliatory (as Nong Kimny reported), stating China's position more in terms of demands than suggestions. He urged the Cambodian government to incorporate resistance elements into the army, police, and civil service. But he reserved his emphasis for Cambodia's future security position. In a thinly-veiled warning, Chou said that should Cambodia join the pact, permit foreign bases on its territory, or accept American military instructors, "the consequences would be very serious and would aggravate the situation with unfortunate consequences for Cambodian independence and territorial integrity" (Smith's paraphrase). Cambodia could have French or British instructors, Chou said. But his three-fold limitation, obviously directed at assuring against future Cambodia-U.S. defense ties, remained-and, he added, it applied to Laos and Vietnam as well.

The Chinese were clearly out to get from the conference what they could, without Russian assistance, before a settlement was concluded. Chou did not stop at warning Nong Kimny, either. On July 17 he took his case to Eden, telling the foreign secretary that while the CPR stood ready to join in guaranteeing the freedom and independence of all three Indochinese states, membership in a Southeast Asia pact would change everything. Evidently intent on removing what he may have sensed was a possible last-minute obstacle, Eden implied that he knew of no proposal for including the United States in the pact, although he did not deny American interest in forming a defense organization for Southeast Asia. Chou said he had no objections to ANZUS (it was

directed against Japan, he thought), but he went into a lengthy discourse on the danger to China of having foreign bases in Indochina.

Eden's assurances evidently did not [words illegible] Chou deeply. On July 18 Chou met with the Laotian foreign minister and presented "unofficial" but extravagant demands which the latter found totally unacceptable. Laos was willing to provide the resistance elements with [words illegible] zones in the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua; Chou proposed, additionally, portions of Luang Prabang and Xien Khouang provinces. The royal government was further willing to concede the insurgents freedom of movement in those zones, but Chou demanded administration by joint royal-insurgent committees and a supervisory joint committee in Vientiane until the general elections of August 1955. Finally, where the Laotians thought the issue of French Union bases had been resolved in their favor, Chou now said the bases should be completely eliminated even though established by Franco-Laotian treaty.

Chou's obsession with foreign military bases and related issues led to an effort to make a settlement contingent upon Western acceptance of Chinese neutralization plans. A Chinese informant (probably Huang Hua) told Seymour Topping that Western willingness to bar foreign military bases from Indochina and to deny the Associated States admission to any military blocs would assure agreement by July 20. More than that, the informant said, the United States had also to subscribe to and guarantee the final settlement, evidently in the belief that America's signature would make Indochinese participation in SEATO illegal. [Doc. 74] A more direct statement was made by NCNA's "special correspondent" in Geneva, who drew a harsh characterization of a cease-fire agreement that left the door open to Indochinese involvement in a military alliance:

If efforts are made at the same time negotiations for peace are taking place to drag the three Indochinese countries into an aggressive military bloc whose purpose is to unleash war, then the cease-fire would mean nothing other than a respite for adjusting battle lines and dispositions of strength in order to start the fighting again on an even larger scale. In such circumstances, the armistice agreement would become no more than a scrap of paper.

Whether the Chinese seriously believed that the United States would sign the accords in order to achieve a settlement, or that Laos and Cambodia [words missing] Out of the Southeast Asia collective defense is at best debatable. There seems little doubt, however, that Peking sincerely considered a written prohibition on the accords against Indochinese alliances or foreign bases as a major step toward the neutralization of Southeast Asia and the area's eventual dissociation from the American defense system.

General Smith felt that Topping's report dovetailed with growing Communist intransigence in the past few days, particularly on the part of Molotov. He believed that Molotov, who had urgently requested a restricted session for the 18th, would likewise raise the question of explicit American acquiescence in a final settlement. [Doc. 74] When the meeting came, however, Molotov did not reiterate Huang Hua's implication

that American failure to sign the accords might scuttle the conference. Perhaps aware that a warning of that kind would not work, Molotov instead limited himself to talking of the conference's achievements to date. He complimented those who had been engaged in private negotiations, and went so far as to voice confidence that a settlement of outstanding problems relating to Laos and Cambodia could be achieved. He closed by pointing out that two drafts were before the conference relating to the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam and Laos, two on Cambodia, and two on a final declaration dealing with political matters. That ended Molotov's contribution, leaving the Americans, and probably others, wondering why the Soviet foreign minister had hastily summoned the meeting. [[Doc. 76](#)]

E. AGREEMENT

If Molotov's refusal at the July 18 restricted session to warn the conference of failure signaled renewed Communist efforts toward agreement, his subsequent actions proved the point. Between July 18 and 21, the conferees were able to iron out their differences sufficiently to produce agreements now commonly referred to as the Geneva "accords." In fact, the accords consist of military agreements for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to fulfill the conference's primary task of restoring peace to Indochina, and a Final Declaration designed to establish the conditions for future political settlements throughout Indochina. The nature of the eleventh-hour compromises reached, and a broad outline of the settlement, are treated below.

Vietnam

The Geneva accords temporarily established two zones of Vietnam separated by a line running roughly along the 17th parallel and further divided by a demilitarized zone. Agreement to the demarcation line was apparently the work of Molotov, who gained French acceptance of the 17th parallel when he found the French flatly opposed to the 16th, a late Viet Minh compromise perhaps prompted by Molotov himself. [[Doc. 72](#)] Precisely what motivated Molotov to make his proposal is not clear. Speculatively, he may simply have traded considerable territorial advantage which the Viet Minh enjoyed for a specific election date he, Chou, and Pham Van Dong wanted from the outset. The Western negotiators certainly recognized the trade-off possibility: Eden considered a line between the 17th and 18th parallels worth exchanging for a mutually acceptable position on elections; and Mendès-France observed in a conversation with Mob-toy that the election and demarcation questions might be linked in the sense that each side could yield on one of the questions. [[Doc. 72](#)]

Whether or not a trade-off actually took place, the fact remains that the French came off much better in the matter of partition than on elections, which they had insisted not be given a specific date. On July 16, Molotov had proposed holding elections in 1955, with the exact date to be decided between Vietnamese and Viet Minh authorities. [[Doc. 72](#)] The Chinese were more flexible. In a talk with a member of the British delegation, Li K'e-nung argued for a specific date, but said his government was willing to set it within two or three years of the ceasefire. [[Doc. 76](#)] The compromise formula was

reportedly worked out by Molotov, who, at a meeting July 19 attended also by Eden, Mendès-France, Chou, and Dong, drew the line at two years. It was agreed in the Final Declaration that the Vietnamese of the two zones would consult together in July 1955 and reunify Vietnam by national plebiscite one year later. Importantly for the Viet Minh, the demarcation line was said to be "provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary." Representatives of the member states on the ICC would act as a commission to supervise the national elections, which were to be freely conducted by secret ballot. As shall be pointed out later, however, the evident intention of all the conferees (including the United States and the Government of South Vietnam) to see Vietnam reunified was to a large extent undercut by the nature of the military and political settlements.

The military accords on Vietnam also stipulated that the Joint Commission, which was to take over the work of the military commission that had met at Trung Gia, would have general responsibility for working out the disengagement of forces and implementation of the cease-fire. French Union soldiers were to be removed from North Vietnam in stages within 300 days (article 15), a lengthy period in keeping with French demands. Thereafter, the introduction into the two zones of fresh arms, equipment, and personnel was prohibited with the exception of normal troop rotation and replacement of damaged or destroyed materiel (articles 16 and 17). The establishment of new military bases in Vietnam, and the adherence of either zone to military alliances, were also proscribed under articles 18 and 19.

The membership and powers of the International Control Commission were finally resolved (Chapter VI of the accords). Apparently through Chou En-lai's efforts, agreement was reached that India, Poland, and Canada should be the member states of the ICC. The ICC was empowered to form fixed and mobile inspection teams and to have full freedom of movement in both zones of Vietnam. In the performance of these tasks, the ICC was to expect complete cooperation from local civil and military officials. Its functions extended to control of the movement of armed forces and the release of prisoners of war, and to supervision of the demarcation line, frontiers, ports, and airfields.

Less clearly decided was the delicate question of the ICC's relationship to the Joint Commission. Generally, the plan adopted was close to that originally submitted by the French in early July, wherein the ICC's supremacy was tacitly admitted. The ICC was to be informed by the Joint Commission of disputes arising out of differences of interpretation, either of a provision or of fact, that the Joint Commission could not resolve. The ICC would then (article 40) have the power of recommendation; but, quite aside from the limited effectiveness of a recommendation, there remained the problem of majority or unanimous voting by the ICC in reaching agreement to recommend. Under article 42, the rule of unanimity was to apply to "questions concerning violations, or threats of violations, which might lead to a resumption of hostilities," namely, a refusal to regroup is provided in the accords, or an armed violation by one party of the territory of the other. The West, which had pushed hard for majority rule, had to settle for its application to those less volatile questions that would not be considered threats to the peace. Furthermore, under article 43, recognition was taken of possible splits among the

three members by providing for majority and minority reports; but these, like ICC decisions, could be no more than suggestive, and as such wholly dependent upon the cooperativeness of the conference members who had created it.

Cambodia and Laos

In conflict with the wishes of the Cambodian and Laotian delegations, cease-fires in their countries occurred simultaneously with the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam. Nevertheless, in most other respects, their persistence was largely responsible for settlements highly favorable to their respective interests.

In the first place, the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Cambodia called for the removal of nonnative Free Khmer troops, whether Communist Vietnamese or Cambodians, ninety days from the cease-fire date (July 20). (French Union units, but not instructors, were also scheduled for departure.) As the Cambodian delegation had promised, those insurgents still in the country would be guaranteed the right to rejoin the national community and to participate, as electors or candidates, in elections scheduled under the constitution for 1955; but the agreement assured their demobilization within one month of the cease-fire. Separate joint and international supervisory commissions for Cambodia were established, as Phnom Penh had demanded. Finally, a declaration issued July 21 by the Cambodian delegation was incorporated into the accord proclaiming, in effect, Phnom Penh's inherent right of self-defense. The royal government vowed not to enter into military alliances "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"; nor, so long as its security was not threatened, would Cambodia permit the establishment of foreign military bases. As for war materiel and military personnel, the delegation made clear that these would not be solicited during the period July 20, 1954, to the election date in 1955 "except for the purpose of the effective defence of the territory." Thus, after the elections, Cambodia proclaimed itself free to take any steps it considered necessary for its security, whether or not such steps were absolutely necessary for self-defense.

Cambodia's acquisition of considerable latitude was entirely in keeping with the royal government's expressed insistence on not being either neutralized or demilitarized. On this point, the Cambodians received indirect assurance from the United States that their security would in some way be covered by the Southeast Asian pact despite their unilateral declaration. Toward the end of the conference, Philip Bonsal of the State Department and the American delegation, told Sam Sary that he (Bonsal) "was confident U.S. and other interested countries looked forward to discussing with Cambodian government" the security problem upon implementation of a cease-fire. When Sam Sary called a few days later on Smith in the company of Nong Kimny, the Under Secretary recommended that Phnom Penh, at the conference, state its intention not to have foreign bases on its territory and not to enter into military alliances. At the same time, though, Cambodia would be free to import arms and to employ French military instructors and technicians. Cambodia might not be able to join SEATO under this arrangement, Smith said, but it could still benefit from it. Smith:

assured the Cambodian Foreign Minister that, in our view, any aggression overt or covert against Cambodian territory would bring pact into operation even though Cambodia not a member. I took position that French Union membership afforded Cambodia adequate desirable means of securing through France necessary arms some of which would be American as well as necessary instructors and technicians some of which might well be American trained.

Nong Kimmy replied that Cambodia relied heavily on the United States for protection against future aggression. The way was thus cleared for the subsequent inclusion of Cambodia in the Protocol to the SEATO treaty.

The cease-fire agreement on Laos followed lines similar to those drawn for Cambodia. A separate joint commission was set up to supervise the withdrawal of Pathet Lao units, although provision was made for their prior regroupment in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua.* Although Laos was prohibited from seeking to

* The Laotian delegation also issued a declaration averring the government's willingness to integrate former insurgents into the national community without reprisal. Elections in Laos were scheduled for September 1955, and former Pathet Lao were promised the right to participate in the balloting as electors or candidates.

augment its military establishment, the royal government was specifically permitted a maximum of 1,500 French training instructors. Moreover, the prohibition against the establishment of foreign military bases on Laotian territory did not apply to two French bases in operation under a 1949 treaty, and employing 3,500 Frenchmen. Laos, like Cambodia, was allowed to import arms and other military equipment essential for self-defense; but Vientiane also issued a unilateral declaration on July 21 making clear, in terms that nearly duplicated those used in Cambodia's declaration, that its refrainment from alliances and foreign military bases was limited to situations in which Laotian security was not threatened. In view of Vientiane's expressed hope for American protection, its delegates had succeeded admirably in getting a settlement containing terms that restricted, but did not eliminate, Laotian control over their security requirements.

F. DISSENTING VIEWS: THE AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE POSITIONS

No delegate at the final plenary session on Indochina July 21 should have been surprised when Under Secretary Smith issued a unilateral statement of the American position. The United States had frequently indicated, publicly and privately, directly and indirectly, that it would not be cosignatory with the Communist powers to any agreement and that, at best, it would agree only to "respect" the final settlement. At the restricted session of July 18, Smith had, moreover, indicated the points which were to become basic features of his final statement. Despite the fact that the accords were in line with the Seven Points in nearly every particular, it would have been presumptuous of any delegation to believe that the United States, given the implacable hostility of Administration leaders to

Communist China and to any agreement that would imply American approval of a territorial cession to the Communists, would formally sign the Geneva accords.

Bedell Smith, revealing a considerably more pliant approach to dealing with the Communist world, was able to exact from Washington agreement to partial American acceptance of the Final Declaration. On July 19 he had been approached by Mendès-France, who from the beginning had sought to identify the United States as closely as possible with the final terms, with the proposal that Washington not simply respect any military agreements reached, but in addition take note of them and the political statements that comprised the first nine paragraphs of the proposed conference declaration. Mendès-France indicated the French would be sharply disappointed if the United States could not at least take note of those portions of the declaration. Smith, apparently swayed by the premier's views, recommended to Washington that his instructions be amended to provide for taking note in the event the Final Declaration was substantially as the French had indicated. [Doc. 80] Dulles gave his approval, demurring only on the second part of paragraph 9 (in the final version, paragraph 13), which the Secretary said "seems to imply a multilateral engagement with Communists which would be inconsistent with our basic approach and which subsequently might enable Communist China to charge us with alleged violations of agreement to which it might claim both governments became parties." [Doc. 81] When Smith, therefore, issued his unilateral statement, note was taken only of the first twelve paragraphs of the Final Declaration; but this was much more than had been called for in his revised instructions of July 16.

In line with his instructions, Smith declared on behalf of the Government that the United States would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the accords. Moreover, the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Finally, Smith reiterated a U.S. policy declaration of June 29, made during the visit of Eden and Churchill, that registered Washington's support of UN supervision of free elections to reunify countries "now divided against their will Smith mentioned on this point that the United States could not associate itself with any arrangement that would hinder "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future..."

Smith's caution against "any renewal of aggression" deserves additional comment inasmuch as it was cited by President Kennedy (in a letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem on December 14, 1961) as the basis for the American commitment to South Vietnam's defense. Viewed in the context of the conference, the statement does not seem to have been intended as an open-ended American commitment to South Vietnam against possible aggression from the North. Rather, the Administration apparently intended the statement as a warning to the Viet Minh that should they, within the two-year interval before general elections, "renew" what Washington and Saigon regarded as their "aggression" since 1946, the United States would be gravely concerned. Smith's statement, in short, seems to have been limited to the period July 1954 to July 1956.

That part of Smith's unilateral statement dealing with United Nations supervision of elections is also noteworthy. Coming in the wake of Dulles' expressed concern over provision in the accords for ICC supervision, [[Doc. 81](#)] Smith's reference to the UN may have forecast American unwillingness to back an electoral process not supervised by the Organization. Inasmuch as the United States delegation had consistently pushed at Geneva for United Nations rather than any other form of international machinery, Smith may have meant to give an advance signal of American displeasure with free Vietnamese elections that the UN would be prevented from overseeing.

American qualifications to the Geneva accords paled beside those made by the South Vietnam delegation. However naively, the "South" Vietnamese refused to accept a divided country and believed, to the end of the conference, that the French had brazenly and illegally sold out Vietnamese interests. Vietnam's anger at French manipulation of its political future was reflected in a note handed to the French delegation on July 17 by Nguyen Huu Chau. [[Doc. 73](#)] The note maintained that not until the day before (an exaggeration by about three weeks, it would appear) did Vietnam learn that at the very time the French High Command had ordered the evacuation of troops from important areas in the Tonkin Delta, the French had also "accepted abandoning to the Viet Minh all of that part situated north of the eighteenth parallel and that the delegation of the Viet Minh might claim an even more advantageous demarcation line." The Vietnamese delegation protested against having been left "in complete ignorance" of French proposals, which were said not to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people."

While it may have been absurd for the Vietnamese to believe that partition was avoidable given Viet Minh strength, their rationale for keeping the country united was, as matters developed, eminently clear-sighted. In speeches during June and July, their leaders had warned that partition would be merely a temporary interlude before the renewal of fighting. When the Viet Minh first proposed a temporary division of territory, the Defense Minister, Phan Huy Quat, said in Saigon on June 2 that partition would "risk reviving the drama of the struggle between the North and the South." Diem, in his investiture speech of early July, warned against a cease-fire that would mean partition, for that arrangement "can only be the preparation for another more deadly war..." And General Nguyen Van Hinh, head of the Vietnamese National Army, declared:

To realize a cease-fire by partition of Vietnamese territory can be only a temporary measure to stop the bloodshed but not to end the war. And it is possible that we shall have to face a cold war as in Korea where both sides' troops have their fingers on the triggers of their guns all the time, and people are thinking only of recovering what has been given up under the pressure of the circumstances.

Although their struggle against partition, which reached a climax in the aftermath of the signing of the accords with huge rallies in the major cities, proved futile, the Vietnamese early gave notice that they would accept neither partition nor a fixed date for national elections. We need only recall the statements by Bao Dai's cabinet in Paris on the eve of the conference to find evidence of Vietnam's early determination that it would not be

party to a sell-out of its own territory. When partition became certain in July with the circulation of draft final declarations, the Vietnamese delegation became more vocal. At the final plenary session, Tran Van Do said: ". . . the Government of the State of Viet-Nam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom." When asked to consent to the military accords and the Final Declaration, Do requested insertion of the following text into the Declaration:

The conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Viet-Nam undertaking:

to make and support every effort to reestablish a real and lasting peace in Viet-Nam;

not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the ceasefire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Viet-Nam has expressed, especially in its final statement.

The request was denied.

As for elections, the Vietnamese believed that the war situation compelled the postponement of elections until the country had achieved a measure of internal stability. As early as May, Diem indicated his opposition to elections for a National Assembly, much less to national elections for the presidency. In its note to the French delegation, moreover, the Vietnamese asserted that a cease-fire without disarmament was incompatible with elections; the regroupment of the armed forces of the belligerents into separate zones was said to compromise their freedom in advance. In Vietnam's view, elections could only be considered after security and peace had been established, thereby excluding a set time interval of two years. [[Doc. 73](#)]

Having taken these positions, the Vietnamese could hardly adhere to the Final Declaration. At the same time, they protested against the "hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Vietminh High Commanders only . . ." (as Tran Van Do put it at the July 21 session). Inasmuch as the military accords, by prearrangement, were signed by French and Viet Minh commanders precisely to avoid seeking Vietnamese consent, there was nothing Saigon could do but protest. Nevertheless, by having protested, they were asserting that the treaties with France of June 4 had indeed made Vietnam a sovereign state, that the interests of non-Communist Vietnamese were deeply involved in the settlement, and that France's by-passing of the Bao Dai government only made the settlement possible, not legal. Despite article 27 of the agreement on Vietnam, which bound "successors" (such as Vietnam) to the signatories to respect and enforce the agreement, Vietnam was in a legally persuasive position to argue that France could not assume liabilities in its behalf, least of all to the political provisions contained in the Final Declaration, which was an unsigned document.

*

* Article 27, which is frequently cited to demonstrate that Vietnam was bound to abide by the accords, and particularly the elections provision, refers to "signatories of the present [*military*] Agreement..." Hence, the article would seem not to obligate France's "successor" with respect to any provisions of the Final Declaration, a document to which South Vietnam did not adhere.

G. SUMMARY

Throughout the rapid series of compromises in the last thirty days of the Geneva Conference, American diplomacy revealed a constancy of purpose fully in line with the Eisenhower Administration's global foreign policy. Based largely on the unfortunate experiences at Panmunjom, the Administration could not reconcile itself to the notion that Sino-Soviet negotiating tactics in the post-Stalin period of peaceful coexistence had changed. Consequently, even as the realization dawned that the Communists could not be expelled from Indochina and that some compromise with them by France was inevitable, the Administration stuck fast to the position that the United States delegation to the conference would only assist, but not take an active part, in bringing about an acceptable settlement. From June on, the delegation was under instructions to remain clear of any involvement in the negotiations such as might implicate or commit the United States to the final terms reached, yet simultaneously was to maintain an influential role in making the best of difficult circumstances. British and French agreement to the Seven Points proved a diplomatic victory, not because their acceptance of them assured a reasonable settlement but because, quite contrary to American expectations, they returned to Geneva prepared to hold the line against exorbitant Communist demands. Allied agreement to future discussions of a regional defense system for Southeast Asia was really a hedge against a French sell-out at Geneva; in the event Vietnam, and parts of Cambodia and Laos, were ceded to the Communist insurgents, the United States would at least have Anglo-French consent to protect the security of what remained of Indochina and its neighbors.

The Seven Points represented principles, not American objectives. They constituted not a statement of goals to be achieved by the United States, but of principles to be adopted by the British and French negotiators toward concluding a satisfactory settlement. In this manner, the Administration could preserve its dignity before anticipated Vietnamese outrage at partition and domestic displeasure at further Communist inroads in the Far East without losing its ability to influence the terms. Under Secretary Smith's final statement taking note of the agreements and vowing not to disturb them thus culminated a careful policy that rejected an American commitment to the accords such as might identify the Administration with a cession of territory and people to the Communist bloc.

The Geneva Conference left much work undone, especially on a political settlement for Vietnam. The State of Vietnam, like the United States, had refused to adhere to the Final Declaration and was not signatory to the military accord that partitioned the country. In the next section, the focus is therefore on the practical effect of the Geneva accords, the

expectations of the conferees concerning them, and the extent to which the major powers, in reaching a settlement, achieved the objectives they had set for themselves.

VIII. THE MEANING OF GENEVA

Much of the controversy surrounding the American involvement in Vietnam relates to the post-Geneva period, in particular to the two-year interval before national elections were to bring about Vietnam's reunification. To address the question whether the United States instigated or colluded with the Government of Vietnam to defy the Final Declaration's stipulation for national elections would broaden this paper beyond its intended scope. What is relevant, however, are the documented or presumed expectations and objectives of the major participants concerning Vietnam, as well as Cambodia and Laos, at the time the conference closed. How had the accords met the aims of the participants, and to what extent were objectives intertwined with, or perhaps divorced from, expectations? To anticipate, the present argument over the failure to hold elections in July 1956 overlooks the relative unimportance of them, for a variety of reasons, to the five major powers at the Geneva Conference; their objectives only secondarily took into account the expectations of the Vietnamese, north and south.

An assessment of the hopes and goals of the Geneva conferees in the immediate aftermath of the conference should, in the first place, be differentiated from the practical effect of the accords they drew up. The distinction not often made, yet highly important to an understanding of the conference and its achievements, is between the intent of the parties regarding Vietnam and the seemingly contradictory consequences of their agreement.

A. THE PRACTICAL NATURE OF THE ACCORDS

With the exception of South Vietnam, every nation represented at the conference came to believe that partition was the only way to separate the combatants, settle the widely disparate military and political demands of the French and Viet Minh, and conclude an armistice. It might further be argued (although the evidence available does not actually permit a definitive statement one way or the other) that these eight delegations intended the partition line to be temporary inasmuch as they all desired Vietnamese elections in 1956. But what needs to be pointed out is that the accords themselves did not further that intent. By creating two regimes responsible for "civil administration" (article 14-a of the Vietnam armistice agreement), by providing for the regroupment of forces to two zones and for the movement of persons to the zone of their choice, and by putting off national elections for two years, the conferees had actually made a future political settlement for Vietnam extremely unlikely. Certainly, the separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel was designed to facilitate the armistice, not to create political subdivisions; but its unintended effect was to allow time for the development of two *governments*, headed by totally divergent personalities and committed to antithetical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems. Thus, the call for elections in the Final Declaration had as little chance of implementation in Vietnam as previously in Korea and Germany, a point brought home by Vietnamese officials and reinforced by the failure of the same

Geneva conferees to agree on a political settlement in Korea. "Elections," Victor Bator has commented "can, indeed, decide secondary problems of coexistence in circumstances where some measurable minimum basis for political agreement exists. But they are incapable of acceptance by two opposing states, or parts of a state, when diametrically opposite philosophies are involved." If the intent of the Geneva accords was subverted, the subverters were the conferees themselves, who aspired to an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam on July 21, 1954.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE COMMUNIST SIDE

Whether or not one accepts the view offered here that the central political provision of the Final Declaration was decisively undercut by provisions of the military accords and the Declaration itself, an examination of the objectives of the Soviet Union and Communist China can go far toward determining, albeit by surmises, the importance they, as distinct from the DRV, attached to Vietnamese unity. For it is the conclusion here that Vietnamese unity, whether achieved by free elections or the disintegration of South Vietnam, was not a priority objective of Moscow or Peking even though both powers may well have anticipated an all-Communist Vietnam by July 1956. If this is so, we may ask, what were the primary aims of Moscow and Peking in supporting a settlement? Why did the Communists apparently strive for a settlement, and why did Molotov in particular, who was not personally identified in Western eyes at the time as a vigorous proponent of détente, play such a key role in keeping the conference from the brink of failure?

Although it would appear that, on the major issues at least, the Soviet Union coordinated its actions with Communist China, the two Communist powers were clearly pursuing separate national interests in working toward a settlement of the war. The reconciliation of those interests seems to have been achieved not so much through Soviet ability (which did exist) to compel Chinese acquiescence as through a common desire for a settlement.

Soviet Objectives at the Conference

In retrospect, the Soviet Union seems to have had four major objectives at the conference: (1) to avert a major war crisis over Indochina that would stimulate Western unity, enable the United States to gain support it previously lacked for "united action," and conceivably force Moscow into a commitment to defend the Chinese; (2) to reduce the prospects for successful passage of EDC in the French National Assembly; (3) to heighten the prestige of the Soviet Union as a world peacemaker; (4) to bolster the prestige of Communist China, probably more as an adjunct to the Soviet drive for leadership of the "peaceful coexistence" movement than as a means of supporting any Chinese claim to unrivaled leadership in Asia.

On the first point, the Soviets were surely aware that the United States, under certain conditions, was prepared to consider active involvement in the war. While united action was a dead issue in Washington by mid-June, the Soviets (and the Chinese as well) could not have known this. Moreover, newspaper reports of the time added both credence and

uncertainty to American military plans. In the course of private discussions at Geneva, Molotov indicated his concern that a breakdown of the conference might lead to continued fighting right up to the point of World War III. The French and British did nothing to dispel those fears. Chauvel, for instance, told the Russian delegate, Kuznetsov, that France's proposed division of Vietnam at the 18th parallel would be more acceptable to the other conferees than the unreasonable Viet Minh demand for the 13th parallel, and that a settlement along the French line would thereby avert the risk of an internationalization of the conflict. And Mendès-France vowed to back his call for conscripts by informing Molotov he "did not intend Geneva would turn into a Panmunjom."

The possibility of renewed fighting leading to a wider war was particularly influential on the Soviets, it would seem, as a consequence of Moscow's inner debate during 1953 and 1954 over American strategic intentions and their meaning for the Soviet defense system. The views of the so-called Khrushchev wing apparently won out in the spring of 1954: The United States was considered fully capable of initiating a nuclear exchange and a new world war. Free-wheeling discussion in the Western press on the foreign policy implications of Eisenhower's "New Look" and Dulles' "massive retaliation" speech of January 12, 1954, was closely followed by the Soviets, who may have been persuaded in their pessimistic assumptions regarding American strategy by the very ambiguity of American "reliance" on nuclear weapons to combat Communist aggression. In fact, it can be argued that even though the United States and its allies went to the conference table from a position of diplomatic weakness, their hands were considerably strengthened because of Soviet uncertainty over what the West might do in the event the conference failed. Inasmuch as Soviet analyses by no means excluded American recklessness with nuclear weapons, Moscow might have been highly reluctant to press too vigorously for the West's acceptance of exorbitant Viet Minh demands. Soviet awareness that the United States had seriously considered active involvement in Indochina prior to the fall of Dienbienphu may therefore have been a significant lever for the West in the Geneva negotiations. Had the opposite perception been true-had the Soviets, that is, been confident that the American Administration would be highly sober, conservative, and cautious in responding to war situations-Molotov might have been instructed to play a far more audacious game while the Viet Minh intensified their military operations. Dulles' reputation as a militant anti-Communist with tremendous influence on Eisenhower probably served the Western cause well at Geneva.

As a result, to conclude on this point, one of the Soviets' principal aims at the conference was to diminish the possibility of American unilateral or multilateral intervention in the likely belief that intervention would have built up tremendous pressure on Moscow to make new commitments in Southeast Asia. While this outlook did not prevent the Soviets from at first seeking to capitalize on the change in government in Paris from Laniel to Mendès-France, it did work in the general direction of a reasonable settlement that would be honorable for the French and still valuable to the Viet Minh. The Russians evidently believed that so long as the French (and the British) were kept interested in a settlement, the Americans would be hard-pressed to disregard their allies and intervene.

That Moscow may have been anxious about a wider war does not, however, address the *incentives* it may have had in concluding the cease-fire. Here, the European Defense Community treaty must have been uppermost in Molotov's mind. No evidence has been found to support the contention that Molotov explicitly baited Mendès-France with a lenient Indochina settlement in return for Assembly rejection of EDC. But Molotov need not have been that obtrusive. Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interests to pressure the Viet Minh for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby probably offset their need for an EDC. Soviet interests thus dictated the sacrifice of Viet Minh goals if necessary to prevent German remilitarization. Given Moscow's belated attention to the Indochina war, it appears that the consolidation of Viet Minh gains short of complete reunification of Vietnam was more than sufficient to justify termination of the struggle in Soviet eyes--and this perception, it might be added, dovetailed with what seems to have been the Chinese outlook.

Thirdly, the worldwide Soviet peace offensive which gained priority in the aftermath of Stalin's death could be given added impetus through vigorous Soviet support of an Indochina settlement. This point, in fact, was the theme of Molotov's closing remarks to the conference on July 21. He called the accords "a major victory for the forces of peace and a major step towards a reduction of international tensions." Considering that the conference had demonstrated the value of international negotiations to settle dangerous disputes, Molotov said: "The results of the Geneva Conference have confirmed the rightness of the principle which is fundamental to the whole foreign policy of the Soviet Union, namely, that there are no issues in the contemporary international situation which cannot be solved and settled through negotiations and by agreements designed to consolidate peace." At a time when the United States was alleged to be jeopardizing world peace with its "policy of strength," the Soviet Union could lay claim to sparing no effort in the struggle for ways to avoid a nuclear holocaust.

In this light, Communist China was important to the USSR as a partner in the peace offensive. While Moscow could not have wished to see China so gain in prestige as to rival the Soviet Union in Asia or elsewhere, the Russians do seem, in 1954, to have considered a gain in Chinese influence highly desirable if only because the United States would be bound to suffer a corresponding loss. As Molotov phrased it on July 21:

...the Geneva Conference indicated the great positive importance that the participation of the People's Republic of China has in the settlement of urgent international problems. The course of work at this Conference has shown that any artificial obstacles on the road to China's participation in the settlement of international affairs, which are still being put up by aggressive circles of some countries, are being swept away by life itself.

Noteworthy is Molotov's omission of the additional claim made at the time by Peking that China's participation was absolutely essential to the solution of Asian problems. While the Soviet foreign minister was perhaps thinking in terms of CPR admission to the United Nations, the Chinese apparently were looking beyond the UN to

the kind of full-scale diplomatic effort that would earn them Asia's respect as founders of what was later termed the "Bandung spirit." Nor did Molotov assert that China's work at the conference had earned it a status equivalent to one of the major powers. The Soviets were willing to admit that Peking had gained a new importance as a result of the conference, but they refused to go as far as the Chinese in asserting China's first-rank status either in Asia or worldwide.

The Soviets, then, had much to gain from an honorable settlement of the Indochina war and much to risk in permitting the talks to drag on inconclusively. The Viet Minh had proven their strength as a national liberation movement and had been amply rewarded with a firm territorial base assured by international agreement. With overriding interests in Western Europe, Moscow no doubt found great appeal in giving the French a face-saving "out" from Indochina. That EDC was eventually defeated in the National Assembly (in August) was testimony not to the cleverness of any Soviet "deal" with Mendès-France, but simply to a low-cost Soviet diplomatic gamble that paid off handsomely.

Chinese Objectives

For Peking, a negotiated settlement of the Indochina war represented an important opportunity to propel China forward as a major Asian power whose voice in Asian councils could not be ignored. When the Berlin Conference decided in February 1954 to hold an international conference on Indochina, the Chinese applauded the move and prophesied then that the People's Republic, as an invitee, would thereby gain recognition of its major role in Asian affairs. With the Geneva Conference coming at a time of vigorous Chinese diplomatic activity in India and Burma, Peking probably considered a settlement short of a complete Viet Minh victory acceptable, since it would prove China's sincere commitment to peace. Had the CPR spurred the Viet Minh on, it not only would have been in conflict with the Soviets, whose aid was vital to China's economic recovery plans, but would also have lost considerable ground in the support Chou En-lai's travels had earned. The war in Indochina had become, for China, a demonstration test of its sincerity in promoting peaceful coexistence. From the tactical standpoint, devotion to peaceful coexistence may also have been seen as reducing the prospects of widespread Asian support of, or participation in, the American plan for a regional alliance. With the conference ended, China was in a position to offer Asian nations an alternative to alliance with the United States—the concept of "collective peace and security," sustained by mutual agreement to foster the five principles.

The motive force behind China's drive for Asian leadership during the period of the Geneva Conference was the theme that negotiated solutions were possible for all outstanding world problems. By the time of Geneva, Peking had already been party to the armistice in Korea, to agreement with India over Tibet, and to statements of mutual respect issued bilaterally with India and Burma. Moreover, China had joined with Moscow in supporting negotiations of the Indochina war as early as September 1953, while the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese statements also contained calls for an early settlement. The major role played by Chou En-Lai at Geneva therefore not simply

affirmed China's interest in peace, but as importantly established China's reputation as a flexible bargainer willing to negotiate disputes and make concessions to resolve them. Indeed, once the conference ended, Peking declared that the conference had proved that negotiations could resolve such other East-West problems as a final Korea settlement, arms control, nuclear weapons proliferation, German unification, and European security.

Relatedly, China urged that the Geneva Conference was a benchmark in the rise of the People's Republic to new prominence on the international scene. "The great significance of the convening of the Geneva Conference," the *People's Daily* proclaimed before its close, "lies in the fact that the Chinese People's Republic is participating in the settlement of Asian questions as one of the Great Powers, thus putting an end to the era when the Asian peoples were denied their say in their own problems." China stood not only for a resurgent, decolonialized Asia, but also as a Great Power. As stated by the authoritative *World Culture*:

The contributions of the CPR at the Geneva Conference to the search for peace, and its efforts to establish collective security in Asia, have received the universal recognition and trust of the world's peace-loving peoples and nations. Because of this, the position of the CPR as one of the world's great nations has been even more affirmed and its international prestige greatly elevated. The Chinese people feel extraordinary glory because of this.

The fact that China had, in Indochina and as was not the case in Korea, been invited to join with the Big Four in discussing measures for the restoration of peace was considered by Peking to have given the CPR still more international authority.

Augmentation of Chinese prestige in Asia and throughout the world was a benefit due to the conference; but it does not fully explain why China apparently pressed for a settlement when she did rather than prolong the talks until better terms were available. Having negotiated at Panmunjom for two years, why did she take less than three months to conclude a cease-fire in Indochina? There seem to have been three reasons for China's reluctance to engage in extended discussions: (1) agreement with the Soviets that the United States could intervene to spark a wider war; (2) consideration that Laos and Cambodia had been effectively neutralized; (3) satisfaction that a communist state had been established on China's southern flank.

In the first place, Peking was convinced, to judge from its published comments on the war, that influential men in Washington, including Secretary Dulles and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were quite prepared to move directly against China if circumstances permitted. Washington's warnings to Peking in 1953 left room for the continuation of Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, but Peking could never be certain when that aid might become the pretext for active American intervention. By 1954, moreover, the Chinese had evinced greater concern than before over the military effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Having been through a costly war in Korea, and having decided as early as the fall of 1952 to give priority to "socialist reconstruction" at home, Peking had nothing to gain from provoking the United States. Were the Viet Minh encouraged to strive for the maximum territorial advantage, the United States-Peking may have calculated-might withdraw from the

conference and change the nature of the war. Once those events occurred, the Chinese advocacy of peace through diplomacy would have been irreparably undercut.

Peking, moreover, was made clearly aware of the dangers inherent in continued fighting. At the conference, Eden used the implied threat of American involvement against Chou in much the same way as Chauvel had used it against Kuznetsov. During late May, for example, Eden warned Chou "again" of the dangers in the Indochina situation; unpredictable and serious results could come about. When Chou said he was counting on Britain to prevent these from happening, the foreign secretary replied Chou was mistaken, since Britain would stand by the United States in a showdown. Furthermore, with the Eisenhower-Churchill warning of June 28 that unacceptable demands made against France would "seriously aggravate" the international situation, with Dulles' perceived pressure on Mendès-France at the Paris meeting of mid-July, and with the return of Smith to the conference table, the Chinese were given unmistakable signs that Western unity had finally been achieved and some kind of coordination worked out on the settlement. At that juncture, the outstanding issue for Peking was not how much territory the DRV would ultimately obtain, but how far Cambodia and Laos could be pressed before the July 20 deadline passed.

By the deadline, as we have seen, Chou En-lai's hardened attitude in conversations with the Cambodian and Laotian delegates had not swayed them from their hope of eventual security coverage by the United States. From China's standpoint, however, the vital agreement had been secured: None of the Indochinese states was permitted to join a military alliance or to allow the establishment of foreign military bases on their soil. Whether the Chinese recognized the alternative for the three states of obtaining protection through a device such as the SEATO Protocol is not known. When the accords were signed, Peking greeted them with the remark that the restrictions upon Indochina's military ties to the West had dealt a severe blow to American regional security ambitions. So long as the United States was not permitted to establish bases in the three countries and to introduce military personnel there, China's security requirements were fulfilled even though, in their internal political make-up, the three states might take a strong anti-Communist line. It was perhaps because the CPR had emerged with these advantages that a Chinese journalist confided on July 23: "We have won the first campaign for the neutralization of all Southeast Asia."

The supposed "neutralization" of Cambodia and Laos was coupled with the securance of a solid territory for the DRV along China's southern frontier. Further territorial gains by the Viet Minh would augment DRV resources, but would not significantly enhance China's security. With agreement by the conference to stabilize the military assets of both zones of Vietnam and to forbid their military alignment with other nations, China could feel some confidence that a divided Vietnam would not present an immediate threat. Thus, the agreements on Cambodia and Laos complemented the Vietnam accord in bolstering China's security from the south even as it also meant a sacrifice of the Viet Minh's capability for overrunning all Vietnam.

The argument here is, in summary, that the Soviet Union and Communist China were less concerned with the specific terms of the settlement than with attaining it once their basic objectives had been achieved. A settlement along lines that would satisfy the Viet Minh need for territory, give France the satisfaction that it had not sold out, go far toward fulfilling Chinese security requirements and political ambitions in Southeast Asia, and reduce the possibility of a precipitate American withdrawal from the conference was, to Moscow and Peking, acceptable and even desirable. They saw advantages to themselves in an early equitable agreement that clearly conflicted with Viet Minh terms, but not with their own objectives.

Precisely how Chou and Molotov reasoned with Ho Chi Minh-by threat, persuasion, or a combination of the two-will likely never be known; but it seems reasonable to suppose that, given the precarious political situation in South Vietnam, the multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to the Saigon government, the continued exacerbating presence of the French, and the economic and social vulnerabilities of a society wracked by war, Peking and Moscow could argue convincingly that South Vietnam would never cohere sufficiently to pose a viable alternative to the DRV. It may thus have been the Communists' expectation that the DRV would as likely assume control of the entire country by default as by an election victory in 1956. The Chinese, to be sure, accepted the notion that the Geneva accords had, temporarily at least, created two Vietnamese governments rather than simply divided the country administratively. [\[Doc. 64\]](#) But it is improbable that either they or the Soviets anticipated that even an American-supported South Vietnam could survive. Put another way, the possibility of a prospering, anti-Communist South Vietnam may simply not have been a serious, and certainly was not an immediate, concern for either Communist power. The Geneva Conference had created French goodwill for Moscow and added security for Peking; what might happen in South Vietnam may, in 1954, have seemed inconsequential.

Viet Minh Objectives

The Viet Minh did not emerge as "losers" in the negotiations. They received the territorial benefits of the settlement without having to cede the French or any neutral body control of enclaves in northern Vietnam. In addition, the DRV was promised an opportunity within two years to gain full control of the country through a ballot box victory, although it appears that Viet Minh leaders put more stock in a collapse of the southern regime before the election date as the path to complete control of the country. In Laos, the Pathet Lao had not been disarmed immediately; instead, they were permitted to regroup over a wide expanse of terrain that would make disarmament difficult to accomplish. And in both Laos and Cambodia, the resistance elements were to be accorded full political rights to participate, as individuals, in the 1955 elections.

In their public commentaries on the Geneva accords, Viet Minh leaders displayed full satisfaction. Military victories had gained political recognition, they said, thanks to the support rendered by the Soviet and Chinese delegations. Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity were admitted by Paris, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed. Moreover, the regroupment to two zones in Vietnam was, as he put it, "a temporary action, a transitional

step in the realization of a cease-fire, toward restoring peace and attaining the unification of our country by means of general elections." No "administrative partition" was intended; nor would the "zonal arrangements" be permitted to interfere with Vietnam's future unification:

North, Central and South Viet Nam are territories of ours. Our country will certainly be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated. Our compatriots in the South were the first to wage the war of Resistance. They possess a high political consciousness. I am confident that they will place national interests above local interests, permanent interests above temporary interests, and join their efforts with the entire people in strengthening peace, achieving unity, independence and democracy all over the country . . . our people, army men and cadres from North to South must unite closely. They must be at one in thought and deed.

And Ton Duc Thang vowed: "The Vietnam State will undoubtedly be unified through general elections."

Despite these protestations of satisfaction and confidence, Tillman Durdin's report from Geneva that members of the Viet Minh delegation were sharply disappointed by the results and vexed at pressure applied by their Chinese and Russian comrades seems on the mark. The Viet Minh command evidently believed--and no French authority on the spot doubted this--that they could eliminate the French from Tonkin with one major offensive and proceed from there against a weakened, demoralized Franco-Vietnamese army in Annam. Surely Ho Chi Minh must have considered the possibility of American intervention--although this concern does not emerge as clearly from Viet Minh public commentaries as it does from the official Moscow and Peking organs. But the Viet Minh looked to the Korea experience as having demonstrated that fighting and talking simultaneously was, as put by a mid-May VNA broadcast, a tactic they could pursue for two years (like the Chinese during the Panmunjom talks) in order to maximize territorial gains. Whether the Viet Minh ultimately envisaged the conquest of all Vietnam before reaching agreement with the French to cease fire is debatable; at the least, they, like the French, probably regarded maximum control of population and territory as insurance against future elections. Thus, to the Viet Minh, a settlement at the 17th parallel could only have been regarded as a tactical blunder in violation of the guerrilla war theory and practice they had mastered.

Forfeiture of considerable territory in Vietnam was undoubtedly not the only ground for the Viet Minh's displeasure. Their frequent pronouncements on the "indivisibility" of the Viet Minh, Free Khmer, and Pathet Lao were largely ignored by Chou and Molotov, whose agreement on Laos and Cambodia seems to have given priority to Chinese interests. Account had been taken, as Chou insisted, of the desirability of integrating the resistance forces into the national Khmer and Laotian communities, but those forces were eventually to be disarmed and disbanded, or withdrawn. Conceivably, the Viet Minh leaders never intended to leave Laos, or were assured by the Chinese and Soviets that the agreements reached regarding the Pathet Lao were not meant to exclude future North Vietnamese support. Nevertheless, any future Viet Minh contacts with the rebels would

be a clear violation of the Geneva accords and provide the occasion for intensified Laotian ties to the West.

The Viet Minh also yielded ground on national elections. Their hopes for an all-Vietnamese political settlement soon after the cease-fire were quashed by the Soviets and Chinese, who were disposed to accept a longer waiting period. Furthermore, the political settlement itself was not given the priority the Viet Minh had originally demanded; it would be achieved, as phrased in the Final Declaration, "in the near future," as the result of rather than as the precondition to, a military (cease-fire) settlement. Finally, when the time for a political settlement was at hand, the Declaration specified that an international body would supervise it rather than the Viet Minh and "South" Vietnamese alone. The overriding interests of the Soviets and Chinese had taken the heart out of the initial Viet Minh proposals of May 10 and, in addition, had considerably undercut their "fallback" positions expressed in late May and June. Jean Chauvel was apparently correct when he perceived, after private talks with the Chinese, that the Viet Minh were really on the end of a string being manipulated from Moscow and Peking. When they moved forward too quickly, Chou and Molotov were always at hand to pull them back to a more accommodating position. Briefly put, the Viet Minh very likely felt they had been compelled to give away much of what they had earned even as they acquired the attributes of sovereignty for which they had fought.

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE WESTERN BIG THREE

The British

For Great Britain, the accords signalled the end of a war that more than once threatened to involve the United States and risk a regional conflagration. Had the point of direct American intervention been reached, the Churchill government would have been faced with an extraordinarily difficult decision: whether to join with an old ally in a war venture that Britain considered politically wrong and militarily foolish, or to break with Washington and thereby throw into question the Anglo-American alliance. Britain's consistent advice to delay irreversible military steps, including formation of a Southeast Asia defense organization, until the Communists had been given an opportunity to make good on their proclaimed devotion to a peaceful solution over Indochina had been grudgingly accepted by the United States; the choice of following or ignoring American leadership was averted.

A diplomatic untangling of the Indochina problem, as Britain's first hope, also became in large measure its responsibility. If the allies were not to be pressed into a military response, it was as much up to Eden as to Bidault (and, later, Mendès-France), to establish the grounds for a settlement. Although final agreement at the conference required Soviet and Chinese preparedness to offer equitable terms, Eden's own contributions cannot be exaggerated. Working closely with Molotov and Chou, Eden apparently earned their respect as a forthright, flexible, but firm negotiator. That the accords were drawn up testified to Eden's persistence. They were a triumph of British diplomacy to the extent that the Chinese and Soviets, in press commentaries immediately

following the close of the Conference, accorded the UK delegation the unusual accolade of having, along with their delegations, rendered the most important services in the agonizing process of reaching agreement.

At the same time as the British successfully pushed through a settlement by diplomatic rather than military means, they also reserved the right to join with the United States in a regional security arrangement immediately after the conference. As Eden had told Chou, the formation of a SEATO would not be put off, even though the Associated States would not become members. British membership in SEATO represented another significant diplomatic victory. They had on several occasions informed the United States that a Southeast Asia pact formed in advance of or during the Geneva deliberations might be interpreted as provocative by the Chinese and reduce, if not eliminate, chances for a settlement. The British never opposed the concept of SEATO, but they cautioned against poor timing. SEATO's establishment in September 1954 was thus doubly welcomed by London: It satisfied Britain's conviction that a much-needed regional organization should be formed to preserve what remained of Indochina, not to take action to recover it all from the Viet Minh.

Britain's opposition to forming SEATO before or during the conference so as, in part, not to provoke the Chinese fitted with London's aspirations for better Sino-British relations. Quite unlike the dominant voices in Washington, Churchill and Eden were amenable to attempting to achieve some kind of working relationship with Peking, particularly in view of the ongoing guerrilla war in Malaya. The conference, as Eden noted in his June 23 speech to the Commons, had resulted in an improvement of Sino-British relations, demonstrated by Peking's agreement on June 17, after four years of silence, to exchange charges d'affaires. In the remaining month of the conference, moreover, British youth delegations traveled to China, and there were hopeful comments from both countries on the possibilities for stepped up trade and the exchange of cultural delegations. Thus, in sharp contrast to the United States, Great Britain fully exploited this period of harmony through diplomacy to change, rather than preserve, its pattern of contact with Peking.

The French

France probably had as much cause for satisfaction with the outcome at Geneva as any other party to the conference. Paris had extricated itself from la sale guerre with honor, yet had also retained a foothold in South Vietnam and a close relationship with Cambodia and Laos. The French Union lost much of its strength, but not all of its appeal, in Indochina. At least in mid-1954, it appeared that French cultural and economic interests in all three former colonies would be substantially preserved; and even the DRV had indicated, at the close as well as at the beginning of the negotiations, that it aspired to membership in the Union. French military power would have to be surrendered, of course;* but French influence could (and did) remain in all three countries.

* Even as most French troops were withdrawn, a French military presence remained for some time. The last troops did not leave Vietnam until February 1956 while, under the

military accords, French instructors remained in Laos and Cambodia and two bases continued to function in Laos.

While the British were ready to join with the United States and other interested nations in SEATO, the French clearly intended, as evidenced by their concern over the location of the demarcation line, that South Vietnam have a defensible territory within which to establish a stable regime competitive with the DRV. * * As already

** French interest was not confined to South Vietnam after July 21, 1954. Soon thereafter, Paris dispatched Jean Sainteny, its former chief negotiator with the Viet Minh at Fontainebleau and Dalat in 1946, to Hanoi to represent French interests without conferring recognition on the DRV. France recognized only one Vietnam but in fact dealt with two.

observed, Paris was not motivated by altruism alone; a substantial territorial base was as much for the preservation of French economic holdings in the South as for the future security of the Saigon government. To judge from the French attitude, the Paris government, no less than the American administration, looked forward to participating fully in the consolidation and rehabilitation of the GVN at least in the two years before nationwide elections.

The Americans

The United States viewed the conference results with mixed emotions. On the one hand, the terms of the settlement conformed surprisingly well to those the Administration had agreed with the French and British would be acceptable. Even as the Administration could not do more than agree to "respect" and "take note" of the Geneva accords, it had to concede that they represented a reasonable outcome given the chaotic state of Allied relations before the conference, the rejection by France of a possible military alternative, and the undeniable military superiority of the Viet Minh beyond as well as within Vietnam. On the other hand, the settlement, viewed through the special lenses of the Eisenhower-Dulles Administration, also contained the elements of defeat. Part of the Free World's "assets" in the Far East had been "lost" to the Sino-Soviet bloc (much as China had been "lost" to Mao Tse-tung's forces); our allies had begged off when offered a chance to deal with the Communists by force of arms and, later, by an Asian-Western anti-Communist alliance ready for action; and the United States had been compelled to attend an international conference which not only confirmed to the Communists by diplomacy what they had gained by force, but also enhanced their image elsewhere in Asia and worldwide as standard-bearers of peace.

The view that Geneva had come out better than could have been expected was the one offered publicly. The President, at a July 21 news conference, declined to criticize the accords. He said they contained "features which we do not like, but a great deal depends

on how they work in practice." He announced the Government's intention to establish permanent missions in Laos and Cambodia, and said the United States was actively "pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area."

Under Secretary Smith likewise was very guarded in remarks two days later. Denying that Geneva was another "Munich," Smith said: "I am . . . convinced that the results are the best that we could possibly have obtained in the circumstances," adding that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield." When Dulles spoke (also on July 23), he was much less interested in the past than in the future. Referring to "the loss in Northern Vietnam," the Secretary expressed the hope that much would be learned from the experience toward preventing further Communist inroads in Asia. Two lessons could be culled, he observed. First, popular support was essential against Communist subversion; "the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions." Second, collective defense should precede rather than come during the aggression—a pointed criticism of British policy during the crisis. A collective security system now in Southeast Asia, he concluded, would check both outright aggression and subversion.

A point-by-point comparison of the Seven Points with the provisions of the accords indicates that quite apart from what had happened to American interests in Southeast Asia as a consequence of the conference, American diplomacy had, on balance, succeeded:

- (1) The integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia were preserved, and Viet Minh forces were to be withdrawn or disarmed and disbanded.
- (2) Southern Vietnam was retained, although without an enclave in the North and with the partition line somewhat south of Dong Hoi.
- (3) Laos, Cambodia, and "retained" Vietnam were not prevented from forming "non-Communist regimes" (in the case of Vietnam, within the two-year preelection period); nor were they expressly forbidden "to maintain adequate forces for internal security." Vietnam's right to import arms and other war materiel was, however, restricted to piece-by-piece replacement, and its employment of foreign advisers to the number in the country at the war's close.
- (4-5) Recalling Dulles' interpretation of July 7 that elections should "be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance," the accords did not "contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"; nor did they "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means." Although Dulles and Mendès-France preferred that no date be set for the elections, the compromise two-year hiatus gave the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese a considerable breathing spell. The first priority, therefore, was to "give democratic elements best chance"; as was subsequently determined by Washington, this meant providing South Vietnam with economic assistance and political support. Elections, as Dulles indicated then, and as the OCB concurred in August, were agreeable to the United States; but they

were two years away, and *the immediate, primary task* was "to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam..." Thus, the corollary objective (stated by the NSC in August and approved by the President) "to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections" did *not* connote American intention to subvert the accords; read in context, the phrase meant that American influence would aim at assuring that the Communists not gain an electoral victory through deceitful, undemocratic methods in violation of the Final Declaration's stipulation that they be "free."

(6) The accords expressly provided for the transfer of individuals desiring to move from one zone to another.

(7) The accords did seem, *at the time*, to have basically fulfilled the precondition of providing "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement." Although the machinery would be the ICC's rather than the UN's, Under Secretary Smith noted that the ICC would have a veto power on important questions (referring, evidently, to the unanimity rule); would be composed of one genuine neutral (India) and one pro-Western government (Canada); and would be permitted full freedom of movement into demilitarized zones and frontier and coastal areas. Smith gave this assessment:

Taking everything into consideration, I strongly feel this [the control and supervision arrangement] is satisfactory and much better than we were able to obtain in Korea. French feel, and Eden and I agree, that with such composition built-in veto will work to our advantage. This setup is best French or anybody else could get, and I feel it is within spirit of point 7. [[Doc. 79](#)]

Despite the overall concordance of major provisions of the accords with the Seven Points, the fact that another piece of territory had been formally ceded to the Communists obviously weighed heavily on the Administration. When, in August, papers were drawn up for the National Security Council, the Geneva Conference was evaluated as a major defeat for United States diplomacy and a potential disaster for United States security interests in the Far East. The Operations Control Board, in its progress report on the then-current NSC paper 5405, stated that the Final Declaration of the conference "completed a major forward stride of communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia. It therefore recorded a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC 5405 and a serious loss for the free world, the psychological and political effects of which will be felt throughout the Far East and around the globe." In a separate report, the NSC was somewhat more specific concerning the extent of the damage, but no less restrained. The Communists had acquired "an advance salient" in Vietnam for use in military and nonmilitary ways; the United States had lost prestige as a leader in Asia capable of stemming Communist expansion; the Communist peace line had gained at America's expense; and Communist military and political prestige had been enhanced as the result of their proven ability to exploit unstable situations in Southeast Asian countries without resort to armed attack.

The conclusion that emerges from the obvious contrast between the public and private comments of Administration officials and organs is that where American diplomacy fell down was not at the conference but during the Indochina crisis as a whole. Nearly all the revised American negotiatory *principles* had emerged unscathed; but American *objectives* in Indochina--the elimination of the Viet Minh threat, preservation of the

strategically vital Tonkin Delta, and obstruction of Communist political and military expansionist policies in the region (all of which were enumerated in NSC 5405--had still been defeated. The United States had admirably maneuvered at Geneva in its self-limited role of interested party; but the Administration, convinced that any attrition of what had been regarded as "Free World" territory and resources was inimical to American global interests, could only view the settlement as the acceptance of terms from the Communist victors. The task in Vietnam in the two years ahead was therefore to work with what had been "retained" in the hope, by no means great, that the Diem government could pull the country up by its bootstraps in time to present a meaningful alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 4, "U.S. and France in Indochina, 1950-56"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 1, pp. 179-214

Summary

AID FOR FRANCE IN INDOCHINA, 1950-1954

The United States decision to provide military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was reached informally in February/March 1950, funded by the President on May 1, 1950, and was announced on May 8 of that year. The decision was taken in spite of the U.S. desire to avoid direct involvement in a colonial war, and in spite of a sensing that France's political-military situation in Indochina was bad and was deteriorating. Moreover, predictions that U.S. aid would achieve a marked difference in the course of the Indochina War were heavily qualified.

The situation in which the decision was made was completely dominated by the take-over of and consolidation of power in China by the communists. Nationalist Chinese forces had been withdrawn from mainland China and Communist Chinese troops had arrived on the border of Indochina in late 1949. This period was the high water mark of U.S. fears of direct Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina. NIE 5 of 29 December 1950 stated: "Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time . . . it is almost certain to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to maintain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh."

The rationale of the decision was provided by the U.S. view that the Soviet-controlled expansion of communism both in Asia and in Europe required, in the interests of U.S. national security, a counter in Indochina. The domino thesis was quite prominent. On 6

March 1950, the Secretary of Defense wrote the President as follows: "The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal government in Indochina or to face the extension of communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward . . ." Despite this statement, it was a generally accepted proposition that "regardless of current U.S. commitments for certain military assistance to China, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances."

The decision to begin military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was not made under the illusion of great expectations. In April 1950, the Joint Chiefs would go no further than to say that prompt delivery of the aid would do no more than create the "possibility of success." In July 1950, General Erskine, after completing his Presidential mission to Indochina, reported that "the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation." All U.S. expectations seemed to have been underpinned by the Joint Chiefs' belief that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China."

Results of the decision were mixed. Although implementation of the decision was partially successful in that it enabled the French to continue the military campaign in Indochina to the time of the Geneva Accords, military assistance was by and large a failure as an instrument of U.S. policy: the U.S. neither assured the French a military success, influenced the political situation to advantage, nor prevented the loss of North Vietnam to the communists at Geneva.

The U.S. MAAG Indochina was unable to perform even the limited functions assigned it. The French, never eager for U.S. advice, succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense.

Contributing to the initial U.S. decision to aid the French, and to limiting the effectiveness of the U.S. program of assistance, were (1) setting impracticable preconditions for assistance upon the French, (2) the U.S. proclivity to accept a slender chance of success without weighing alternatives, (3) the suppression of alternatives leading to decisional circularity and reinforcement of existing policies, (4) repeated failures of the U.S. to bargain effectively with the French, and (5) the vulnerability of the U.S. policy-making machinery to spoofing, particularly as regards U.S. credulity in accepting French information at face value and in being susceptible to "red" scares.

The decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States is the focus of this discussion; it was but one issue among hundreds preoccupying the United States Government in the time period under consideration-the fall of China and the Korean War-and it was probably not regarded by those who made policy as among their critical decisions. There is no evidence of any high U.S. official arguing that any *significant commitment* threshold was being crossed. There were, however, those who maintained that the important anti-colonial stand of the U.S. was being undermined. These voices (and they were basically from the public domain) were drowned out by those who

advocated immediate security needs. The importance of the decision was that when the U.S. was faced with an unambiguous choice between a policy of anti-colonialism and a policy of anti-communism, it chose the latter. And, although the decision was not perceived as getting the U.S. more deeply "involved" in Indochina, it did mark a tangible first step in that direction.

THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

Vietnam was the crucible of contemporary France. Military defeat by the Viet Minh--unprecedented victory of Asian over European--was but one political reagent: there was also intense frustration and disappointment among French of Rightist-convictions that sneaker-shod Asian peasants could undo a century of costly labor at France's "civilizing mission," and jeopardize the largest investment of French capital in the Far East. The Tonkin Delta region represented in a special way all that Vietnam meant to France. Tonkin, of all Vietnam, was where French economic stakes were highest, where the culture of France most completely overglossed indigenous ways, where stood educational focus of Vietnam--the University of Hanoi, with its French faculty--and where Catholicism flourished among the rural folk. Thus, evacuation of Tonkin per the dictates of the Geneva Settlement stung less from a sense of humiliation over Dien Bien Phu than from a sense of abandonment: an epoch had closed, France was demeaned.

Had the Geneva Settlement been fulfilled, France might have retained a presence and influence in Vietnam that would have mollified both the Right and Left. After all, no significant body of opinion in France held the French should continue to mold Vietnamese politics or that the French Expeditionary Corps should remain there undiminished--the reality of the DRV and the exigencies of North Africa rendered such a position untenable. The Left and the Center were quite willing for France to withdraw under the Geneva formula; even the "Indochina" clique within the army recognized the priority of Algeria. But France in the end, at American instance, had to accept withdrawal without the cover of general elections, and to accede to a second, further, more final abandonment.

The supplanting of France by the U.S. in South Vietnam, and the failure of the Geneva Settlement, both well advanced by mid-1956, denied the French Left its prospects for cooperation with Ho Chi Minh in a precedent-setting experiment in coexistence. It disappointed moderates who had hoped to preserve French cultural influence and salvage French capital. It enraged Rightists who interpreted American policies in Vietnam invidiously. None of these factions was prepared to take a stand for France's staying, but all attempted to draw political sustenance from acerbic treatment of the U.S.

The whole episode of French withdrawal from Vietnam, in fact, soured the Western alliance. It is possible that France's rejection of the European Defense Community on August 30, 1954, may have been in part payment for Soviet good offices on behalf of France at Geneva. But it is certain that many French were persuaded that the U.S. and the UK furnished inadequate support to France during the latter phases of the war, and at the Conference. And it is equally certain that American policy in the aftermath of Geneva

widely alienated affection for the U.S. in France, and created that lack of confidence which the Suez crisis of summer, 1956, translated into outright distrust.

After the Geneva Conference, all the governments involved in the Accords, with one significant exception, anticipated that France would remain in Vietnam. The exception was the State of Vietnam, whose Premier, Ngo Dinh Diem, was determined to uproot French influence as a concomitant to the establishment of a genuinely independent nationalist government. The policy of the United States was initially directed toward a partnership with France, a joint sponsorship of Diem and the newly independent nation he headed.

Almost at once, however, U.S. policy began to respond to military urgency, and this in turn caused the U.S. to move beyond partnership to primacy. In September of 1954, SEATO was brought into being, its protection extended to Vietnam by a protocol to the Manila Pact. The U.S. resolved through SEATO to balk further expansion of communist dominion, and looked to transforming Vietnam into a key redoubt in the line of containment. The U.S. was determined that Vietnam would become politically sound, economically self-sufficient, and militarily capable of providing for its own internal security, coping with invasion from North Vietnam, and contributing to the deterrent strength of the SEATO coalition. France, then beset with internal political divisions, and plagued with Algeria, evidenced doubt, indecision, and occasional reluctance in aiding Vietnam toward the foregoing objectives. The U.S. was not prepared to wait. In late September 1954, the U.S. cut out the French as middle-men in all its assistance for Vietnam, and began to deal directly with Diem, his government, and his armed forces.

France did not readily accept this enlarged American role, nor was there complete agreement with the U.S. Government that the United States should pursue a further shouldering aside of France. Through the fall of 1954, France-U.S. relations worsened, and a policy debate developed in Washington. Once again, military considerations emerged as paramount. The JCS were originally opposed to the United States assuming responsibility for training the Army of Vietnam. They took the position, however, that if political considerations dictated such a U.S. involvement "the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training mission." On October 26, 1954, the Secretary of Defense, acting on behalf of the President, instructed the JCS to prepare a "long-range program for the organization and training of a minimum number of free Vietnam forces necessary for internal security." The development of this plan and an appropriate working relationship with the French continued into 1955, and necessitated the dispatch to Vietnam of General J. Lawton Collins, with Ambassadorial status, to obtain a tri-partite agreement acceptable in Saigon, in Paris, and in Washington. During November 1954, the JCS expressed serious reservations about the success of such a combined undertaking. Nevertheless, the NSC considered the policy sound, and this judgment was confirmed from the field by General Collins. Collins reported that:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps would be withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could be enacted.

Collins recommended that the United States continue military aid to France to "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces." In the meantime, events in Vietnam seemed to support those who, like the JCS, continued to entertain strong reservations about the future of Ngo Dinh Diem and his government. Diem managed to survive attempted coups by army leaders, and succeeded in maintaining an unhappy peace with the several armed factions of Cochinchina. But his political future remained questionable at best. At the same time, the French mission in Hanoi pressed hard to preserve French economic and cultural prerogatives in North Vietnam, and certain French political leaders in Paris spoke grandiloquently of a cooperative *modus vivendi* with the DRV becoming a model for east-west relations--a disquieting message for the U.S. Secretary of State and those who shared his convictions within the Administration. Finally, parallel to these developments, the Emperor Bao Dai, retaliating for Diem's vituperative political campaign against him, actively sought to supplant Diem.

All the foregoing tension resolved to two central issues between the United States and France. The first was the question of how and by whom Vietnam's armed forces were to be trained. The second, and more far-reaching, was whether Ngo Dinh Diem was to remain at the head of Vietnam's government, or whether he was to be replaced by another nationalist leader more sympathetic to Bao Dai and France. The first issue was resolved relatively quickly. General Collins struck an agreement with General Ely in Vietnam by which, despite serious misgivings in Paris, France agreed to turn over the training of the Vietnamese army to the U.S. and to withdraw French cadres. On February 12, 1955, the U.S. assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces, and the French disassociation began.

But the political controversy over Diem was less easily resolved. Diem exacerbated matters with increasingly vehement stricture against the French and Bao Dai. The United States on its part was insensitive to the impact within France of Diem's militant anti-communism--frequently directed at the French Left--and of the rancor aroused by U.S. statements portraying America as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. The U.S. did alert, however, to French statements that Diem was categorically incapable of unifying Vietnamese nationalists. French advice to the U.S. that Diem should, therefore, be replaced was seconded by Ambassador Collins from Vietnam. Throughout the winter and spring, Secretary Dulles and the Department of State in general seemed disposed to consider favorably suggestions that an alternative leader for the Vietnamese be placed in power. However, despite an ostensibly thorough search, no nationalist leader with qualities competitive with Diem's was identified.

Both the U.S. and France were then caught up in the sweep of events. The armed sects directly challenged Diem's authority, and he responded with force. An uneasy truce ended the first clash in March, and amid the mounting tension in April 1955, the U.S., France, and amid the mounting tension in April 1955, the U.S., France, and Bao Dai all sought

actively to bring about a change in the GVN. On 28 April, Diem, against U.S. advice, against French advice, and against the advice of his cabinet, moved again against the sects. When Binh Xuyen resisted in Saigon, he committed the Vietnamese army to battle. Diem's forces won an immediate military victory, and simultaneously Diem's brother, Nhu, co-opted a committee of nationalist figures who called for Bao Dai's removal, and transfer of civil and military power to Diem.

Encouraged by Diem's success, the U.S. declared its unequivocal support for him as apposed to Bao Dai. The U.S. choice presented acute difficulties for France. The French Government was convinced that Nhu's "Revolutionary Committee" was under Viet Minh influence, and was strongly resentful of a renewed GVN campaign against French presence. In May 1955, France, the U.S., and Britain met in Paris to discuss European defense, but France promptly made Vietnam the principal agenda item. France maintained that the U.S., in backing Diem, forced upon France the necessity for withdrawing altogether from Vietnam. The French Foreign Minister Faure held that Diem was "not only incapable but mad . . . France can no longer take risks with him." Secretary Dulles in reply indicated that the U.S. was aware of Diem's weaknesses, but stressed Diem's recent successes as indicating redeeming qualities. But, Dulles pointed out "Vietnam is not worth a quarrel with France," and offered U.S. withdrawal in preference to allied disunity. No decision was taken immediately, and during a recess Secretary Dulles received advice from the JCS that Diem seemed the most promising avenue to achievement of U.S. objectives, and that while withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," a precipitate withdrawal was to be prevented since it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual loss of South Vietnam to communism. Secretary Dulles then proposed to the French that they continue to support Diem until a national assembly were elected. British support for Diem seems to have swayed Faure, and he accepted Dulles' proposal. The tri-partite meeting ended on a note of harmony, but the undertones were distinct: the days of joint U.S.- French policy were over; thereafter, the U.S. would act independently of France in Vietnam.

Backed by the United States, Diem refused to open consultation with the North Vietnamese concerning general elections when the date for these fell due in July 1955. Pressing his military advantage against the sects, he moved to consolidate his position politically within South Vietnam. In October, he won a resounding victory in a popular referendum in which voters were given a choice between Diem and Bao Dai. As Diem's political strength grew, his relations with Paris deteriorated. In December 1955, Diem suddenly terminated the existing economic and financial agreements with France, and called upon France to denounce the Geneva agreements and break relations with Hanoi. Soon thereafter, he withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

On January 2, 1956, general elections in France produced a government under Socialist Guy Mollet, a third of the members of which were communists or avowed neutralists. In early March, Mollet's Foreign Minister, Pineau, declared in a speech to the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris that France would actively seek policy position

bridging East and West, and that there was no unanimity of policy among the U.S., UK, and France. He cited UK Middle East policy and U.S. support for Diem as contrary to French interests, and condemned both powers for stirring up the Moslem world to France's distinct disadvantage in North Africa. A few days later, at a SEATO Council meeting in Karachi, Pineau proclaimed the end of the "era of aggression," and called for a "policy of coexistence."

Action followed Pineau's line. On March 22, 1956, France agreed with Diem to withdraw the FEC altogether. On April 26, 1956, the French High Command in Saigon was disestablished. On the due date for the general elections agreed to at Geneva, France possessed no military forces in Vietnam. And the date for the fulfillment of the political portions of the Settlement, July 1956, coincided with the inception of the Suez crisis.

End of Summary

I. AID FOR FRANCE IN INDOCHINA, 1950-1954

A. THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE DEVELOPS

1. *The U.S. and the French Colonial War*

Because the early phase (1946-1949) of the Indochina war was an overt attempt by the French to reassert authority and control over their Indochinese colonies, the United States, although aware that European Recovery Program (ERP) funds were indirectly used to finance the war, refused to support that war directly. However, American actions taken to assure a neutral position—refusal to sell armaments to the French for use in Indochina; refusal to transport troops, arms, or ammunition "to or from Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina"—accompanied by public and private statements of anti-colonialist sentiments, did constitute, at least in French eyes, a policy hostile to the French interest in Indochina. Therefore, early in 1947, the Department of State attempted to reassure the French Government, and to make U.S. policies and actions more palatable to them:

...In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area...

Neither direct nor indirect assistance to the French effort in Indochina was deemed "appropriate," however, until the French took concrete steps to grant autonomy to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The U.S. was prepared to support the "Bao Dai solution" for

Vietnam when and if Bao Dai acquired genuine independence. The U.S. warned France against settling for a "native government [headed by Bao Dai] which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually [a] puppet government, separated from [the] people and existing only by [the] presence [of] French military forces."

In March, 1949, in the so-called Elysee Agreement, France contracted with Bao Dai to grant "independence within the French Union" to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Despite U.S. urgings, the Elysee Agreement remained a potentially empty and ill-defined French promise for eleven months. In that period, the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek were driven from the China mainland, and in November, Mao's legions arrived at the Indochina border. In January, 1950, Ho Chi Minh declared that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnamese people" and indicated his willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." The Communist Chinese promptly responded with *recognition*, followed by the Soviets. In France, there was a sharp debate in the National Assembly between Leftist advocates of an immediate truce with the Viet Minh, and Government supporters of ratification for the Elysee Agreement. On 2 February 1950, the French Government prevailed, and the Elysee Agreement was formally ratified. Under the circumstances, the United States determined that this action met its minimum requirements for tangible French progress towards Vietnamese autonomy. On 3 February, President Truman approved recognition of the States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Within three months the United States decided to extend economic and military aid to the new States. On 8 May 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war originated with its decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States, and to form MAAG Indochina. Therefore, it is of particular importance to understand the reasons for the decision, the form of its execution, and its effects.

2. The Containment of Communism

U.S. chagrin and increasing concern over the post-World War II expansion of the Soviet Union in Europe, together with fear of further gains by communism, set the tone of U.S. policy toward Asian communist nations in the 1948-1950 period. As the Secretary of State's statement above indicates, these were the days of the "monolithic Communist bloc," dominated by the Soviet Union. A National Security Council policy paper of 1949 stated that:

The USSR is now an Asiatic power of the first magnitude with expanding influence and interest extending throughout continental Asia and into the Pacific. Since the defeat of Japan . . . the Soviet Union has been able to consolidate its strategic position until the base of Soviet power in Asia comprises not only the Soviet Far East, but also China north of the Great Wall, Northern Korea, Sakhalin, and the Kuriles.

The question of how best to oppose the expansion of communism in Asia was raised to crisis proportions by the "loss" of China. An extensive and acrimonious national debate on foreign policy was stirred, conducted in the midst of growing public apprehension over communist penetration, espionage, and subversion in Europe and within the United States. Many advocated increased aid to the Chinese Nationalists, who were regarded by many, even at this late date, as the bulwark containing communism in Asia. Although no major emphasis was given Indochina in 1949, NSC papers did discuss the importance of the Franco-Viet Minh struggle, and link the future of Indochina with that of the rest of the world:

In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of Southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire Southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of Southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us: if Southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia.

It was precisely the extension of communist authority over China referred to above that led to increased emphasis in U.S. policy on Indochina in late 1949 and 1950.

Following the Chinese Communist victories of 1949 and the movement of Chinese Communist troops to the border of Indochina in November of that year, NSC 64 (February 27, 1950) [[Doc. 1](#)] concluded that "the Departments of State and Defense should prepare, as a matter of priority, a program of all practicable measures designed to protect U.S. security interests in Indochina." On the same day, following the Communist Chinese (January 18) and the Soviet (January 30) recognition of the Ho Chi Minh regime, the United States announced its recognition of the Bao Dai Government. Theretofore, the U.S. had remained neutral, hesitating to choose between supporting France, a friendly colonial power engaged in re-establishing its authority, or supporting the Viet Minh, a communist-dominated independence movement in opposition to that European ally. This dilemma had been resolved by the victory of the Chinese Communists over the Nationalists, and by the threat posed to Indochina. The United States policy of support for the French and the Associated States was adjudged one befitting an anti-colonial democracy: support of nationalism and independence; opposition to attempted encroachments thereon by international communism.

3. *"The Line of Containment" and "The Domino Theory"*

The logic of this shift in U.S. policy is found not only in the direct threat to Southeast Asia posed by Communist China (and the Soviet Union), but also in the broader strategic concept of a line of containment, and in the early articulation of what later became known as the "domino theory." Discussion of the line of containment centered about where that line was to be drawn: Indochina, and, later, Korea, fell on the free side of that line. The domino notion had been advanced by General Claire Chennault, among others, in the reference to Nationalist China; the domino theory as applied to Indochina reinforced the decision of where to draw the line of containment. Both ideas were embodied by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a 1950 memorandum to the Secretary of Defense evaluating "the strategic importance, from the military point of view, of Southeast Asia":

- c. Southeast Asia is a vital segment in the line of containment of Communism stretching from Japan southward and around to the Indian Peninsula . . . The security of the three major non-Communist base areas in this quarter of the world—Japan, India, and Australia—depends in a large measure on the denial of Southeast Asia to the Communists. If Southeast Asia is lost, these three base areas will tend to be isolated from one another;
- d. The fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia .
- e. The fall of Southeast Asia would result in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia .
- f. . . . Soviet control of all the major components of Asia's war potential might become a decisive factor affecting the balance of power between the United States and the USSR .
- g. A Soviet position of dominance over the Far East would also threaten the United States position in Japan . . . The feasibility of retention by the United States of its offshore island bases could thus be jeopardized. [[Doc. 3](#)]

This theory, whether more or less completely articulated, appears in the relevant NSC papers of the Indochina War period, and underlies all major U.S. policy decisions taken relevant to the area.

4. *U.S. Perception of the Chinese Communist Threat*

In the words of NSC 64 (February, 1950), "The presence of Chinese Communist troops along the border of Indochina makes it possible for arms, material and troops to move freely from Communist China to the northern Tonkin area now controlled by Ho Chi Minh. There is already evidence of movement of arms." NIE 5 maintained somewhat later, as the decision to help the French was being re-examined, that: "The Communist Chinese regime is already furnishing the Viet Minh materiel, training, and technical assistance. Official French sources report that Chinese Communist troops are already present in Tonkin in some strength . . . Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time . . . It is almost certain to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to attain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh." NIE 5 appeared on December 29, 1950.

Although the threat of intervention to be expected from Communist China did not again reach this intensity or certainty during the remainder of the war-the estimated probability of intervention declined consistently after the publication of NIE 5-estimates throughout the period indicate continuing Communist Chinese provision of military arms, materiel, and training to the Viet Minh, and the existence of Communist Chinese potential for direct intervention. No direct reference was made to possible Viet Minh resentment toward, or resistance to, direct Chinese intervention.

In sum, the U.S. perceived a major Chinese threat at the time the decision to support France and the Associated States was made; a high probability was assigned direct Chinese Communist intervention at the time this decision was being confirmed; this assigned probability declined rapidly, and it remained low through the post-Korean war period. It was believed that the Chinese were providing assistance to the Viet Minh throughout the period late 1949-1954.

5. U.S. Perceptions of the Situation Within Vietnam

On April 5, 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring to intelligence estimates, indicated to the Secretary of Defense their view that "the situation in Southeast Asia has deteriorated," and that, further, "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." (The implication that U.S. assistance would result in improvement over and above the present situation cannot be detected in this carefully worded statement.) The Joint Chiefs of Staff went on to state that:

"In general, the basic conditions of political and economic stability in this area, as well as the military and internal security conditions, are unsatisfactory. These factors are closely interrelated, and it is probable that, from the long-term point of view, political and economic stability is the controlling factor. On the other hand, the military situation in some areas, particularly Indochina, is of pressing urgency."

NIE 5 was the over-all U.S. assessment of the situation in Vietnam closest in time to the U.S. decision to support the French and the Associated States. It estimated the French position as "critically endangered by the Viet Minh," and as "precarious." Combining the more detailed estimates of this document with statements and estimates contained in other U.S. documents contemporary with NIB 5, the following picture emerges:

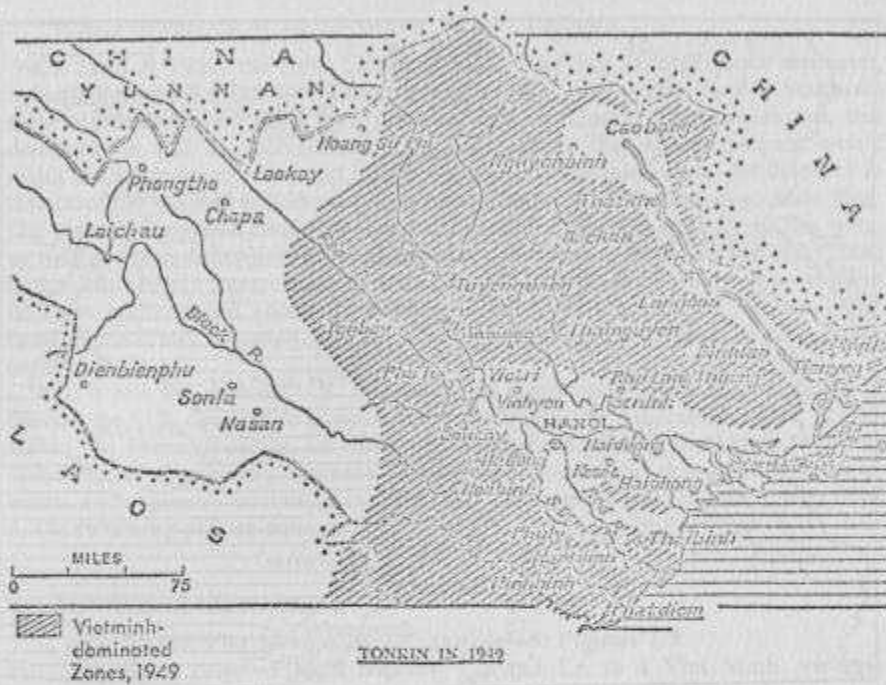
a. The Military Situation

- (1) French-Viet Minh areas of control-see Figures 1-5
- (2) Force ratio-French between 1.5 and 1.6 to 1 Viet Minh; vis-a-vis regular forces in the Tonkin Delta, the ratio was reversed-approximately 1.15 Viet Minh to 1 French (NIE 5).
- (3) Equipment status-French superiority, but Viet Minh improving due to Chinese aid.
- (4) Mobility-Viet Minh superior; French roadbound.
- (5) Strategy-French strategy lacking in aggressiveness, defensive, of doubtful value.
- (6) Status of Vietnamese National Army-essentially none; "only a slight chance that the French can maintain their military position long enough" to build such an army.

(7) Relative capabilities-danger of a major military defeat of the French by the Viet Minh in Tonkin within six to nine months, which would jeopardize the French position in the remainder of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.



Map of Indochina in 1949 showing territorial divisions and major cities. The map includes labels for China, Thailand, Cambodia, and various cities like Hanoi, Haiphong, and Saigon. It also features a legend for Vietminh-dominated zones and a scale bar.



Source: L. Edgard, *The Quifeng and Viet-Quang Little*, (London 1947), pp.

trol of the bureaucracy to the Vietnamese, indicate a reluctant departure, if any departure, from colonial objectives.

d. *French Resolve to Remain in Vietnam*

"... there are grounds for questioning the French will to remain in Indochina."

Thus, the American perception of the situation in Vietnam in 1950 was generally one of gloom, with little light at the end of the tunnel; in retrospect, it seems reasonably accurate.

B. *THE BEGINNING OF AMERICAN AID*

1. *The Decision to Assist France and the Associated States*

a. *French Request Aid*

United States involvement in the bleak Indochinese situation was hastened when, on February 16, 1950, the French requested U.S. military and economic assistance for the prosecution of the Indochinese war. The French forwarded



b. The Economic and Political Situation

French resources badly strained; little or no real nationalist Vietnamese leadership, government; little popular support of Bao Dai regime; political and economic situation generally poor.

c. French Objectives in Vietnam

French slowness and obstruction over the years in creating a Vietnamese national government and national army (March 8, 1949, agreements were not ratified by France until February 2, 1950), and continued slowness in giving control of the bureaucracy to the Vietnamese, indicate a reluctant departure, if any departure, from colonial objectives.

d. French Resolve to Remain in Vietnam

"...there are grounds for questioning the French will to remain in Indochina."

Thus, the American perception of the situation in Vietnam in 1950 was generally one of gloom, with little light at the end of the tunnel; in retrospect. it seems reasonably accurate.

B. THE BEGINNING OF AMERICAN AID



1. The Decision to Assist France and the Associated States

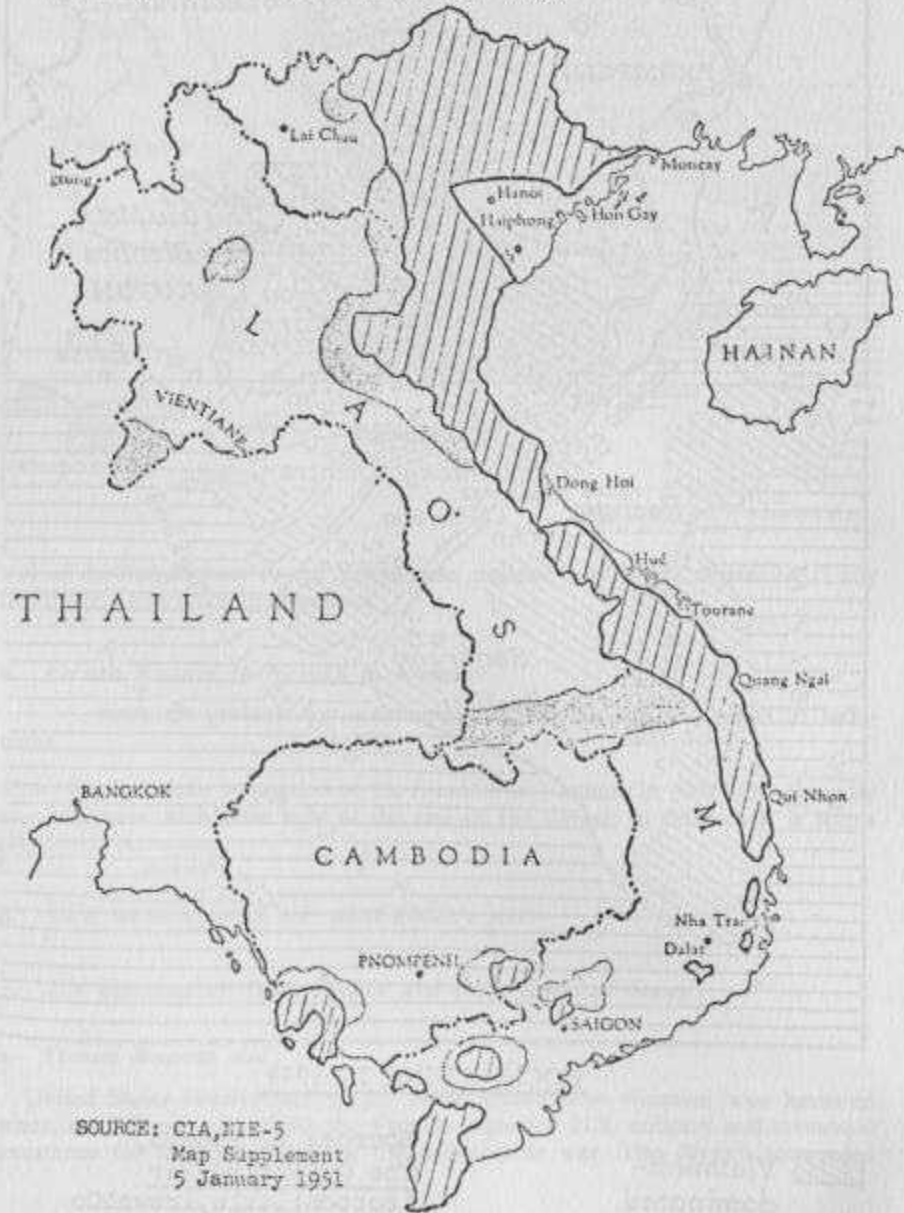
a. French Request Aid

United States involvement in the bleak Indochinese situation was hastened when, on February 16, 1950, the French requested U.S. military and economic assistance for the prosecution of the Indochinese war. The French forwarded their request after deciding "to set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the

DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES IN INDOCHINA

(3 November 1950)

-  Areas in which Communist-led rebels are challenging government authority.
-  Areas in which Communist-instigated guerrilla attacks have recently occurred.



SOURCE: CIA, NIE-5
Map Supplement
5 January 1951

LEGEND
● Infantry
○ Region
△ Artillery

extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina..."

...the truth of the matter was that the effort in Indochina was such of a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise...it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina...looking into the future it was obvious . . . that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about . . . In any event the French Government was confronted with necessity of reducing the present French forces in Indochina by at least 25,000 not only for budgetary reasons, but because additional men were urgently needed in connection with French national military program.

Yet this appeal for aid, its thinly-veiled reinforcing arguments referring to withdrawal and the defense of Europe (on the day following the severing of U.S.- Bulgarian relations), was unaccompanied by a willingness to satisfy a U.S. request for France to announce the "evolutionary nature" of the governments of the Associated States, or to clarify otherwise the French intentions toward Indochina.

On February 27, a Department of State report on the position of the United States with respect to Indochina was submitted for the NSC's consideration. Issued on February 27 as NSC 64, the report concluded that:

10. It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.
11. The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.
12. Accordingly, the Departments of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina. [[Doc. 1](#)]

To "facilitate" Department of Defense consideration of NSC 64, then Deputy Under Secretary of State Dean Rusk provided Major General James H. Burns of OSD a brief statement of Department of State policy in Indochina and Southeast Asia:

The Department of State believes that within the limitations imposed by existing commitments and strategic priorities, the resources of the United States should be deployed to reserve Indochina and Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. The Department of State has accordingly already engaged all its political resources to the end that this object be secured. The Department is now engaged in the process of urgently examining what additional economic resources can effectively be engaged in the same operation.

It is now, in the opinion of the Department, a matter of the greatest urgency that the Department of Defense assess the strategic aspects of the situation and consider, from the military point of view, how the United States can best contribute to the prevention of further Communist encroachment in that area.

In a memorandum for the President of March 6, 1950, the Secretary of Defense described U.S. options as follows:

The French are irrevocably committed in Indochina and are supporting the three states as a move aimed at achieving non-Communist political stability . . . The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward...

b. The Griffin Mission

While the choice among alternatives awaited provision of the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military departments, the Secretary of State sent to the Far East "the Griffin Mission," which was given the task of surveying "the kinds and approximate value of assistance needed" in Indochina (among other countries). Departing when it did, some five months following the fall of Nationalist China, and headed by the former Deputy Chief of the Aid Mission to Mainland China, the Griffin Mission was probably intended to avoid further attacks on the State Department's Asia policy as well as to determine how U.S. economic resources might effectively be employed in Southeast Asia.

On March 22, the Griffin Mission report recommended U.S. aid for a program of rural rehabilitation, the provision of limited amounts of commodities and industrial equipment, and a program of technical assistance. These measures were estimated to cost \$23.5 million for the period through June, 1951. The mission also recommended the "psychological shock of ships with military aid material in the immediate future," as a measure to dramatize the U.S. commitment to those on the scene.

c. JCS Views

On April 5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to a request by the Secretary of Defense with recommendations for measures which, from the United States military point of view, might prevent communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The six most important points made by the Chiefs are these:

(1) A recommendation for early implementation of military aid programs for Indochina and the other states of Southeast Asia, with funds already allocated to the states of Southeast Asia, to be delivered at the earliest practicable date and to be augmented as a matter of urgency with funds from the unallocated portion of the President's emergency fund. For the next fiscal year, an estimated \$100 million will be required for the military portion of this program.

(2) "In view of the history of military aid in China, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urge that these aid programs be subject, in any event, to the following conditions:

"a. That United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs; and

"b. That requests for military equipment be screened first by an officer designated by the Department of Defense and on duty in the recipient state. These requests should be subject to his determination as to the feasibility and satisfactory coordination of specific military operations. It should be understood that military aid will only be considered in connection with such coordinated operational plans as are approved by the representative of the Department of Defense on duty in the recipient country. Further, in conformity with current procedures, the final approval of all programs for military materiel will be subject to the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

(3) "Formation of a Southeast Asia Aid Committee is recommended.

(4) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize the political implications involved in military aid to Indochina. It must be appreciated, however, that French armed forces . . . are in the field and that if these were to be withdrawn this year because of political considerations, the Bao Dai regime probably could not survive even with United States aid. If the United States were now to insist upon independence for Vietnam and a phased French withdrawal from that country, this might improve the political situation. The French could be expected to interpose objections to, and certainly delays in such a program. Conditions in Indochina, however, are unstable and the situation is apparently deteriorating rapidly so that the urgent need for at least an initial increment of military and economic aid is psychologically overriding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, recommend the provision of military aid to Indochina at the earliest practicable date under a program to implement the President's action approving the allocation of \$15 million for Indochina and that corresponding increments of political and economic aid be programmed on an interim basis without prejudice to the pattern of the policy for additional military, political and economic aid that may be developed later."

(5) ". . . the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the immediate establishment of a small United States military aid group in Indochina . . . The Joint Chiefs of Staff would expect the senior member of this group to sit in consultation with military representatives of France and Vietnam and possibly of Laos and Cambodia. In addition to screening requests for materiel, he would be expected to insure full coordination of military plans and efforts between the French and Vietnamese forces and to supervise the allocation of materiel."

(6) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe in the possibility of success of a prompt coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid to Southeast Asia and feel that such a success might well lead to the gaining of the initiative in the struggle in that general area."

The last of these points is clearly fundamental to the undertaking of any program of assistance; yet in the Chiefs' memorandum it appears only as the concluding portion of the paragraph (paragraph 15) recommending establishment of a military aid group in Indochina, and is subsequently subjected to the qualification that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China." More remarkable, however, is the rarity with which even such equivocal predictions of success appear in the available documents relating directly to the decision to provide assistance to Indochina. Direct statements on the probable effectiveness of such United States programs of the period are typically absent; indirect statements are typically of the implied-imperative ("we must do X *if* Asia is to be saved."), or the negative-imperative (if we do *not* do X, Asia will be lost"). There was no assurance of military success given; and the calculus of the decision-making process relating to the weighing of the probability of success against the costs of failure of U.S. programs in the 1950 period is not evident, unfortunately, in available documents.

d. Presidential Approval

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved the allocation of \$10 million to the Department of Defense to cover the early shipment of urgently needed military assistance items to Indochina, thus taking the first crucial decision regarding U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. On May 8, the Secretary of State, in a statement at the ministerial level meeting in Paris, announced United States assistance to the Associated States and France. And on May 24, the governments of France and the Associated States were notified of the United States intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States, thus marking the implementation of the recommendations of the Griffin Mission.

On June 27, 1950, President Truman, in announcing the onset of the Korean war, also stated that he had "directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces." [[Doc. 8](#)] The concept of a military assistance advisory group had also been approved, although the President did not refer to MAAG in his public statement. Also, in June, following the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee was established.

e. Erskine Mission

The military mission dispatched by the President and headed by Major General Graves B. Erskine, USMC, arrived in Saigon on July 15, and reported its findings on August 5. General Erskine reported that a permanent solution of the Indochina crisis went beyond military action alone, the core of the problem being a deep-seated hatred and distrust of the French by the population that precluded their cooperation in the prosecution of the war. The mission also reported that the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation.

The first elements of the U.S. MAAG were assigned to Indochina on August 3, 1950; Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, USA, assumed command as the first Chief of MAAG on October 10. The mission of the MAAG was limited to provision of material assistance to the French forces and indirect provision of military aid to the forces of the Associated States; General Brink was directed not to assume any training or advisory responsibilities toward the indigenous armies. But from the outset, the French rigorously limited end-use inspections of MAAG to a small number of carefully prescribed visits.

f. JCS Reevaluation

After the initial decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States had been taken, the formation of an economic mission had been announced, the first shipment of arms and equipment had arrived in Indochina, and the MAAG had been approved and was in the process of formation, concern mounted over the soundness of these moves. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were again asked by the Secretary of Defense to formulate a position on future U.S. actions with respect to Indochina, and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee (SEAAPC) published, on October 11, 1950, a draft "Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy on Indochina." The SEAAPC statement proposed adding another dimension to U.S. assistance policy: "Regardless of current U.S. commitments for provision of certain military assistance to Indochina, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances." The paper also recommended that the U.S. support the "prompt acceleration of the formation of new national armies of the three Associated States," and a covering memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense recommended that if negotiations were conducted with the French, U.S. representatives should:

....secure French acceptance of the following conditions which shall attach to the extension of U.S. assistance in the formation of national armies in Indochina: (1) French Union Forces would not be withdrawn from Indochina until such Associated States armies are fully trained and ready to act effectively in replacement; (2) France would not decrease its outlays for Indochina below the 1950 rate during the period of the American military aid requested; (3) the national armies project would have the approval of the three Associated States governments; (4) the High Commissioner for Indochina, the French Command, and the three Associated States would maintain full consultative relations with the Legation and MAAG during the period of the formation of the armies.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reevaluation appeared on October 27: military aid should be continued on an expedited basis. Again the judgment was offered that genuine autonomy and self-government had to be extended to the people of Indochina to ameliorate the basic cause of the deterioration of security in Indochina: lack of popular support for the authorities. But the most clearly articulated and complete expression of the Joint Chiefs' over-all position at year end is found in NSC 64/1, a November 28 paper by the Chiefs which takes account of a report from General Brink and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee's draft of October 11; in fact, this statement of short- and long-run objectives contained in NSC 64/1 was to remain the basis of United States policy toward Indochina for the duration of the French-Indochina war:

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

- a. The United States should take action, as a matter of urgency, by all means practicable short of the actual employment of United States military forces, to deny Indochina to Communism.
- b. As long as the present situation exists, the United States should continue to insure that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French.
- c. The United States should seek to develop its military assistance program for Indochina based on an over-all military plan prepared by the French, concurred in by the Associated States of Indochina, and acceptable to the United States.

(1) Both the plan and the program should be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency. It should be clearly understood, however, that United States acceptance of the plan is limited to the logistical support which the United States may agree to furnish. The aid provided under the program should be furnished to the French in Indochina and to the Associated States. The allocation of United States military assistance as between the French and the national armies of Indochina should be approved by the French and United States authorities in Indochina.

(2) Popular support of the Government by the Indochinese people is essential to a favorable settlement of the security problem of Indochina. Therefore, as a condition to the provision of those further increases in military assistance to Indochina necessary for the implementation of an agreed over-all military plan, the United States Government should obtain assurances from the French Government that:

(a) A program providing for the eventual self-government of Indochina either within or outside of the French Union will be developed, made public, and implementation initiated at once in order to strengthen the national spirit of the Indochinese in opposition to Communism.

(b) National armies of the Associated States of Indochina will be organized as a matter of urgency. While it is doubtful that the buildup of these armies can be accomplished in time to contribute significantly to the present military situation, the direct political and psychological benefits to be derived from this course would be great and would thus result in immediate, although indirect, military benefits.

(c) Pending the formation and training of Indochinese national armies as effective units, and as an interim emergency measure, France will dispatch sufficient additional armed forces to Indochina to insure that the restoration of peace and internal security in that country will be accomplished in accordance with the timetable of the over-all military plan for Indochina.

(d) France will change its political and military concepts in Indochina to:

- i. Eliminate its policy of "colonialism."
 - ii. Provide proper tutelage to the Associated States.
 - iii. Insure that a suitable military command structure, unhampered by political interference, is established to conduct effective and appropriate military operations.
- (3) At an appropriate time the United States should institute checks to satisfy itself that the conditions set forth in subparagraph c.(2) above are being fulfilled.
- d. The United States should exert all practicable political and diplomatic measures required to obtain the recognition of the Associated States by the other non-Communist states of Southeast and South Asia.
 - e. In the event of overt attack by organized Chinese Communist forces against Indochina, the United States should not permit itself to become engaged in a general war with Communist China but should, in concert with the United Kingdom, support France and the Associated States by all means short of the actual employment of United States military forces. This support should include appropriate expansion of the present military assistance program and endeavors to induce States in the neighborhood of Indochina to commit armed forces to resist the aggression.
 - f. The United States should immediately reconsider its policy toward Indochina whenever it appears that the French Government may abandon its military position in that country or plans to refer the problem of Indochina to the United Nations. Unless the situation throughout the world generally, and Indochina specifically, changes materially, the United States should seek to dissuade the French from referring the Indochina question to the United Nations.
 - g. Inasmuch as the United States-sponsored resolution, "Uniting for Peace," has been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and should a situation develop in Indochina in a manner similar to that in Korea in which United Nations forces were required, the United States would then probably be morally obligated to contribute its armed forces designated for service on behalf of the United Nations. It is, therefore, in the interests of the United States to take such action in Indochina as would forestall the need for the General Assembly to invoke the provisions of the resolution, "Uniting for Peace."

The JCS also proposed long-term objectives, urging the development of an underground guerrilla warfare capability, a psychological warfare program ("to demonstrate the evils of Communism. . . and to warn . . . of renewed Chinese imperialism"), and encouragement of an appropriate regional security arrangement. These concepts formed the heart of an NSC Staff Study of December 28. The initial decision to give assistance was confirmed after nearly one year's continual re-examination, and remained basic to U.S. policy for the remainder of the war.

2. MAP for Indochina

a. Magnitude

The U.S. military assistance program to the French and Associated States was implemented rapidly, considering the major U.S. commitment to the Korean war. In a somewhat premature judgment of outcomes, a progress report on the implementation of NSC 64 (March 15, 1951) stated that "American military aid furnished the States' forces and the Army of the French Union may have been the decisive factor in the preservation of the area against Communist aggression." Through 1952 and into 1954 the MDAP shipments to Indochina increased steadily: by February 3, 1953, the United States had shipped 137,200 long tons of material (224 ships' cargoes); by July 1954, approximately 150,000 long tons had been sent, including 1,800 combat vehicles, 30,887 motor transport vehicles, 361,522 small arms and machine guns, 438 naval craft, 2 World War II aircraft carriers, and about 500 aircraft. By the conclusion of the Geneva agreements in July, 1954, the U.S. had delivered aid to Indochina at an original cost of \$2,600 million. Nonetheless, protests of the French at the slowness of deliveries and the "interference" of MAAG with French requests were recurrent, and peaked, during the crisis days of 1954. Yet these complaints probably reflected less genuine U.S. shortcomings than French resentment of American efforts to advise, screen, inspect, and verify, and sheer frustration. Moreover, the vagaries of the French logistic system not only made the MAAG job more difficult, but further impeded combat supplies.

b. Effectiveness

In spite of the conditions under which U.S. assistance to France and the Associated States was given, the MAAG during the period of the Indochina war was little more than a small (70 in 1950, 342 in 1954) supply-support group which exerted far more influence upon U.S. decisions than on the French. The French, never eager for American advice, not only succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense, but in fact-through adroit pressuring of officials above the MAAG-sometimes reduced MAAG to the position of taking their military orders. Available data do not permit detailed evaluation of the efficiency of MAP, but it seems clear that French restrictions on the U.S. MAAG reduced it to virtual impotence.

If it would be an error to evaluate the effectiveness of the U.S. program in terms of war outcome, and if the efficiency of MAP and MAAG cannot meaningfully be analyzed, it remains to evaluate the degree to which France met the conditions under which assistance was tendered, which presumably impinged directly on U.S. political objectives:

(1) The United States objective of insuring "that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French" was fulfilled; in fact, it was insisted on by the French. On the one hand, U.S. military forces were never directly engaged in the Indochina war. On the other hand, the French, in retaining this primary responsibility, preserved the prerogative to determine policy and the freedom to reject U.S. advice. U.S. "leverage" was minimal.

(2) The condition of basing the assistance program on "an urgently prepared French plan acceptable to the Associated States and to the U.S." was frustrated in several ways. At the outset no overall plan was presented, and those portions of existing plans to which U.S. authorities were privy (e.g., Alessandri's pacification plan for the Tonkin Delta) were not acceptable to U.S. thinking. Second, when the Letourneau-Allard and Navarre plans were finally prepared (in 1953, three years after the U.S. decided that a plan was a necessary precondition for aid), some U.S. observers realized that these were more concepts than plans. U.S. acceptance of the plans was more reluctant than the granting of \$385 million in additional assistance might indicate. Finally, the plans, once "accepted," were not vigorously carried out.

(3) The French met *pro forma* the condition that they provide the U.S. assurances that they would grant self-government for Indochina, and form national armies for the Associated States. But it was clear throughout the war that, regardless of the amounts of U.S. assistance rendered, France's declarations of intent were grudgingly issued, and were seldom followed by action. The French Indochina war had to be lost before Vietnam was granted genuine independence.

(4) Although France did expand its forces in Indochina, these forces were never sufficient to the task. French draftees were never employed in Indochina. France continually pointed to its European defense posture in explanation. In at least one case, U.S. personnel were requested (e.g., as aircraft mechanics), and 200 were provided, when a pool of suitable personnel existed in Metropolitan France.

(5) Statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the French did not ameliorate neo-mercantilism or other colonial policies, or provide "proper tutelage" to the Associated States; nor did it develop a command structure suitable to the United States.

(6) The U.S. "checks to satisfy itself that the conditions" imposed were being satisfied, were, by and large, few and far between, and were conducted at the pleasure and within the specifications of the French.

(7) The French chose not to refer Indochina to the United Nations. Certainly the U.S. assistance program bore on this decision; whether or not it was the deciding factor is unclear.

The effectiveness of the United States assistance program as an instrument of United States policy--quite aside from the outcome of the war--was thus quite low.

3. Critique

As earlier sections of this paper have suggested, the U.S. was persuaded to involve itself in the Indochina war by the perceived need, following the fall of Nationalist China, to hold a line against communists. This strategic drawing of the line at the Chinese-Indochina border was reinforced by the belief that the fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia, and that the

fall of Southeast Asia would eventuate in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia. Prospects for a French victory in Indochina were assessed in contemporary U.S. intelligence documents as poor; nonetheless, the U.S. provided military and economic assistance to the French and the Associated States in the belief that a prompt, coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid offered some prospect that France might succeed in gaining the initiative in the struggle in that area. Six major points of critique of U.S. policy follow:

a. The U.S. Misestimated France

U.S. policymakers apparently realized that the conditions they imposed upon the French were impracticable to some degree. Nonetheless, they believed that pre-conditions were necessary and could assist in convincing the French to mend their colonial ways and to pursue the war with American methods, diligence, and aggressiveness. The French, long noted for proficiency and precision in logic, required no Descartes to realize that the United States was thus asking France (1) to regain full responsibility for the Indochina War, and in particular for fighting and taking casualties in that war; (2) to follow the "guidance" and "advice" of the United States on the exercise of this French responsibility; and (3) having fought the war, presumably to a successful conclusion, to relinquish control over Indochina. In view of the French willingness to retain responsibility for the war, it is not surprising that they were reluctant, at best, to accept propositions (2) and (3). Despite French pronouncements on their role in fighting communism, there is little reason to believe that they regarded the Indochina war in the same light as the U.S. viewed the Korean War. Rather, their behavior resembled that of other colonial powers who had fought to retain profitable colonies.

b. Slim Chance Accepted by the U.S.

Had U.S. policymakers recognized the slimness of the chance of persuading France to accept the three propositions specified above, they might have sought alternative courses of action in Indochina. As it was, the possibility (as opposed to the probability) of success was their prime consideration, and, overestimating U.S. leverage for influencing a favorable outcome, alternatives were not considered.

c. Circular U.S. Policy

Suppression of alternatives, both on the general and the particular level (see Note 48 for an example of the latter), led to a circularity in and reinforcement of existing policies--constant forced choices between "bad" and "worse."

d. Poor Bargaining

Having taken a hard policy line toward the French, the United States failed to bargain effectively. Thus, in circumstances not totally dissimilar from those prevailing in Vietnam in subsequent time periods, the U.S. continued to provide assistance

disregarding infractions of pre-conditions; moreover, the pre-conditions for aid were not modified. Without modification, the conditions became worse than meaningless: standing testaments to U.S. impotence, to be recognized only when and how the French chose. The U.S. became virtually a prisoner of its own policy. Containment of communism, concern for the French in relation to the postwar Europe of NATO, EDC, and the Soviet threat in the West, combined with a fear, based on World War II strategy, that a French withdrawal from Indochina would leave exposed the U.S. flank in Korea, all compelled the U.S. to continue aid. Yet none of these considerations should have precluded modification of the U.S. bargaining strategy.

e. Misinformation

The U.S. policymaking machinery was highly vulnerable to spoofing, on at least three counts: (1) the very strength of the U.S. position regarding communism must have been a constant temptation, not always resisted, for other parties to cry "red" and thus to manipulate the U.S.; (2) dependence on official French sources for intelligence and other information was potentially misleading; (3) reliance on the high-level mission technique for gathering information to be used as a direct input to policy decisions proved unsatisfactory.

f. Costs Not Weighed

Finally, there is little indication that U.S. policymakers, their thoughts dominated by the objective of containing the monolithic communist bloc, faced up to the costs of winning the Indochina war, even while direct U.S. intervention was being considered. Nor does the evidence suggest that consideration was given to the tangible and intangible costs of providing U.S. military assistance to a power losing a war, including the potential impact on the U.S. position in Asia. And, finally, available documents fail to reveal any consideration given to the notion of sunk costs. There were, of course, voices in the wilderness. An unsigned, undated memorandum posed eight key questions to be answered by the NSC *during the spring of 1954*. Comment on the following four questions, in relation to the time at which they were raised, is unnecessary:

--Just how important is Southeast Asia to the security interests of the U.S.? Is the analysis in NSC 5405 still valid? Is the area important enough to fight for?

--How important is Indochina in the defense of Southeast Asia? Is the "domino theory" valid? Is Indochina important enough to fight for? If not, what are the strategic consequences of the loss of all or part of Indochina?

--If the U.S. intervenes in Indochina, can we count on the support of the natives? Can we fight as allies of the French and avoid the stigma of colonialism?

--Is there a strategic concept for the conduct of a war in Indochina which offers promise of early success. . . ?

The decision of the United States to provide assistance to France and the Associated States during the Indochina War is usually treated lightly, if at all, in current histories. Yet, both the taking of the decision and its implementation were significant for and remarkably similar to subsequent U.S. experiences in Vietnam.

II. THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

CHRONOLOGY

7 July 54	<p><i>Diem appointed Premier of South Vietnam</i> Urged by America and France, Emperor Bao Dai named Ngo Dinh Diem premier of South (Free) Vietnam. Bao Dai remained legal, constitutionally recognized Chief of State.</p>
21 July 54	<p><i>Geneva Accords signed</i> France became guarantor of Vietnamese sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7); with the PAVN, guarantor of armistice agreements (Geneva Agreements, Articles 22, 23), and all-Vietnam elections (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7) France agreed to withdraw the French Expeditionary Corps at the request of local governments (Conference Final Declaration, Article 10, Unilateral Declaration, France)</p>
8,12 Aug 54; 20 Aug 54	<p><i>National Security Council meetings; NSC 5429/2</i> US policies toward post-Geneva Vietnam. Economic: disassociate France from levers of command, integrate land reform with refugee resettlement, work with the French but "encourage" them to turn over financial, administrative, economic controls to the Vietnamese. Give aid directly to the Vietnamese- not through France. Military: work with France only insofar as necessary to build up indigenous military forces able to provide internal security. Political: France must grant total independence (including right to withdraw from French Union) to South Vietnam and support a strong indigenous government. Diem must broaden the governmental base, elect an assembly, draft a constitution and legally dethrone Bao Dai. French support and cooperation for these policies was necessary; retention of the FEC was essential to South Vietnamese security.</p>
Aug 54	<p><i>Sainteny Mission</i> Jean Sainteny was sent to Hanoi to find ways to protect French economic and cultural interests in the DRV. Political overtones of the mission annoyed the US and General Paul Ely, High Commissioner in the South. Ely received firm assurance from Mendes-France that France was not playing a "double game," has not sent Sainteny for political bridge-building purposes. Mendes-France reaffirmed French support for an independent, strong South Vietnam.</p>
8 Sep 54	<p><i>Manila Pact Signed</i> Dulles' anti-communist military alliance was realized in SEATO. The</p>

	Associated States of Indochina were covered by separate protocol ensuring collective defense by SEATO nations in case of subversion or aggression.
27-29 Sep 54	<i>Washington Conference</i> France agreed to support Diem (against the French belief that Diem would prove unable to unify or stabilize the country); agreed to keep the FEC in South Vietnam but received no indication of possible US financial aid for the French forces. France knew economic and military aid would be given directly to Vietnam but was led to believe she would have a hand in its distribution by ambiguous US-drafted statements. The US military role in Vietnam was not discussed because of a State-JCS split (Dulles wanted to assume training responsibilities; JCS did not because of political instability, presence of French troops and Geneva restrictions).
22 Oct 54	<i>NSC Action Program</i> The U.S. decided to take firmer steps to strengthen Diem, to tell Paris that French support had been inadequate. An earlier JCS concession to consider a training program for the NVA opened the way for the decision to inaugurate a "limited" U.S. role in military affairs.
24 Oct 54	<i>Eisenhower letter to Diem</i> Announced direct economic aid and military assistance from the U.S.; demanded no Vietnamese moves as reciprocation for aid. France called it a <i>carte americaine</i> , said it violated the principle of joint action adopted in September.
8 Nov 54	<i>Collins Mission</i> General J. Lawton Collins, given broad authority to coordinate all U.S. programs and--with French support--get things moving, arrived in Vietnam.
13 Dec 54	<i>Collins-Ely Minute of Understanding</i> France will grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1955, the U.S. will assume training responsibilities, the U.S. MAAG, Indochina, will direct the training program--under General Ely's over all authority. French and U.S. instructors will be phased out as VNA efficiency increases. Washington approved the Minute; Paris objected, particularly to the phase-out of French trainers. France did not relent and consent until 11 February 1955.
16 Dec 54	<i>Collins recommends Diem be replaced</i> Diem's failure to include Dr. Quat in the cabinet as Defense Minister confirmed Collins' doubts about Diem's capacity to stabilize the government, or rally support for his regime. He recommended Bao Dai's return be considered, but if this were unacceptable, recommended the U.S. withdraw from Vietnam
19 Dec 54	<i>Trilateral Meetings, Paris (U.K., U.S., France)</i> Mendes-France insisted the time had come to consider an alternative to

	<p>Diem. Recommended Collins and Ely study the problem and come up with suggestions for a change by mid-January. France felt Bao Dai should be involved in an alternative plan.</p> <p>Dulles: Diem is the only suitable leader but we will consider alternatives and will allow Collins and Ely to consider the matter. But Dulles made it clear that Congress would probably not appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. U.S. study of alternatives was cursory, however; Dulles was sure Diem could succeed, with proper direction; he was more sure that no other possible leader existed.</p>
20 Jan 55	<p><i>Collins' report to NSC</i></p> <p>December's despair over Diem had dissipated; Diem's had acted well on a few matters. Collins recommended continued support for Diem because without it South Vietnam will surely fall to communism and the rest of other Southeast Asia will soon follow. The NSC approved Collins' report.</p>
12 Feb 55	<p><i>Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) opens</i></p> <p>General O'Daniel, under Ely's general supervision, took charge of programs to train and reorganize the VNA along American lines. Despite friction between French and Americans in Saigon and despite Paris-Washington disputes, officers in TRIM seemed able to rise above differences and initiate sound programs for the VNA.</p>
22 Feb 55	<p><i>United Front announced</i></p> <p>French subsidies to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect armies-about 40,000 men-ended in February. When Diem refused to meet sect requests for financial aid, integration of forces into the VNA and recognition of spheres of influence, previous sect cooperation with Diem ceased. Representatives of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dan Xa (Ba Cut), Lien Minh (Thinh Minh The) and Binh Xuyen (Bay Vien) forces met at Tay Ninh, agreed to work together against Diem. Cao Dai Pope Tac headed the group.</p>
21 Mar 55	<p><i>United Front "ultimatum"</i></p> <p>Claiming to speak for the popular will, the United Front asked that Diem form a government of national union and make other political, economic, military reforms. Diem called this an ultimatum and refused to consider the request. The Front then sent an emissary to Bao Dai asking him to intervene on its behalf. Bao Dai refused.</p>
29-30 Mar 55	<p><i>Diem attacks central police headquarters</i></p> <p>Brewing for months, the fight finally broke between Diem and the Binh Xuyen (a coalition of gangsters and river pirates which ran gambling and prostitution in Cholon, and the Saigon-Cholon police, paid Bao Dai for his protection and enjoyed some French support). A company of paratroopers took over the central police station, driving the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Diem then wanted to go after Police Commissioner Sang and end Binh Xuyen control. Defense Minister Minh resigned when Diem refused to consult the cabinet over this. However, French representations dissuaded Diem from taking on Bay Vien's 600-man force at this</p>

	time, and the French then negotiated a truce between Diem and the Binh Xuyen.
7 Apr 55	<i>Collins and Ely agree Diem must go</i> Collins says Diem has proved himself incapable of inspiring unity, and must be replaced. Dulles demurs, then agrees to consider a change if Collins will fly to Washington for consultations.
23 Apr 55	<i>Diem proposes to broaden the government</i> Diem calls for a national referendum and elections for a national assembly within six months. The Front scores the proposal.
26 Apr 55	<i>Diem fires Sang</i> (Collins had left Saigon for Washington.) Diem replaces Sang with a man loyal to his regime but Sang refuses to resign saying only Bao Dai had the legal authority to remove him.
27 Apr 55	<i>Dulles agrees to a change in Saigon</i> Collins met with Dulles in Washington. Dulles agreed to consider an alternate to Diem but was determined to keep this from the French until their purposes were clear and their promise to unequivocally support a new regime firm. Saigon was informed of this new policy.
28 Apr 55	<i>Diem hits the Binh Xuyen</i> Diem struck at the Sureté-and Sang-after fighting erupted between the VNA and Binh Xuyen forces in Cholon. The French said Diem instigated the fight; Americans supported Diem's version that the Binh Xuyen began firing first. Whatever its origin, the fight ended with a VNA victory. The Binh Xuyen were driven out of Cholon into the Rung Sat swamps.
30 Apr 55	<i>Revolutionary Congress Announced</i> Diem's brother Nhu had a hand in organizing this broad amalgam of political interests behind a program calling for support of Diem against the Binh Xuyen sects and Bao Dai, in favor of broad representation in the government. Generals The and Phuong, tired of the "weak" Revolutionary Congress, formed a Revolutionary Committee whose outlook was more anti-Bao Dai and anti-French than the Congress. Present and former Vietminh supporters were members of the Congress and Committee.
May 55	<i>Bao Dai's ultimatum</i> Bao Dai summoned Diem to replace the Army Chief of Staff with his own man. Diem ignored the summons and orders.
1 May 55	<i>The U.S.: back on the track behind Diem</i> Because of Diem's victory--superficial though it may have been--over the Binh Xuyen, because of VNA support for Diem, Dulles canceled the cable of 28 April: again, the U.S. will support Diem.
8 May 55	<i>A National Campaign launched</i> Diem announced a national campaign to regain "wayward" provinces and

	<p>unify the country. Or: he declared war on the sects. The VNA fought over a year against Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen forces, but finally established control over them, over areas of sect influence and control.</p>
8-11 May 55	<p>Tripartite Talks, Paris Faure: We cannot support Diem-but Vietnam is not worth a split in Franco-American relations. Therefore, France offers to withdraw from Vietnam. Dulles: We must support Diem. But if a U.S. withdrawal would prevent discord, the U.S. will consider it. Then, after hearing JCS and Collins' arguments against either precipitate French withdrawal or a U.S. withdrawal, Dulles urged Faure to [words missing] Diem a while longer on the grounds that he will broaden the government and call for elections. Faure agreed- against his own wishes and against strong popular pressure and on several conditions (most of which required action from Diem and which Dulles could not guarantee). Dulles then suggested France and the U.S. apprise each other of policy and actions but pursue them more independently than in the past. The days of joint policy--of togetherness in Vietnam--were over.</p>
July 1955	<p><i>Diem refuses to meet with the DRV about elections</i> France and Britain urged Diem to hold consultations with Hanoi for all-Vietnam elections, as stipulated in the Geneva Accords. The U.S. suggested consultations but also suggested Diem request firm guarantees (for secret ballot, UN or international supervision) which the DRV was expected to reject. But Diem refused to meet with the North Vietnamese. He had not signed the Geneva Accords and denied being bound by them in any way.</p>
24 Oct 55	<p><i>National Referendum</i> With 98 percent of the vote, Diem became President of the Republic of Vietnam--and Bao Dai was dethroned.</p>
Aug-Dec 1955	<p><i>Franco- Vietnamese Conferences</i> Diem wanted renegotiation of economic and financial accords reached in 1954; transfer of Vietnamese affairs from the ministry of the associated states to the Foreign Office; abolition of Ely's former post of High Commissioner; termination of the military High Command and Vietnamese authority over remaining French troops in Vietnam. (The FEC now numbered about 35,000--vice the 150,000-man force which France spoke of retaining in Vietnam during the September 1954 Washington Conference.) France could not accept Diem's last demand; had difficulty satisfying the others, but finally made major concessions. Diem's response was to withdraw Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.</p>
26 Apr 56	<p><i>French High Command abolished</i> Only about 5,000 French troops remained in Vietnam; most French instructors had left TRIM. A French liaison mission with the ICC still</p>

	functioned, however, and France still served on the Joint Armistice Commission with DRV military representatives.
July, 1956	<i>All-Vietnam elections</i> Diem had refused to consult with the DRV about elections in 1955; he refused to hold them in 1956. Diem did agree to take over the French responsibility to support the ICC; France would continue to finance ICC operations. The Joint Armistice Commission gradually died of inactivity.

KEY AMERICAN PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

20 Jan 53-20 Jan 61

President: Dwight D. Eisenhower

Secretary of State: John Foster Dulles

Secretary of Defense: Charles E. Wilson

Ambassador to Vietnam: Donald R. Heath (25 Jun 52-20 Apr 55);

Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Special Mission (8 Nov 54-6 May 55);

G. Frederick Reinhart (20 Apr 55-14 Mar 57)

Chairman, JCS: Arthur W. Radford, Adm., USN (14 Aug 53-15 Aug 57)

Chief MAAG, Indochina:

John W. O'Daniel, Lt. Gen., USA (31 Mar 54-23 Oct 55);

Samuel T. Williams, Lt. Gen., was 1st Chief of MAAG to Vietnam (24 Oct 55- 31 Aug 60)

KEY FRENCH PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Jun 54-Feb 55

Prime Minister: Pierre Mendes-France

Foreign Minister: Georges Bidault

Minister for Associated States: Guy La Chambre

Minister for National Defense: Rene Pleven

High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Paul Ely

23 Feb 55-31 Jan 56

Prime Minister: Edgar Faure

Foreign Minister: Antoine Pinay

Minister for Associated States: M. La Forest

Minister for National Defense: General Pierre Koenig

High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Ely's post abolished after his departure, June 1955. (Gen. Jacquot assumed military responsibilities until April, 1956)

Ambassador, Vietnam: Henri Hoppenot (July, 1955)

31 Jan 56-16 Apr 57

Prime Minister: Guy Mollet

Foreign Minister: Christian Pineau

Minister for National Defense: Maurice Bourges-Maunouvry

High Commissioner, Vietnam: (General Jacquot-military responsibilities until April

1956)

Ambassador, Vietnam: M. Payart (November, 1956)

KEY SOUTH VIETNAMESE PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Mar 49-26 Oct 55

Head of State: Bao Dai, Emperor

12 Jan 54-16 Jun 54

Head of State: Bao Dai

Premier: Prince Buu Loc

Minister for Foreign Affairs: Nguyen Quoc Dinh

7 Jul 54-1 Nov 63

Head of State: Ngo Dinh Diem (President: 23 Oct 55)

Premier: Ngo Dinh Diem

Minister for Foreign Affairs: Tran Van Do (Jul 54-May 55) Vq Van Mau (Jul 55-Nov 63)

Minister for National Defense: Ngo Dinh Diem (General Minh served temporarily, early 1955).

A. INTRODUCTION: POST-GENEVA EXPECTATIONS

1. France Will Stay in Vietnam

After 100 years of investment, interest and influence, France got out of Vietnam in less than a year after the Geneva Conference of July 1954. And France did not want to leave. On July 25, three days after signing the Geneva Accords, Prime Minister Mendes-France said France would maintain cultural and economic ties with North Vietnam and would assist the development of Free (South) Vietnam. The predecessor Laniel Government had recognized "Vietnam as a fully independent and sovereign state in possession of all qualifications and powers known in international law" on June 4, 1954; Mendes-France pledged to uphold and further that treaty. In August he announced a three-phase formula to implement it. Economic, administrative and financial ties with the Associated States would be terminated as fast as possible. By December 1954, the last vestiges of the French colonial apparatus had been eliminated. However, Mendes-France's formula viewed membership in the French Union as compulsory--indicative of French desire to stay in Vietnam but inimical to demands lodged by Diem and the United States for independence which included the right to withdraw from the French Union.

Also in August, General Paul Ely, French High Commissioner in Vietnam, reaffirmed French support of Vietnamese independence and French readiness to further Vietnamese development. That the French had a role to play was clear: French economic investment, cultural institutions, military, political and administrative operations were already part of South Vietnamese life. That France must play a role was also clear. Under the Geneva Accords, France had pledged to guarantee all-Vietnam elections in 1956, guarantee execution of the armistice agreement, guarantee Vietnamese sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, pledged to maintain the French Expeditionary Corps until Vietnam

requested its removal. General Ely had been delegated extensive political and military authority to enable him to meet these obligations. He worked sincerely to persuade both Vietnamese and French that mutual cooperation would be mutually beneficial, to erase the colonialist tinge of French presence, to both speed and smooth the French transition from master to equal partner of Vietnam.

2. Diem: France Will Leave South Vietnam

In this endeavor, Ely received qualified support from French officials, "colons" and military officers in Vietnam. He received sporadic support from Paris. He received almost no support from the Vietnamese. France was not welcome in Vietnam for many reasons, a major one being Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. A Francophobe of the first order, Diem wanted full independence for South Vietnam and wanted France out of the country as soon as possible. Many shared Diem's sentiments. France had just lost a long, devastating and demoralizing war against Vietnamese communists as well as Vietnamese nationalists. French colonial rule had been tight, previous French promises of independence had been broken. Why believe professions of French good intentions in 1954 were any different from those of the past? Added to this was the problematical relationship of France vis-a-vis South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. Some South Vietnamese expected France to actively work toward accommodation with the Viet Minh and reunification of North and South under Viet Minh direction. Many more felt the fact of continued French presence alone compromised South Vietnamese independence. "To convince the people of Vietnam that the administration was independent, it became a political necessity to be anti-colonial and specifically anti-French."

3. The U.S. Will "Join" France in South Vietnam

Finally, France was not alone in Vietnam. More than Diem, more than the psychological damage done by colonial years, the United States made life in Vietnam difficult for France. The U.S. was eager to strengthen Vietnam, needed and demanded French cooperation, but offered little in return. U.S. policy insisted upon an immediate and dramatic transformation of French policy. But the U.S. little understood what this meant to France, what problems it created for French domestic and foreign policy or what U.S. concessions might help effect the transformation.

Although remnants of the French Expeditionary Corps remained until 1956, France was out of Vietnam to all intents and purposes by May 1955, ten months after Geneva. These months are characterized by professions of Franco-American cooperation but demonstrations of Franco-American division, characterized by conflict of word and action on several levels. Paris said one thing but did another, Paris said one thing and French officials in Saigon did the opposite; Washington activities were not always in line with Washington pronouncements and the gulf between the thought and deed of Ngo Dinh Diem only compounded an already sensitive situation. It is during this period that Diem established his rule, against French advice and best interests but with almost unwavering support from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. And it is the period

during which the anti-communist moralism of Dulles and Diem rejected any rapprochement with the North, ultimately ensuring that the temporary military demarkation line would become a permanent division of Vietnam.

B. INITIAL U.S. POLICY TOWARD INDOCHINA

The U.S. began revising policy toward Indochina as the Geneva Conference closed. The exercise was marked by urgency dictated by the belief that Geneva had been a disaster for the free world. Geneva gave Communist China and North Vietnam a new base for exploitation of Southeast Asia; it enhanced Peking's prestige to Washington's dismay and detriment; it restricted free world room to maneuver in Southeast Asia. And its grant of Vietnamese territory above the seventeenth parallel to the communist Ho Chi Minh was a painful reminder of the scarring French defeat by the Viet Minh, the first defeat of a European power by Asians (Asian communists at that), a defeat shared by the United States to the tune of more than \$1.5 billion in economic and military assistance granted France and the Associated States of Indochina.

1. SEATO: The New Initiative?

The first step toward countering this disaster had been discussed with Britain and France since the spring of 1954, and Walter Bedell Smith's comment as Geneva closed, "We must get that pact!" heralded its inauguration. The Southeast Asian Collective Defense Treaty was to be a "new initiative in Southeast Asia" to protect the U.S. position in the Far East and stabilize "the present chaotic situation . . . to prevent further losses to communism" through subversion or overt aggression. But the Manila Pact, signed on September 8, 1954, proved to be neither the new initiative nor the strong anti-communist shield called for by Secretary Dulles. Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, deputy assistant secretary and Defense Department representative at Manila, reported the Pact left Southeast Asia "no better prepared than before to cope with Communist aggression." The failure was largely of American making. While Dulles wanted to put the communists on notice that aggression would be opposed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted the United States must not be committed financially, militarily or economically to unilateral action in the Far East and that U.S. freedom of action must not be restricted. The two objectives conflicted and one cancelled out the other. Thus, Article IV of the treaty, the mechanism for collective action in case of enemy threat, did not pledge automatic response with force to force. Instead, each signatory promised to "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." The United States, particularly Mr. Dulles, tried to put teeth into SEATO through unilateral declarations of U.S. readiness to act. Dulles defined the obligations under Article IV as "a clear and definite agreement on the part of the signatories, including the United States, to come to the aid of any member of the Pact who under the terms of this treaty is subjected to aggression." However, Dulles failed to instill the same dedication to instant intervention in the other SEATO members.

The obligation assumed at Manila emphasized the importance attached to Southeast Asia by the U.S. Government. U.S. refusal to pledge unqualified support to Indochina emphasized the need for indigenous strength and stability in the area to counter

communist power, to make infiltration and aggression less appetizing to the enemy. Of the three Indochina states, most important yet least stable and least strong was South Vietnam. Thus, the second step in policy development was to decide what the U.S. could do to change the situation, a decision which turned on what France could or would do in South Vietnam.

2. Alternative French Policies

That France and the United States would eventually part company over Vietnam might have been predicted in August 1954, when U.S. policy toward Vietnam was drawn. Formulae for economic, military and especially political courses of action were different from-often antithetical to-French objectives and interests.

The U.S. intelligence community felt if France "acted swiftly to insure Vietnam full independence and to encourage strong nationalist leadership . . . anti-French nationalist activity might be lessened (and) with French military and economic assistance-backed by U.S. aid-the Vietnamese could proceed to develop gradually an effective security force, local government organization and a long range program for economic and social reform." But there were three other routes or combinations of routes open to France in post-Geneva Vietnam. France could work to maintain French Union ties, indirect French political control and economic domination rather than grant full independence to Vietnam. Or, France could try to reach an agreement with the Viet Minh, expedite elections and achieve a unified country in which French cultural, economic and political interests could be maintained. A fourth possibility, thought likely only if the situation deteriorated to the point of hopelessness, was a French decision to withdraw all military, economic and administrative support from Indochina.

Of the four courses of action open to France, three were rejected by the Eisenhower Administration. Continuation of French Union ties plus indirect French controls would be impossible under Diem, whose anti-French feeling ran deep, who had not in the past and would not now accept anything less than complete freedom from France. And Diem had American backing. Dulles believed "the kind of thing he stands for" is the "necessary ingredient of success" and called the Diem government the "nucleus for future efforts." Accommodation with the Viet Minh was anathema to both Diem and the U.S. Although American policy spoke of taking steps to prevent the complete absorption of the DRV into the Soviet bloc, those steps amounted to nothing more than maintenance of a U.S. consulate in Hanoi. Dulles in particular could not see Ho Chi Minh as Asia's Tito and refused to deal with him, thereby crushing Mendes-France's hope that Vietnam could become an experiment in peaceful coexistence. The U.S. was equally determined to prevent the quick withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam. It was believed:

in the last analysis, Vietnamese security will be determined by the degree of French protection and assistance in the development of a national army,

plus Vietnamese energies and the will of other powers to guarantee Vietnamese security.

Thus, United States policy required France to grant full Vietnamese independence quickly and to support a strong indigenous political regime, to maintain French military presence but reduce military, economic and political controls. Basic guidance determined at National Security Council meetings on August 8 and 12 became NSC 5429/2, issued on August 20.

3. U.S. Objectives in Vietnam: Political, Economic, Military

The American formula for government in free Vietnam rested on three legs. Independence was first and more important. France must treat South Vietnam as an independent sovereign nation and the U.S. would deal with it on that basis. Full independence was the only way to win nationalist support away from the Viet Minh, and nationalist support was thought to be essential to successful government in South Vietnam. Secondly, the U.S. would urge Ngo Dinh Diem to establish a government of national union representative of dominant elements on the political scene. After bringing some stability to the nation, a Constituent Assembly would be called and a constitution drafted to herald the legal dethroning of Emperor Bao Dai and inauguration of democracy. Finally, the formula demanded firm French and U.S. support for Diem. Despite his rigidity, his penchant for a one-man show and his inability to communicate or deal with people, Diem was a nationalist untainted by past association with either Viet Minh or French. This quality, plus full independence, plus Franco-American backing and encouragement for broad reform ultimately would result in a strong anti-communist South Vietnam. Or so the U.S. thought.

U.S. determination to back Diem was made with the knowledge that French support for him was hardly enthusiastic. Guy La Chambre, Minister for the Associated States, faulted Diem on three essential points: Diem would oppose a representative government, oppose agrarian reform and refuse to depose Bao Dai and create a republic. La Chambre expected a new government would be necessary to give South Vietnam a chance of winning the 1956 elections.

American's economic policy for South Vietnam was designed to yield immediate political advantage, cope with the staggering distortion of Vietnamese economic life and ease France out of economic affairs. U.S. planners believed integration of land reform measures with refugee resettlement would fill a triple bill: surplus land distributed among the thousands of refugees would invite their political support, facilitate assimilation of Tonkinese with Cochinese and bring the land to full productivity. Aid would be given directly to Vietnam as befitting its independence and as a means to accelerate the "disassociation of France from (economic) levers of command." French domination in this area, it was thought, stifled Vietnamese efforts and contradicted Vietnamese independence. It also inhibited American economic interests. Militarily, the U.S. would build up "indigenous military forces necessary for internal security . . . working through the French only insofar as necessary." Exactly how indigenous forces would be developed was not decided until December 1954, because France had some ideas about what to do and the Joint Chiefs of Staff differed with State Department opinions as to the kind of U.S. involvement required.

4. The U.S. "Chooses" Policy for France

In effect, these policy decisions of August 1954 asked Mendes-France to overcome "French traditional interests and emotions which have in the past governed the implementation of policy in Indochina." They asked for--or demanded--a "dramatic transformation in French policy" because policy makers believed this was necessary to "win the active loyalty and support of the population for a South Vietnamese Government." The U.S. asked France to stay in Vietnam militarily, to get out of Vietnamese economic and political life, but at the same time Washington asked for French support and cooperation in implementing U.S. programs. This was probably asking too much.

By December, the U.S. no longer asked for French support but demanded it. By December, the qualified U.S. commitment to Diem had hardened, U.S. involvement in Vietnam had deepened and U.S. activities there either dominated or simply excluded the French. Several forces converged to produce this change in U.S. policy. Resolution of differences within the Eisenhower Administration on military issues opened the way for U.S. assumption of responsibilities in what had been an exclusively French preserve. The belief that Diem for all his failings and weaknesses was the only available leader for South Vietnam, and that he needed stronger U.S. and French support to quell opponents and speed development led to the creation of programs designed to provide that strong support.

Finally, the U.S. believed France had not done enough for Diem, believed the schizophrenic French policy of professing support while acting to undermine Diem's regime was largely to blame for Vietnamese difficulties. This resulted in demands that France live up to her promises. It made unilateral American efforts more attractive--French assistance might not be available in any case--and it inspired a feeling that Americans had to do more because the French were doing so little.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 4, "U.S. and France in Indochina, 1950-56"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 215-241

C. TENTATIVE U.S. INVOLVEMENT BECOMES DEEPER, FIRMER

1. Adoption of Military Responsibilities

Authorization for General John (Iron Mike) O'Daniel, Chief of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, to take up the task of training the Vietnamese

National Army (VNA) was long in coming. General O'Daniel and French General Ely had discussed U.S. participation in training in June 1954; O'Daniel drew up a comprehensive plan for advisory assistance at all levels of the military establishment and in July begged the U.S. to beef up the MAAG staff before August 11, when the Geneva prohibition against introduction of new military personnel went into effect. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected.

a. The JCS Arguments Against U.S. Training the VNA

Early in August, the JCS listed four preconditions essential to the success of a U.S. training effort in Indochina, preconditions which should be met before training obligations were assumed. First:

It is absolutely essential that there be a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control. It is hopeless to expect a US military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of armed forces.

Secondly, that government "should formally request that the United States assume responsibility for training . . . forces and providing the military equipment, financial assistance and political advice necessary to insure internal stability." The Chiefs saw no role in training for the French; the third precondition called for complete French withdrawal from the country:

Arrangements should be made with the French granting full independence to the Associated States and providing for the phased, orderly withdrawal of French forces, French officials and French advisors from Indochina in order to provide motivation and a sound basis for the establishment of national armed forces. The United States from the beginning should insist on dealing directly with the governments of the respective Associated States, completely independent of French participation or control.

Finally, both "local military requirements and the over-all U.S. interests should dictate the size and composition of indigenous forces."

b. Dulles' Views

Of the four preconditions, only the second presented no problem. The State Department, notably Secretary Dulles, Walter F. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, and Kenneth T. Young, head of an interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force, objected to the other three stipulations. Dulles outlined his thinking in a letter of August 18 to Defense Secretary Charles Wilson. Agreeing that the Diem government "is far from strong or stable" Dulles pointed out that reorganization and retraining of the army was "one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong." Calling this "the familiar hen-and-egg argument as to which comes first," Dulles made his preference clear. He saw two courses of action open to the United States:

one, to strengthen the government by means of a political and economic nature and the other, to bolster that government by strengthening the army which supports it.

Dulles wished to adopt both courses.

As for the question of French presence or absence, Dulles said:

It would be militarily disastrous to demand the withdrawal of French forces from Vietnam before the creation of a new National Army. However . . . there would seem to be no insuperable objection to the U.S. undertaking a training program . . . while at the same time the French Forces commence a gradual phasing out from that theater.

c. The NSC Backs Dulles

Adoption of NSC 5429/2 indicates the U.S. Government found Dulles' views more persuasive than those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But while it was agreed to "work through the French only insofar as necessary" to build up indigenous forces, the program for bolstering the Vietnamese army was not developed for several months.

d. JCS-State Split on Force Level, Mission for VNA

On September 22, in a memorandum recommending establishment of a MAAG, Cambodia (if "all French advisors ultimately" are withdrawn, if the U.S. deals directly with Phnom Penh and if these caveats are written into a bilateral agreement with Cambodia), the JCS recommended against assignment of training responsibilities to the Saigon MAAG because of the "unstable political situation" in South Vietnam. Instability was noted "with concern" by the JCS in a second September 22 memorandum dealing with development of forces in Indochina, as was the cease-fire agreement (called "a major obstacle to the introduction of adequate U.S. MAAG personnel and of additional arms and equipment"). Because of these factors, the Chiefs considered "this is not a propitious time to further indicate United States intentions with respect to the support and training of Vietnamese forces."

But the JCS had been directed by the NSC to address the question of Vietnamese force levels; against their best wishes, one supposes, this memorandum forwarded their views. A 234,000-man army was proposed for Vietnam; the annual cost of training and maintaining this force—assuming France turned over to the VNA arms and equipment furnished under the U.S. Military Development Assistance Program since 1950—was put at \$420 million. Another \$23.5 million would be needed to train and equip the Navy and Air Forces. Further, the JCS wanted speedy relinquishment of French over-all command of the VNA and speedy withdrawal of French forces as the Vietnamese "are capable of exercising command of an effective force." Finally, the JCS requested "a definite agreement . . . be obtained from the French Government with respect to the timing of their programmed phased withdrawal" before U.S. assumption of training responsibilities.

Dulles objected to these proposals:

It seems to me that the mission of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces should be to provide internal security. The manpower and cost estimates (of the JCS) would seem to be excessive in the above context.

The Secretary called a French request of \$330 million to support the French Expeditionary Corps, then expected to number 150,000 men through 1955, and the Vietnamese plan to keep 230,000 men under arms ". . . beyond what the United States should consider feasible to support for maintaining the security of free Indochina at this time." Instead, he called it "imperative" that the U.S. Government-e.g., the JCS-"prepare a firm position on the size of the forces we consider a minimum level to assure the internal security of Indochina."

A week later the Chiefs in turn objected. The idea of training the VNA for internal security contradicted NSC 162/2 which "envisages reliance on indigenous ground forces to the maximum extent possible" in territorial defense. Citing the threat from "considerable numbers of Viet Minh guerrillas and sympathizers...known to be or suspected of being within the territory of free Vietnam" and the GVN "intention of requesting the phased withdrawal of the French forces by 1956" the Chiefs said:

This would result in a complete military vacuum unless the Vietnamese are adequately prepared to take over progressively as the French withdraw.

The force levels recommended on September 22 were reaffirmed as "the minimum required ultimately to carry out the . . . objectives" of the VNA, which should be "to attain and maintain internal security and to deter Viet Minh aggression by a limited defense of the Geneva Armistice demarkation line." The JCS pointed again to the unstable political situation in Vietnam, the 342-man MAAG ceiling and concluded:

Under these conditions, U.S. participation in training not only would probably have but limited beneficial effect but also would assume responsibility for any failure of the program. In light of the foregoing and from a military point of view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the United States should not participate in the training of Vietnamese forces in Indochina. However, if it is considered that political considerations are overriding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG, Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training effort.

e. Again, the NSC Backs Dulles, Recommends a U.S. Military Program in South Vietnam

Political considerations were overriding. The JCS concession to consider training the Vietnamese for internal security alone coincided with deliberations in the Operations Coordinating Board over possible ways in which to strengthen the Diem regime. A crash program had been outlined by State, part of which was a limited interim training program recommended by the OCB. Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

believed this would set in motion the long-range training program proposed by General O'Daniel in June; he still believed that program should not be adopted. But before the JCS could consider or suggest revisions to the OCB proposal, the National Security Council met on October 22 and approved a joint State-Defense message to Saigon authorizing Ambassador Donald Heath and O'Daniel to "collaborate in setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese Forces." The JCS were directed to recommend force levels necessary to "accomplish the military objective merely of the maintenance of internal security."

Responding on November 17, the JCS proposed a force of 89,085 at an estimated cost of \$193.1 million for Fiscal Year 1956 and approximately \$100 million for the remainder of FY 1955. To provide internal security and "in an attempt to stabilize the Diem government" the JCS suggested prompt reduction in force and prompt reassignment of selected personnel and units to maintain "the security of the legal government in Saigon and other major population centers," execute "regional security operations in each province" and perform "territorial pacification missions." Later, military centers would be established for reorganization and training of the military.

The Chiefs expressed serious reservations about the probability of Vietnamese--and American--success. First,

the chaotic internal political situation within Vietnam is such that there is no assurance that the security forces visualized herein can be developed into loyal and effective support for the Diem Government, or, if developed, that these forces will result in political and military stability within South Vietnam. Unless the Vietnamese themselves show an inclination to make individual and collective sacrifices required to resist communism, which they have not done to date, no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay complete Communist victory in South Vietnam.

Secondly, "the cooperation and collaboration of the French MAAG" is vital to effective execution of the program--and the JCS doubted that support would be readily offered. Finally, the Chiefs cautioned,

the above program does not provide adequate security for the Associated States against external aggression after the withdrawal of the French forces. With the Viet Minh increasing the size and effectiveness of their forces and with no forces in being committed to mutual defense under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the above long-range program would be insufficient to provide more than limited initial resistance to an organized military assault by the Viet Minh.

f. Collins Agrees with the NSC

Another memorandum of November 17 indicated how quickly the United States had moved to inaugurate the crash program approved at the October 22 NSC meeting. Secretary Dulles outlined for President Eisenhower the recommendations of General J.

Lawton Collins, special envoy sent to Vietnam to over-see all U.S. operations, coordinate them with French programs and get things moving. Collins recommended the "Vietnamese National Army . . . be reduced by July 1955 to 77,000. It should be placed under Vietnamese command and control by that date. . . . The cost to the U.S. would be two hundred million dollars annually. . . . The United States should assume training responsibility . . . by January 1, 1955, with French cooperation and utilizing French trainers."

Collins insisted that French forces be retained in Vietnam:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps were withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could act.

To "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces," Collins urged U.S. financial support of at least \$100 million through December 1955. General Ely concurred.

2. Conditions in Vietnam Invite Firmer Action

The situation in Vietnam during the autumn of 1954 invited an action program of some kind-any kind. Premier Diem barely controlled Saigon; he was opposed by his army's chief of staff, by powerful sect politicians guarding significant special interests with powerful sect armies; he was at least tacitly opposed by many French in Vietnam. The countryside had been devastated by the war; communications, administration and financial operations were stalled; an already prostrate economy was threatened by the deluge of some 860,000 refugees from the north. Over all hung "an atmosphere of frustration and disillusionment" created by the Geneva Accords and imposed partition, "compounded by widespread uncertainty as to French and U.S. intentions." U.S. policy in August set out to correct the uncertainty.

a. The Military Threatens Diem

General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese National Army, was the first coup-plotter to rise and first to fall. September threats of a military revolt were first staved off by the mediation of U.S. Ambassador Donald Heath and General Ely (who doubted Diem's capacity to lead but worked to prevent his violent downfall.) Then Diem uncovered a coup plot, arrested some Hinh supporters, removed the general from command and ordered him out of the country. Hinh refused to leave and continued his machinations against the government. Plans for one coup in October were dropped when Hinh was told revolt would mean automatic termination of U.S. aid. Another scheduled for October 26 was foiled when Colonel E. G. Lansdale, head of the Saigon Military Mission and chief CIA man on the scene, lured two key subordinates out of the country. Lansdale invited Hinh and staff to visit the Philippines. Hinh unhappily declined but his supporters--one of whom allegedly was a French agent--could not resist the chance to see the inner workings of the Magsaysay-led, U.S.-supported operation against Huk insurgents. Finally, in November, Bao Dai was persuaded by America and France to

intervene on Diem's behalf. He did, ordered Hinh to report to Cannes, and on November 19, the general left the country. General Hinh enjoyed some French support in his anti-Diem activity. Ambassador Heath reported he received "quiet encouragement if not unofficial support" from many French officers and officials in Saigon and "at the working level in Paris." Hinh was also aided initially by the sects, later by the Binh Xuyen.

b. The Sects Threaten Diem

The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, basically religious groups with important political controls and interests as well as private, French-subsidized armies, worked with Hinh through early September. Then, spurred by the knowledge that precipitate action would jeopardize American aid, the sects agreed to work with Diem. Last minute threats and "heavy pressure" from French officials against coalition left sect leaders "dizzy" but they recovered sufficiently to accept cabinet positions on September 24. Shaky to begin with, the coalition never worked: Diem refused to delegate responsibility to his eight new ministers and they soon tired of trying to work through the government.

c. And the Binh Xuyen Oppose Diem

The Binh Xuyen, too, considered joining the coalition but pulled out when Diem refused to name Binh Xuyen leader, "a colorful brigand named Le Van (Bay) Vien" Minister of the Interior. Bay Vien had forged a motley group of small-time gangsters into a fairly sophisticated organization of 6000 big-time gangsters and river pirates, and had been helped in this endeavor by Bao Dai and French colonial administrators. The Binh Xuyen controlled prostitution and gambling in Cholon and the Saigon-Cholon police force-reportedly because Bay Vien paid Bao Dai some 40 million piasters for these privileges. Still-dissident sect leaders such as Ba Cut, whose 5000 Hoa Hao adherents denounced Geneva and refused cooperation with Diem, and Frenchmen opposed to Diem abetted Binh Xuyen intrigues against the government.

3. French Laxity Demands Strong U.S. Programs

More than the Vietnamese power struggles and Diem's inability to consolidate his rule, French activities during the autumn of 1954 galvanized the United States. From acquiescence to U.S. demands in September, American policy makers felt France had moved toward opposition to U.S. demands by November. That this assessment of French actions was either objective or fair is questionable.

a. The Washington Conference, September, 1954

After Franco-American discussions in Washington in late September-the first in a progression of monthly meetings on Vietnam-the United States seemed to have scored highest. France promised to support Diem, to grant independence to Vietnam quickly. The transfer of financial, administrative, economic and other functions to the Vietnamese had begun and would be completed by December 1954. That France balked at U.S. demands for an immediate grant of independence outside of the French Union is not

surprising: French cultural, economic and political interests in Vietnam were still strong; the Frenchman's belief in the validity of the French Union was deep. No French government dared defy public opinion by seeming to hasten the end of the French Union. France felt the U.S. had an "almost psychological attachment to 'independence' without giving sufficient thought and attention to the practical problems and risks involved."

Secondly, the U.S. had been able to defer a commitment to finance the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam although an indication that aid would be resumed, if not resumption itself, had been the first order of French business at the Washington Conference. France agreed to maintain the Corps in Vietnam but was told no aid figures would be available until December.

Both France and the U.S. thought their respective economic aims had been won. France objected strongly to the idea of direct American aid to Vietnam on the grounds that it violated the Geneva Accords, would needlessly provoke Communist China, promote graft and corruption in Vietnam, and intensify the political struggle. Plus, "past (French) sacrifices on behalf of Vietnam and their obligation as a member of the French Union" made French supervision of aid essential. To France, a compromise agreement drafted by Walter Bedell Smith meant the U.S. accepted these arguments and was willing to give France a hand in disbursing aid to the Associated States. The U.S. chose not to interpret the agreement this way. The State Department said the U.S. merely indicated willingness to consult on such matters. On 29 October, Dulles told Mendes-France that the U.S. alone would disperse aid; by late November Mendes-France finally tired of arguing an obviously lost cause and dropped the matter.

b. The U.S. Faults French Support for Diem

Despite apparent agreement at Washington to back Diem, Secretary Dulles met with Mendes-France three weeks later in Paris about the same subject. "For . . . ready reference" Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover quoted for Dulles part of the 29 September Minute of Understanding in which the

....representatives of France and the United States agree that their respective governments support Ngo Dinh Diem in the establishment and maintenance of a strong, anti-Communist and nationalist government. To this end France and the United States will urge all anti-Communist elements in Vietnam to cooperate fully with the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem in order to counter vigorously the Viet Minh and build a strong free Vietnam.

....While Ely seems to have attempted honestly to carry out this agreement, the fact that many French elements have never accepted Diem solution must have weakened Ely's efforts and encouraged Hinh camarilla in its recalcitrance. . . . Unless Diem receives unreserved U.S. and French support, his chances of success appear slight. With such support, his chances are probably better than even, repeat even.

c. Accommodation Between Paris and Hanoi?

Apart from the quiet backing given Diem's opponents by French officers and officials in Saigon and persistent Paris proposals for a change in government (Prince Buu Hoi, whose "political ideologies" were repugnant to Dulles, was a French favorite at this time), the U.S. found in French accommodative gestures toward Hanoi ample proof that French backing for Diem was reserved at best. Ambassador Dillon felt Mendes-France found in Vietnam a "situation ideally designed to test (the) bases of his fundamental political philosophy of 'peaceful coexistence'" and that his government grew more and more "disposed to explore and consider a policy looking toward an eventual peaceful North-South rapprochement." French insistence on strict legal interpretation of the Geneva Accords was one example of accommodation thinking. France objected to anything which could possibly delay or destroy elections in 1956; Dillon predicted Paris would accept the results of elections "however academic that exercise may eventually prove to be." But the most worrisome example to those at the State Department who lined up against any kind of accommodation was the Sainteny Mission to Hanoi.

d. Sainteny or Ely?

Jean Sainteny, credited with reaching short-lived independence accords with Ho Chi Minh in March 1946, was sent back to Hanoi in August 1954 to find ways to protect French business and cultural interests in Tonkin. Sainteny's past success at rapprochement gave the mission definite political overtones. General Ely wished Paris had sent a "stupid type of consular official" not a man of Sainteny's "active stripe"; he was disturbed enough to fly to Paris to tell Mendes-France he would resign if French policy was to play a "double game" in North and South Vietnam aimed at backing whichever side ultimately won. Mendes-France assured Ely that French policy was to give maximum support to the anti-Communist elements in South Vietnam and do everything possible to assure their victory in 1956. Ely was placated and returned to Saigon. But Sainteny remained in Hanoi and maximum support for Diem did not materialize.

From another source came word that Ely was not "au courant" with French policy. French Union Counsellor Jacques Raphael-Leygues, reportedly a member of the Mendes-France "brain trust" on Indochina, told Ambassador Dillon that Sainteny had convinced Paris that South Vietnam was doomed and the "only possible means of salvaging anything was to play the Viet Minh game and woo the Viet Minh away from Communist ties in the hope of creating a Titoist Vietnam which would cooperate with France and might even adhere to the French Union." Raphael-Leygues said France deferred to U.S. wishes over which government to support in Saigon to get money for the French Expeditionary Corps and to fix responsibility for the eventual loss of South Vietnam on the U.S.

In December 1954, Sainteny won Ho Chi Minh's agreement to permit French enterprises to carry on without discrimination. But if the contract pleased Paris it did not assure French businessmen in Tonkin. Viet Minh legislation would regulate their operations; profits could not be transferred outside the Communist orbit. Most French concerns decided potential benefit was not worth the risk of doing business with the DRV and

despite Sainteny's efforts to establish mixed government-private corporations, most withdrew from the North. Sainteny remained as a "general delegate" to the DRV.

e. The Mansfield Report

A final spur to U.S. action was the Mansfield Report. After a fact-finding trip to South Vietnam, Senator Mansfield concluded his old acquaintance Diem was the only man for the job in Saigon. He said the issue "is not Diem as an individual but rather the program for which he stands." That program "represents genuine nationalism, . . . is prepared to deal effectively with corruption and . . . demonstrates a concern in advancing the welfare of the Vietnamese people." The Senator felt it "improbable" that any other leadership "dedicated to these principles" could be found and recommended the Government "consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union Forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in Free Vietnam" if Diem fell.

The Mansfield Report elated Diem (who proceeded to react with even more intransigent self-righteousness to suggestions of change), subdued the French and annoyed Paris. For those Frenchmen who favored conciliation with the Viet Minh, Mansfield's analysis proved the validity of their policy. Obviously, they said, if Diem falls the U.S. will heed Mansfield and withdraw from Vietnam. Equally obviously, they said, Diem will fall. Ergo, France should start "betting on Viet Minh to win war." To French officials willing to back Diem the Report and Washington's endorsement of it was a violation of the Franco-American agreement to support another government if Diem fell. When Mendes-France reminded Dulles of this and spoke of the need to lay plans for "another structure of government" which both France and the U.S. could support, Dulles was noncommittal.

4. NSC Action Program of October and Eisenhower Letter to Diem

President Eisenhower's letter to Diem of 24 October (written August and shown to the French at that time; held up until the political situation in South Vietnam settled somewhat; finally approved for transmission at the October 22 NSC meeting) was called a direct violation of the principle of cooperative action agreed upon in September by Minister La Chambre. French Ambassador Bonnet told Secretary Dulles that "it was felt (the letter) had given Diem full rein without requiring of him as a preliminary condition that he should first succeed in forming a strong and stable government, even though this preliminary condition had been a part of the basis of the Washington agreements." Bonnet added that the letter might be a violation of the armistice and the Viet Minh might take advantage of it. Then, when Ambassador Dillon suggested to the Quai d'Orsay that French support for Diem had not been all that it might have been, La Chambre was inflamed. Not only was this a false allegation, it was a direct slur on General Ely, the government in Paris and the glory of France. M. La Chambre said he was personally convinced Diem was leading South Vietnam to disaster but would still support him:

We prefer to lose in Vietnam with the U.S. rather than to win without them . . . we would rather support Diem knowing he is going to lose and thus keep Franco-U.S. solidarity than to pick someone who could retain Vietnam for the free world if this meant breaking Franco-U.S. solidarity.

In response, Secretary Dulles formally told Mendes-France that both the Eisenhower letter and the stronger U.S. action were "in furtherance of the understandings reached at Washington." The U.S. had not "the slightest idea of questioning the good faith of the French government" but "many French officials have not concealed their belief that Diem has failed . . . and . . . should be replaced." This attitude produced an "impasse in Saigon" necessitating firmer action. La Chambre received this with "little comment" other than to suggest appointment of Nguyen Van Tam (General Hinh's father, Premier during 1952-1953 and a strong--even oppressive--administrator) to the Interior Ministry. La Chambre called this a "way out of the mess . . . (for) here is a man who knows how to fight Communists." As in the past, the U.S. rejected the proposal.

5. More Action: The Collins Mission

The initial U.S. action program rested on three assumptions: that Diem could be persuaded to accept U.S. proposals, that Hinh would obey the government, that the French at all levels would cooperate. None proved immediately valid. So the U.S. adopted yet another tactic. General J. Lawton Collins, U.S. Representative to the NATO Military Committee, was dispatched to Vietnam on November 8 with the personal rank of Ambassador (Heath returned to the State Department). As President Eisenhower described it, Collins' mission was:

to coordinate and direct a program in support of (Diem's) government to enable it to: (a) promote internal security and political and economic stability; (b) establish and maintain control throughout the territory; and (c) effectively counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the demarkation line.

After initial resistance to the Collins mission (seen as a precursor to complete U.S. take-over of Indochina), General Ely established a close working relationship with Collins. A seven-point program for political, military and economic action was quickly designed. On December 13, Ely and Collins signed a Minute of Understanding agreeing that France would grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1, 1955 and that the U.S. would assume training duties in January. They agreed the French Expeditionary Corps must remain in Vietnam and the level of financial assistance suggested by Collins (\$100 million through December 1955 after which assistance was not contemplated) was adopted by the Foreign Operations Administration and subsequently announced to Paris. Aid was contingent upon consultation with Congress and "subject to Ely and Collins and the two governments mutually agreeing on what is to be done in Indochina."

6. France Objects to Collins-Ely Agreements

Paris was unhappy about the aid figure--a third of what France requested. Consequently, withdrawal of French forces was speeded: of the 150,000 troops scheduled to remain in Vietnam through 1955 all but 35,000 were phased out. Monetary reasons were said to be paramount but political and psychological pressures for the pull-out were probably more important. There was strong sentiment in France for sending the FEC to North Africa where it could serve the interests of France and the French Union. In Vietnam, French soldiers served the free world but were hated by the Vietnamese and ignored by the very powers they aided, powers which did not care enough to properly defray French expenses.

Paris was more upset by the Minute of Understanding. During November discussion with Dulles, Mendes-France had said he doubted full autonomy could be assumed by the Vietnamese by July 1955 and believed a readjustment of MAAG personnel for the new training mission might violate the Geneva Accords. These arguments, were reiterated at December Trilateral meetings. But Mendes-France's real trouble was agreeing to phase out French instructors. Neither the French people nor French soldiers would understand why France was denied influence while required to support such a heavy burden in Vietnam. Mendes-France and General Ely insisted that if French instructors were eliminated the U.S. automatically would have assumed primary responsibility for free world policy toward Indochina. (Dulles and General Collins rejected that line of reasoning but convinced neither the French nor others that it was fallacious.)

Collins compromised in the Minute of Understanding by agreeing to softer language (both French and American instructors would be removed as Vietnamese efficiency increased), hoping to assuage Paris. He failed. When the Minute was forwarded for final approval Mendes-France stalled. First he had to study it closely to ensure no conflict with Geneva was involved. Then on January 7, the French submitted a redraft of the Minute which omitted reference to General O'Daniel's authority over French personnel.

Collins was already annoyed by hedging in December, tantamount to a slap in the face of Ely to whom full authority to negotiate the agreement had been delegated. He refused to "agree to (the redraft) unless specifically instructed by higher authority" because lines of authority were not spelled out. Yet Ely thought Paris had approved the original agreement. He urged Collins to continue negotiations with the Vietnamese on the basis of the first Minute, advice Collins followed despite the Paris-Washington snafu. On January 19 and 20 a formal exchange of letters finalized the agreement for U.S. assumption of training duties and financial support (\$214.5 million) for the Vietnamese forces. The forces would be scaled down to 100,00 by December 1955. Both cost and force levels were raised from Collins' November recommendations in deference to Vietnamese arguments. The U.S. and France remained deadlocked until February 11, 1955, when the terms--but not the form--of the original agreement were finally accepted. The next day, General O'Daniel assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) went into operation.

D. FRANCO-AMERICAN IMPASSE OVER DIEM

Resolution of military problems within the U.S. Government and between the U.S. and France was a fairly major accomplishment. Political differences were not similarly resolved. To support or not to support Ngo Dinh Diem was the issue over which France and America split.

1. Paris: Diem Is Ill-Suited for Rule

As noted above, France acquiesced in the retention of Diem as Prime Minister in deference to U.S. insistence and French concern for U.S. financial assistance for the FEC during the September Washington conference. In mid-November, Mendes-France reaffirmed the 29 September agreement but said an alternative form of government had to be considered unless Diem implemented an energetic program within the next two months. By December, when Mendes-France, Dulles and Eden met in Paris, the French Premier made it clear he thought the time had come for a change. Two ways to accomplish change were suggested. Bao Dai could name a Viceroy and give him full authority to use the powers of Chief of State to unify the warring political factions. Tran Van Huu, Nguyen Tan Tam or Dr. Phan Huy Quat were possible candidates for this job. Or, Bao Dai himself could return to Saigon and form a government with Huu as premier, Tam as Interior Minister, Quat in Defense.

France wanted Diem out of power for several reasons. U.S. policymakers did not seem to fully appreciate how galling Diem's Franco-phobia must have been, nor did the U.S. seem to understand--or allow for--the divisive effect Diem's militant anti-communist stance had within the French Government. Little consideration was given to charges that the U.S. was undermining France by portraying itself as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S. could appreciate the validity of French arguments that Diem had not been and perhaps would not be able to unify and stabilize South Vietnam.

2. Collins: Diem Cannot Lead South Vietnam

General Collins had been skeptical about Diem from the outset; by December he was convinced an alternative to his government should be urgently considered. Diem's refusal to name Dr. Quat as Defense Minister triggered Collins' recommendation. Both Collins and Colonel Lansdale had urged Diem to accept Quat, agreeing Quat alone was strong enough to unify the Vietnamese armed forces behind the Saigon government. On December 13, Collins suggested five reasons for Diem's adverse decision:

(1) unwillingness to delegate control of Vietnam armed forces to any strong man; (2) fear of Quat as potential successor; (3) opposition of sects (who also feared a strong man in the defense post); (4) influence of brothers Luyen and Nhu (anxious to neutralize the power of any potential successor); (5) desire [material missing]

According to Collins,

Whatever the reasons, the failure to utilize Quat epitomizes lack of unity among Vietnamese and lack of decisive leadership on part of Diem...Acceptance of status quo

with Minh elevated to Defense Ministry and sects reinforced in veto power over government is simply postponing evil day of reckoning as to when, if ever, Diem will assert type of leadership that can unify this country and give it chance of competing with hard, effective, unified control of Ho Chi Minh.

Three days later, General Collins communicated his "final judgment" on the situation. He made four recommendations:

- A. Continue to support Diem along present lines for short while longer but without committing U.S. to specific aid programs;
- B. Consider urgently, as possible alternative, the early return of Bao Dai;
- C. If after short period of further test Diem Government fails to achieve substantial progressive action and if return to Bao Dai is acceptable to U.S. Government, to support his prompt return;
- D. If return of Bao Dai is not acceptable to U.S. Government, assuming Diem Government continues to demonstrate inability to unite free Vietnam behind an aggressive program, I recommend re-evaluation of our plans for assisting Southeast Asia with special attention (to an) earlier proposal.

The earlier proposal, made by General Collins on December 13, was that the U.S. gradually withdraw from Vietnam. Collins said this was the "least desirable (but) in all honesty and in view of what I have observed here to date this may be the only sound solution."

3. State Department: Diem Is the Only Available Leader

The State Department went along with Collins' suggestion to avoid specific assistance commitments at the present time but could not see salvation in Bao Dai. A memorandum from Ambassador Heath, then working in the Far East Bureau is indicative of State Department thinking. Heath first called attention to "massive opposition" faced by Diem and French unwillingness to firmly support him--implying that all Diem's problems were not Diem's fault. He then spoke of General Collins' "attempt to achieve a rapid solution," said Collins' "recommendations are now based on the circumstances of a satisfactory settlement prior to January 1"--thereby suggesting that one not looking for a rapid solution might not arrive at similar conclusions.

The memorandum closed with Heath's interpretation of Secretary Dulles' policy and his own thoughts as to what ought to be done:

In our view, General Collins' recommendations ignore the basic factor that we would assist a Communist takeover by a withholding of our aid, even if it must necessarily be given to a government which is less than perfect. The Secretary has analyzed the situation as one in which we are conducting a time buying operation. If we withhold our support to

Vietnam, it will be taken over sooner than if we extend smaller aid, at a figure of about a third of last year. In the meantime, we will proceed to do what we can to strengthen Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. This is my understanding of the Secretary's policy.

I recommend we inform the Secretary and General Collins that we recognize the dangers posed by the above policy, but that in the lack of more useful alternatives that we will continue to support Diem, because there is no one to take his place who would serve U.S. objectives any better. This includes the Bao Dai solution which is opposed by the facts of Bao Dai's lack of support in Vietnam and his past demonstrations of inability to govern. The fear that a fiscal commitment of over \$300 million plus our national prestige would be lost in a gamble on the retention of Free Vietnam is a legitimate one, but the withholding of our support at this juncture would almost inevitably have a far worse effect."

The substance of the memorandum was cabled to Secretary Dulles, then in Paris for the Tripartite French, U.S. and British discussions.

4. December Tripartite Talks

a. France Proposes Alternative to Diem, Dulles Seems to Acquiesce

On 19 December, Mendes-France opened the Indochina talks by calling Diem's approach "wholly negative," said "not a single reform suggested (by Franco-American working groups advising the government on all matters) had accepted by Diem," that the "French Government now considered . . . a approach would have to be made to Diem." Reaffirming his past agreement with Dulles' "thesis that we must do our maximum to permit Diem Government to succeed" Mendes-France added:

now . . . he was no longer sure that even maximum would help. He said we must now have alternate formula in mind. Without varying from our stated purpose of supporting Diem Government as long as it exists we must now prepare in our minds [material missing]

Dulles agreed the

task in South Vietnam was difficult (but) regarded basic factors as favorable. People were opposed to communism and had great natural resources....they received greater aid from abroad than North . . . situation was much improved now that there was full cooperation between French and American authorities. The problem must not be approached in spirit of defeatism. Only serious problem we have not yet solved is that of indigenous leadership. We cannot expect it to be solved ideally because there is no tradition among indigenous people for self-government. We must get along with something less good than best. . . . (The U.S. was) not repeat not committed to Diem in any irrevocable sense. We have accepted him because we knew of no one better. Developments have confirmed our fears as to his limitations but no substitute for him has yet been proposed. Those

suggested in past varied from month to month. Now it is claimed that only Bao Dai can save situation. If that is case, then we must indeed be desperate. . . . We should continue to back Diem but exert more pressure on him to make changes we consider necessary.

Mendes-France suggested the U.S. and France approach Bao Dai and mentioned the French Viceroy plan to replace Diem. Dulles countered by saying the U.S. and French might use Bao Dai but "we must go to him prepared with our own ideas and not . . . simply accept his." Dulles did not expect any Viceroy to be able "to decide on alternate to Diem and to set up machinery to implement our ideas . . . our job (is) to create this machinery." He added,

We must exhaust all our pressures on Diem to get things done before considering alternate solutions. . . . He asked Mendes not to think we had obstinately closed our minds to possible alternate solution. We had not repeat not, but our investigation of alternate must be done on careful basis and we must for present support Diem.

Mendes-France agreed. He summarized his position as follows:

First, to support Diem; second, to study alternatives. Collins and Ely should be instructed to explore further possibilities including Bao Dai with great discretion . . . third point was that Ely and Collins should be requested to investigate matter of timing. How much further delay can be tolerated? . . . We must set deadline...

Then Dulles agreed--but added a fourth point:

If the US should decide that there is no repeat no good alternative to Diem we will have to consider how much more investment we will be prepared to make in Indochina. Our policy would have to be reappraised. Congressional committees . . . would have to be consulted. Mansfield believes in Diem. . . . Even slight chance of success in Vietnam was worth considerable investment. US had also to think of what happened in adjacent countries-in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Malaya. US situation was different from that of French. French had an investment in lives and property in Vietnam while ours involved effect that fate of Vietnam would have on rest of Southeast Asia.

b. But Dulles Reports, No Other Suitable Leader Can Be Seen

After the Tripartite meetings, Dulles reported his assessment of their outcome to Saigon. He said he had agreed with Mendes-France on four points concerning Diem but had not agreed to a deadline for Diem's replacement. Rather, "Collins and Ely would report late January on overall situation."

Dulles called the "investment in Vietnam justified even if only to buy time to build up strength elsewhere in area" and concluded:

We are going to have to maintain flexible policy and proceed carefully by stages in Vietnam. . . . Under present circumstances and unless situation (in Vietnam) clearly

appears hopeless and rapidly disintegrating, we have no choice but continue our aid Vietnam and support of Diem. There no other suitable leader known to us.

France believed Dulles had in fact committed the United States to consider a change with which Bao Dai would be associated by mid-January. Washington denied it and Paris protests were unable to budge the State Department. The U.S. and France did agree that the Tripartite talks had given Collins and Ely a mandate to study alternatives, however.

c. The U.S. Looks at Alternatives

Having told Paris the U.S. was not committed to either a deadline or an alternative involving Bao Dai, the U.S. proceeded to study alternatives. Secretary of Defense Wilson asked the Joint Staff to assess the impact on military commitments to Southeast Asia of the loss of South Vietnam, of continued but reduced assistance to that nation and of a range of actions in between. The JCS responded by calling Wilson's alternate options incomplete, that consideration of increased aid, and institution of a unilateral program of direct guidance to the GVN through an "advisory system" should be among U.S. considerations.

[material missing]

As a result of Collins' recommendations the NSC endorsed a strong policy in Vietnam: the U.S. would continue to support the Diem government and continue to press France to carry out its commitments under the Smith-LaChambre agreement. The NSC approved in principle the programs of military and economic aid to implement Collins' recommendations (about \$500 million) and determined to seek reaffirmation of the Manila powers' determination to react under the SEATO treaty if hostilities were resumed. Dulles decided to "take the plunge" and begin direct aid to Vietnam on January 1, 1955. The aid program was to be flexible and fluid, adjusted according to circumstances and subject to discontinuance at any time, as at present.

E. CRISIS OF THE SPRING, 1955

With strong United States backing, Diem went into the sect crisis of the spring, 1955. Different from the military coup crisis of Autumn 1954 and the Quat cabinet crisis of December, the sect crisis was resolved by Diem's taking firm action and was not followed by another. It was followed by the end of any real French presence in Vietnam.

1. The Problem of the Sect Armies

The sects had been quiescent but not quiet since Cao Dai and Hoa Hao ministers had joined the cabinet in September 1954. The end of French subsidies for sect armies in February shook them out of complacency. Diem agreed to pay a part of what the armies had received from the French to ease the transition of some 40,000 soldiers to civilian life. But transition it was to be: he would not tolerate armed bands separate from VNA command and separate from Saigon's political guidance. Sect leaders had different

objectives, however. They wanted to preserve their military forces by integrating, intact, as many units as possible into the National Army. (With a VNA force level of 100,000, few could be accommodated; in January only 6,000 sect troops had been absorbed.) Secondly, the sects wanted substantial government assistance for soldiers forced to leave the military. Most important, they wanted recognition of their areas of influence and Diem's assurance that he would not encroach on their territories. Diem would countenance no part of this third request.

Since December, a Franco-American group headed by Col. Lansdale and directed to "come up with a peaceful solution" to the problem had worked furiously, found a solution and urged its prompt adoption. Generals Collins and Ely decided to give the matter further study. Lansdale's reaction:

We warned them that time was extremely short, that the sects were about to take action by arms and that a peaceful solution would have to be introduced immediately or the opportunity would be lost. The opportunity was lost.

2. The United Front Challenges Diem

Lost because Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect leaders joined with Bay Vien in February, put down hostilities among themselves and joined in a United Front of Nationalist Forces. In March, the United Front demanded Diem form a government of large national union. The eight sect cabinet members resigned (although Cao Dai Generals The and Phuong soon changed their minds). A United Front delegate tried to convince Bao Dai to withdraw Diem's powers as premier but the timely arrival of a personal letter from President Eisenhower outlining US objectives and progress in Vietnam proved more persuasive. The letter either reassured Bao Dai that the US had not written him out of the political picture or made him think twice about joining with the sects and thereby incurring US wrath. Whatever the reason, he refused to intervene on behalf of the Front. Diem called the Front Program an ultimatum and would not budge.

France wanted Bao Dai to mediate between Diem and the United Front. The US wanted to issue a joint declaration telling the sects both America and France opposed violence and warning them that the French Expeditionary Corps would block any movement of Hoa Hao troops into Saigon to reinforce the Binh Xuyen. Ely and Paris refused the warning clause: French troops would act only in protection of the lives and property of French and foreign nationals.

3. Diem Challenges the Binh Xuyen

During this time, Lansdale was meeting almost nightly with Diem. He reports Diem

was desperately trying to get French and US help to remove the Sureté from the control of the Binh Xuyen. French and US reactions to the problem were in the form of advice to proceed slowly, to act with caution. Events would not permit this.

Before dawn on the 28th of March, a paratrooper company loyal to Diem attacked and overcame the Binh Xuyen-controlled central police headquarters. The next day, Diem told Defense Minister Minh he planned to oust Binh Xuyen Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang that afternoon--March 29--and replace him with someone loyal to his regime. Minh insisted Diem at least consult the cabinet before taking action. Diem refused and Minh resigned. Representatives of General Ely were able to persuade Diem to defer any move against the Sureté, however.

On the night of March 29-30 the Binh Xuyen struck back. Mortar shells fell on the palace grounds and Binh Xuyen troops tried to regain the prefecture. They were repulsed by National Army troops. The VNA then moved to attack the Sureté itself in retaliation but French officers apparently cut off their gas and ammunition supplies temporarily to keep the National Army on the defensive. Fighting ended by 3:30 in the morning of March 30.

General Ely opposed a VNA offensive against the Sureté headquarters, not because it might fail but because it was irrelevant. Relevant was Diem's inability to defeat the sects rapidly and decisively throughout the country. If force were used to prove a minor point, a long, bloody and major civil war would surely ensue. Ely was outraged at Diem's attitude. He felt the premier verged on megalomania and was ready to "put the city to sword and flame to establish his authority. Collins sympathized with Ely, but also felt if Diem did not prove he could control Saigon he would be forced to accede to sect demands.

4. Truce-But No Calm

On March 31, a 48-hour cease-fire was won by General Jean Gambiez, trusted by both the National Army and the Binh Xuyen. The truce was extended into April but failed to cool tempers or ease tensions. (Cao Dai forces which had broken with the United Front were integrated into the National Army on March 31, however--one happy note for Diem.)

a. Lansdale Version

Lansdale, whose account of this and later developments is not at all flattering to the French, says Ely decided to impose a cease-fire and won Collins' concurrence. French officers then moved in and stopped the fighting. Lansdale "saw Ambassador Collins . . . explaining that only the Binh Xuyen would gain by the cease-fire." But it continued:

Ambassador Collins was sincerely convinced that the Binh Xuyen could be induced by French negotiations to withdraw from the Sureté and police control of the metropolis....

Lansdale reports the French had long been working against Diem through the Vietnamese National Army (they used its G-6 as an arm of French intelligence) and that French soldiers under his command in the National Security Division of TRIM tried to sabotage the Diem regime and US programs designed to strengthen it.

The French had daily fed us the latest French propaganda line (Diem was weak, Diem was bloodthirsty, the VNA had low morale . . . was unable to fight, Americans didn't understand the Vietnamese, all whites must encourage only selected Vietnamese loyal to the French because the remainder would turn against all whites in another "night of the long knives" similar to that of 1946.) Now the French had been insistent that the National Army was a hollow shell, that its officers would refuse to fight . . . that morale was so bad the troops would desert rather than follow "bloody Diem."

Lansdale implies Collins fell for this "propaganda" but he, Lansdale, did not. On the cease-fire, Lansdale reports:

The French told Diem that if he tried to take over Sureté headquarters which was now included in the French zone, French troops would open fire on the Vietnamese Army. The US advised Diem to be patient, that the French were really being helpful by negotiating with the Binh Xuyen. The cease-fire limit was extended . . . Sizeable sums were being offered (by French) to Army officers and to sect leaders who were remaining loyal to Diem and to entice them into being at least neutral. Those who refused were subjected to character assassination attacks...

b. Ely and Collins' Decision: Diem Must Go

On April 7, Collins and Ely discussed Diem. Ely said Diem could be maintained only by overcoming enormous difficulties. After a full day of "soul-searching," Ely had been forced to conclude Diem had to go to preserve Vietnam for the free world. He would accept anyone but Diem as premier. Collins had been nearing a similar conclusion. On March 31 he told the State Department it was necessary to consider alternatives to Diem. A week later Collins cabled Dulles to insist Diem be removed. He recommended Tran Van Do (Diem's foreign minister who also resigned from the cabinet in March) or Dr. Quat as replacements.

c. Dulles' Indecision

Dulles replied as he had in December: he could not see how Diem's replacement would solve the sect problem for any successor worthy of US assistance would still have to contend with them. A change in premiers would damage US prestige throughout the Far East: the US would be charged with paying lip service to the cause of Asian nationalism, then abandoning a nationalist leader when pressured by "colonial interests." Plus pro-Diem Congressional sentiment was a problem. The Mutual Security bill was under debate and Mansfield had made it clear that Congress would be reluctant to appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. Despite these difficulties, Dulles eventually agreed to consider a change if Collins would personally come to Washington for consultation.

d. Paris: Diem's Time Is Up

At the same time Paris was fast losing patience. The time has come to form a government responsive to dominant political forces in Vietnam, to abandon the unrealistic U.S. policy

of maintaining and strengthening Diem, said France. Formation of a Conseil Superieur was proposed, representative of Diem and his supporters, the sects, intellectuals, politicians and the army. The Conseil would decide policy and a cabinet of non-political technicians headed by Diem would implement it. But the U.S. rejected this plan saying Diem should be allowed to strike back at the Binh Xuyen with force and France and America should support him-morally and logistically.

Then Washington asked the Quai d'Orsay to answer a set of questions designed to elicit specific French plans for the change in Vietnamese government. Paris' rejoinder: the questions should be answered jointly or the united FrancoAmerican effort in Vietnam would be over and France would have to say publicly that the U.S. had assumed sole responsibility for developments in Vietnam. But in mid-April, France filled-in part of the questionnaire-leaving blank a successor to Diem (only joint consultation could decide this). Paris proposed Collins and Ely draw up a slate of acceptable candidates for major positions. The U.S. and French governments would agree on a final list, ask Bao Dai to summon representatives of various factions to Cannes and on the basis of French-U.S. recommendations, negotiate a solution to the sect-Binh Xuyen-Diem impasse. Sect support would be assured by their membership in a high council and a program of honors, indemnification and integration of sect troops into the National Army.

e. Bao Dai's Plan

On April 21, Bao Dai announced his own plan for resolving the crisis, remarkably similar to that submitted by Paris. Bao Dai wanted to summon various representatives to Cannes, name Dr. Quat as premier, ask him to form a cabinet of technicians and a high council of notables. On April 26, Bao Dai said he would implement the scheme unilaterally unless the U.S. made some response by the following day.

Meanwhile, Collins had left Saigon for consultations with Dulles. Lansdale reports a meeting held just before his departure:

He (Collins) told Lansdale not to be worried by newspaper rumors that the US would stop supporting Diem. Lansdale asked then if his orders were to continue supporting Diem; Collins said yes. Members of the country team privately felt that Diem should be supported by us, that the National Army was ready to support him and had the capability of defeating the Binh Xuyen.

f. Dulles' Decision: U.S. Will Consider a Change in Regime

General Collins and Secretary Dulles met on April 27. Dulles agreed to consider shifting support to either Quat or Do and a message to this effect was sent to Saigon. But Dulles determined not to discuss this with France until a full and frank statement of her intentions had been received. That statement was to include an unequivocal assurance to back whole-heartedly any new political arrangements in Saigon and to resolve "certain ambiguities" in French policy toward North Vietnam. Until this declaration appeared the US would reveal no change of heart over Diem.

5. Diem Acts Against the Binh Xuyen

Then the truce exploded. On 28 April, Diem told Lansdale:

The Army and people laid the blame (for the crisis between the government and the Binh Xuyen) on the French because they could see French armored vehicles and troops in the streets evidently ready for action against the Vietnamese. We (Lansdale and an assistant) told him that it looked as the Vietnamese still needed a leader, that Diem was still President, that the US was still supporting him.

That afternoon, Diem's private secretary called Lansdale. He said the palace was

under heavy mortar fire, that the President was on another line talking to General Ely, that Ely stated that he couldn't hear any explosions and the President was holding the mouthpiece out towards the explosions so Ely could hear them. Hai (the secretary) started to ask what should be done, interrupted himself to say that the President had just ordered the National Army to start returning the fire and had so informed Ely. He hung up.

Against the advice of French, US and most cabinet advisors, Diem had issued a decree charging Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang with "very grave official misconduct" and named Col. Nguyen Ngoc Le to replace him. Sang refused to resign, saying only Bao Dai had authority to remove him. Binh Xuyen troops in Cholon apparently opened fire on National Army units and Binh Xuyen shells fell again on the palace. But within nine hours after Diem's order to take the offensive, the National Army had driven the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Fires raged (set by the Binh Xuyen, according to Lansdale); hundreds were killed or wounded.

6. Washington Acts: U.S. Will (Again) Support Diem

Washington responded with alacrity to Diem's success, superficial though it was. Saigon was told to forget Dulles' earlier message about US willingness to see a change in government. Policy had not changed after all: the US supported Diem. The Saigon Embassy burned the first message.

7. Diem and Others Defy Bao Dai

Buoyed by his showing against Bay Vien, Diem ignored the summons from Bao Dai which appeared on April 28. The Emperor ordered Diem and General Ty to Ca~ines, placed Binh Xuyen sympathizer General Vy in charge of the army and dispatched General Hinh to Saigon with personal instructions from Bao Dai. Diem refused to leave Saigon, refused to allow General Vy to assume command, refused to allow General Hinh into the country.

On April 30 a new development surfaced. The National Revolutionary Congress of the Vietnamese people was announced. Backed by Cao Dai Generals Phuong and The, Hoa Hao General Ngo, other attentiste politicians, it claimed to represent almost all political

parties in South Vietnam. The Congress declaration repudiated Bao Dai, dissolved the present government and called on Diem to form a new government and elect a national assembly to draft a constitution.

Diem was receptive to the program of the Revolutionary Congress, particularly since his brother Nhu had a hand in drafting it. He was probably not as receptive to some of the activist members of the Congress, however, most of whom joined in a Revolutionary Committee. Generals Trinh Minh The and Phuong confided to Lansdale:

The Revolutionary Committee had grown out of the Revolutionary Congress Front organization which Diem's brother Nhu had tried to organize some days earlier; they had followed (SMM's) advice and had joined with Nhu in the Front but were dissatisfied with some of the weak organizations they felt Nhu was depending on, so had organized something more dynamic to meet the threat of Vy and Bao Dai and called themselves the Revolutionary Committee. They wanted Bao Dai dethroned and wanted the French to stop interfering in Vietnamese affairs.

Support, backhanded though it may have been, helped Diem politically in Vietnam and with the United States. Militarily he was never really threatened by Bao Dai or Generals Vy or Hinh (who was never able to deliver Bao Dai's special orders). The National Army was stronger than French and Americans thought and it refused to obey General Vy. The following episode, related to Lansdale by General Ty and Colonel Tran Van Don after their temporary arrest by Vy, illustrates this. General Vy bragged about being able to get anything he wanted from the French. Ty and Don asked him to prove it. "(They) . . . asked him to call up the French and request the armored vehicles which the French had been holding at Bien Hoa so long without delivering to the Vietnamese Army. The French rushed these vehicles to Hinh's house (Vy's headquarters), evidently having been holding them just outside town for this emergency, where Army men took them over and drove them into the fight against the Binh Xuyen. Don said the French still hadn't caught on, still thought that Vy would use this armor to bring the Army into line to stop fighting the Binh Xuyen and be loyal to Bao Dai. Don added that the Army felt the same as the Revolutionary Committee: Bao Dai was finished." General Vy retreated to Dalat (and Bao Dai's Imperial Guards), then left the country.

During these days, General Ely had grown more convinced that Diem was not only irresponsible, he was quite mad. Ely feared fighting would spread to the European sector but was unable to win American or British support for an attempt to reimpose the cease-fire. American Charge d'Affairs Kidder felt Ely himself was approaching hysteria and that his emotional involvement compromised his usefulness to either France or the United States. Ely's premonitions of violence between Vietnamese and French forces proved unfounded. But violence did accompany Diem's final offensive against the Binh Xuyen which opened on May 2 when the VNA crossed the Chinese Arroyo and attacked Bay Vien's forces in Cholon. By the following day, most of the Binh Xuyen had been driven out into the Rung Sat swamps.

When Collins returned to Saigon he urged Diem to hold the Revolutionary Committee in check (Collins, most of the French and French intelligence thought Vietminh had infiltrated the front organization; they feared Diem would become its prisoner if he backed it too strongly). Collins wanted Diem to reconstitute the government and get on with reforms, leaving the problem of Bao Dai to an elected national assembly. Diem followed this advice. He invited some 700 elected counselors from 39 provinces to consider Bao Dai's legality. An Estates General composed of 50 counselors drew up a program demanding Bao Dai transfer all civilian and military powers to Diem who would exercise them until the assembly met--within six months--to draw up a constitution.

8. May Trilateral Meetings

a. Dulles Backs Diem

At this same time, France, the United States and Britain met once again in Paris. The Tripartite session had been called to discuss problems of European Defense but Vietnam was the real subject. The positions of both Secretary Dulles and French Prime Minister Edgar Faure (who succeeded Mendes-France in February 1955) toward Diem had hardened. Dulles insisted he be upheld:

Diem is only means US sees to save South Vietnam and counteract (the) revolutionary movement underway in Vietnam. US sees no one else who can. Whatever US view has been in past, today US must support Diem whole-heartedly. US must not permit Diem to become another Karensky.

...Bao Dai . . . had irretrievably lost capacity to be anything but titular head of government. . . . Cao Dai and Hoa Hao could be used but not Binh Xuyen. . . . With support (of France and US) Diem could sit on top of revolution. Diem is only force of moderation. FEC is certain stabilizing influence. US was giving funds to support Vietnamese army and could not see anyone else to give funds to but Diem for that purpose.

...In US view present revolution is not yet dominated or influenced by Communists to any appreciable degree. . . . Support of Diem did not indicate US non-recognition of his weaknesses. US . . . had been and remained ready to support any other man who might be presented by orderly process of law. (Dulles) remarked that just before outbreak of fighting US was prepared to consider alternatives but he was not sure now that it would have been practical. . . . If there is a better man US is ready to consider him but . . . no one has been suggested. Although Collins had reached agreement with Ely in early April to change Diem he now believes we must support him.

b. The French Position

French Minister La Forest had opened the meeting by pointing to consultations (scheduled for July) between North and South Vietnam about elections. He said France

felt South Vietnam could win the contest if a "nationalist, stable and broadly based government" were in control and that France wanted South Vietnam to win.

There is no ambiguity in French policy between North and South Vietnam. Presence of France in North could not be erased by stroke of pen. It is French duty to protect her cultural and economic presence there. Sainteny mission is designed for only that purpose. France had given up thought of mixed companies as result (US) objections and had now surrendered coal mines....

LaForest presented the French analysis of events over the past four months. While the US could not argue his facts, the US could not accept LaForest's interpretation of them. Differences between the two nations were more fundamental than at any time in the past.

France had loyally supported government of Diem from beginning. Any allegation to contrary is untrue . . . France reached agreement with US last December to persuade "or compel" Diem to enlarge government. It was agreed to give him until January at which time, if he had failed, we would look into matter of alternate discreetly. This was not done. Last March present government broke into open conflict with sects. United Front of sects was formed against Diem. Both December agreement and common sense told us at that time that something (had) to be done to avoid civil war. . . . For this reason, joint Ely-Collins approach was tried. It was hoped they would arrive at joint plan for solution. Washington appeared first to welcome this concept then changed its mind. Collins left Saigon when civil war was about to break out. Untenable truces were declared. When they were about to expire Bao Dai submitted his own plan . . . in order to try to reconcile US and French failure to act. US failed to reply to Bao Dai. In absence of Collins from Saigon, Bao Dai acted.

La Forest continued

...that new Revolutionary Committee appeared to have control. Committee is strongly under Viet Minh influence. . . . There is violent campaign against French and French Expeditionary Control. Viet Minh agents make good use of it and certain Americans do not seem sufficiently aware of this. French Government does not wish to have its army act as platform for Vietminh propaganda. Army will not be maintained at any cost...

c. Faure: We Will Withdraw to Save the U.S.-France Alliance

Then M. Faure took the floor, stating France was not in agreement with the United States and that it was time to speak frankly. He said Diem is "not only incapable but mad," he took advantage of Collins' absence to effect a "coup de force which won primary victory but which has not contributed to any lasting solution" and "France can no longer take risks with him." Diem will "bring on a Viet Minh victory, focus the hostility of everyone on French" and force a break between France and the US.

Faure concluded with this significant statement.

Diem is a bad choice, impossible solution, with no chance to succeed and no chance to improve the situation. Without him some solution might be possible, but with him there is none. However, I cannot guarantee any other solution would work nor is it possible to clarify the situation. There seems to be fundamental disagreement between us. I could have claimed that since French position is predominant in Vietnam, you should accommodate your views more to ours, but I have rejected this. What should be done under the circumstances? What would you say if we were to retire entirely from Indochina and call back the FEC as soon as possible. I fully realize this would be a grave solution, as it would leave French civilians and French interests in a difficult position. . . . If you think this might be a possible solution, I think I might be able to orient myself towards it if you say so. It would have advantage of avoiding all further reproach to France of "colonialism" while at same time giving response to Diem's request that France should go. Since it contemplates the liquidation of the situation and the repatriation of the FEC, would the United States be disposed to help protect French civilians and the refugees?

Secretary Dulles repeated his awareness of Diem's weaknesses but did not agree with Faure's opinion. Diem "showed so much ability that US fails to see how he can be got rid of now . . . Diem is stronger now than when Bao Dai first withdrew his powers." Dulles said the worst aspect of the problem was the differences between France and the US: "Vietnam is not worth quarrel with France." Then he matched Faure's offer by saying the US would withdraw from Vietnam if that would solve the problem.

Choice open to us is to have Diem supported or to withdraw . . . US interest in Vietnam is simply to withhold area from communists. US will give consideration to any suggestion French make but must warn that US financial support may not be expected to any solution which (Dulles) can think of as alternative to Diem.

Foreign Secretary MacMillan, calling British interests "more indirect but nonetheless vital because (1) interest in area itself and (2) interest in Communist threat from any area in world," made the obvious statement that a decision on Vietnam was too grave to be taken that evening. Faure and Dulles agreed.

d. Dulles: Continue with Diem--but Independently of France

By May 11, when the three ministers reconvened, Dulles had received counsel from the JCS and General Collins. As was their wont, the Joint Chiefs of Staff offered no opinion about whether Diem should or should not be continued (a matter for "resolution at the governmental level") but then stated his government showed the "greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam." Addressing the military aspects of the problem, the Chiefs found neither withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps nor withdrawal of US military support acceptable. The Vietnamese National Army was considered incapable of maintaining internal security, even less able to resist outside aggression without outside military assistance. The US was barred by Geneva from increasing its forces either to defend Vietnam or to defend French civilians, other foreign nationals or refugees. Thus, although withdrawal of the French

Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," precipitate withdrawal at this time was not: it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual fall of South Vietnam to communism. The Chiefs felt France alone would be unable to stabilize the situation, that the VNA would fall apart without "US moral and materiel support," and that the "best interest of France as well as the United States" warranted energetic action to restore internal order and prevent South Vietnam's loss to the free world.

General Collins also opposed French withdrawal for three reasons: first, the FEC was responsible under the Manila Pact for the defense of Indochina and neither the US nor Britain were prepared to take over that responsibility. Secondly, French military assistance (logistical support and training) was essential to the development of the Vietnamese forces. Third, although the presence of French troops was a source of bitterness to the Vietnamese, General Collins believed the FEC was a stabilizing influence on Vietnamese politics.

Dulles' proposal to Faure on May 11 reflected these judgments. Emphasizing that Indochina, for all its importance, must not be allowed to damage FrancoAmerican relations, that US support for Diem must not be allowed to split the alliance, Dulles proposed that France continue to support Diem until a National Assembly could be elected to determine the ultimate political structure of South Vietnam, a structure which might or might not include Diem.

Against his own views, against French public opinion and on certain conditions, Faure accepted the proposal. The Prime Minister insisted the Diem government be enlarged, elections be held as soon as possible, the sect problem be resolved, anti-French propaganda cease, Bao Dai be retained as chief of state, French and American officials deemed disturbing to Franco-US harmony be removed from Vietnam (Lansdale, for one) and that the US assure him French economic, cultural and financial relations with South Vietnam would be nurtured. Agreeing to these stipulations, Dulles added Diem was not a US puppet and he could not guarantee conditions involving Vietnamese action would be met. Then, saying the problem in Vietnam did not lend itself to a contractual agreement between France and the United States, Dulles suggested each should state its policy and proceed accordingly. In effect, said Dulles, the days of joint policy are over; the US will act (more) independently of France in the future.

F. THE TWILIGHT OF FRENCH PRESENCE IN VIETNAM

Back in Vietnam, Diem was doing well. He had dealt the Binh Xuyen a coup de grace; the Army was pleased with its success against Bay Vien, supported Diem and rather relished the chance to continue the fight against remaining sect armies. Diem launched a campaign against the sect armies on May 8, to regain control of wayward provinces and solidify Saigon's control throughout the country. The US, again, gave Diem unqualified support and the French, again, reluctantly backed him. Bao Dai was a minor threat; trying to overthrow Diem had been a blunder and his popularity was very low. On May 10, a relatively unknown group of "technicians" was named as Diem's cabinet, to function until

elections for a national assembly (held on March 4, 1956). General Collins left Vietnam on May 14; Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt replaced him later in the month. And on June 2, General Ely's mission terminated. General Jacquot assumed military duties as Commissioner-General, duties which consisted primarily of supervising the increasingly rapid pace of the French military pull-out.

1. All-Vietnam Elections

Although political concessions made to the United States in May and economic and military actions taken before and after that time had reduced- almost eliminated-French presence and influence in Vietnam France still was obligated to carry out the provisions of the Geneva Accords. Under increasing pressure from French public opinion to give Hanoi no pretext for renewing hostilities as long as the French Expeditionary Corps remained in South Vietnam, the French Government urgently sought to persuade Diem to accept consultations about the elections scheduled to begin in July 1955. Britain wanted to prevent any public repudiation of the Accords and joined France in urging Diem to talk to the Vietminh. But Diem had not changed his view of the Accords: he had refused to sign them and continued to insist he was not bound by them.

The United States stood between these extremes. A draft policy toward all-Vietnam elections--finally produced in May 1955--held that to give no impression of blocking elections while avoiding the possibility of losing them, Diem should insist on free elections by secret ballot with strict supervision. Communists in Korea and Germany had rejected these conditions; hopefully the Vietminh would follow suit.

Diem could not bring himself to sit down with the Vietminh. Consultations would give the appearance of having accepted the Geneva settlement; consultation with the Vietminh without the kind of Western backing given Rhee and Adenauer would be futile. On July 16, Diem said South Vietnam could "not consider any proposal from the Communists" without proof that they had mended their ways and were prepared to hold genuinely free elections. But another reason was Diem's belief that he could not represent a sovereign nation--or be free of Vietminh propaganda charges of being a colonialist puppet--until the French High Command and the French Expeditionary Corps were gone. Minister Nguyen Huu Chau was dispatched to Paris to negotiate the withdrawal of the FEC from Vietnam (except naval and air forces which Diem wanted under VNA command) and revision of economic, cultural and financial accords. Diem also wanted Vietnamese affairs transferred from the Ministry of Associated States to the French Foreign office; he insisted the post of High Commissioner be abolished and that Ely's successor (Henri Hoppenot) be credited as Ambassador.

2. Franco-Vietnamese Differences, Autumn 1955

France was anxious to get the FEC out of Vietnam (and into North Africa); the matter of turning the High Command over to the VNA was not a problem. Placing French units under Vietnamese command was a definite problem, however and domestic politics would not allow any immediate change of Vietnam's status within the French Union.

Talks stalled until July. Diem accepted Ambassador Hoppenot (whose duties, if not title, were that of High Commissioner) and things moved a bit, then stopped when Diem arrested two French officers suspected of bombing electric power stations in Saigon and said they would be tried by Vietnamese courts. In October, France refused to talk unless the officers were released. The deadlock was finally broken by the French in December. Paris agreed the Quai d'Orsay would handle Vietnamese affairs, refused to accept the assignment of a diplomatic representative from the DRV to France and made it clear the Sainteny mission was in Hanoi solely for economic and cultural reasons. France had already recognized Vietnam as a Republic after Diem's resounding-too resounding-victory of 98 percent of the vote in an October popular referendum. Diem finally released the officers into French custody.

But these concessions produced no improvement in French-Vietnam relations. In December, Diem suddenly terminated the economic and financial accords worked out at the Paris conference of 1954; mounting US activity fast drove the former colony from franc to dollar area and stringent commercial regulations applied to French businesses in South Vietnam forced already outraged entrepreneurs out of the country in increasing numbers. Diem laid down these conditions on which he would consider renewed relations with France. France had to

denounce the Geneva Agreements, to renounce to speak about the general elections in 1956; to approve openly and without reservation the policy of Mr. Diem, to break all relations with the Vietminh and of course to call home the Sainteny Mission.

Soon after this, Diem withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

There was little France could do. Diem spoke for a government no longer dependent on French support, no longer near collapse. By February 1956, only 15,000 French troops remained in Vietnam and 10,000 of these were to be evacuated by the end of March. The High Command was abolished on April 26, 1956. The next month, the US Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) entered Vietnam and another 350 military personnel were added to the US advisory effort. Few French instructors remained at the TRIM.

3. What of French Obligations Under the Geneva Accords?

But an important question remained. Under the Geneva agreements France was responsible for protection and support of the International Control Commission; representatives of the People's Army of North Vietnam and France sat on the Joint Armistice Commission charged with ensuring provisions of the armistice agreement were met. France could not lightly cast off these obligations nor could France transfer them to South Vietnam: Diem denounced the Geneva accords and refused to be bound by them in any way.

In February, French Foreign Minister Pineau described the difficult French position as a result of certain conditions:

These are the independence granted to South Vietnam and the Geneva accords some provisions of which have up to date demanded and justified our presence in this country.

Particularly difficult was the question of ICC support. Diem refused to associate South Vietnam openly with the ICC but did agree to assume responsibility for its servicing if France would leave a small mission in Vietnam to fulfill French obligations. Dulles liked this idea. His view was: "while we should certainly take no positive step to speed up present process of decay of Geneva Accords, neither should we make the slightest effort to infuse life into them."

Eight months later, Diem finally relaxed his uncompromising stand against Geneva, agreed to respect the armistice and provide security for the ICC. In July 1956, Vietnam promised to replace the French liaison mission to the ICC. France maintained membership on the Joint Armistice Commission and continued to bear ICC expenses. But France was never able to meet Geneva obligations concerning the elections of 1956, for Diem matched his refusal to consult with the Vietminh about elections with an adamant refusal to ever hold them. Neither Britain nor the Soviet Union pressed the matter; the United States backed Diem's position.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 1, pp. 242-69

Summary

From the perspective of the United States, the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam raise four principal questions:

1. Was the breakdown of the peace of 1954 the fault of the U.S., or of the ambiguities and loopholes of the Geneva Accords?
2. Was the insurgency in essence an indigenous rebellion against Ngo Dinh Diem's oppressive government, transformed by the intervention of first the U.S., and then the DRV?
3. Or was it, rather, instigated, controlled, and supported from its inception by Hanoi?
4. When did the U.S. become aware of the Viet Cong threat to South Vietnam's internal security, and did it attempt to counter it with its aid?

The analysis which follows rests on study of three corpora of evidence:

- (a) Intelligence reports and analyses, including the most carefully guarded finished intelligence, and pertinent National Intelligence Estimates.
- (b) Unfinished governmental intelligence, field reports, and memoranda such as interrogations of prisoners and translated captured documents, as well as contract studies based on similar evidence.
- (c) Open sources, including the works of former U.S. officials, Vietnam correspondents, and the like.

The U.S. has attempted to amplify (c) by publishing White Papers in 1961 and 1965, in which substantial citations were made from (b) and interpretations offered consistent with (a). This study has benefited from further effort during 1967 and early 1968 to identify in (b) evidence which could be publicly released. But, based on the survey of (a), (b), and (c) reported on below, the U.S. can now present no conclusive answers to the questions advanced above.

Tentative answers are possible, and form a continuum: By 1956, peace in Vietnam was plainly less dependent upon the Geneva Settlement than upon power relationships in Southeast Asia--principally upon the role the U.S. elected to play in unfolding events. In 1957 and 1958, a structured rebellion against the government of Ngo Dinh Diem began. While the North Vietnamese played an ill-defined part, most of those who took up arms were South Vietnamese, and the causes for which they fought were by no means contrived in North Vietnam. In 1959 and 1960, Hanoi's involvement in the developing strife became evident. Not until 1960, however, did the U.S. perceive that Diem was in serious danger of being overthrown and devise a Counterinsurgency Plan.

It can be established that there was endemic insurgency in South Vietnam throughout the period 1954-1960. It can also be established-but less surely- that the Diem regime alienated itself from one after another of those elements within Vietnam which might have offered it political support, and was grievously at fault in its rural programs. That these conditions engendered animosity toward the GVN seems almost certain, and they could have underwritten a major resistance movement even without North Vietnamese help.

It is equally clear that North Vietnamese communists operated some form of subordinate apparatus in the South in the years 1954-1960. Nonetheless, the Viet Minh "stay-behinds" were not directed originally to structure an insurgency, and there is no coherent picture of the extent or effectiveness of communist activities in the period 1956-1959. From all indications, this was a period of reorganization and recruiting by the communist party. No direct links have been established between Hanoi and perpetrators of rural violence. Statements have been found in captured party histories that the communists plotted and controlled the entire insurgency, but these are difficult to take at face value. Bernard Fall ingeniously correlated DRV complaints to the ICC of incidents in South Vietnam in 1957 with GVN reports of the same incidents, and found Hanoi suspiciously well informed. He also perceived a pattern in the terrorism of 1957-1959, deducing that a broad, centrally

directed strategy was being implemented. However, there is little other corroborative evidence that Hanoi instigated the incidents, much less orchestrated them.

Three interpretations of the available evidence are possible:

Option A--That the DRV intervened in the South in reaction to U.S. escalation, particularly that of President Kennedy in early 1961. Those who advance this argument rest their case principally on open sources to establish the reprehensible character of the Diem regime, on examples of forceful resistance to Diem independent of Hanoi, and upon the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) alleged to have come into being in South Vietnam in early 1960. These also rely heavily upon DRV official statements of 1960-1961 indicating that the DRV only then proposed to support the NLF.

Option B--The DRV manipulated the entire war. This is the official U.S. position, and can be supported. Nonetheless, the case is not wholly compelling, especially for the years 1955-1959.

Option C--The DRV seized an opportunity to enter an ongoing internal war in 1959 prior to, and independent of, U.S. escalation. This interpretation is more tenable than the previous; still, much of the evidence is circumstantial.

The judgment offered here is that the truth lies somewhere between Option B and C. That is, there was some form of DRV apparatus functioning in the South throughout the years, but it can only be inferred that this apparatus originated and controlled the insurgency which by 1959 posed a serious challenge to the Diem government. Moreover, up until 1958, neither the DRV domestic situation nor its international support was conducive to foreign adventure; by 1959, its prospects were bright in both respects, and it is possible to demonstrate its moving forcefully abroad thereafter. Given the paucity of evidence now, well after the events, U.S. intelligence served policy makers of the day surprisingly well in warning of the developments described below:

FAILURE OF THE GENEVA SETTLEMENT

The Geneva Settlement of 1954 was inherently flawed as a durable peace for Indochina, since it depended upon France, and since both the U.S. and the Republic of South Vietnam excepted themselves. The common ground from which the nations negotiated at the Geneva Conference was a mutual desire to halt the hostilities between France and the Viet Minh, and to prevent any widening of the war. To achieve concord, they had to override objections of the Saigon government, countenance the disassociation of the U.S. from the Settlement, and accept France as one executor. Even so, Geneva might have wrought an enduring peace for Vietnam if France had remained as a major power in Indochina, if Ngo Dinh Diem had cooperated with the terms of the settlement, if the U.S. had abstained from further influencing the outcome. No one of these conditions was likely, given France's travail in Algeria, Diem's implacable anti-communism, and the U.S.' determination to block further expansion of the DRV in Southeast Asia.

Therefore, the tragedy staged: partition of Vietnam, the sole negotiable basis found at Geneva for military disengagement, became the prime *casus belli*. To assuage those parties to Geneva who were reluctant to condone the handing over of territory and people to a communist government, and to reassure the Viet Minh that their southern followers could be preserved en bloc, the Accords provided for regrouping forces to North and South Vietnam and for Vietnamese freely electing residence in either the North or the South; the transmigrations severely disrupted the polity of Vietnam, heated the controversy over reunification, and made it possible for North Vietnam to contemplate subversive aggression. Both sides were fearful that the armistice would be used to conceal construction of military bases or other preparations for aggression; but these provisions depended on a credible international supervision which never materialized. Partition and regroupment pitted North against South Vietnam, and arms control failed patently and soon. Geneva traded on long-run risks to achieve short-run disengagement. France withdrew from Vietnam, leaving the Accords in the hands of Saigon. Lasting peace came between France and the Viet Minh, but the deeper struggle for an independent, united Vietnam remained, its international implications more grave, its dangers heightened.

The Southeast Asia policy of the U.S. in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference was conservative, focused on organizing collective defense against further inroads of communism, not on altering *status quo*. *Status quo* was the two Vietnams set up at Geneva, facing each other across a demilitarized zone. Hanoi, more than other powers, had gambled: hedged by the remaining Viet Minh, it waited for either Geneva's general elections or the voracious political forces in the South to topple the Saigon government. In South Vietnam, Diem had begun his attempt to gain control over his people, constantly decried DRV subversion and handling of would-be migrants as violations of the Geneva Accords, and pursued an international and domestic policy of anti-communism. Both Vietnams took the view that partition was, as the Conference Final Declaration stated, only temporary. But statements could not gainsay the practical import of the Accords. The separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel facilitated military disengagement, but by establishing the principle that two regimes were separately responsible for "civil administration" each in distinct zones; by providing for the regroupment of military forces to the two zones, and for the movement of civilians to the zone of their choice; and by postponing national elections for at least two years, permitting the regimes in Hanoi and Saigon to consolidate power, the Geneva conferees in fact fostered two governments under inimical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems.

The Geneva powers were imprecise-probably deliberately indefinite-concerning who was to carry out the election provisions. France, which was charged with civil administration in the "regrouping zone" of South Vietnam, had granted the State of Vietnam its independence in June 1954, six weeks before the Accords were drawn up. Throughout 1954 and the first half of 1955, France further divested itself of authority in South Vietnam: police, local government, and then the Army of Vietnam were freed of French control, and turned over to the Saigon government. Concurrently, the U.S. began to channel aid directly to South Vietnam, rather than through France. The convolution of French policy then thrust upon the U.S. a choice between supporting Diem or the French

presence in Indochina. The U.S. opted for Diem. By the time the deadlines for election consultations fell due in July 1955, South Vietnam was sovereign *de facto* as well as *de jure*, waxing strong with U.S. aid, and France was no longer in a position to exert strong influence on Diem's political actions.

As early as January 1955, President Diem was stating publicly that he was unlikely to proceed with the Geneva elections:

Southern Viet-Nam, since it protested the Geneva Agreement when it was made, does not consider itself a party to that Agreement, nor bound by it.

In any event, the clauses providing for the 1956 elections are extremely vague. But at one point they are clear--in stipulating that the elections are to be free. Everything will now depend on how free elections are defined. The President said he would wait to see whether the conditions of freedom would exist in North Viet-Nam at the time scheduled for the elections. He asked what would be the good of an impartial counting of votes if the voting has been preceded in North Viet-Nam by a campaign of ruthless propaganda and terrorism on the part of a police state.

As the deadline for consultations approached (20 July 1955), Diem was increasingly explicit that he did not consider free elections possible in North Vietnam, and had no intention of consulting with the DRV concerning them. The U.S. did not--as is often alleged--connive with Diem to ignore the elections. U.S. State Department records indicate that Diem's refusal to be bound by the Geneva Accords and his opposition to pre-election consultations were at his own initiative. However, the U.S., which had expected elections to be held, and up until May 1955 had fully supported them, shifted its position in the face of Diem's opposition, and of the evidence then accumulated about the oppressive nature of the regime in North Vietnam. "In essence," a State Department historical study found, "our position would be that the whole subject of consultations and elections in Viet-Nam should be left up to the Vietnamese themselves and not dictated by external arrangements which one of the parties never accepted and still rejects." Secretary of State Dulles explained publicly that:

Neither the United States Government nor the Government of Viet-Nam is, of course, a party to the Geneva armistice agreements. We did not sign them, and the Government of Viet-Nam did not sign them and, indeed, protested against them. On the other hand, the United States believes, broadly speaking, in the unification of countries which have a historic unity, where the people are akin. We also believe that, if there are conditions of really free elections, there is no serious risk that the Communists would win.....

Thus, backed by the U.S., Diem obdurately refused to open talks with the Hanoi government. He continued to maintain that the Government of South Vietnam had not signed the Geneva Agreements and thus was not bound by them.

Our policy is a policy for peace. But nothing will lead us astray of our goal, the unity of our country, a unity in freedom and not in slavery. Serving the cause of our nation, more than ever we will struggle for the reunification of our homeland.

We do not reject the principle of free elections as peaceful and democratic means to achieve that unity. However, if elections constitute one of the bases of true democracy, they will be meaningful only on the condition that they be absolutely free.

Now, faced with a regime of oppression as practiced by the Viet Minh, we remain skeptical concerning the possibility of fulfilling the conditions of free elections in the North.

On 1 June 1956, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter Robertson, stated:

President Diem and the Government of Free Viet-Nam reaffirmed on April 6 of this year and on other occasions their desire to seek the reunification of Viet-Nam by peaceful means. In this goal, we support them fully. We hope and pray that the partition of Viet-Nam, imposed against the will of the Vietnamese people, will speedily come to an end. For our part we believe in free elections, and we support President Diem fully in his position that if elections are to be held, there first must be conditions which preclude intimidation or coercion of the electorate. Unless such conditions exist there can be no free choice.

President Eisenhower is widely quoted to the effect that in 1954 as many as 80% of the Vietnamese people would have voted for Ho Chi Minh, as the popular hero of their liberation, in an election against Bao Dai. In October 1955, Diem ran against Bao Dai in a referendum and won--by a dubiously overwhelming vote, but he plainly won nevertheless. It is almost certain that by 1956 the proportion which might have voted for Ho--in a free election against Diem--would have been much smaller than 80%. Diem's success in the South had been far greater than anyone could have foreseen, while the North Vietnamese regime had been suffering from food scarcity, and low public morale stemming from inept imitation of Chinese Communism--including a harsh agrarian program that reportedly led to the killing of over 50,000 small-scale "landlords." The North Vietnamese themselves furnished damning descriptions of conditions within the DRV in 1955 and 1956. Vo Nguyen Giap, in a public statement to his communist party colleagues, admitted in autumn, 1956, that:

We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread. . . . Whilst carrying out our land reform program we failed to respect the principles of freedom of faith and worship in many areas . . . in regions inhabited by minority tribes we have attacked tribal chiefs too strongly, thus injuring, instead of respecting, local customs and manners. . . . When reorganizing the party, we paid too much importance to the notion of social class instead of adhering firmly to political qualifications alone. Instead of recognizing education to be the first essential, we resorted

exclusively to organizational measures such as disciplinary punishments, expulsion from the party, executions, dissolution of party branches and calls. Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization.

That circumstances in North Vietnam were serious enough to warrant Giap's confiteor was proved by insurrection among Catholic peasants in November 1956, within two weeks of his speech, in which thousands more lives were lost. But the uprisings, though then and since used to validate the U.S.-backed GVN stand, were not foreseen in 1955 or 1956; the basis for the policy of both nations in rejecting the Geneva elections was, rather, convictions that Hanoi would not permit "free general elections by secret ballot," and that the ICC would be impotent in supervising the elections in any case.

The deadlines for the consultations in July 1955, and the date set for elections in July 1956, passed without international action. The DRV repeatedly tried to engage the Geneva machinery, forwarding messages to the Government of South Vietnam in July 1955, May and June 1956, March 1958, July 1959, and July 1960, proposing consultations to negotiate "free general elections by secret ballot," and to liberalize North-South relations in general. Each time the GVN replied with disdain, or with silence. The 17th parallel, with its demilitarized zone on either side, became de facto an international boundary, and—since Ngo Dinh Diem's rigid refusal to traffic with the North excluded all economic exchanges and even an interstate postal agreement—one of the most restricted boundaries in the world. The DRV appealed to the UK and the USSR as cochairmen of the Geneva Conference to no avail. In January 1956, on DRV urging, Communist China requested another Geneva Conference to deal with the situation. But the Geneva Co-Chairmen, the USSR and the UK, responded only by extending the functions of the International Control Commission beyond its 1956 expiration date. By early 1957, partitioned Vietnam was a generally accepted modus vivendi throughout the international community. For instance, in January 1957, the Soviet Union proposed the admission of both the GVN and the DRV to the United Nations, the USSR delegate to the Security Council declaring that "in Vietnam two separate States existed, which differed from one another in political and economic structure. Thus, reunification through elections became as remote a prospect in Vietnam as in Korea or Germany. If the political mechanism for reunifying Vietnam in 1956 proved impractical, the blame lies at least in part with the Geneva conferees themselves, who postulated an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam they themselves undertook in July 1954.

But partition was not, as the examples of Korea and Germany demonstrate, necessarily tantamount to renewed hostilities. The difference was that in Korea and Germany international forces guarded the boundaries. In Vietnam, the withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps prior to the date set for elections in 1956 left South Vietnam defenseless except for such forces as it could train and equip with U.S. assistance. The vague extending of the SEATO aegis over Vietnam did not exert the same stabilizing influence as did NATO's Central Army Group in Germany, or the United Nations Command in Korea. Moreover, neither East Germany nor North Korea enjoyed the

advantage of a politico-military substructure within the object of its irredentism, as the Viet Minh residue provided North Vietnam. The absence of deterrent force in South Vietnam invited forceful reunification; the southern Viet Minh regroupes in the North and their comrades in the South made it possible.

Pursuant to the "regroupment" provisions of the Geneva Accords, some 190,000 troops of the French Expeditionary Corps, and 900,000 civilians moved from North Vietnam to South Vietnam; more than 100,000 Viet Minh soldiers and civilians moved from South to North. Both nations thereby acquired minorities with vital interests in the outcome of the Geneva Settlement. In both nations, the regroupes exerted an influence over subsequent events well out of proportion to their numbers.

In North Vietnam, the DRV treated the southern regroupes from the outset as strategic assets--the young afforded special schooling, the able assigned to separate military units.

The southerners in the North, and their relatives in the South, formed, with the remnants of the Viet Minh's covert network in South Vietnam, a means through which the DRV might "struggle" toward reunification regardless of Diem's obduracy or U.S. aid for South Vietnam. These people kept open the DRV's option to launch aggression without transcending a "civil war" of southerners against southerners--no doubt an important consideration with the United States as a potential antagonist. The evidence indicates that, at least through 1956, Hanoi did not expect to have to resort to force; thereafter, the regroupes occupied increasing prominence in DRV plans.

For Diem's government, refugees from the North were important for three H reasons: firstly, they provided the world the earliest convincing evidence of the undemocratic and oppressive nature of North Vietnam's regime. Though no doubt many migrants fled North Vietnam for vague or spurious reasons, it was plain that Ho's Viet Minh were widely and genuinely feared, and many refugees took flight in understandable terror. There were indications that the DRV forcefully obstructed the migration of other thousands who might also have left the North. In 1955 and 1956, the refugees were the most convincing support for Diem's argument that free elections were impossible in the DRV.

Secondly, the refugees engaged the sympathies of the American people as few developments in Vietnam have before or since, and solidly underwrote the U.S. decision for unstinting support of Diem. The poignancy of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes and fortunes to escape communist tyranny, well journalized, evoked an outpouring of U.S. aid, governmental and private. The U.S. Navy was committed to succor the migrants, lifting over 300,000 persons in "Operation EXODUS" (in which Dr. Tom Dooley--then a naval officer--won fame). U.S. government-to-government aid, amounting to \$100 per refugee, more than South Vietnam's annual income per capita, enabled Diem's government to provide homes and food for hundreds of thousands of the destitute, and American charities provided millions of dollars more for their relief. U.S. officials defending American aid programs could point with pride to the refugee episode to demonstrate the special eligibility of the Vietnamese for U.S. help, including an early,

convincing demonstration that Diem's government could mount an effective program with U.S. aid.

Thirdly, the predominantly Catholic Tonkinese refugees provided Diem with a clique: a politically malleable, culturally distinct group, wholly distrustful of Ho Chi Minh and the DRV, dependent for subsistence on Diem's government, and attracted to Diem as a co-religionist. Under Diem's mandarinal regime, they were less important as dependable votes than as a source of reliable political and military cadres. Most were kept unassimilated in their own communities, and became prime subjects for Diem's experiments with strategic population relocation. One heritage of Geneva is the present dominance of South Vietnam's government and army by northerners. The refugees catalyzed Diem's domestic political rigidity, his high-handedness with the U.S., and his unyielding rejection of the DRV and the Geneva Accords.

The Geneva Settlement was further penalized by the early failure of the "International Supervisory Commission" established by the Agreement (Article 34) and cited in the Conference Declaration (Article 7). While a Joint Commission of French and Viet Minh military officers was set up to deal with the cease-fire and force regroupment, the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICC), furnished by Poland, India, and Canada, was to oversee the Accords in general. Its inability to cope with violations of the Armistice in the handling of would-be migrants, vociferously proclaimed in both Saigon and Hanoi, impugned its competence to overwatch the general free elections, for which it was also to be responsible.

Equally serious for the Settlement, the ICC was expected to control arms and guarantee against aggression. The armistice agreement signed by the French and the Viet Minh, and affirmed in the several declarations of the Geneva Conference, included four main provisions for arms control: (1) arms, bases, and armed forces were to be fixed at the level existing in Vietnam in July 1954, with allowance for replacement of worn or damaged equipment, and rotation of personnel; (2) further foreign influences were to be excluded, either in the form of alliances, or foreign military bases established in either North or South Vietnam; (3) neither party was to allow its zone to be used for the renewal of aggression; and, (4) all the foregoing were to be overseen by the ICC. As was the case of the regroupment provisions, these arrangements operated in practice to the detriment of the political solution embodied in the Accords, for the ICC, the election guardian, was soon demonstrated to be impotent.

The level of arms in Vietnam in 1954 was unascertainable. The Viet Minh had been surreptitiously armed, principally by the Chinese, from 1950 onward. That Viet Minh forces were acquiring large amount of relatively advanced weaponry was fully evident at Dien Bien Phu, but neither the DRV nor its allies owned to this military assistance. After the 1954 armistice, French, U.S., and British intelligence indicated that the flow of arms into North Vietnam from China continued on a scale far in excess of "replacement" needs. Similarly, while U.S. military materiel had been provided to the French more openly, no one--neither the French, the Vietnamese, the U.S., nor certainly the ICC--knew how much of this equipment was on hand and serviceable after 1954. The issue of

arms levels was further complicated by regroupment, French withdrawals, and the revamping of the national army in South Vietnam. The ICC could determine to no one's satisfaction whether the DRV was within its rights to upgrade the armament of the irregulars it brought out of South Vietnam. Similarly, though the DRV charged repeatedly that the U.S. had no right to be in South Vietnam at all, the ICC had to face the fact that U.S. military advisors and trainers had been present in Vietnam since 1950 under a pentilateral agreement with Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and France. If France withdrew its cadres in Vietnamese units, could they not be "replaced" by Americans? And if the French were withdrawing both men and equipment in large quantities, did not Vietnam have a right under the Accords to replace them in kind with its own, American-equipped formations? To DRV charges and GVN countercharges, it could reply with legalistic interpretations, but it found it virtually impossible to collect facts, or exercise more than vague influence over U.S., GVN, or DRV policy. The only major example of U.S. ignoring the ICC was the instance of the U.S. Training and Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM), 350 men ostensibly deployed to Vietnam in 1956 to aid the Vietnamese in recovering equipment left by the French, but also directed to act as an extension of the existing MAAG by training Vietnamese in logistics. TERM was introduced without ICC sanction, although subsequently the ICC accepted its presence.

The question of military bases was similarly occluded. The DRV protested repeatedly that the U.S. was transforming South Vietnam into a military base for the prosecution of aggression in Southeast Asia. In fact, as ICC investigation subsequently established, there was no wholly U.S. base anywhere in South Vietnam. It was evident, however, that the South Vietnamese government had 'made available to the U.S. some portions of existing air and naval facilities- e.g., at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Nha Be-for the use of MAAG and TERM. ICC access to these facilities was restricted, and the ICC was never able to determine what the U.S. was shipping through them, either personnel or materiel. By the same token, ICC access to DRV airports, rail terminals, and seaports was severely limited, and its ability to confirm or deny allegations concerning the rearming of the People's Army of Vietnam correspondingly circumscribed. International apprehensions over arms levels and potential bases for aggression were heightened by statements anticipating South Vietnam's active participation in SEATO, or pronouncements of DRV solidarity with China and Russia.

Not until 1959 and 1961 did the ICC publish reports attempting to answer directly DRV charges that the U.S. and South Vietnam were flagrantly violating the arms control provisions of the Geneva Accords. Similarly, though in its Tenth and Eleventh Interim Reports (1960 and 1961) the ICC noted "the concern which the Republic of Vietnam has been expressing over the problem of subversion in South Vietnam," it did not mention that those expressions of concern had been continuous since 1954, or attempt to publish a factual study of that problem until June 1962. In both cases, the ICC was overtaken by events: by late 1960, international tensions were beyond any ability of the ICC to provide reassurances, and the U.S. was faced with the decision whether to commit major resources to the conflict in South Vietnam.

The Geneva Settlement thus failed to provide lasting peace because it was, as U.S. National Security Council papers of 1956 and 1958 aptly termed it, "only a truce." It failed to settle the role of the U.S. or of the Saigon government, or, indeed, of France in Vietnam. It failed because it created two antagonist Vietnamese nations. It failed because the Geneva powers were unwilling or unable to concert follow-up action in Vietnam to supervise effectively observance of the Accords, or to dampen the mounting tension. Mutual distrust led to incremental violations by both sides, but on balance, though neither the United States nor South Vietnam was fully cooperative, and though both acted as they felt necessary to protect their interests, both considered themselves constrained by the Accords. There is no evidence that either deliberately undertook to breach the peace. In contrast, the DRV proceeded to mobilize its total societal resources scarcely without pause from the day the peace was signed, as though to substantiate the declaration of its Deputy Premier, Pham Van Dong, at the closing session of the Geneva Conference:

We shall achieve unity. We shall achieve it just as we have won the war. No force in the world, internal or external, can make us deviate from our path....

Diem's rejection of elections meant that reunification could be achieved in the foreseeable future only by resort to force. Diem's policy, and U.S. support of it, led inevitably to a test of strength with the DRV to determine whether the GVN's cohesiveness, with U.S. support, could offset North Vietnam's drive to satisfy its unrequited nationalism and expansionism.

REVOLT AGAINST MY-DIEM

By the time President Kennedy came to office in 1961, it was plain that support for the Saigon government among South Vietnam's peasants--90% of the population--was weak and waning. The Manifesto of the National Liberation Front, published in December 1960, trumpeted the existence of a revolutionary organization which could channel popular discontent into a political program. Increasingly Diem's government proved inept in dealing either through its public administration with the sources of popular discontent, or through its security apparatus with the Viet Cong. Diem's government and his party were by that time manifestly out of touch with the people, and into the gap between the government and the populace the Viet Cong had successfully driven. When and why this gap developed is crucial to an understanding of who the Viet Cong were, and to what extent they represented South as opposed to North Vietnamese interests.

The U.S. Government, in its White Papers on Vietnam of 1961 and 1965, has blamed the insurgency on aggression by Hanoi, holding that the Viet Cong were always tools of the DRV. Critics of U.S. policy in Vietnam usually hold, to the contrary, that the war was started by South Vietnamese; their counter-arguments rest on two propositions: (1) that the insurgency began as a rebellion against the oppressive and clumsy government of Ngo Dinh Diem; and (2) that only after it became clear, in late 1960, that the U.S. would commit massive resources to succor Diem in his internal war, was the DRV impelled to unleash the South Vietnamese Viet Minh veterans evacuated to North Vietnam after

Geneva. French analysts have long been advancing such interpretations; American protagonists for them often quote, for example, Philippe Devillers, who wrote in 1962 that:

In 1959, responsible elements of the Communist Resistance in IndoChina came to the conclusion that they had to act, whether Hanoi wanted them to or no. They could no longer continue to stand by while their supporters were arrested, thrown into prison and tortured, without attempting to do anything about it as an organization, without giving some lead to the people in the struggle in which it was to be involved. Hanoi preferred diplomatic notes, but it was to find that its hand had been forced.

Devillers related how in March 1960 the "Nambo Veterans of the Resistance Association" issued a declaration appealing for "struggle" to "liberate themselves from submission to America, eliminate all U.S. bases in South Vietnam, expel American military advisors . . ." and to end "the colonial regime and the fascist dictatorship of the Ngo family." Shortly thereafter, according to Devillers, a People's Liberation Army appeared in Cochinchina and:

From this time forward it carried on incessant guerrilla operations against Diem's forces.

It was thus by its *home* policy that the government of the South finally destroyed the confidence of the population, which it had won during the early years, and practically drove them into revolt and desperation. The non-Communist (and even the anti-Communist) opposition had long been aware of the turn events were taking. But at the beginning of 1960 very many elements, both civilian and military, in the Nationalist camp came to a clear realization that things were moving from bad to worse, and that if nothing were done to put an end to the absolute power of Diem, then Communism would end up by gaining power with the aid, or at least with the consent, of the population. If they did not want to allow the Communists to make capital out of the revolt, then they would have to oppose Diem actively.

Based on a similar analysis, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., held that:

Diem's authoritarianism, which increasingly involved manhunts, political reeducation camps, and the "regroupment" of population, caused spreading discontent and then armed resistance on the countryside. It is not easy to disentangle the events of these murky years; but few scholars believe that the growing resistance was at the start organized or directed by Hanoi. Indeed, there is some indication that the Communists at first hung back . . . it was not until September, 1960 that the Communist Party of North Vietnam bestowed its formal blessing and called for the liberation of the south from American imperialism.

Events in Vietnam in the years 1954 to 1960 were indeed murky. The Diem government controlled the press tightly, and discouraged realism in reports from its provincial bureaucracy. Even official U.S. estimates were handicapped by reliance upon GVN sources for inputs from the grass roots of Vietnamese society, the rural villages, since the

U.S. advisory effort was then largely confined to top levels of the GVN and its armed forces. But enough evidence has now accumulated to establish that peasant resentment against Diem was extensive and well founded. Moreover, it is clear that dislike of the Diem government was coupled with resentment toward Americans. For many Vietnamese peasants, the War of Resistance against French-Bao Dai rule never ended; France was merely replaced by the U.S., and Bao Dai's mantle was transferred to Ngo Dinh Diem. The Viet Cong's opprobrious catchword "My-Diem" (American-Diem) thus recaptured the nationalist mystique of the First Indochina War, and combined the natural xenophobia of the rural Vietnamese with their mounting dislike of Diem. But Viet Cong slogans aside, in the eyes of many Vietnamese of no particular political persuasion, the United States was reprehensible as a modernizing force in a thoroughly traditional society, as the provider of arms and money for a detested government, and as an alien, disruptive influence upon hopes they held for the Geneva Settlement. As far as attitudes toward Diem were concerned, the prevalence of his picture throughout Vietnam virtually assured his being accepted as the sponsor of the frequently corrupt and cruel local officials of the GVN, and the perpetrator of unpopular GVN programs, especially the population relocation schemes, and the "Communist Denunciation Campaign." Altogether, Diem promised the farmers much, delivered little, and raised not only their expectations, but their fears.

It should be recognized, however, that whatever his people thought of him, Ngo Dinh Diem really did accomplish miracles, just as his American boosters said he did. He took power in 1954 amid political chaos, and within ten months surmounted attempted coups d'etat from within his army and rebellions by disparate irregulars. He consolidated his regime while providing creditably for an influx of nearly one million destitute refugees from North Vietnam; and he did all of this despite active French opposition and vacillating American support. Under his leadership South Vietnam became well established as a sovereign state, by 1955 recognized de jure by 36 other nations. Moreover, by mid-1955 Diem secured the strong backing of the U.S. He conducted a plebiscite in late 1955, in which an overwhelming vote was recorded for him in preference to Bao Dai; during 1956, he installed a government-representative in form, at least-drafted a new constitution, and extended GVN control to regions that had been under sect or Viet Minh rule for a decade; and he pledged to initiate extensive reforms in land holding, public health, and education. With American help, he established a truly national, modern army, and formed rural security forces to police the countryside. In accomplishing all the foregoing, he confounded those Vietnamese of North and South, and those French, who had looked for his imminent downfall.

While it is true that his reforms entailed oppressive measures--e.g., his "political reeducation centers" were in fact little more than concentration camps for potential foes of the government--his regime compared favorably with other Asian governments of the same period in its respect for the person and property of citizens. There is much that can be offered in mitigation of Diem's authoritarianism. He began as the most singularly disadvantaged head of state of his era. His political legacy was endemic violence and virulent anti-colonialism. He took office at a time when the government of Vietnam controlled only a few blocks of downtown Saigon; the rest of the capital was the feudal

fief of the Binh Xuyen gangster fraternity. Beyond the environs of Saigon, South Vietnam lay divided among the Viet Minh enclaves and the theocratic dominions of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao sects. All these powers would have opposed any Saigon government, whatever its composition; in fact, their existence accounts for much of the confidence the DRV then exhibited toward the outcome of the Geneva Settlement. For Diem to have erected any central government in South Vietnam without reckoning resolutely with their several armed forces and clandestine organizations would have been impossible: they were the very stuff of South Vietnam's politics.

Diem's initial political tests reinforced his propensity to inflexibility. The lessons of his first 10 months of rule must have underscored to Diem the value of swift, tough action against dissent, and of demanding absolute personal loyalty of top officials. Also, by May 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem had demonstrated to his satisfaction that the U.S. was sufficiently committed to South Vietnam that he could afford on occasion to resist American pressure, and even to ignore American advice. Diem knew, as surely as did the United States, that he himself represented the only alternative to a communist South Vietnam.

Diem was handicapped in all his attempts to build a nation by his political concepts. He had the extravagant expectations of a Rousseau, and he acted with the zeal of a Spanish Inquisitor. Despite extensive travel and education in the West, and despite his revolutionary mien, he remained what he had been raised: a mandarin of Imperial Hue, steeped in filial piety, devoted to Vietnam's past, modern only to the extent of an intense, conservative Catholicism. The political apparatus he created to extend his power and implement his programs reflected his background, personality, and experience: a rigidly organized, over-centralized familial oligarchy. Though his brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, created extensive personal political organizations of considerable power--Nhu's semi-covert *Can Lao* party borrowed heavily from communist doctrine and technique--and though a third brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was the ranking Catholic bishop, in no sense did they or Diem ever acquire a broad popular base for his government. Diem's personality and his political methods practically assured that he would remain distant, virtually isolated from the peasantry. They also seem to have predetermined that Diem's political history over the long-run would be a chronicle of disaffection: Diem alienated one after another of the key groups within South Vietnam's society until, by late 1960, his regime rested on the narrow and disintegrating base of its own bureaucracy and the northern refugees.

Such need not have been the case. At least through 1957, Diem and his government enjoyed marked success with fairly sophisticated pacification programs in the countryside. In fact, Diem at first was warmly welcomed in some former Viet Minh domains, and it is probable that a more sensitive and adroit leader could have captured and held a significant rural following. Even the failure of the Geneva Accords to eventuate in general elections in 1956 at first had little impact upon GVN pacification. The strident declamations of the DRV notwithstanding, reunification of partitioned Vietnam was not at first a vital political issue for South Vietnam's peasants. By and large, as late as 1961 as Devillers pointed out:

For the people of the South reunification is not an essential problem. Peace, security, freedom, their standard of living, the agrarian question- these are far more important questions to them. The stronghold of the sects over certain regions remains one of the factors of the situation, as is also, in a general fashion, the distrustful attitude of the Southerner towards the Northerner, who is suspected of a tendency to want to take charge of affairs.

The initial GVN pacification effort combined promises of governmental level reforms with "civic action" in the hamlets and villages. The latter was carried out by "cadre" clad in black pajamas, implementing the Maoist "three-withs" doctrine (eat with, sleep with, work with the people) to initiate rudimentary improvements in public health, education, and local government, and to propagandize the promises of the central government. Unfortunately for Diem, his civic action teams had to be drawn from the northern refugees, and encountered Cochinchinese-Tonkinese tensions. More importantly, however, they incurred the enmity of the several Saigon ministries upon whose field responsibilities they impinged. Moreover, they became preoccupied with Diem's anti-communist campaign to the detriment of their social service. By the end of 1956, the civic action component of the GVN pacification program had been cut back severely.

But the salesmen were less at fault than their product. Diem's reform package compared unfavorably even in theory with what the Viet Minh had done by way of rural reform. Diem undertook to: (1) resettle refugees and other land destitute Vietnamese on uncultivated land beginning in 1955; (2) expropriate all rice land holdings over 247 acres and redistribute these to tenant farmers beginning in 1956; and (3) regulate landlord-tenant relations beginning in 1957 to fix rents within the range 15-25% of crop yield, and to guarantee tenant land tenure for 3-5 years. Despite invidious comparison with Viet Minh rent-free land, had these programs been honestly and efficiently implemented, they might have satisfied the land-hunger of the peasants. But they suffered, as one American expert put it from "lack of serious, interested administrators and top side command." Government officials, beginning with the Minister for Agrarian Reform, had divided loyalties, being themselves land holders. Moreover, the programs often operated to replace paternalistic landlords with competitive bidding, and thus increased, rather than decreased, tenant insecurity. And even if all Diem's goals had been honestly fulfilled-- which they were not--only 20% of the rice land would have passed from large to small farmers. As it turned out, only 10% of all tenant farmers benefited in any sense. By 1959, the land reform program was virtually inoperative. As of 1960, 45% of the land remained concentrated in the hands of 2% of landowners, and 15% of the landlords owned 75% of all the land. Those relatively few farmers who did benefit from the program were more often than not northerners, refugees, Catholics, or Annamese--so that land reform added to the GVN's aura of favoritism which deepened peasant alienation in Cochinchina. Farmer-GVN tensions were further aggravated by rumors of corruption, and the widespread allegation that the Diem family itself had become enriched through the manipulation of land transfers.

Diem's whole rural policy furnishes one example after another of political maladroitness. In June 1956, Diem abolished elections for village councils, apparently out of concern

that large numbers of Viet Minh might win office. By replacing the village notables with GVN appointed officials, Diem swept away the traditional administrative autonomy of the village officials, and took upon himself and his government the onus for whatever corruption and injustice subsequently developed at that level. Again, the GVN appointees to village office were outsiders--northerners, Catholics, or other "dependable" persons--and their alien presence in the midst of the close-knit rural communities encouraged revival of the conspiratorial, underground politics to which the villages had become accustomed during the resistance against the French.

But conspiracy was almost a natural defense after Diem launched his Denunciation of Communists Campaign, which included a scheme for classifying the populace into lettered political groups according to their connections with the Viet Minh. This campaign, which featured public confessions reminiscent of the "people's courts" of China and North Vietnam, invited neighbors to inform on each other, and raised further the premium on clandestine political activity. In 1956, the GVN disclosed that some 15-20,000 communists had been detained in its "political reeducation centers," while Devillers put the figure at 50,000. By GVN figures in 1960, nearly 50,000 had been detained. A British expert on Vietnam, P. J. Honey, who was invited by Diem to investigate the reeducation centers in 1959, concluded that, after interviewing a number of rural Vietnamese, "the consensus of the opinion expressed by these peoples is that . . . the majority of the detainees are neither communists nor pro-communists." Between 1956 and 1960, the GVN claimed that over 100,000 former communist cadres rallied to the GVN, and thousands of other communist agents had surrendered or had been captured. The campaign also allegedly netted over 100,000 weapons and 3,000 arms caches. Whatever it contributed to GVN internal security, however, the Communist Denunciation Campaign thoroughly terrified the Vietnamese peasants, and detracted significantly from the regime's popularity.

Diem's nearly paranoid preoccupation with security influenced his population relocation schemes. Even the refugee relief programs had been executed with an eye to building a "living wall" between the lowland centers of population and the jungle and mountain redoubts of dissidents. Between April 1957 and late 1961, the GVN reported that over 200,000 persons-refugees and landless families from coastal Annam-were resettled in 147 centers carved from 220,000 acres of wilderness. These "strategic" settlements were expensive: although they affected only 2% of South Vietnam's people, they absorbed 50% of U.S. aid for agriculture. They also precipitated unexpected political reactions from the Montagnard peoples of the Highlands. In the long run, by introducing ethnic Vietnamese into traditionally Montagnard areas, and then by concentrating Montagnards into defensible communities, the GVN provided the tribes with a cause and focused their discontent against Diem. The GVN thus facilitated rather than hindered the subsequent subversion of the tribes by the Viet Cong. But of all Diem's relocation experiments, that which occasioned the most widespread and vehement anti-GVN sentiment was the "agroville" program begun in mid-1959. At first, the GVN tried to establish rural communities which segregated families with known Viet Cong or Viet Minh connections from other citizens, but the public outcry caused this approach to be dropped. A few months later, the GVN announced its intent to build 80 "prosperity and density centers"

along a "strategic route system." By the end of 1963, each of these 80 agrovilles was to hold some 400 families, and each would have a group of satellite agrovilles of 120 families each. In theory, the agrovillage master plan was attractive: there were provisions for community defense, schools, dispensary, market center, public garden, and even electricity. Despite these advantages, however, the whole program incurred the wrath of the peasants. They resented the corvee labor the GVN resorted to for agrovillage construction, and they abhorred abandoning their cherished ancestral homes, tombs, and developed gardens and fields for a strange and desolate community. Passive peasant resistance, and then insurgent attacks on the agrovilles, caused abandonment of the program in early 1961 when it was less than 25% complete.

Yet, for all Diem's preoccupation with rural security, he poorly provided for police and intelligence in the countryside. Most of the American aid the GVN received was used for security, and the bulk of it was lavished on the Army of Vietnam. Security in the villages was relegated to the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Guard (CG)-poorly trained and equipped, miserably led. They could scarcely defend themselves, much less secure the farmers. Indeed, they proved to be an asset to insurgents in two ways: they served as a source of weapons; and their brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness induced innumerable villagers to join in open revolt against the GVN. The Army of Vietnam, after 1956, was withdrawn from the rural regions to undergo reorganization and modernization under its American advisors. Its interaction with the rural populace through 1959 was relatively slight. The SDC and CG, placed at the disposal of the provincial administrators, were often no more venal nor offensive to the peasants than the local officials themselves, but the corrupt, arrogant and overbearing men the people knew as the GVN were among the greatest disadvantages Diem faced in his rural efforts.

Nor was Ngo Dinh Diem successful in exercising effective leadership over the Vietnamese urban population or its intellectuals. Just as Diem and his brothers made the mistake of considering all former Viet Minh communists, they erred in condemning all non-Diemist nationalists as tools of Bao Dai or the French. The Diem family acted to circumscribe all political activity and even criticism not sanctioned by the oligarchy. In late 1957, newspapers critical of the regime began to be harassed, and in March 1958, after a caustic editorial, the GVN closed down the largest newspaper in Saigon. Attempts to form opposition political parties for participation in the national assembly met vague threats and bureaucratic impediments. In 1958, opposition politicians risked arrest for assaying to form parties unauthorized by Nhu or Can, and by 1959 all opposition political activity had come to a halt. In the spring of 1960, however, a group of non-communist nationalist leaders came together--with more courage than prudence--to issue the Caravelle Manifesto, a recital of grievances against the Diem regime. Eleven of the 18 signers had been cabinet members under Diem or Bao Dai; 4 had been in other high government positions, and others represented religious groups. Their manifesto lauded Diem for the progress that he had made in the aftermath of Geneva, but pointed out that his repressions in recent years had "provoked the discouragement and resentment of the people." They noted that "the size of the territory has shrunk, but the number of civil servants has increased and still the work doesn't get done"; they applauded the fact that "the French Expeditionary Corps has left the country and a Republican Army has been

constituted, thanks to American aid," but deplored the fact that the Diem influence "divides the men of one and the same unit, sows distrust between friends of the same rank, and uses as a criterion for promotion fidelity to the party in blind submission to its leaders"; they described, despairingly, "a rich and fertile country enjoying food surpluses" where "at the present time many people are out of work, have no roof over their heads, and no money." They went on to "beseech the government to urgently modify its policies." While the Caravelle Manifesto thoroughly frightened Diem, coming, as it did, three days after Syngman Rhee was overthrown in Korea, it prompted him only to further measures to quell the loyal opposition. By the fall of 1960, the intellectual elite of South Vietnam was politically mute; labor unions were impotent; loyal opposition in the form of organized parties did not exist. In brief, Diem's policies virtually assured that political challenges to him would have to be extra-legal. Ultimately, these emerged from the traditional sources of power in South Vietnam--the armed forces, the religious sects, and the armed peasantry.

Through 1960, the only serious threats to Diem from inside the GVN were attempted military coups d'etat. In his first 10 months in office, Diem had identified loyalty in his top army commanders as a sine qua non for his survival. Thereafter he took a personal interest in the positioning and promoting of officers, and even in matters of military strategy and tactics. Many of Vietnam's soldiers found Diem's attentions a means to political power, wealth, and social prominence. Many others, however, resented those who rose by favoritism, and objected to Diem's interference in military matters. In November 1960, a serious coup attempt was supported by three elite paratroop battalions in Saigon, but otherwise failed to attract support. In the wake of the coup, mass arrests took place in which the Caravelle Group, among others, were jailed. In February 1962, two Vietnamese air force planes bombed the presidential palace in an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Diem and the Nhu's. Again, there was little apparent willingness among military officers for concerted action against Diem. But the abortive attempts of 1960 and 1962 had the effect of dramatizing the choices open to those military officers who recognized the insolvency of Diem's political and military policies.

Diem's handling of his military impinged in two ways on his rural policy. Diem involved himself with the equipping of his military forces showing a distinct proclivity toward heavy military forces of the conventional type. He wanted the Civil Guard equipped very much like his regular army--possibly with a view to assuring himself a check on army power. There were a few soldiers, like General Duong Van Minh, who sharply disagreed with the President on this point. Nonetheless, Diem persisted. His increasing concern for the loyalty of key officials, moreover, led him to draw upon the military officer corps for civil administrators. From 1956 on his police apparatus was under military officers, and year by year, more of the provincial governments were also placed under military men. By 1958, about 1/3 of the province chiefs were military officers; by 1960, that fraction had increased to nearly 2/3; by 1962, 7/8 of all provinces were headed by soldiers.

Diem's bete noire was communism, and he appealed to threats from communists to justify his concentration on internal security. In August 1956, GVN Ordinance 47 defined being a communist, or working for them, as a capital crime. In May 1959, by GVN Law

10/59, the enforcement of Ordinance 47 was charged to special military tribunals from whose decisions there was no appeal. But "communist" was a term not used by members of the Marxist-Leninist Party headed by Ho Chi Minh, or its southern arms. Beginning in 1956, the Saigon press began to refer to "Viet Cong," a fairly precise and not necessarily disparaging rendition of "Vietnamese Communist." There is little doubt that Diem and his government applied the term Viet Cong somewhat loosely within South Vietnam to mean all persons or groups who resorted to clandestine political activity or armed opposition against his government; and the GVN meant by the term North as well as South Vietnamese communists, who they presumed acted in concert. At the close of the Franco-Viet Minh War in 1954, some 60,000 men were serving in organized Viet Minh units in South Vietnam. For the regroupments to North Vietnam, these units were augmented with large numbers of young recruits; a reported 90,000 armed men were taken to North Vietnam in the regroupment, while the U.S. and the GVN estimated that from 5-10,000 trained men were left behind as "cadre." If French estimates are correct that in 1954 the Viet Minh controlled over 60-90% of rural South Vietnam outside the sect domains, these 5-10,000 stay-behinds must have represented only a fraction of the Viet Minh residue, to which GVN figures on recanting and detained communists in the years through 1960 attest.

From studies of defectors, prisoners of war, and captured documents, it is now possible to assess armed resistance against Diem much better than the facts available at the time permitted. Three distinct periods are discernible. From 1954 through 1957, there was a substantial amount of random dissidence in the countryside, which Diem succeeded in quelling. In early 1957, Vietnam seemed to be enjoying the first peace it had known in over a decade. Beginning, however, in mid-1957 and intensifying through mid-1959, incidents of violence attributed to Viet Cong began to occur in the countryside. While much of this violence appeared to have a political motive, and while there is some evidence that it was part of a concerted strategy of guerrilla base development in accordance with sound Mao-Giap doctrine, the GVN did not construe it as a campaign, considering the disorders too diffuse to warrant committing major GVN resources. In early 1959, however, Diem perceived that he was under serious attack and reacted strongly. Population relocation was revived. The Army of Vietnam was committed against the dissidents, and the Communist Denunciation Campaign was reinvigorated. By autumn 1959, however, the VC were in a position to field units of battalion size against regular army formations. By 1960, VC could operate in sufficient strength to seize provincial capitals for periods ranging up to 24 hours, overrun ARVN posts, and cut off entire districts from communication with the GVN-controlled towns. Diem's countermeasures increasingly met with peasant obstructionism and outright hostility. A U.S. Embassy estimate of the situation in January 1960 noted that:

While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations . . . these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment . . . the situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment.

In December 1960, the National Liberation Front of SVN (NLF) was formally organized. From its inception it was designed to encompass all anti-GVN activists, including communists, and it formulated and articulated objectives for all those opposed to "My-Diem." The NLF placed heavy emphasis on the withdrawal of American advisors and influence, on land reform and liberalization of the GVN, on coalition government and the neutralization of Vietnam; but through 1963, the NLF soft-pedalled references to reunification of Vietnam. The NLF leadership was a shadowy crew of relatively obscure South Vietnamese. Despite their apparent lack of experience and competence, however, the NLF rapidly took on organizational reality from its central committee, down through a web of subordinate and associated groups, to villages all over South Vietnam. Within a few months of its founding, its membership doubled, doubled again by fall 1961, and then redoubled by early 1962. At that time an estimated 300,000 were on its rolls. Numerous administrative and functional "liberation associations" sprang into being, and each member of the NLF normally belong simultaneously to several such organizations.

The key operational components of the NLF were, however, the Liberation Army and the People's Revolutionary Party. The former had a lien on the services of every NLF member, man, woman, or child, although functionally its missions were usually carried out by formally organized military units. The People's Revolutionary Party was explicitly the "Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam" and claimed to be the "vanguard of the NLF, the paramount member." It denied official links with the communist party of North Vietnam beyond "fraternal ties of communism." Although the PRP did not come into existence until 1962, it is evident that communists played a paramount role in forming the NLF, and in its rapid initial growth. The official U.S. view has been that the PRP is merely the southern arm of the DRV's communist party, and a principal instrument through which Hanoi instigated and controlled the revolt against "My-Diem." The organizational genius evident in the NLF, as well as the testimony of Vietnamese communists in interrogations and captured documents supports this interpretation.

But significant doubt remains. Viet Minh stay-behinds testified in 1955 and 1956 that their mission was political agitation for the holding of the general elections promised at Geneva. Captured documents and prisoner interrogations indicate that in 1957 and 1958, although there was some "wildcat" activity by local communists, party efforts appeared to be devoted to the careful construction of an underground apparatus which, though it used assassinations and kidnapping, circumspectly avoided military operations. All evidence points to fall of 1959 as the period in which the Viet Cong made their transition from a clandestine political movement to a more overt military operation. Moreover, throughout the years 1954-1960, a "front" seems to have been active in Vietnam. For example, the periodic report submitted by USMAAG, Vietnam, on 15 July 1957--a time of ostensible internal peace--noted that:

The Viet Cong guerrillas and propagandists, however, are still waging a grim battle for survival. In addition to an accelerated propaganda campaign, the Communists have been forming "front" organizations to influence portions of anti-government minorities. Some of these organizations are militant, some are political. An example of the former is the "Vietnamese Peoples' Liberation Movement Forces," a military unit composed of ex-Cao

Dai, ex-Hoa Hao, ex-Binh Xuyen, escaped political prisoners, and Viet Cong cadres. An example of the latter is the "Vietnam-Cambodian Buddhist Association," one of several organizations seeking to spread the theory of "Peace and Co-existence."

Whether early references to the "front" were to the organizations which subsequently matured as the NLF cannot be determined. Indeed, to shed further light on the truth or falsehood of the proposition that the DRV did not intervene in South Vietnam until after the NLF came into existence, it is necessary to turn to the events in North Vietnam during the years 1954-1960.

HANOI AND THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

The primary question concerning Hanoi's role in the origins of the insurgency is not so much whether it played a role or not--the evidence of direct North Vietnamese participation in subversion against the Government of South Vietnam is now extensive--but when Hanoi intervened in a systematic way. Most attacks on U.S. policy have been based on the proposition that the DRV move on the South came with manifest reluctance, and after massive U.S. intervention in 1961. For example, George McTurnin Kahin and John W. Lewis, in their book *The United States in Vietnam*, state that:

Contrary to United States policy assumptions, all available evidence shows that the revival of the civil war in the South in 1958 was undertaken by Southerners at their own--not Hanoi's--initiative. . . . Insurgency activity against the Saigon government began in the South under Southern leadership not as a consequence of any dictate from Hanoi, but contrary to Hanoi's injunctions.

As discussed above, so much of this argument as rests on the existence in South Vietnam of genuine rebellion is probably valid. The South Vietnamese had both the means, the Viet Minh residue, and motive to take up arms against Ngo Dinh Diem. Moreover, there were indications that some DRV leaders did attempt to hold back southern rebels on the grounds that "conditions" were not ripe for an uprising. Further, there was apparently division within the Lao Dong Party hierarchy over the question of strategy and tactics in South Vietnam. However, the evidence indicates that the principal strategic debate over this issue took place between 1956 and 1958; all information now available (spring, 1968) points to a decision taken by the DRV leaders not later than spring, 1959, actively to seek the overthrow of Diem. Thereafter, the DRV pressed toward that goal by military force and by subversive aggression, both in Laos and in South Vietnam.

But few Administration critics have had access to the classified information upon which the foregoing judgments are based. Such intelligence as the U.S. has been able to make available to the public bearing on the period 1954-1960 has been sketchy and not very convincing: a few captured documents, and a few prisoner interrogations. Indeed, up until 1961 the Administration itself publicly held that Ngo Dinh Diem was firmly in control in South Vietnam, and that the United States aid programs were succeeding in meeting such threat to GVN security as existed both within South Vietnam and from the North. Too, the vigorous publicizing of "wars of national liberation" by N. S. Khrushchev and the

"discovery" of counterinsurgency by the Kennedy Administration in early 1961 tended to reinforce the overall public impression that North Vietnam's aggression was news in that year. Khrushchev's speech of 6 January 1961, made, according to Kennedy biographer Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "a conspicuous impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff and read excerpts from it aloud to the National Security Council." Thereafter, Administration leaders, by their frequently identifying that Khrushchev declamation as a milestone in the development of communist world strategy, lent credence to the supposition that the Soviet Union had approved aggression by its satellite in North Vietnam only in December 1960--the month the NLF was formed.

American Kremlinologists had been preoccupied, since Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, with the possibilities of a genuine detente with the USSR. They were also bemused by the prospect of a deep strategic division with the "Communist Bloc" between the Soviets and the Chinese. Yet, despite evidences of disunity in the Bloc--in Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany--virtually all experts regarded North Vietnamese national strategy, to the extent that they considered it at all, as a simple derivative of that of either the USSR or the CPR. P. J. Honey, the British authority on North Vietnam, tends to the view that Hanoi remained subservient to the dictates of Moscow from 1956 through 1961, albeit carefully paying lip service to continue solidarity with Peking. More recently, a differing interpretation has been offered, which holds that the Hanoi leaders were in those years motivated primarily by their concern for internal development, and that they, therefore, turned to the Soviet Union as the only nation willing and able to furnish the wherewithal for rapid economic advancement. Both interpretations assume that through 1960 the DRV followed the Soviet line, accepted "peaceful coexistence," concentrated on internal development, and took action in South Vietnam only after Moscow gave the go-ahead in late 1960.

But it is also possible that the colloquy over strategy among the communist nations in the late 1950's followed a pattern almost exactly the reverse of that usually depicted: that North Vietnam persuaded the Soviets and the Chinese to accept its strategic view, and to support simultaneous drives for economic advancement and forceful reunification. Ho Chi Minh was an old Stalinist, trained in Russia in the early '20's, Comintern colleague of Borodin in Canton, and for three decades leading exponent of the Marxist-Leninist canon on anti-colonial war. Presumably, Ho spoke with authority within the upper echelons of the communist party of the Soviet Union. What he said to them privately was, no doubt, quite similar to what he proclaimed publicly from 1956 onward: the circumstances of North Vietnam were not comparable to those of the Soviet Union, or even those of the CPR, and North Vietnam's policy had to reflect the differences.

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization bombshell burst in February 1956 at a dramatically bad time for the DRV. It overrode the Chinese call for reconvening of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, and it interfered with the concerting of communist policy on what to do about Diem regime's refusal to proceed toward the general elections. Although the Soviets issued in March 1956 a demand for GVN observance of the Accords, its

diplomacy not only failed to bring about any action on behalf of the DRV, but elicited, in April 1956, a sharp British note condemning Hanoi for grave violations of the Accords. Hanoi received the British note about the time that Khrushchev proclaimed that the Soviet was committed to a policy of "peaceful coexistence." At the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, held in Hanoi that month, Ho Chi Minh lauded "de-Stalinization," but unequivocally rejected "peaceful coexistence" as irrelevant to the DRV. In November 1957, after more than a year of upheavals and evident internal political distress in North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan journeyed to Moscow for the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. That conference issued a declaration admitting the possibility of "non-peaceful transition to socialism" remarkably similar in thrust to Ho's 1956 speech. Further, Khrushchev's famous January 1961 speech was simply a precis of the Declaration of the November 1960 Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. That 1960 Declaration, which formed the basis for Khrushchev's pronouncements on wars of national liberation in turn explicitly reaffirmed the 1957 Declaration.

Other evidence supports the foregoing hypothesis. The DRV was, in 1960, an orthodoxly constituted communist state. Both the government and the society were dominated by the Lao Dong (Communist) Party, and power within the party concentrated in a small elite--Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants from the old-time Indochinese Communist Party. This group of leaders were unique in the communist world for their homogeneity and for their harmony--there has been little evidence of the kind of turbulence which has splintered the leadership of most communist parties. While experts have detected disputes within the Lao Dong hierarchy--1957 appears to be a critical year in that regard--the facts are that there has been no blood-purge of the Lao Dong leadership, and except for changes occasioned by apparently natural deaths, the leadership in 1960 was virtually identical to what it had been in 1954 or 1946. This remarkably dedicated and purposeful group of men apparently agreed among themselves as to what the national interests of the DRV required, what goals should be set for the nation, and what strategy they should pursue in attaining them.

These leaders have been explicit in setting forth DRV national goals in their public statements and official documents. For example, Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues placed a premium on "land reform"--by which they meant a communization of rural society along Maoist lines. Moreover, they clearly considered a disciplined society essential for victory in war and success in peace. It was also evident that they were committed to bring about an independent, reunified Vietnam capable of exerting significant influence throughout Southeast Asia, and particularly over the neighboring states of Laos and Cambodia. What is not known with certainty is how they determined the relative priority among these objectives.

In the immediate aftermath of Geneva, the DRV deferred to the Geneva Accords for the achievement of reunification, and turned inward, concentrating its energies on land reform and rehabilitation of the war-torn economy. By the summer of 1956, this strategy was bankrupt: the Geneva Settlement manifestly would not eventuate in reunification, and the land reform campaign foundered from such serious abuses by Lao Dong cadre

that popular disaffection imperiled DRV internal security. In August 1956, the Lao Dong leadership was compelled to "rectify" its programs, to postpone land reform, and to purge low echelon cadre to mollify popular resentment. Even these measures, however, proved insufficient to forestall insurrection; in November 1956, the peasant rebellions broke out, followed by urban unrest. Nonetheless, the DRV leadership survived these internal crises intact, and by 1958 appears to have solved most of the problems of economic efficiency and political organization which occasioned the 1956-1957 outbursts.

But domestic difficulty was not the only crisis to confront the Lao Dong leaders in early 1957. In January, when the Soviet Union proposed to the United Nations the admitting of North and South Vietnam as separate states, it signalled that the USSR might be prepared in the interests of "peaceful coexistence," to make a great power deal which would have lent permanency to the partition of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, in evident surprise, violently dissented. When in February 1957 Khrushchev went further in affirming his intention to "coexist" with the United States, the DRV quickly moved to realign its own and Soviet policies. In May 1957, the Soviet head of state, Voroshilov, visited Hanoi, and in July and August 1957, Ho Chi Minh traveled extensively in Eastern Europe, spending several days in Moscow. The Voroshilov visit was given top billing by the Hanoi Press and Ho, upon his return from Moscow, indicated that important decisions had been reached. Thereafter, Hanoi and Moscow marched more in step.

In the meantime, the needs and desires of communist rebels in South Vietnam had been communicated directly to Hanoi in the person of Le Duan, who is known to have been in South Vietnam in 1955 and 1956, and to have returned to Hanoi sometime before the fall of 1957. In September of that year, upon Ho's return from Europe, Le Duan surfaced as one of the members of the Lao Dong Politburo; it is possible that he was already at that time de facto the First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party, to which position he was formally promoted in September 1960. In 1955 and 1956, Le Doan, from the testimony of prisoners and captured documents, had been expressing conviction that Diem would stamp out the communist movement in South Vietnam unless the DRV were to reinforce the party there. Presumably, he carried these views into the inner councils of the DRV. In November 1957, Le Duan and Ho traveled to Moscow to attend the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. The Declaration of that conference, quoted above, has since been cited repeatedly by both North and South Vietnamese communists, as one of the strategic turning points in their modern history. Le Duan, upon his return to Hanoi from Moscow, issued a statement to the effect that the DRV's way was now clear. Taking Le Duan literally, it could be construed that the DRV deemed the Moscow Declaration of 1957 the "go ahead" signal from Moscow and Peking for forceful pursuit of its objectives.

There is some sparse evidence that the DRV actually did begin moving in 1958 to set up a mechanism for supporting the insurgency in South Vietnam. But even had the decision been taken, as suggested above, in late 1957, it is unlikely that there would have been much manifestation of it in 1958. The Lao Dong leadership had for years stressed the lessons that they had learned from experience on the essentiality of carefully preparing a party infrastructure and building guerrilla bases before proceeding with an insurgency.

Viet Minh doctrine would have dictated priority concern to refurbishing the communist apparatus in South Vietnam, and it is possible that such a process was set notion during 1958. Orders were captured from Hanoi which directed guerrilla bases be prepared in South Vietnam in early 1959.

There is, however, other evidence that questioning among the DRV hierarchy concerning strategy and tactics for South Vietnam continued throughout 1958 and into 1959. Captured reports from party headquarters in South Vietnam betrayed doubt and indecisions among party leaders there and reflected the absence of clear guidance from Hanoi. Moreover, in 1958, and in 1959, the DRV did concentrate much of its resources on agricultural and industrial improvement: extensive loans were obtained from the Soviet Union and from the Chinese Peoples Republic, and ambitious uplift programs were launched in both sectors. It is possible, therefore, to accept the view that through 1958 the DRV still accorded priority to butter over guns, as part of its base development strategy.

In the larger sense, domestic progress, "consolidation of the North," was fundamental to that strategy. As General Vo Nguyen Giap put it in the Lao Dong Party journal *Hoc Tap* of January 1960:

The North has become a large rear echelon of our army . . . The North is the revolutionary base for the whole country.

Up until 1959, the economy of North Vietnam was scarcely providing subsistence for its people, let alone support for foreign military undertakings; by that year, substantial progress in both agriculture and industry was evident:

North Vietnam Food Grain Per Capita

	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Kilograms	260	310	282	315	358	304
%	100	119	109	121	138	117

Due mainly, however, to industrial growth, the Gross National Product reached a growth rate of 6% per annum in 1958, and sustained that rate thereafter. Both 1958 and 1959 were extraordinarily good years in both industry and agriculture. A long-range development plan launched in 1958 achieved an annual industrial expansion of 21% per year through 1960, chiefly in heavy industry. Foreign aid-both Chinese and Soviet-was readily obtained, the USSR supplanting the CPR as prime donor. Foreign trade stepped up markedly. Compared with 1955, the DRV's foreign commerce doubled by 1959, and nearly tripled by 1960.

By 1959, it seems likely that the DRV had elected to pursue a "guns and butter" strategy, and obtained requisite Soviet and Chinese aid. While pressing forward with its economic

improvement programs-which were showing definite progress-the DRV prepared with word and deed for large-scale intervention in South Vietnam. In May 1959, at the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, a Resolution was adopted identifying the United States as the main obstacle to the realization of the hopes of the Vietnamese people, and as an enemy of peace. The Resolution of the Fifteenth Plenum called for a strong North Vietnam as a base for helping the South Vietnamese to overthrow Diem and eject the United States. A Communist Party history captured in South Vietnam in 1966, and the testimony of high-ranking captives, indicate that South Vietnamese communists still regard the resolution of the Fifteenth Plenum as the point of departure for DRV intervention.

Within a month of the Fifteenth Plenum, the DRV began to commit its armed forces in Laos, and steadily escalated its aid to the Pathet Lao. By the time the National Liberation Front issued its manifesto in December 1960, the conflict in Laos had matured to the point that Pathet Lao-NVA troops controlled most of NE Laos and the Laotian panhandle; moreover, by that time, the Soviet Union had entered the fray, and was participating in airlift operations from North Vietnam direct to Pathet Lao-NVA units in Laos. Also, by fall of 1959, the insurgency in South Vietnam took a definite upsurge. Viet Cong units for the first time offered a direct challenge to the Army of Vietnam. Large VC formations seized and held district and province capitals for short periods of time, and assassinations and kidnappings proliferated markedly. The Preamble of the Constitution of the DRV, promulgated on 1 January 1960, was distinctly bellicose, condemning the United States, and establishing the reunification of Vietnam as a DRV national objective. During 1959 and 1960, the relatively undeveloped intelligence apparatus of the U.S. and the GVN confirmed that over 4,000 infiltrators were sent from North Vietnam southward--most of them military or political cadre, trained to raise and lead insurgent forces.

In September 1960, the Lao Dong Party convened its Third National Congress. There Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Giap, and others presented speeches further committing the DRV to support of the insurgency in the South, demanding the U.S. stop its aid to Diem, and calling for the formation of a unified front to lead the struggle against "My-Diem." The Resolution of the Third Congress, reflecting these statements, is another of those historic benchmarks referred to in captured party documents and prisoner interrogations.

In November 1960, the Moscow Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries once again declared its support of the sort of "just" war the DRV intended to prosecute. The United States was identified as the principal colonial power, and the right and obligation of communist parties to lead struggles against colonial powers was detailed. By the time Khrushchev cited that Declaration in his "wars of national liberation" speech, the "liberation war" for South Vietnam was nearly a year and a half old.

The evidence supports the conclusion, therefore, that whether or not the rebellion against Diem in South Vietnam proceeded independently of, or even contrary to directions from

Hanoi through 1958, Hanoi moved thereafter to capture the revolution. There is little doubt that Hanoi exerted some influence over certain insurgents in the South throughout the years following Geneva, and there is evidence which points to its preparing for active support of large-scale insurgency as early as 1958. Whatever differences in strategy may have existed among Moscow, Peking, and Hanoi, it appears that at each critical juncture Hanoi obtained concurrence in Moscow with an aggressive course of action. Accordingly, it was not "peaceful coexistence," or concern over leadership of the "socialist camp" which governed Hanoi's policy. What appeared to matter to Hanoi was its abiding national interests: domestic consolidation in independence, reunification, and Vietnamese hegemony in Southeast Asia. Both Soviet and Chinese policy seems to have bent to these ends rather than the contrary. If Hanoi applied brakes to eager insurgents in South Vietnam, it did so not from lack of purpose or because of Soviet restraints, but from concern over launching one more premature uprising in the South. Ngo Dinh Diem was entirely correct when he stated that his was a nation at war in early 1959; South Vietnam was at war with both the Viet Cong insurgents and with the DRV, in that the latter then undertook to provide strategic direction and leadership cadres to build systematically a base system in Laos and South Vietnam for subsequent, large-scale guerrilla warfare. Persuasive evidence exists that by 1960 DRV support of the insurgency in South Vietnam included materiel as well as personnel. In any event, by late 1959, it seems clear that Hanoi considered the time ripe to take the military offensive in South Vietnam, and that by 1960 circumstances were propitious for more overt political action. A recently captured high-ranking member of the National Liberation Front has confirmed that in mid-1960 he and other Lao Dong Party leaders in South Vietnam were instructed by Hanoi to begin organizing the National Liberation Front, which was formally founded upon the issuance of its Manifesto on 20 December 1960. The rapid growth of the NLF thereafter--it quadrupled its strength in about one year--is a further indication that the Hanoi-directed communist party apparatus had been engaged to the fullest in the initial organization and subsequent development of the NLF.

U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSURGENCY, 1954-1960

Much of what the U.S. knows about the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam rests on information it has acquired since 1963, approximately the span of time that an extensive and effective American intelligence apparatus had been functioning in Vietnam. Before then, our intelligence was drawn from a significantly more narrow and less reliable range of sources, chiefly Vietnamese, and could not have supported analysis in depth of insurgent organization and intentions. The U.S. was particularly deprived of dependable information concerning events in South Vietnam's countryside in the years 1954 through 1959. Nonetheless, U.S. intelligence estimates through 1960 correctly and consistently estimated that the threat to GVN internal security was greater than the danger from overt invasion. The intelligence estimates provided to policy makers in Washington pegged the Viet Cong military offensive as beginning in late 1959, with preparations noted as early as 1957, and a definite campaign perceived as of early 1959. Throughout the years, they were critical of Diem, consistently expressing skepticism that he could deal successfully with his internal political problems. These same estimates miscalculated the numerical and political strength of the Viet Cong, misjudged the extent

of rural disaffection, and overrated the military capabilities of the GVN. But as strategic intelligence they were remarkably sound.

Indeed, given the generally bleak appraisals of Diem's prospects, they who made U.S. policy could only have done so by assuming a significant measure of risk. For example, on 3 August 1954, an NIE took the position that:

Although it is possible that the French and Vietnamese, even with firm support from the U.S. and other powers, may be able to establish a strong regime in South Vietnam, we believe that the chances for this development are poor and, moreover, that the situation is more likely to continue to deteriorate progressively over the next year...

This estimate notwithstanding, the U.S. moved promptly to convene the Manila Conference, bring SEATO into being with its protocol aegis over Vietnam, and eliminate France as the recipient of U.S. aid for Vietnam. Again on 26 April 1955, an NIE charged that:

Even if the present impasse [with the sects] were resolved, we believe that that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress towards developing a strong, stable, anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva Agreement and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists...

Within a matter of weeks, however, the U.S. firmly and finally committed itself to unstinting support of Ngo Dinh Diem, accepted his refusal to comply with the political settlement of Geneva, and acceded to withdrawal of French military power and political influence from South Vietnam. Even at the zenith of Diem's success, an NIE noted adverse political trends stemming from Diem's "authoritarian role" and predicted that, while no short-term opposition was in prospect:

Over a longer period, the accumulation of grievances among various groups and individuals may lead to development of a national opposition movement...

There was no NIE published between 1956 and 1959 on South Vietnam: an NIE of May 1959 took the position that Diem had a serious military problem on his hands:

The [GVN] internal security forces will not be able to eradicate DRV supported guerrilla or subversive activity in the foreseeable future. Army units will probably have to be diverted to special internal security assignments...

The same NIB noted a waning of popular enthusiasm for Diem, the existence of some disillusionment, "particularly among the educated elite," some "dissatisfaction among military officers," but detected little "identifiable public unrest":

The growth of dissatisfaction is inhibited by South Vietnam's continuing high standard of living relative to that of its neighbors, the paternalistic attitude of Diem's government towards the people, and the lack of any feasible alternative to the present regime.

The 1959 NIE again expressed serious reservations about Diem's leadership and flatly stated that:

The prospects for continued political stability in South Vietnam hang heavily upon President Diem and his ability to maintain firm control of the army and police. The regime's efforts to assure internal security and its belief that an authoritarian government is necessary to handle the country's problems will result in a continued repression of potential opposition elements. This policy of repression will inhibit the growth of popularity of the regime and we believe that dissatisfaction will grow, particularly among those who are politically conscious....

Despite these reservations, U.S. policy remained staunchly and fairly uncritically behind Diem through 1959.

The National Intelligence Estimates reservations re Diem do not appear to have restrained the National Security Council in its two major reviews of U.S. policy between 1954 and 1960. In 1956, the NSC (in policy directive NSC 5612) directed that U.S. agencies

Assist Free Vietnam to develop a strong, stable, and constitutional government to enable Free Vietnam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone . . . [and] work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Vietnam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anti-Communist leadership.

In 1958 (in NSC 5809) this policy, with its "roll-back" overtones, was reiterated, although revisions were proposed indicating an awareness of the necessity to adapt the army of Vietnam for anti-guerrilla warfare. Operations Coordinating Board Progress Reports on the implementation of the policies laid out in NSC 5612 and 5809 revealed awareness that Vietnam was under internal attack, and that "in spite of substantial U.S. assistance, economic development, though progressing, is below that which is politically desirable."

While classified policy papers through 1959 thus dealt with risks, public statements of U.S. officials did not refer to the jeopardy. To the contrary, the picture presented the public and Congress by Ambassador Durbrow, General Williams, and other Administration spokesmen was of continuing progress, virtually miraculous improvement, year-in and year-out. Diem was depicted as a strong and capable leader, firmly in command of his own house, leading his people into modern nationhood at a remarkable pace. As late as the summer of 1959, Ambassador Durbrow and General Williams assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Vietnam's internal security was in no serious danger, and that Vietnam was in a better position to cope with invasion from the North than it had ever been. In the fall of 1959, in fact, General

Williams expressed the opinion that by 1961 GVN defense budgets could be reduced, and in the spring of 1960, he wrote to Senator Mansfield that American military advisors could begin a phased withdrawal from MAAG, Vietnam the following year.

Whatever adverse judgment may be deserved by such statements or by the quality of U.S. assistance to Vietnam on behalf of its internal security, the American aid program cannot be faulted for failing to provide Diem funds in plenty. The U.S. aid program-economic and military-for South Vietnam was among the largest in the world. From FY 1946 through FY 1961, Vietnam was the third ranking non-Nato recipient of aid, and the seventh worldwide. In FY 1961, the last program of President Eisenhower's Administration, South Vietnam was the fifth ranking recipient overall. MAAG, Vietnam, was the only military aid mission anywhere in the world commanded by a lieutenant general, and the economic aid mission there was by 1958 the largest anywhere.

Security was the focus of U.S. aid; more than 75% of the economic aid the U.S. provided in the same period went into the GVN military budget; thus at least \$8 out of every \$10 of aid provided Vietnam went directly toward security. In addition, other amounts of nominally economic aid (e.g., that for public administration) went toward security forces, and aid for agriculture and transportation principally funded projects with strategic purposes and with an explicit military rationale. For example, a 20-mile stretch of highway from Saigon to Bien Hoa, built at Gen. Williams' instance for specifically military purposes, received more U.S. economic aid than all funds provided for labor, community development, social welfare, health, and education in the years 1954-1961.

In March 1960, Washington became aware that despite this impressive outpouring of treasure, material, and advice, the Viet Cong were making significant headway against Diem, and that U.S. aid programs ought to be reconfigured. In March, the JCS initiated action to devise a Counter-insurgency Plan (CIP), intended to coordinate the several U.S. agencies providing assistance to the GVN, and rationalize the GVN's own rural programs. The CIP was worked out among the several U.S. agencies in Washington and Saigon during the summer and fall of 1960.

The heightened awareness of problems in Vietnam did not, however, precipitate changes in NSC policy statements on Vietnam. Objectives set forth in NSC 6012 (25 July 1960) were virtually identical to those of NSC 5809.

Planning proceeded against a background of developing divergence of view between the Departments of State and Defense. As Ambassador Durbrow and his colleagues of State saw the problem on the one hand, Diem's security problems stemmed from his political insolvency. They argued that the main line of U.S. action should take the form of pressures on Diem to reform his government and his party, liberalizing his handling of political dissenters and the rural populace. Department of Defense officials, on the other hand, usually deprecated the significance of non-communist political dissent in South Vietnam, and regarded Diem's difficulties as proceeding from military inadequacy. In this view, what was needed was a more efficient internal defense, and, therefore, the Pentagon tended to oppose U.S. leverage on Diem because it might jeopardize his

confidence in the U.S., and his cooperation in improving his military posture. Communist machination, as Defense saw it, had created the crisis; the U.S. response should be "unswerving support" for Diem.

While the CIP was being developed, Department of Defense moved to adapt the U.S. military assistance program to the exigencies of the situation. On 30 March 1960 the JCS took the position that the Army of Vietnam should develop an anti-guerrilla capability within the regular force structure, thus reversing an antithetical position taken by General Williams. During 1959 Diem had attempted to form a number of special "commando" units from his regular forces, and the MAAG had opposed him on the grounds that these would deplete his conventional strength. In May, MAAG was authorized to place advisers down to battalion level. In June, 1960, additional U.S. Army special forces arrived in Vietnam, and during the summer a number of Ranger battalions, with the express mission of counter-guerrilla operations, were activated. In September, General Williams was replaced by General McGarr who, consistent with the directives of the JCS, promptly began to press the training of RVNAF to produce the "anti-guerrilla guerrilla." General McGarr's desire for an RVNAF capable of meeting and defeating the Viet Cong at their own game was evident in the CIP when it was forwarded to Washington, in January, 1961, just before John F. Kennedy took office.

The CIP had been well coordinated within the U.S. mission in Vietnam, but only partially with the Vietnamese. The plan, as forwarded, incorporated one major point of difference between the Embassy and MAAG. General McGarr desired to increase the RVNAF force level by some 20,000 troops, while Ambassador Durbrow maintained reservations concerning the necessity or the wisdom of additional forces. The Ambassador's position rested on the premise that Diem wanted the force level increase, and that the United States should not provide funds for that purpose until Diem was patently prepared to take those unpalatable political measures the Ambassador had proposed aimed at liberalizing the GVN. The Ambassador held out little hope that either the political or even military portions of the CIP could be successfully accomplished without some such leverage: "Consideration should, therefore, be given to what actions we are prepared to take to encourage, or if necessary to force, acceptance of all essential elements of the plan." In the staff reviews of the CIP in Washington, the divergence between State and Defense noted above came once more to the fore. Those (chiefly within DOD) who considered the VC threat as most important, and who therefore regarded military measures against this threat as most urgent, advocated approval and any other measures which would induce Diem's acceptance of the CIP, and his cooperation with MAAG. They were impatient with Ambassador Durbrow's proposed "pressure tactics" since they saw in them possibility of GVN delay on vital military matters, and the prospect of little profit other than minor concessions from Diem in political areas they deemed peripheral or trivial in countering the VC. Tipping the scales toward what might be called the Diem/MAAG/DOD priorities was the coincident and increasing need to "reassure" Diem of U.S. support for the GVN and for him personally. The fall of President Syngman Rhee of Korea in April, the abortive November 1960 coup d'etat in Saigon, Ambassador Durbrow's persistent overtures for reform, and above all, uncertainties over U.S. support for the Royal Laotian

Government. This requirement to reassure Diem was plainly at cross purposes with the use of pressure tactics.

Ten days after President Kennedy came to office, he authorized a \$41 million increase in aid for Vietnam to underwrite a level increase and improvements in the Civil Guard--a complete buy of the CIP. In March, Ambassador Durbrow was replaced by Frederick E. Nolting. Ambassador Durbrow's closing interview with Diem in mid-March was not reassuring. While Diem stated that he was prepared to carry out the military aspects of the CIP, he dodged Durbrow's questions on the political action prescribed. It was on this disquieting note that the Kennedy Administration began its efforts to counter the insurgency in South Vietnam.

End of Summary

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

Section 2, pp. 270-82

MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE 1954 GENEVA ACCORDS Three Agreements on the Cessation of Hostilities for Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia

<i>Provisions</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Laos</i>	<i>Cambodia</i>
<i>A. Disengagement, Partition, and Military Regroupment</i>			
Disengagement of combatants, including concentration of forces into provisional assembly areas (and provisional withdrawal of other party's forces from such areas in Vietnam)	To be completed 15 days after effective date of cease-fire in each area Provisional assembly areas for French Union forces; perimeter of Hanoi, perimeter of Haiduong, perimeter of Haiphong	To be completed 15 days after effective date of cease-fire (Aug. 22, 1954) [Art. 11] Provisional assembly areas: 5 areas for reception Vietnamese People's Volunteer forces; 5	No provision

	<p>Provisional assembly areas for Vietnam People's Army: Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh perimeter (Central Vietnam), Xuyen-Moc, Ham Tan perimeter (South Vietnam), Plaine des Jones perimeter, and Cape Camau perimeter (both South Vietnam) [Art. 15]</p>	<p>areas for reception French forces, 12 areas, one per province, for reception "fighting units Pathet Lao" [Art. 12]</p>	
<p>Withdrawals of forces, supplies and equipment</p>	<p>French Union forces to withdraw from provisional assembly areas to regrouping zones south of demarcation line within 300 days (May 19, 1955), according to following schedule: From Hanoi perimeter-80 days (October 11, 1954) From Haiduong perimeter-100 days (November 1, 1954) From Haiphong perimeter-300 days (May 19, 1955)</p> <p>People's Army of Vietnam to withdraw from provisional assembly areas to regrouping zone north of demarcation line within 300 days</p>	<p>French forces to withdraw, except from bases at Seno and in MeKong Valley near or downstream from Vientiane, in 120 days (Nov. 20, 1954) [Art. 4, 12] Vietnames People's Volunteers, except those settled in Laos before hostilities (special convention), to withdraw by provinces in 120 days (Nov. 20, 1954) [Art. 4, 13]</p>	<p>French armed forces and military combatant personnel, combatant formations of all types which have entered Cambodia from other countries or regions, and non-native Cambodians holding supervisory functions in bodies connected with Vietnamese (DRV) activities in Cambodia to withdraw within 90 days (Oct. 21, 1954) [Art. 4]</p>

	<p>(May 19, 1955), according to following schedule: From Xuyen-Moc, Ham Tan-80 days (October 11, 1954) From Central Vietnam I-80 days (October 11, 1954) From Plaine des Jones-100 days (November 1, 1954) From Central Vietnam 11-100 days (November 1, 1954) From Cape Camau-200 days (February 8, 1955) From Central Vietnam 111-300 days (May 19, 1955) [Art. 15]</p>		
Plans for movements into regrouping zones	<p>To be communicated between the parties within 25 days August 17, 1954) [Art. 11]</p>	No provision	No provision
Provisional military demarcation line	<p>Vicinity of 17° N latitude from the mouth of the Song Ben Hat (Cua Tung River) and the course of that river (known as the Rao Tkanh in the mountain) to the village of Bo Ho Su, then the parallel of Bo Ho Su to the Laos-Viet-Nam frontier [Art. 1-4, Annex]</p>	No provision	No provision

Demilitarized zone	On either side of demarcation line to width of not more than 5 kms. to act as a buffer zone [Art. 1]	No provision	No provision
Withdraw of all forces, supplies, and equipment from demilitarized zone	To be completed within 25 days (August 14, 1954) [Art. 5]	No provision	No provision
Withdrawal for assembly or regrouping through territory of the other party	Forces of the other party to withdraw provisionally 3 kms. on each side of route of withdrawal [Art. 12]	No provision	No provision
On-the-spot demobilization	No provision	Any military personnel of the fighting units of "Pathet Lao," who so wish, may be demobilized on the spot [Art. 14]	Khmer Resistance Forces to be demobilized on the spot within 30 days (August 22, 1954) [Art. 5]
Concentration areas	No provision	Pending political settlement, fighting units of "Pathet Lao" to move into provinces of Phong Saly and Sam-Neus and to move between these two provinces in defined corridor along Laos-Vietnam border. Concentration to be completed within 120 days (Nov. 20, 1954) [Art. 14]	No provision
<i>B. Civil Regroupment and Administration</i>			
Movement across demarcation line or	Prohibited except by specific permission	No provision	No provision

<p>into demilitarized zones</p>	<p>of the Joint Commission; fully authorized for the Joint Commission, its organs, the International Supervisory Commission and its organs [Art. 6,7,9]</p>		
<p>Civil administration and relief in demilitarized zones</p>	<p>Responsibility of the Commanders in Chief of the two parties in their respective zones on either side of the demarcation line [Art. 14]</p>	<p>No provision</p>	<p>No provision</p>
<p>Civil and administrative measures pending general elections</p>	<p>In each regrouping zone, a) civil administration to be in hands of party whose forces to be regrouped in that zone, b) civil administration in a territory to be transferred to continue in hands of present controlling force until the withdrawing troops have completely left, c) from July 25 through completion of troop regroupment (May 19, 1955) any civilians so desiring may be permitted and helped to move to other zone, d) from July 23 through completion of troop regroupment, any</p>	<p>Each party to refrain from any reprisals or discrimination against persons or organizations for their activities during hostilities and to guarantee their democratic freedoms [Art. 15]</p>	<p>No reprisals to be taken against any nationals or their families, each being entitled, without any discrimination, to all constitutional guarantees concerning protection of person and property and democratic freedoms [Art. 5, 6]</p>

	civilians so desiring may be permitted and helped to move to other zone [Art. 14]		
Liberation and repatriation of POW's and civilian internees	All POW's and civilian internees (latter term covering all persons who have been detained by reason of contributing in any way to the "political and armed struggle" between the parties) held by both sides after the cease-fire in each theater and to be surrendered to appropriate authorities of other party who shall assist them in proceeding to their country of origin, place of habitual residence, or zone of their choice [Art. 21]	Same as for Vietnam, except that only foreign POW's captured by either party are to be surrendered to appropriate authorities of other party [Art. 16]	Same as for Vietnam except that no time period is given, and that only foreign POW's captured are to be surrendered to appropriate authorities of other party [Art. 8]
<i>C. Arms Control</i>			
Introduction of troop reinforcements and additional military personnel, including instructors	Prohibited from July 23, 1954, except for: rotation of units, admittance of individual personnel on a temporary duty basis, and return to Vietnam of individual personnel from leave or temporary duty abroad, which are allowed under defined and controlled	Prohibited after proclamation of cease-fire, but French may leave maximum of 1,500 officers and NCO's to train Laotian National Army [Art. 6]	Prohibited after date of cease-fire in Vietnam and until final political settlement in Vietnam, except for purpose of "effective defense of its territory" [Art. 7]

	conditions [Art. 16]		
Introduction of all types of arms, munitions, and other war materiels, including aircraft	<p>Prohibited from July 23, 1954, except for piece-for-piece replacement of war materiel, arms, munitions destroyed, damaged, worn out, or used up after cessation hostilities (exception does not apply to French Union forces north of demarcation during 300 day withdrawal period)</p> <p>Admission of any materials on excepted basis to be under defined and controlled conditions [Art. 17]</p>	Prohibited after July 23, except for specified quantities of arms in categories defined as necessary for defense of Laos [Art. 9]	Prohibited after date of cease-fire in Vietnam and until final political settlement in Vietnam, except for purpose of "effective defense of its territory" [Art. 7]
Specified points of entry for excepted personnel and replacement material	<p>1) North of Line: Laokay, Langson, Tien-Yen, Haiphong, Vinh, Dong-Hoi, Muong-Sen</p> <p>2) South of Line: Tourane, Quinhon, Nhatrang, Bangoi, Saigon, Cap St. Jacques, Tranchau [Art. 20]</p>	Luang-Prabang, Xieng-Khouang, Vientiane, Seno, Pakse, Savannakhet, Tchepone [Art. 10]	No provision
Establishment of new military bases in Vietnam and Laos and military bases of foreign powers in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia	Prohibited after July 23, 1954 throughout Vietnam [Art. 18, 19]	Prohibited after July 23, except for 1) French base at Seno, 2) French base in Mekong Valley, either in Vientiane Province or downstream from	Military bases of foreign powers prohibited after July 23 "so long as its security is not threatened" [Art. 7]

		Vietiane. Effectives in these two French bases may not exceed 3,500 men. Bases of foreign powers prohibited "so long as its security is not threatened" [Art. 7, 8]	
Adherence to military alliances	Prohibited for both sides from July 23, 1954 [Art. 19]	No provision	May not join agreements carrying the obligation to enter into military alliance "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the UN or with the principles of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities or, so long as its security is not threatened, to establish bases on Cambodian territory for the military forces of foreign powers" [Art. 7]
Use of zones to resume hostilities or to further aggressive policy	Prohibited from July 23, 1954 [Art. 19]	No provision	No provision
<i>D. International Supervision and Control</i>			
Responsibility for ensuring observance and enforcement of terms and provisions of the agreements	Rests with the French and People's Army Commanders [Art. 22]	Rests with the parties [Art. 24]	Rest with the parties {Art. 10]
International Control Commission	To be composed of India, Canada, Poland, with India	Same as for Vietnam: Headquarters,	Same as for Vietnam: Headquarters,

	as chairman, and to be set up at time of cessation of hostilities "to ensure control and supervision." Headquarters not given [Art. 29, 34, 36]	Vientiane [Art. 25]	Phnom-Penh [Art. 12]
Fixed inspection teams (of International Control Commission)	At Laokay, Langson, Tien-Yen, Haiphong, Vinh, Dong-Hoi, Muong-Sen, Tourane, Quinhon, Nhatrang, Bangoi, Saigon, Cap St Jacques, Tranchau [Art. 35]	At Pakse, Seno, Tchepone, Vientiane, Xieng-Khouang, Phong-Saly, Sophao (Sam-Neua) [Art. 26]	At Phnom Penh, Kompong-Cham, Kratie, Svay-Rieng, Kampot [Art. 12]
Mobile inspection teams (of International Control Commission)	Zones of action: Regions bordering land and sea frontiers of Vietnam, demarcation lines between regrouping zones, and demilitarized zones [Art. 35]	Zones of action: Land frontiers of Laos [Art. 26]	Zones of action: Land and sea frontiers of Cambodia [Art. 12]
Joint Commission of the parties	Established by the parties to facilitate execution of provisions concerning joint actions by the two parties (equal number of representatives of the commands of both parties) [Art. 33]	Set up to facilitate implementation of the agreement (equal number of representatives of commands of parties concerned [Art. 28]	Set up to facilitate implementation of the agreement (equal number of representatives of commands of parties concerned [Art. 14]
Joint Commission teams or groups	To be set up by Joint Commission and governed by the parties [Art. 32]	Formed by Joint Commission [Art. 28]	Formed by Joint Commission [Art. 14]

<p>International Control Commission recommendations</p>	<p>1) Adopted by majority, except when dealing with questions concerning violations, threats of violations, or problems which might lead to resumption of hostilities, in which cases unanimity applies; 2) Sent directly to the parties and Joint Commission is notified; 3) Recommendation concerning amendments and additions to provisions of the Agreement may be formulated with unanimous participation [Art. 40, 41]</p>	<p>1) Adopted by majority, except when dealing with questions concerning violations, threats of violations, or problems which might lead to resumption of hostilities, in which cases unanimity applies; 2) Sent directly to the parties and Joint Commission is notified; 3) Recommendation concerning amendments and additions to provisions of the Agreement may be formulated with unanimous participation [Art. 34, 35]</p>	<p>1) Adopted by majority, except when dealing with questions concerning violations, threats of violations, or problems which might lead to resumption of hostilities, in which cases unanimity applies; 2) Sent directly to the parties and Joint Commission is notified; 3) Recommendation concerning amendments and additions to provisions of the Agreement may be formulated with unanimous participation [Art. 19, 20]</p>
<p>Appeal to members of the Geneva Conference</p>	<p>If one party refuses to put into effect a recommendation of the International Control Commission the parties concerned or the Commission itself shall inform the members of the Geneva Conference. If unanimity is not reached by the Commission in cases where it applies, a majority and one or more minority reports shall be submitted.</p>	<p>If one party refuses to put into effect a recommendation of the International Control Commission the parties concerned or the Commission itself shall inform the members of the Geneva Conference. If unanimity is not reached by the Commission in cases where it applies, a majority and one or more minority reports shall be submitted.</p>	<p>If one party refuses to put into effect a recommendation of the International Control Commission the parties concerned or the Commission itself shall inform the members of the Geneva Conference. If unanimity is not reached by the Commission in cases where it applies, a majority and one or more minority reports shall be submitted. The Commission shall</p>

	The Commission shall inform members of the conference in all cases where its activity is being hindered. [Art. 43]	The Commission shall inform members of the conference in all cases where its activity is being hindered. [Art. 36]	inform members of the conference in all cases where its activity is being hindered. [Art. 22]
<i>E. Procedural Matters</i>			
Parties and signatories to agreements	For the Commander in Chief of the People's Army of Vietnam, Ta-Quang Buu, Vice-Minister of National Defense of the DRV; For the Commander in Chief of the French Union Forces in Indochina, Brig. Gen. Delteil [Art. 47]	For the Commander in Chief of the fighting units of "Pathet Lao" and for the Commander in Chief of the People's Army of Vietnam, Ta-Quang Buu; For the Commander in Chief of the French Union Forces in Indochina, Brig. Gen. Delteil [Art. 41]	For the Commander of the units of the Khmer Resistance Forces and for the Commander in Chief of the Vietnamese (DRV) military units, Ta-Quang Buu; For the Commander in Chief of the Khmer National armed forces, General NhieK Tioulong [Art. 33]
Entry into force of agreements	Except as provided, 2400 hours, July 22, 1954 (Geneva time) [Art. 47]	Except as provided, 2400 hours, July 22, 1954 (Geneva time) [Art. 40]	00 hours, July 23, 1954 (Geneva time) [Art. 33]
Effective date of cessation of hostilities	North Vietnam: 0800 (local), July 27, 1954 Central Vietnam: 0800 (local), August 1, 1954 Southern Vietnam: 0800 (local), August 11, 1954 [Art. 11]	0800 (local), August 6, 1954 [Art. 40]	0800 (local), August 7, 1954 [Art. 2]

MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE 1954 GENEVA ACCORDS

Conference Final Declaration (CFD)

and

Unilateral Declarations (UD)

(Laos, Cambodia, and France each made two unilateral declarations referring to the CFD)

<i>Provisions</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Laos</i>	<i>Cambodia</i>
Principles of political settlement	Respect for "independence, unity, territorial integrity," and enjoyment of "fundamental freedoms guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot" [CFD Art. 7]	All citizens of Laos and Cambodia to be integrated without discrimination into the national community and to be guaranteed enjoyment of rights and freedoms provided by the constitution [UD Laos and Cambodia; CFD Art. 3]	All citizens of Laos and Cambodia to be integrated without discrimination into the national community and to be guaranteed enjoyment of rights and freedoms provided by the constitution [UD Laos and Cambodia; CFD Art. 3]
Method of political settlement	"General elections to be held in July 1956, under supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the Member States of the International Supervisory Commission referred to in the agreement on cessation of hostilities. Consultations will be held on this subject between the competent, representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards." [CFD Art. 7]	All Laotian and Cambodian citizens to participate freely as electors or candidates in general elections by secret ballot; in conformity with the constitution, next general elections to take place in the course of 1955 by secret ballot and in conditions of respect for fundamental freedoms [UD Laos and Cambodia Art. 3]	All Laotian and Cambodian citizens to participate freely as electors or candidates in general elections by secret ballot; in conformity with the constitution, next general elections to take place in the course of 1955 by secret ballot and in conditions of respect for fundamental freedoms [UD Laos and Cambodia Art. 3]
Reprisals against persons who have collaborated with one of parties during war, or their families	Must not be permitted [CFD Art. 9]	Must not be permitted [CFD Art. 9]	Must not be permitted [CFD Art. 9]

Protection of individuals and property	Provisions of agreements on cessation hostilities must be strictly applied [CFD Art. 8]	Provisions of agreements on cessation hostilities must be strictly applied [CFD Art. 8]	Provisions of agreements on cessation hostilities must be strictly applied [CFD Art. 8]
Free choice of zone of residence	Everyone must be allowed to decide freely in which zone he wishes to live [CFD Art. 8]	No provision	No provision
Principle of relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia	The French Government and each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs [UD France; CFD Art. 11, 12]	The French Government and each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs [UD France; CFD Art. 11, 12]	The French Government and each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs [UD France; CFD Art. 11, 12]
Special representation for dissident elements	No provision	Government of Laos will promulgate measures to provide for special representation, in the Royal Administration of Phong-Saly and Sam-Neua Provinces during interval between cessation hostilities and general elections, of the interests of Laotian Nationals who did	No provision

		not support royal forces during hostilities [UD Laos]	
Introduction of arms and force, adherence to military alliances, or establishment of foreign bases	Clauses in Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities Vietnam noted [CFD Art. 4, 5]	Government of Laos will not join in any agreement with other states if it includes the obligation to participate in a military alliance not in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter or with the principles of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities or, unless its security is threatened, the obligation to establish bases on Laotian territory for military forces of foreign powers [UD Laos; CFD Art. 4, 5]	"The Royal Government of Cambodia will not join in any agreement with other States, if this agreement carries for Cambodia the obligation to enter a military alliance not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, or, as long as its security is not threatened, the obligation to establish bases on Cambodian territory for the military forces of foreign powers" [UD Cambodia; CFD Art. 4, 5]
Use of territory to further aggression	Clauses in Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam noted [CFD Art. 5]	The Government of Laos undertook "never to permit the territory of Laos to be used in furtherance of a policy of aggression." [UD Laos]	The Government of Cambodia "resolved never to take part in an aggressive policy and never to permit the territory of Cambodia to be utilized in service of such a policy." [UD Cambodia]

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

I. FAILURE OF THE GENEVA SETTLEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION: THE FLAWED PEACE

The Geneva Conference of 1954 brought only transitory peace to Indochina. Nonetheless, except for the United States, the major powers were, at the time of the Conference, satisfied that with their handiwork: the truce averted a further U.S. military involvement on the Asian mainland, and dampened a heightening crisis between East and West which might readily have led to conflict outside Southeast Asia. So long as these conditions obtained, neither France, the U.K., the U.S.S.R. nor Communist China were seriously disposed to disturb the *modus vivendi* in Vietnam. U.S. leaders publicly put the best face possible on the Geneva Settlement-about all that might possibly have been obtained from a seriously disadvantaged negotiating position, and no serious impairment to freedom of United States action. But the U.S., within its inner councils immediately after Geneva, viewed the Settlement's provisions for Vietnam as "disaster," and determined to prevent, if it could, the further extension of communist government over the Vietnamese people and territory. U.S. policy adopted in 1954 to this end did not constitute an irrevocable nor "open-ended" commitment to the government of Ngo Dinh Diem. But it did entail a progressively deepening U.S. involvement in the snarl of violence and intrigue within Vietnam, and therefore a direct role in the ultimate breakdown of the Geneva Settlement.

The Settlement of Geneva, though it provided respite from years of political violence, bitterly disappointed Vietnamese of North and South alike who had looked toward a unified and independent Vietnam. For the Viet Minh, the Settlement was a series of disappointing compromises to which they had agreed at the urging of the Soviet Union and China, compromises beyond what hard won military advantage over the French had led them to expect. For the State of Vietnam in the South, granted independence by France while the Geneva Conference was in progress, the Settlement was an arrangement to which it had not been party, and to which it could not subscribe. The truce of 1954, in fact, embodied three serious deficiencies as a basis for stable peace among the Vietnamese:

- It relied upon France as its executor.
- It ignored the opposition of the State of Vietnam.
- It countenanced the disassociation of the United States.

These weaknesses turned partitioned Vietnam into two hostile states, and given the absence of a stabilizing international force and the impotence of the ICC, brought about an environment in which war was likely, perhaps inevitable. A nominally temporary "line of demarcation" between North and South at the 17th parallel was transformed into one of the more forbidding frontiers of the world. A mass displacement of nearly 5% of the population disrupted the polity and heightened tensions in both North and South. And both the Democratic Government of Vietnam (DRV) in the North, and the Government

of Vietnam (GVN) in the South armed, with foreign aid, for what each perceived as a coming struggle over reunification. Some of the main roots of the present conflict run to these failures of Geneva.

B. THE PARTITION OF VIETNAM

1. Provisions for Unifying Vietnam

The sole formal instrument of the Geneva Conference was the document signed by the military commanders of the two hostile forces termed "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam," dealing largely with the disengagement and regroupment of military forces. Article 14 of the Agreement contained one brief--but fateful allusion--to a future political solution:

Article 14a. Pending the general elections which will bring about the unification of Vietnam, the conduct of civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue of the present agreement....

A more general expression of the intent of the conferees was the unsigned "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference," by which the Conference "takes note" of the aforementioned Agreement and several declarations by represented nations and:

recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Vietnam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary . . . declares that, so far as Vietnam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity, and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot. In order to insure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July, 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the member States of the International Supervisory Commission, referred to in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Consultations will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards....

The DRV approved the Final Declaration, and, having failed in its attempts to bring about immediate elections on unification, no doubt did so reluctantly. There has been some authoritative speculation that the Viet Minh accepted this aspect of the Settlement with deep cynicism; Pham Van Dong, the DRV delegate at Geneva is supposed to have expressed conviction that the elections would never be held. But it seems more likely that the communist powers fully expected the nascent GVN, already badly shaken from internal stresses, to collapse, and unification to follow with elections or not. In any event, the public stance of the DRV stressed their expectations that the election would be held.

Ho Chi Minh stated unequivocally on 22 July 1954 that: "North, Central and South Vietnam are territories of ours. Our country will surely be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated."

The Saigon Government was no less assertive in calling for unification of Vietnam. In a note to the French of 17 July 1954, the GVN delegate at Geneva protested having been left until then "in complete ignorance" of French intentions regarding the division of the country, which he felt failed to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people"; he proposed, futilely, United Nations trusteeship of all Vietnam in preference to a nation "dismembered and condemned to slavery." At the final session of the Conference, when called upon to join in the Final Declaration, the GVN delegate announced that his government "reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence and freedom." Thus the Geneva truce confronted from the outset the anomaly of two sovereign Vietnamese states, each calling for unification, but only one, the DRV, committed to achieving it via the terms of the Settlement.

2. France Withdraws, 1954-1956

France, as the third party in Vietnam, then became pivotal to any political settlement, its executor for the West. But France had agreed to full independence for the GVN on June 4, 1954, nearly six weeks before the end of the Geneva Conference. By the terms of that June agreement, the GVN assumed responsibility for international contracts previously made on its behalf by France; but, there having been no reference to subsequent contracts, it was technically free of the Geneva Agreements. It has been argued to the contrary that the GVN was bound by Geneva because it possessed at the time few of the attributes of full sovereignty, and especially because it was dependent on France for defense. But such debates turn on tenuous points of international law regarding the prerogatives of newly independent or partitioned states. France speedily divested itself of responsibilities for "civil administration" in South Vietnam. In February, 1956, the GVN requested France to withdraw its military forces, and on April 26, 1956, the French military command in Vietnam, the signatory of the Geneva Agreement, was dissolved. France, torn by domestic political turbulence in which past disappointments and continued frustrations in Vietnam figured prominently, and tested anew in Algeria, abandoned its position in Southeast Asia. No doubt, an increasingly acerbic relation between its representatives and those of the United States in South Vietnam hastened its departure, where American policy clashed with French over the arming and training of a national army for the GVN, over French military assistance for the religious sects, over French economic policy on repatriating investments, and over general French opposition to Diem. But more fundamentally, France felt itself shouldered aside in South Vietnam by the United States over:

(1) *Policy toward the DRV*. The French averred initially that Ho was a potential Tito, and that they could through an accommodation with him preserve their economic and cultural interests in Vietnam--in their view, a "coexistence experiment" of world wide significance in the Cold War. As of December, 1954, they were determined to carry out

the Geneva elections. Eventually, however, they were obliged to choose between the U.S. and the DRV, so firmly did the U.S. foreclose any adjustment to the DRV's objectives.

(2) *Policy toward Diem.* France opposed Diem not solely because he was a cally Francophobe Annamite, but because he threatened directly their posiin Vietnam. His nationalism, his strictures against "feudalists," his notions of moral regeneration all conjoined in an enmity against the French nearly as heated as that he harbored against the communists--but to greater effect, for it was far easier for him to muster his countrymen's opinion against the French than against the Viet Minh. By the spring of 1955, the Diem-France controversy acquired military dimensions when French supported sect forces took up arms against the GVN. At that time, while the U.S. construed its policy as aiding "Free Vietnam," the French saw Diem as playing Kerensky's role in Vietnam, with the People's Revolutionary Committee as the Bolsheviks, and Ho, the Viet Minh Lenin, waiting off stage.

(3) *Military Policy.* By the end of 1954, the French were persuaded that SEATO could never offer security for their citizens and other. interests in Vietnam, and had despaired of receiving U.S. military aid for a French Expeditionary corps of sufficient size to meet the threat. U.S. insistence that it should train RVNAF increased their insecurity. Within the combined U.S.- French headquarters in Saigon thereafter, officers of both nations worked side by side launching countervailing intrigues among the Vietnamese, and among each other. In March of 1956, as France prepared to accede to the GVN request for withdrawal of its remaining military forces, Foreign Minister Pineau, in a Paris speech, took the U.K. and the U.S. to task for disrupting Western unity. While Pineau selected U.S. support of French-hating Diem for particular rancor, he did so in the context of decrying France's isolation in dealing with nationalist rebels in North Africa--and thus generally indicated two powers who had threatened the French empire since the U.K. intervened in Syria in 1941, and President Roosevelt assured the Sultan of Morocco that his sympathies lay with the colonial peoples struggling for independence.

Ultimately, France had to place preservation of its European position ahead of empire, and, hence, cooperation with the U.S. before opposition in Indochina. France's vacating Vietnam in 1956 eased U.S. problems there over the short run, and smoothed Diem's path. But the DRV's hope for a national plebescite were thereby dashed. On January 1, 1955, as the waning of France's power in Vietnam became apparent, Pham Van Dong, DRV Premier, declared that as far as Hanoi was concerned: ". . . it was with you, the French, that we signed the Geneva Agreements, and it is up to you to see that they are respected." Some thirteen months later the Foreign Minster of France stated that:

We are not entirely masters of the situation. The Geneva Accords on the one hand and the pressure of our allies on the other creates a very complex juridical situation. . . . The position in principle is clear: France is the guarantor of the Geneva Accords . . . But we do not have the means alone of making them respected.

But the GVN remained adamantly opposed to elections, and neither the U.S. nor any other western power was disposed to support France's fulfillment of its responsibility to the DRV.

3. Diem Refuses Consultation, 1955

Communist expectations that the Diem government would fall victim to the voracious political forces of South Vietnam were unfulfilled. Diem narrowly escaped such a fate, but with American support-albeit wavering, and accompanied by advice he often ignored-Diem within a year of the Geneva Conference succeeded in defeating the most powerful of his antagonists, the armed sects, and in removing from power Francophile elements within his government, including his disloyal military chiefs. He spoke from comparatively firm political ground when, on July 16, 1955, before the date set for consulting with the DRV on the plebescite, he announced in a radio broadcast that:

We did not sign the Geneva Agreements....

We are not bound in any way by these Agreements, signed against the will of the Vietnamese people. . . . We shall not miss any opportunity which would permit the unification of our homeland in freedom, but it is out of the question for us to consider any proposal from the Viet Minh if proof is not given that they put the superior interests of the national community above those of communism.

Moreover, Diem spoke with some assurance of American backing, for the U.S. had never pressed for the elections envisaged by the Settlement. At the final session of Geneva, rather than joining with the Conference delegates in the Final Declaration, the U.S. "observer," Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, had linked U.S. policy vis-a-vis Vietnam to that for Korea, Taiwan and Germany in these terms:

In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly.

Although the U.S. opposed elections in 1954 because Ho Chi Minh would have then won them handily, the records of the National Security Council and the Operations Coordinating Board of the summer of 1954 establishes that this government then nonetheless expected elections eventually to be held in Vietnam. But, two major misapprehensions were evident: (1) the U.S. planned through "political action" to ameliorate conditions in Southeast Asia to the point that elections would not jeopardize its objective of survival for a "free" Vietnam; and (2) the U.S. estimated that France would usefully remain in Vietnam. By the spring of 1955, although U.S. diplomacy had brought the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization into being, and although Diem had with U.S. aid weathered a number of severe political storms, the U.S. was less sanguine than its "political action" would suffice, and that further French presence would be helpful. Accordingly, it began to look closely at the conditions under which elections might be held, and urged that Vietnamese do the same. One definition of terms acceptable to the

U.S. was set forth in a State Department memorandum of 5 May 1955, approved by Secretary Dulles:

The U.S. believes that the conditions for free elections should be those which Sir Anthony Eden put forward and the three Western Powers supported at Berlin in connection with German reunification. The United States believes that the Free Vietnamese should insist that elections be held under conditions of genuine freedom; that safeguards be agreed to assure this freedom before, after, and during elections and that there be adequate guarantees for, among other things, freedom of movement, freedom of presentation of candidates, immunity of candidates, freedom from arbitrary arrest or victimization, freedom of association or political meetings, freedom of expression for all, freedom of the press, radio, and free circulation of newspapers, secrecy of the vote, and security of polling stations and ballot boxes.

Although the U.S. communicated to Diem its conviction that proposing such conditions to the DRV during pre-plebescite consultations would lead promptly to a fiat rejection, to Diem's marked advantage in world opinion, Diem found it preferable to refuse outright to talk to the North, and the U.S. indorsed his policy.

4. Divided Vietnam: Status Quo Accepted

The deadline for the consultations in July 1955, and the date set for elections in July 1956, passed without further international action to implement those provisions of the Geneva Settlement. The DRV communicated directly with the GVN in July, 1955, and again in May and June of 1956, proposing not only consultative conference to negotiate "free general elections by secret ballot," but to liberalize North-South relations in general. Each time the GVN replied with disdain, or with silence. The 17th parallel, with its demilitarized zone on either side, became de facto an international boundary, and-since Ngo Dinh Diem's rigid refusal to traffic with the North excluded all economic exchanges and even an interstate postal agreement-one of the most restricted boundaries in the world. The DRV appealed to the U.K. and the U.S.S.R. as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference to no avail. In January, 1956, Communist China requested another Geneva Conference to deal with the situation, but the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. responded only by extending the functions of the International Control Commission beyond its 1956 expiration date. By early 1957 the partition of Vietnam was generally accepted throughout the international community. In January, 1957, the Soviet Union proposed the admission of both the GVN and the DRV to the United Nations, the U.S.S.R. delegate declaring that "in Vietnam two separate States existed, which differed from one another in political and economic structure..."

Professor Hans Morgenthau, writing at the time, and following a visit to South Vietnam, described the political progress of the GVN as a "miracle," but stated that conditions for free elections obtained in neither the North nor the South. He concluded that:

Actually, the provision for free elections which would solve ultimately the problem of Vietnam was a device to hide the incompatibility of the Communist and Western

positions, neither of which can admit the domination of all of Vietnam by the other side. It was a device to disguise the fact that the line of military demarcation was bound to be a line of political division as well....

5. The Discontented

However, there were three governments, at least, for which the status quo of a Vietnam divided between communist and non-communist governments was unacceptable. The GNV, while remaining cool to the DRV, pursued an active propaganda campaign prophesying the overturning of communism in the North, and proclaiming its resolve ultimately to reunify the nation in freedom. The United States supported the GVN, having established as national policy in 1956, reaffirmed again in 1958, these guidelines:

Assist Free Viet Nam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government to enable Free Viet Nam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone. . . . Work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Viet Nam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Viet Nam under anti-Communist leadership. . . . Support the position of the Government of Free Viet Nam that all Viet Nam elections may take place only after it is satisfied that genuinely free elections can be held throughout both zones of Viet Nam. . . . Treat the Viet Minh as not constituting a legitimate government, and discourage other non-Communist states from developing or maintaining relations with the Viet Minh regime....

And the Democratic Republic of Vietnam became increasingly vocal in its calls or "struggle" to end partition. In April, 1956, as the plebescite deadline neared, Ho Chi Minh declared ominously that:

While recognizing that in certain countries the road to socialism may be a peaceful one, we should be aware of this fact: In countries where the machinery of state, the armed forces, and the police of the bourgeois class are still strong, the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle.

While recognizing the possibility of reunifying Vietnam by peaceful means, we should always remember that our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are preparing for war....

In 1956, however, Ho Chi Minh and the DRV faced mounting internal difficulties, and were not yet in a position to translate the partition of Vietnam into *casus belli*.

C. REFUGEES: DISRUPTION OF VIETNAM'S SOCIETY

1. Provisions for Regroupment

Article 14 of the "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam," which provided for separate political administrations north and south of the 17th parallel, also stated that:

14(d) From the date of entry into force of the present agreement until the movement of troops is completed, any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district.

It is probable that none of the conferees foresaw the ramifications of that one sentence, for it put in motion one million Vietnamese refugees, most of them destitute, who became at first heavy burdens on the DRV and the GVN, and ultimately political and military assets for both regimes. For the United States, the plight of these peoples lent humanitarian dimensions to its policy toward Vietnam, and new perspectives to its economic and military assistance.

2. Exodus to South Vietnam

In accordance with Article 1 of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, 190,000 troops of the French Expeditionary Corps were moved from North Vietnam to the South. In addition, some 900,000 civilians exercised their option under Article 14 (d) of the Armistice. While no wholly reliable statistics exist, there is agreement among several authorities that the figures presented by the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam (ICC), citing chiefly the Saigon Government as its source, are generally correct.

FIGURES OF MOVEMENT OF POPULATION IN VIETNAM UNDER ARTICLE 14(d)

<i>North Zone to South Zone</i>	<i>Period Ending</i>		
(i) Total Arrivals (Figs. given by the State of Vietnam)	19.5.55	By air	213,635
		By sea	550,824
		Across provisional demarcation line	12,344
		By other means	41,324
		Total	818,127
(ii) Estimate of arrivals not registered (Figs. given by the State of Vietnam in April)			70,000
		Total	888,127
(iii) Figs. given by PAVN	19.5.55		4,749

	20.7.55		
	Up to 20.7.55	TOTAL	892,876

The uncertainty of statistics concerning total numbers of refugees stems not only from DRV reluctance to report departures, but also the turbulent conditions which then obtained throughout Vietnam, where the French were in the process of turning over public administration to Vietnamese, and where Saigon's communications with refugee relief operations in the field were at best tenuous. U.S. Department of State analysis in 1957 estimated the following composition and disposition of the refugees.

CIVILIAN REGROUPEES FROM THE NORTH, 1954-1955

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number (Approximate)</i>
1. Registered with GVN for refugee benefits	640,000 Vietnamese
	15,000 Nungs
	5,000 Chinese
2. French citizens resettled or repatriated by France	40,000
3. Chinese absorbed into Chinese community in South	45,000
	Total 640,000 Vietnamese
(Remainder, 200,000 Vietnamese absorbed without aid, e.g. dependents of military, civil servants)	

The GVN director of refugee programs that the refugees were composed, by trade, as follows:

Farmers	76%
Fisherman	10%
Artisans, small businessmen, students, government employees, professional	14%

But it was religious orientation which, ultimately assumed the greatest importance in South Vietnam's political life: an estimated 65% of North Vietnam's Catholics moved to the South, more than 600,000 in all; these, with 2,000 northern Protestants, were settled in their own communities.

3. Causes of the Exodus

The flight from North Vietnam reflected apprehension over the coming to power of the Viet Minh. Institutionally, the Viet Minh were further advanced in North Vietnam than the South, and had in areas of the North under their control already conducted several experiments in social revolution.

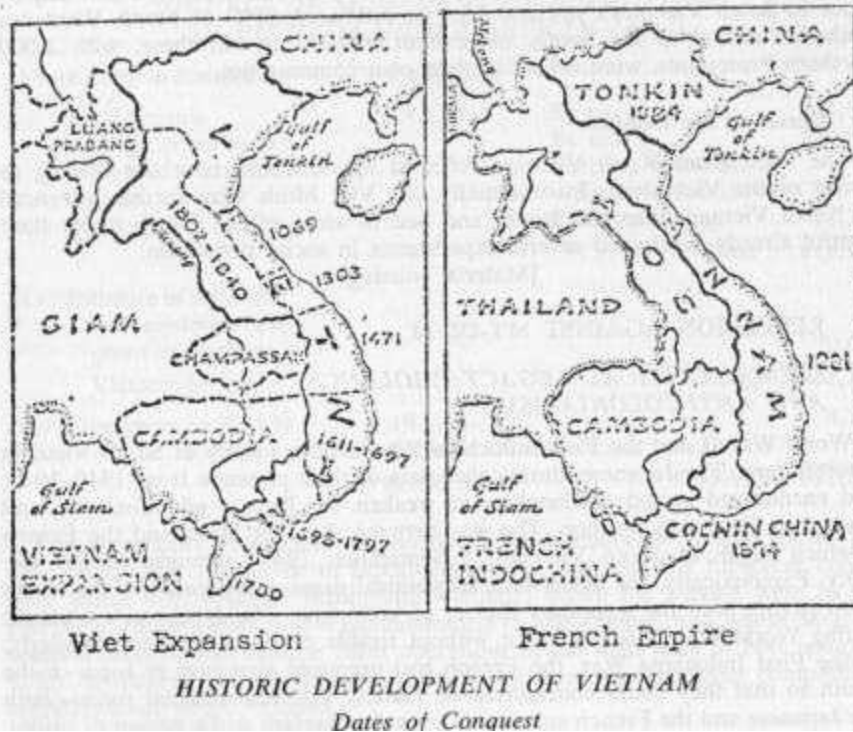
[Material missing]

II. REBELLION AGAINST MY-DIEM

A. DIEM'S POLITICAL LEGACY. VIOLENCE AND ANTI-COLONIALISM

World War II and the First Indochina War left the society of South Vietnam severely torn. The Japanese, during the years of their presence from 1940-1945, had encouraged armed factionalism to weaken the French administration and strengthen their own position. The war between the Viet Minh and the French -which began in South Vietnam in September, 1945-wrought further disunity. Paradoxically, the South suffered political damage compared to the North from having been the secondary theater of both wars. The Japanese had sought during World War II to control it without sizable occupation forces. Similarly, in the First Indochina War, the French had practiced economy of force in the South so that they could concentrate in Tonkin. For conventional forces, both the Japanese and the French substituted irregular warfare and a system of bribes, subversion, arms, military advice, and officially condoned concessions in corruption. From 1945-1954, the fighting in South Vietnam was more sporadic and diffuse than in the North, but in a societal sense, ultimately more destructive. While in Tonkin the Viet Minh flowed in through and behind the French and continued to build a nation and unify the people with surprising efficiency, in the South they were unable to do so. Not only were the Viet Minh centers of power in the North and the China base area too remote to support effectively the southern insurgency, but also the French had imitated the Japanese in arming and supplying certain South Vietnamese factions, fomenting civil war against the southern arm of the Viet Minh. The results approached anarchy: a virtual breakdown in public administration by Franco-Vietnamese central governments and deep cleavages within the Vietnamese body politic. By the summer of 1954, conspiracy had become the primary form of political communication in South Vietnam, and violence the primary mode of political change.

Politically, as well as geographically, South Vietnam consisted of three distinctive regions: the narrow, coastal plan of Annam, thickly settled by Vietnamese, where was located Hue, the ancient Viet capital and cultural center; the Highlands, sparsely populated by Montagnard tribesmen, in which was situated the summer capital of Dalat; and Cochinchina, the fertile, densely peopled river-delta area in which Saigon stood [maps deleted]. Cochinchina had experienced a political development markedly different from that of Annam. The last area of modern Vietnam to be occupied by the Viet people in their expansion southward (8th Century, A.D.), and the first area to fall to French rule (mid-19th Century), Cochinchina had been administered by the French directly as



a colony, while Annam remained under the Emperor as a French protectorate. While the mandarin rule of the Annamese court was more a matter of form than substance, Annam's public administration preserved a degree of unity among the Vietnamese despite the impress of French culture. In South Vietnam, the French seemed to be a wholly divisive influence. Though Cochinchina was the site of some of the achievements of which French colonialists were most proud--the chief seat of the rubber industry, and focus of major feats of engineering with canals and railroads--the Cochinchinese seem to recall less the triumphs of French civilization than its burdens: the French rubber plantations, abrasive with their labor, high-handed with local peoples; the oppressive taxes, and the French controlled monopolies on salt, alcohol and opium; recurrent famine in the midst of one of the earth's richest farming regions; socially restrictive schooling; modernizing challenges to familial piety, village centralism, and other cherished fundamentals of Viet culture. While Annam--and Tonkin to the north--developed indigenous political movements opposing French rule, these were mainly foreign-based, foreign-oriented parties, such as the Nationalist Party (VNQDD), a Vietnamese copy of the Kuomintang, or the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) of the Comintern, headed by Russian-trained Ho Chi Minh. In Cochinchina, however, there emerged a number of nationalist movements peculiar to that region, or principally based on that region. Saigon, for example, developed a range of leftist movements competitive with the ICP, including two Trotskyite parties, as well as a number of VNQDD splinter movements, and a politically active gangster fraternity, the Binh Xuyen. But the important differences were in the countryside, where millions of Vietnamese joined wholly Cochinchinese religious sects which propagated xenophobic nationalism, established theocracies, and fielded armed forces. French and Japanese policy had deliberately fostered conflict among these

several factions to the extent that Cochinchina was, in 1954, literally fractioned among the religious sects, the Binh Xuyen, and the Viet Minh. While by 1954 the Viet Minh dominated Annam and the Highlands, control of Cochinchina eluded them, for all their ruthless efficiency.

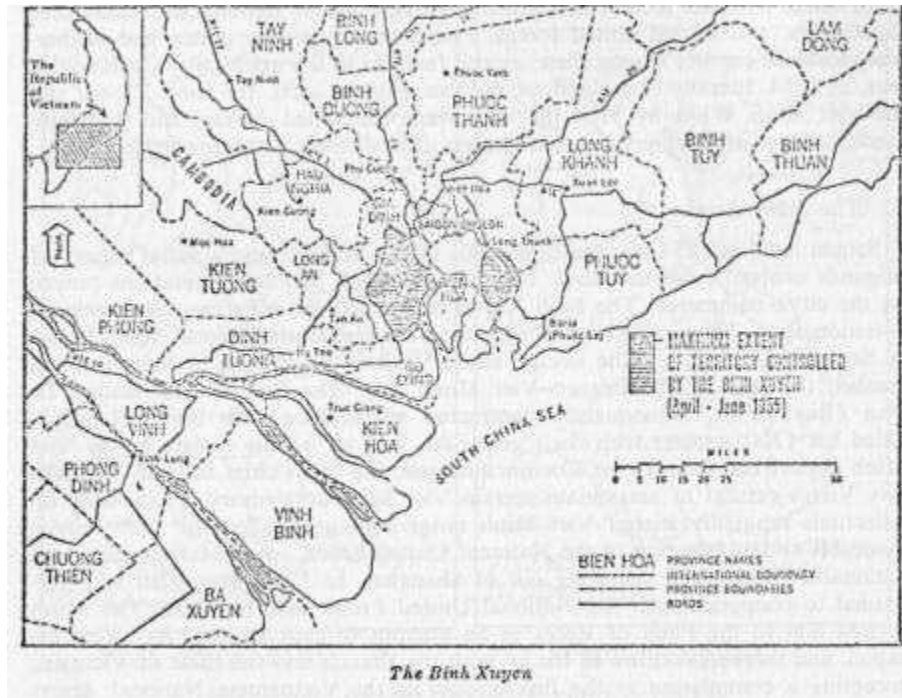
1. The Binh Xuyen

Saigon itself in 1954 was under the rule of the Binh Xuyen, a secret society of brigands evolved from the Black Flag pirates which had for generations preyed on the city's commerce. The Binh Xuyen ethos included a fierce--albeit eclectic--nationalism. They collaborated with the Japanese during World War II, and in September, 1945, led the savage attack against the French in Saigon which marked the start of the Franco-Viet Minh War. The Binh Xuyen leader, Le Van (Bay) Vien, subsequently contracted an alliance with the Viet Minh, allied his 1300 soldiers with their guerrillas, and served for a time as the Viet Minh deputy commander for Cochinchina and one of its chief sources of funds. Bay Vien's refusal to assassinate certain Viet Minh-condemned Vietnamese intellectuals reputedly stirred Viet Minh misgivings, and called the Binh Xuyen favorably to the attention of the National United Front, an anti-communist, Viet nationalist group then operating out of Shanghai. In 1947, Bay Vien was persuaded to cooperate with the National United Front. Informed, the Viet Minh invited him to the Plain of Reeds in an attempt to capture him. Bay Vien escaped, and thereupon threw in his lot with the French and the State of Vietnam, accepting a commission as the first colonel of the Vietnamese National Army. Bay Vien afterwards paid Bao Dai what Colonel Lansdale termed "a staggering sum" for control of gambling and prostitution in Cholon, and of the Saigon-Cholon police. The French accepted the arrangement because Bay Vien offset the Viet Minh threat to Saigon. By 1954, Bay Vien was operating "Grande Monde," a gambling slum in Cholon; "Cloche d'Or," Saigon's preeminent gambling establishment; the "Noveautes Catinat," Saigon's best department store; a hundred smaller shops; a fleet of river boats; and a brothel, spectacular even by Asian standards, known as the Hall of Mirrors. Besides a feudal fief south of Saigon, he owned an opium factory and distribution system, and held substantial interests in fish, charcoal, hotels, and rubber plantations. Besides the police apparatus and other followers numbering 5000 to 8000, he had some 2500 soldiers at his disposal. He ruled Saigon absolutely; not even Viet Minh terrorists were able to operate there. Moreover, he exercised significant influence over the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao leaders.

2. The Cao Dai

The Cao Dai were a religious sect founded by a colonial bureaucrat named Ngo Van Chieu, who with one Pham Cong Tac conducted a series of spiritualist seances from which emerged a new religious faith, and in the early 1920's, a "church" with clerical organization similar to Roman Catholicism. The doctrine of the Cao Dai was syncretic, melding veneration of Christ, Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tze with a curious occultism which deified such diverse figures as Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, and Sun Yat Sen. With the dissolution of the authority of the central government during the 1940's and early 1950's, the Cao Dai acquired increasing political and military autonomy. The sect's

1,500,000 to 2,000,000 faithful comprised a loose theocracy centered in Tay Ninh, the border province northwest of Saigon.



The Cao Dai, too, cooperated first with the Japanese, and then with the Viet Minh; and the Cao Dai leadership also found the latter uncomfortable allies. In 1947, the Cao Dai realigned with the French, agreeing to secure with their forces specified rural areas against the Viet Minh in return for military assistance. Although plagued throughout its history by minor heresy and factional disputes, the Cao Dai became the largest political movement in Cochinchina; the Cao Dai shared with the Hoa Hao the distinction of being the only important political forces to originate in the Vietnamese peasantry. When Diem came to power in 1954, Pham Cong Tac, the Cao Dai Pope, had declared for Bao Dai, controlled some 15,000 to 20,000 armed followers, and ruled the region northwest of Saigon.

3. *The Hoa Hao*

Southwest of Saigon there existed the Hoa Hao, a newer sect, similarly endowed with politico-military autonomy, which repeatedly clashed with the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen. In 1939, a mystic faith healer named Huynh Phu So, from a village named Hoa Hao, launched a reformed Hinayana Buddhist movement which swiftly acquired a wide following. (Among the Vietnamese whom Huynh Phu So favorably impressed was Ngo Dinh Diem.) Huynh Phu So enjoyed Japanese protection, and with their aid, in 1944 the Hoa Hao formed armed bands, among the leaders of which there was one Tran Van Soai. A Viet Minh attempt to gain the assistance of the Hoa Hao failed, and the Viet Minh on 8 September 1945 massacred hundreds of Hoa Hao faithful in the town of Can Tho. Tran Van Soai replied in kind, and in the ensuing weeks Can Tho became the center of

extensive slaughter. French intervention stopped the violence, but turned the Hoa Hao against the French. In April, 1947, the Viet Minh executed Huynh Phu So, which caused Tran Van Soai to rally with 2,000 armed men to the French. He was accepted into the French Expeditionary Corps with the rank of general, and assigned the mission of pacifying his own region. The French from that time forward, until 1955, paid the salaries of the Hoa Hao soldiers. At the time Diem came to office in 1954, the sect had some 1,500,000 believers, controlled most of the Mekong Delta region, and had 10,000 to 15,000 men under arms.

4. The Viet Minh

In 1954, the Viet Minh controlled some 60 to 90 percent of South Vietnam's villages (by French estimates) and 30 to 40 percent of its territory (by U.S. estimates). The bulk of organized Viet Minh forces were located in Annam and the Highlands, proximate to Tonkin, and in regions free of competition from the armed sects. In Cochinchina, they were militarily strongest in areas along the Cambodian border and in the Camau peninsula of the extreme south remote from the principal concentrations of people. Nonetheless, their political organization was pervasive, and in some localities, e.g., Quang Ngai province in Annam, the Viet Minh were the only effective government. A hierarchy of Viet Minh committees paralleled the formal government from the village Administrative and Resistance Committee (ARC) through district, province, and what the Viet Minh termed "interzone" or "region." No reliable estimates exist of the numbers of cadres involved in this apparatus, but Viet Minh military forces of all types south of the 17th parallel probably numbered around 100,000. When orders were issued for the Geneva regroupment, the "provisional assembly areas" designated coincided with the areas in which Viet Minh strength had been greatest. During the time allowed for collecting forces for the move north, the Viet Minh evidently undertook to bank the fires of revolution by culling out of their units trained and reliable cadres for "demobilization," "recruiting" youth--forcibly in many instances--to take their place, and caching weapons. Particularly in Annam and the Highlands, then, the Viet Minh posed a significant challenge to Ngo Dinh Diem. His test of strength with the Viet Minh, however, was to be deferred by the Geneva Settlement and DRV policy for some years.

5. Anti-Colonialism

The political prospects of Ngo Dinh Diem when he accepted the premiership from Bao Dai were dimmed not only by Viet Minh residue, and by the existence of the armed sects, but by the taint of colonialism. As far as most Cochinchinese peasants were concerned, Diem was linked to Bao Dai, and to the corrupt, French dominated government he headed. Studies of peasant attitudes conducted in recent years have demonstrated that for many, the struggle which began in 1945 against colonialism continued uninterrupted throughout Diem's regime: in 1954, the foes of nationalists were transformed from France and Bao Dai, to Diem and the U.S.--My-Diem, American-Diem, became the universal term of Viet Cong opprobrium--but the issues at stake never changed. There was, moreover, some substance to the belief that Diem represented no change, in that, although Ngo Dinh Diem took office before the Geneva Settlement as prime minister

with "full powers civil and military," he did not acquire actual administrative autonomy until September, 1954; proclaim independence until January, 1955; or take command of his army until February, 1955. There was performed a significant carry-over of civil servants from the pre-Diem days. The national flag and the national anthem remained unchanged. Moreover, the laws remained substantially as they had been: the land-holdings, against which was directed much peasant discontent, were based on pre-Diem law; and old legal proscriptions against nationalist political activities remained on the books during Diem's tenure of office. The onus of colonialism was among the heavy burdens which Ngo Dinh Diem had to shoulder from the outset.

B. NGO DINH DIEM: BASIS OF POWER

1. Political Origins

Why amid the military disasters of spring 1954, Bao Dai, head of the State of Vietnam, chose Ngo Dinh Diem from among other Vietnamese nationalists to form a government, has long been debated. Diem was an Annamese Catholic who in his youth had some experience in public administration, first as governor of Phan Thiet province, and then Minister of Interior at Bao Dai's Imperial Court in Hue. In 1933 Diem discovered, after a year in the latter office, that reforms he had been promised were being blocked by high French and Annamite officials. He promptly resigned his office and went into political retirement—an act which earned him modest fame for integrity. Through the years of war and distress in his homeland thereafter, Diem had hewed to attentisme, and by refusing public office, had avoided the political discoloration which besmirched more involved Viet nationalists. Bao Dai had sought him for his premier in 1945, Ho Chi Minh for the DRV government in 1946, the French for their "solutions" in 1947 and 1949—all unsuccessfully. Hence, Diem's reputation for incorruptible nationalism, to the extent that he enjoyed one in 1954, was based on an event 20 years old and a long period of political aloofness. He did come from a prominent family; a brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc was a leading Catholic clergyman with countrywide connections, and the family proper retained some considerable influence in Annam. But his personal handicaps were considerable: bachelor, ascetic, shy, inexperienced, he seemed ill-fit for the seething intrigues of Saigon.

One school of conjecture holds that the French pressed him upon Bao Dai in the belief that under him the newly independent State of Vietnam would founder; another that Bao Dai advanced him to power convinced that his inevitable failure would eliminate him as a political competitor. There are those who believe that Diem was foisted upon the Vietnamese and the French by a cabal of prominent American Catholics and a CIA agent. It can be said that Diem was relatively well acquainted among leading Americans, and that Bao Dai might correctly have regarded Diem's contacts in the United States as a possible source of support for Vietnam. Whatever the reasons for his selection, however, at the time he took office there were few who regarded Diem as promising, and fewer still openly willing to back him. Indeed, from the time he took office on 7 July 1954, until the following May, he was virtually alone. Unaided by Bao Dai, opposed by the French, and proffered by Americans mainly advice, criticism, and promises—but scant material

assistance-Ngo Dinh Diem in ten months surmounted the partition of his nation by the Geneva powers, two threatened military coups by his Army Chiefs of Staff, frenetic clashes with the Binh Xuyen armed sects, the withdrawal of the Viet Minh, and the influx of 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam.

2. Early U.S.-Diem Relations

Diem's durability was one of those surprises in Vietnam which prompted Americans thereafter to refer to the "miracle in Vietnam." On 7 December 1954, Senator Mansfield judged that U.S. "prospects for helping Diem strengthen and uphold South Vietnam look very dim." U.S. Ambassador Heath reported from Saigon on 17 December 1954 a dim view of Diem's chances since "there is every evidence that the French do not want Diem to succeed." In a January, 1955, report to the National Security Council, General J. Lawton Collins agreed with both analyses. On 7 April 1955, Collins cabled from Saigon that: ". . . it is my considered judgment that the man lacks the personal qualities of leadership and the executive ability successfully to head a government that must compete with the unity of purpose and efficiency of the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh." On 19 April, Collins again cabled: "I see no alternative to the early replacement of Diem."

On 26 April 1955, U.S. National Intelligence Estimate 63.1-2-55, "Possible Developments in South Vietnam," took the view that:

A political impasse exists in Saigon where the legally constituted government of Premier Diem is being challenged by a venal special interest group, the Binh Xuyen, which controls the National Security Police, and is temporarily allied with some elements of the religious sects....

Even if the present impasse were resolved, we believe that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress toward developing a strong, stable anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva agreement, and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists.....

But opinion in Washington swung sharply when, in late April, Diem managed to survive a severe test of arms with his army and the sects. Senators Mansfield and Knowland issued strong statements of support for him, and on May 2 Senator Hubert Humphrey told the Senate that:

Premier Diem is the best hope that we have in South Vietnam. He is the leader of his people. He deserves and must have the wholehearted support of the American Government and our foreign policy. This is no time for uncertainty or half-hearted measures. . . . He is the only man on the political horizon of Vietnam who can rally a substantial degree of support of his people. . . . If we have any comments about the leadership in Vietnam let it be directed against Bao Dai. . . . If the Government of South Vietnam has not room for both these men, it is Bao Dai who must go....

On 9 May 1955, the Joint Chiefs of Staff judged that "the government of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem shows the greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam." Five months later, on 11 October, 1955, the National Intelligence Estimate was revised. In NIE 63.1-3-55, 'Probable Developments in Vietnam to July 1956,' the U.S. Intelligence Advisory Committee found it possible to be more sanguine concerning Diem's prospects:

Diem has made considerable progress toward establishing the first fully independent Vietnamese government. . . . He faced a basically unstable and deteriorating situation. . . . The most significant articulate political sentiments of the bulk of the population was an antipathy for the French combined with a personal regard for Ho Chi Minh as the symbol of Vietnamese nationalism....

Diem was forced to move slowly. Although possessing considerable national prestige as a patriot, he was inexperienced in administration and was confronted at the outset by the intrigues of Bao Dai and other self-interested individuals and groups, who in many cases benefited from French support....

Diem concentrated on eliminating or neutralizing the most important groups and individuals challenging the authority of his government....By bribery, persuasion, and finally force, Diem virtually eliminated the Binh Xuyen and the most important elements of the Hoa Hao sects as threats to his authority. At the same time, he maneuvered the Cao Dai--the strongest of the sects--into an uneasy alliance. As a result of these successful actions, Diem gained prestige and increased popularity as a symbol of Diem's efforts to establish a viable anti-communist government are still in doubt....

Provided the Communists do not exercise their capabilities to attack across the 17th Parallel or to initiate large-scale guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam, Diem will probably make further progress in developing a more effective government. His position will probably be strengthened as a result of increased popular support, the continued loyalty of the VNA, and a deterioration in the strength and cohesiveness of his non-Communist opposition. The national government will probably increase the number of rural communities under its control, particularly in areas now held by the sects....

It is likely that Diem's stormy first 10 months in office, June, 1954 to May, 1955, strongly conditioned his behavior in later years. He must have been impressed almost at once with the political importance of the army, and the essentiality of personally loyal ranking officers. He chose openly to oppose the armed sects against the advice of both his American and French advisers, and his success no doubt instilled confidence in his own judgments. The same events probably gave him reason thereafter to value head-on confrontation with a foe over conciliation or compromise. And in his adamant stand against consultations with the DRV on plebescite, again contrary to initial American advice, he no doubt learned that on major issues the U.S. stake in his future was sufficiently high that he could lead, and American policy would follow. In any event, he moved with new assurance from mid-1955 forward. In many respects his first 300 days

were his finest hours, when he was moving alone, rapidly, and with determination against great odds.

3. Political Concepts: Family Centralism and Personalism

But Diem's early victories were essentially negative, in eliminating or bypassing obstacles. It remained for him to provide programs for finding homes and occupations for the refugees, for solving the politically crucial problems of rural land distribution and taxation, for installing capable and incorrupt public administrators, for stimulating the economy, for improving the education system-in short, for coping with the whole broad range of problems of governing a developing nation, each rendered especially acute by South Vietnam's war trauma, internal dissention, and partition from North Vietnam. To cite but a few: 600,000 refugees were dependent on his government for subsistence; 85,000 people were jobless as a result of the French troop withdrawal; inter-provincial communications were impaired-700 miles of main road were war-damaged, one third of the railway trackage lay destroyed, 68 concrete bridges on 860 miles of track lay blown. In devising programs to meet these challenges, Diem worked from two primal concepts: family centralism, and "personalism" as a state philosophy.

Diem was raised in a Mandarin family, born to a tradition of high position in the social hierarchy and governmental bureaucracy. It was also a Catholic family, and Diem received a heritage of obdurate devotion to Christianity under intense persecution-within a century of his birth one hundred relatives had been burned to death by Buddhists in central Annam. His rearing developed his reverence for the past, a capacity for hard work, and a deep seated piety. Two French authors believed that his outlook on life was "born of a profound, of an immense nostalgia for the Vietnamese past, of a desperate filial respect for the society of ancient Annam." There was some thought of his becoming a priest, but he elected public administration; his elder brother Thuc, the cleric, is said to have speculated that Diem found himself too inflexible, too willful, too severe for the priesthood. But above all else, Diem's early years impressed upon him the importance of family in performing the duties of station: the family was the first means of extending personal power, the essential mode of political expression. It is possible that Diem resorted to nepotism simply because he lacked a personal political apparatus which would have permitted him to operate otherwise, but nepotism became the style of his rule, and it was quite consistent with his upbringing.

"Society," said Diem, "functions through personal relations among men at the top." One brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, received the title of Advisor to the President, and controlled the semi-covert Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party. His wife, Madame Nhu, became the President's official hostess, a deputy in the National Assembly, and the founder-chairman of the Woman's Solidarity Movement. Her father became one of Diem's ambassadors, and his wife the GVN observer at the UN. A second brother of Diem, Ngo Dinh Can, became the virtual overlord of Annam, holding no official position, but ruling the region in all respects. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, the Archbishop of Hue and Primate of Vietnam, also held no office, but functioned as Presidential advisor, and levered Catholic opinion on behalf of Diem. A fourth brother, Ngo Dinh Luyen, became an Ambassador.

Three family members--Tran Van Chuong, Tran Van Do, and Tran Van Bac--served in Diem's first cabinet, and two other in-laws, Nguyen Huu Chau and Tran Trung Dung, held the key portfolios of Secretary of State at the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State for National Defense. One of the reasons General Collins opposed Diem may be a letter he received in April, 1955, from a group of nationalists headed by former Premier Nguyen Phan Long, urging the United States to withdraw its support of Diem on the grounds that his brothers were effectively isolating Diem politically. The observation proved to be correct: Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can increasingly gathered power into their own hands, and non-family politicians found themselves quietly shunted aside. Gradually, a concentration of power also occurred within the family circle, again toward Nhu, Mme Nhu and Can, and at the expense of the more remotely related. The President's family thus became an entirely extra-legal elite which in class and geographic origin, as well as religion, was distinct from the South Vietnamese as a whole.

The Diem family circle was promptly targeted by gossipers. In Saigon, rumors were the political medium, and stories were soon rampant that members of the family were looting the government. By 1957, the whispering campaign against the Nhus mounted to such proportions that they issued a public statement denying that they had ever removed money from the country, engaged in financial or commercial speculation, or accepted bribes. But the impression remained, fed by numerous credible reports of official graft at lower levels, that whether or not the Diem family took for personal gain, they took.

Another disadvantage proceeded from the Diem's familial concentration of power: bureaucratic overcentralization; Diem himself seems to have been peculiarly at fault in this instance, reserving for himself the power of decision in minute matters, and refusing to delegate authority to subordinates who might have relieved him of a crushing administrative burden. In part, this may have been simply inexperience in handling a large enterprise, but there seems to have been deeper, philosophical reasons--a passion for perfection, a distrust of other men, a conviction that all subordinates required his paternalistic guidance. The result was an impairment of an administrative system already crippled by the absence of French civil servants. Subordinate officials, incapable of making decisions, fearful of making them, or forbidden to make them, passed upward even minute matters on paper to the brothers Ngo, glutting the communications of government, and imposing long delays on all, even important actions.

Personalism, as Diem called his personal political philosophy, was a melange of Asian and European notions which resembled the French Catholic *personnalisme* of Emmanuel Mounier, or the Encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI. More accurately, it was a blend of Christianity, Marxism, and Confucianism which stressed the development of each individual's moral character as the basis for community progress toward democracy. Diem saw himself as a reformer, even a revolutionary, in the moral realm. His central social message was that each citizen achieved moral fulfillment or harmony only if he applied himself energetically to his civic duties, avoiding on the one hand the selfishness of capitalism, and on the other, the selflessness of Marxist collectivism. "The basis for democracy can only be a spiritual one," said Diem in his Message to the National

Assembly on the Constitution of 1956, and in New Delhi in 1957, he took Asians to task for losing sight of the spiritual essence of their political traditions:

...Does not our spirituality of which we are so proud, simply conceal a narrow conservatism and a form of escapism from concrete responsibility? . . . Has not Buddhist compassion become a pretext for not practicing justice . . . And is not tolerance, which so many can mistake for freedom, the result of paternalistic indulgence?

And the same year, in Korea, he spoke of his hopes for restoring the spiritual strength of Vietnam after "the tremendous material and political difficulties which assailed Vietnam after Geneva had plunged even the best of her sons into a state of apprehension colored with despair....."

We pursue two aims.

First we want to rearm the Vietnamese citizen morally and to make him impervious to all tyranny whatever its origin.

Second, we want to reinforce the spiritual cohesion of the Vietnamese people, cohesion which accounts for capacity to enjoy a largely decentralized system without falling into anarchy. Yet this cohesion has been largely shaken by the impact of the west.

Yet man does not live only by the idea of liberty. He must be given a minimum of material support which will guarantee that liberty .

A GVN approved biography of Diem explained that he recognized in communism the antithesis of true freedom, precisely because communism denied the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Personalism was the answer therefore to communism, since:

Personalism is a system based on the divine, therefore spiritual law, which . . . extols man's transcendent value . . . The practice of Personalism is symbolic of good citizenship with a highly developed civic spirit....

Late in Diem's reign, when his combat with the communists had been fully joined, these vague precepts were elaborated by his brother, Nhu, but hardly clarified:

The personalist conception holds that freedom in an underdeveloped society is not something that is simply given or bestowed. It can only be achieved through militancy and vigilance, by doing away with all pretensions and pretexts for not realistically applying ourselves to our goals. In a situation of underdevelopment, and during a bleeding war of internal division, it may be argued that there is reason enough not to seek to develop democracy, but our personalist approach is precisely militant in denying this. Human rights and human dignity are not static phenomenons. They are only possibilities which men must actively seek and deserve, not just beg for. In this sense, of believing in the process of constantly perfecting of oneself in moral as well as practical ways our

personalist approach is similar to Confucianism. Personalism stresses hard work, and it is the working class, the peasants, who are better able to understand the concept than the intellectuals. We must use Personalist methods to realize democracy at the level where people are fighting and working, and in our new scale of values it is those who participate physically and selflessly in the fight against communism who are most privileged, then those who courageously serve the villages without profit, and finally those who engage diligently in productive labor for their own as well as for their villages' benefit....

Some American observers found these ideas with their emphasis on "democracy" reassuring. Others, including General Edward Lansdale, urged on Diem broader ideological strategies of forming a "front" embracing the concepts of more traditional Viet nationalist parties.

"Personalism," like Diem's Spanish-style Catholicism, harbored little tolerance; merely different political theories were interpreted as competitive, and even dangerous. Personalism thus limited Diem's political horizons, and almost certainly impaired his government's ability to communicate with the peasantry. "Personalism" became the official philosophy of the state, and though government employees were required to attend weekly sessions on its tenets, it never succeeded in becoming much more than the cant of Diem's administration, and the credo of the two political parties organized and directly controlled by his family.

4. Political Parties

The latter were peculiarly Diemist: paternally authoritarian, organized as an extension of family power. The pivotal organization was the Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party (*Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang*), an apparatus devised and controlled by Ngo Dinh Nhu, semi-covert, self-effacing, but with members stationed at all the levers of power within Saigon, and a web of informants everywhere in the country. Nhu envisaged the Can Lao as the vanguard of Diem's undertakings, and it became in fact the backbone of the regime. Drawing intelligence from agents at all echelons of government in the village, in factories, schools, military units, the Can Lao sought to detect the corrupt or disloyal citizen, and was empowered to bring him to arrest and trial. The Can Lao, unfortunately for Diem's political flexibility, concentrated on disloyalty. Ngo Dinh Nhu, who admitted that the Can Lao closely resembled the communists in organization and technique, used it to stifle all political sentiment competitive or opposed to Ngo Dinh Diem.

The other Diemist party was an open, "mass party," the National Revolutionary Movement (*Phong Trao Cach Mang Quoc Gia*). Diem himself was the honorary leader of the Party, and it was the official vehicle for his political movement. The Party claimed to have grown from 10,000 members in 1955 to 1,500,000 in 1959. In that time it acquired a majority in the National Assembly, and amassed strong voting records for Diem and NRM candidates in elections at all levels. The Party claims to have originated in "clandestine struggle for the revolution of national independence and human emancipation" at the time Diem resigned from Bao Dai's government in 1933, but properly it came into being in October, 1954. The NRM was closely associated with the

National Revolutionary Civil Servants League (*Lien Doan Cong Chuc Mang Quoc Gia*), and since membership in the latter was a concomitant of government employment, the civil service became the core of the NRM. The relationship also established a NRM-League hierarchy parallel to, and in most instances identical with, the government hierarchy down to the village level. Obviously, too, the arrangement equated a party membership with distinct advantages in dealing with the government. NRM strength figures were probably exaggerated, and its active members--those who attended party functions and political indoctrination sessions--were those in the League; the NRM was, in effect, a party of government employees or dependents.

Diem did not involve himself directly in the managing of either the Can Lao or the NRM. The former, as mentioned, was always the creature of Nhu. Nhu also controlled the southern branches of the NRM, but in Annam and portions of the Central Highlands the NRM was the tightly held instrument of Ngo Dinh Can. Can brooked no opposition whatsoever; Nhu, more confident in the regions where the Can Lao was most efficient, occasionally permitted some political activity by minority groups, such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, and the Socialists. But that activity was tolerated only so long as it was pro-Diem and supporting, rather than opposing, GVN policy.

These were the ideas and the political apparatus by which Ngo Dinh Diem sought to weld together a nation in the aftermath of Geneva. Their narrowness, their inappropriateness for most Cochinchinese and Annamites, virtually assured that the history of his regime, after its initial successes, would become an almost unbroken record of alienation of one portion after another of the Vietnamese body politic. This process of alienation accentuated the failures of the Geneva Settlement, and ultimately led to Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination.

C. CONFLICT WITH THE ARMED SECTS

1. Defeat of the Binh Xuyen

At the time he took office, Diem controlled scarcely a few blocks of Saigon, the capital remaining firmly in the control of Bay Vien and the Binh Xuyen. Beginning in September, 1954, Diem tried to divide and conquer the sects. Four leaders from each of the religious sects were brought into his cabinet in an effort to isolate the Binh Xuyen, and with U.S. assistance he sought to integrate the sect forces into the national army. He enjoyed some initial success in rallying Cao Dai forces, and confident from assurances of direct American aid, he shut down, in January, 1955, the Binh Xuyen concessions in Saigon and Cholon. In the ensuing confrontation, the Binh Xuyen swung the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao into a United Front of Nationalist Forces, and, although French aid for their forces had formally been withdrawn, continued to draw on French funds and advice. On March 29, 1955, fighting broke in Saigon in which sections of the city were burned. Although a truce was struck, the affair polarized relations between Diem and the sects; between Diem and General Collins, whose advice to conciliate he elected not to follow; and between the Americans and the French, over the viability of Diem. Washington apparently decided at that juncture to temporize with the sects, and to find an alternative

to Diem. Before the instructions could be sent to Saigon, however, fighting was renewed. Even as the battle was joined, Bao Dai telegraphed orders to Diem to travel to France. Diem disobeyed, and, convinced of his moral grounds in attacking the Binh Xuyen, committed his forces to combat. His brother, Nhu, coopted a "Revolutionary Committee" to confer emergency authority on Diem. They were immediately successful, and by mid-May, 1955, the Binh Xuyen had been driven into the Rung Sat swamp east of Saigon, and their power in Saigon was broken. Bay Vien escaped to Paris.

2. Victory over the Sects

Diem's forces then ranged out after the other armed factions. Tran Van Soai of the Hoa Hao surrendered, and was given asylum. Another Hoa Hao leader, Ba Cut--who had cut off a finger to remind himself to fight the French, and had sworn not to cut his hair until Vietnam was reunited--was captured while negotiating surrender in return for a commission as lieutenant general in the ARVN. Other leaders were bribed, and the remainder fled or rallied to the GVN. By the end of 1955, Diem appeared to have dealt finally with the challenge of the sects.

It was this apparent success which enabled Diem to survive successfully pressures from an even more powerful set of opponents: those among his Western allies who were determined to replace him. The dimensions of his victory in Vietnam were just becoming evident when in May, 1955, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization convened. There promptly developed a sharp division of view between the French and the Americans. Bao Dai made known his opposition to Diem, and the French threatened to pull out of Vietnam unless Diem were removed. From Paris, Secretary Dulles reported that the French held that:

...Time something to be done to avoid civil war. France warned that armed conflict--first civil war, then guerrilla warfare, then terrorism--would result if we failed to take action New Revolutionary Committee . . . is strongly under Viet Minh influence . . . There is violent campaign against French and French Expeditionary Corps. Viet Minh agents make good use of it and certain Americans do not seem sufficiently aware of this. French Govt does not wish to have its army act as platform for Viet Minh propaganda. Army will not be maintained in Vietnam at any cost . . . Continuing with Diem would have three disastrous results:

- (1) . . . Viet Minh victory
- (2) . . . focus hostility of everyone on the French, and
- (3) . . . begin a Franco-U.S. breach...

The French then proposed to the U.S. that the French Expeditionary Corps be withdrawn, and asked if the U.S. were willing to guarantee French civilians, and the refugees. From Washington, the following instructions to Dulles were returned promptly:

President's only comment on Vietnam section of (your telegram) was to reiterate position that U.S. could not afford to have forces committed in such undesirable areas as Vietnam. This, of course, is JCS view in past. Am asking Defense and JCS views...

Asked, the JCS took the position that the question was fundamentally beyond their purview, that neither the ARVN nor the French Expeditionary Corps seemed capable of preserving the integrity of South Vietnam against a Viet Minh onslaught, and that being debarred from furnishing arms by the Geneva Agreement, the U.S. was in no position to protect French nationals. They suggested that Secretary Dulles be advised that:

- a. The government of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem shows the greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam.
- b. The U.S. could not guarantee the security of the French nationals should the French Expeditionary Corps be withdrawn.
- c. Possible United States actions under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty could ultimately afford security to Vietnam equal to that provided by the continued presence of the French Expeditionary Corps.

In Paris, Secretary Dulles managed to mollify the French. A key development was a message from Malcolm MacDonald, the British representative in Southeast Asia, urging against Diem's replacement at that time. MacDonald, who was among Diem's severest critics-he once remarked of Diem that "He's the worst prime minister I have ever seen"-aligned the British with Dulles, and eventually the French acquiesced in further support of Diem.

The defeat of the sects also opened a domestic political opportunity for Diem. The Popular Revolutionary Committee his brother Nhu had formed during the height of the sect crisis was a "front" of broad political complexion-the membership included prominent nationalists and, as the French had pointed out, two former Viet Minh leaders; it therefore had some substance as what Nhu termed the "democratic revolutionary forces of the nation." The Revolutionary Committee urged the dissolution of the Bao Dai government, and the organizing of general elections for a National Assembly. Nhu acted under its mandate, setting up a popular referendum in which, on October 23, 1955, an overwhelming vote for Diem in preference to Bao Dai was recorded. The Revolutionary Committee dissolved itself on 31 October, apparently under some pressure from Diem and his brother.

3. The Triumph Reappraised

But it is important to note that Diem's military victory over the sects, while impressive, was by no means complete, and was certainly not as decisive as some Americans were led to believe. For example, an NSC report of 1958 mentioned that the Vietnamese Armed Forces were still operating against the sects, and had "succeeded in practically eliminating the Binh Xuyen and Cao Dai forces..." The Deputy Chief, MAAG, Vietnam,

stated in April, 1959, that: "The Binh Xuyen group was completely eliminated as a menace. The Cao Dai group was pacified or reoriented. . . . The Hoa Hao had been reduced to a handful of the diehards..." These estimates notwithstanding, Binh Xuyen remnants fought off an ARVN force north of Bien Hoa, in 1956, and marauded along the Saigon River north of Saigon in Binh Duong province throughout 1957 and 1958. In 1958, an insurgent force, among whom Binh Xuyen were identified, sacked the Michelin rubber plantations near Dau Tieng, and in March, 1959, ARVN had a number of encounters with Binh Xuyen elements in the Binh Duong-Bien Hoa area. There is evidence, though scanty, which indicates that the Binh Xuyen survivors joined with "communist" groups for their depredations; for example, in the 1958 Michelin attack the combined gangster-communist strength was reported to be 300-400. ARVN General Nguyen Chanh Thi, who fought these particular forces, has told of capturing a Binh Xuyen soldier who died under torture without admitting more than that his band had been communicating with communist forces from Tay Ninh province. The general also described capturing in March, 1959, in the same operations, flags identical to that raised in late 1960 by the "National Liberation Front."

In 1956, the Cao Dai Pope, Pham Cong Tac, crossed the frontier of Tay Ninh into Cambodia with a number of his followers, thence to remain in opposition to Diem. Bay Dom, who had been the deputy of the captured Hoa Hao leader, Ba Cut, also took his forces to the Cambodian border. In 1956, Diem sent Ba Cut, his hair still uncut, to the guillotine. Bay Dom and another Hoa Hao leader, Muoi Tn, then took an oath to avenge Ba Cut, and opened guerrilla warfare against Diem. Some four Hoa Hao battalions are reported to have conducted operations against the GVN continuously through 1962. Muoi Tn in later years openly embraced the Viet Cong cause.

In brief, while Diem's victory over the sects was impressive, it was not wholly conclusive, and the very obduracy and determination which won him early tactical success seemed to impede his inducing the remaining sect dissidents to perform a constructive role in the nation. Rather, his policy invited a Viet Cong- sect alliance against him. That some of the more startling early defeats of Diem's ARVN forces by Viet Cong in 1959 and 1960 occurred in the regions north of Saigon, where lurked Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen remnants, is more than coincidental.

D. RURAL PACIFICATION

1. Strategy

Americans tended to look at Diem's skein of military and political successes in 1955 with satisfaction, and to regard thereafter Vietnam's internal security with growing complacency. But Ngo Dinh Diem did not. To the contrary, Diem seemed, if anything, over-conscious of the fact that his test with the Viet Minh lay ahead, and that they posed a threat more dangerous than the sects could ever have been, not only because they were politically more pervasive, and not only because they had taught a generation of Vietnamese peasants the techniques of armed conspiracy, but also because their tenets offered competing solutions to the most pressing problems of the Vietnamese people:

land and livelihood. Diem's counter is difficult to fault as a broad concept: ARVN forces would reclaim for the GVN regions formerly held by the Viet Minh; political indoctrination teams moving with the troops would carry the message of Diem's revolution to the people; and then a broad follow-up program of Civic Action- political and social development, land reform, and agricultural improvements would be inaugurated to meet fully the aspirations of the people. That these plans miscarried was due in part to the resistance of the farmers they were intended to benefit, reacting sometimes under Viet Cong leadership, sometimes simply out of peasant conservatism. But a principal portion of the blame for failure must be attributed to Diem's inept, overbearing, or corrupt officials, to Diem's own unremitting anti-communist zeal, and to the failure of both he and his American advisers to appreciate the magnitude of the tasks they set for themselves, or the time required to enact meaningful reform.

2. Reoccupying Viet Minh Territory

The first steps were faltering. In early 1955, ARVN units were sent to establish the GVN in the Camau Peninsula in the southernmost part of the country. Poorly led, ill-trained, and heavy-handed, the troops behaved towards the people very much as the Viet Minh had led the farmers to expect. Accompanying GVN propaganda teams were more effective, assailing communism, colonialism, and feudalism--meaning the rule of Francophile Vietnamese, such as Bao Dai's--and distributing pictures of Diem to replace the omnipresent tattered portraits of Ho. A subsequent operation in Quang Nai and Binh Dinh, Operation Giai Phong, reportedly went off more smoothly. Under ARVN Colonel Le Van Kim, the troops behaved well toward the people, and the propagandists exploited Viet Minh errors to the extent that, as the last Viet Minh soldiers marched down toward their ships, the populace jeered them. American advisers were active, and Diem himself visited this operation a week after the last Viet Minh had left, receiving what the Americans present considered a spontaneous welcome by the peasants. Nonetheless, the Cau Mau experience became more typical of the ARVN than the Binh Dinh affair. Foreign observers frequently expressed opinion of the ARVN in terms similar to the 1957 view of correspondent David Hotham, who wrote that "far from giving security, there is every reason to suppose that the army, buttressed by the Civil Guard . . . is regarded by the Southern peasant as a symbol of insecurity and repression."

3. Civic Action

Nor were the follow-up Civic Action teams significantly more effective. These were patterned after the GAM's (Groupes Administratifs Mobiles) with which the French had experimented, modified to incorporate U.S.-Filipino experience. In theory, they were to have been drawn from the urban elite, to help the government establish communications with the rural folk. Acting on the doctrine of "Three Withs: eat, sleep, and work with the people"--some 1400 to 1800 "cadre" undertook: census and surveys of the physical needs of villages; building schools, maternity hospitals, information halls; repairing and enlarging local roads; digging wells and irrigation canals; teaching personal and public hygiene; distributing medicine; teaching children by day, and anti-illiteracy classes by

night; forming village militia; conducting political meetings; and publicizing agrarian reform legislation.

Colonel Lansdale described their origins and operations as follows:

One of the most promising ideas of this period came from Kieu Cong Cung, who was sponsored by Defense Minister Minh. Cung's idea was to place civil service personnel out among the people, in simple dress, where they would help initially by working alongside the people, getting their hands dirty when necessary. The Vietnamese functionaries were aghast, since they cherished their desk work in Saigon and their dignified white-collar authority, and they fought hard within the government machine to kill the idea. It took some months, with the personal intervention and insistence of President Diem, to get a pilot Civic Action program initiated. It was given administrative support by the Ministry of Defense, at first, simply because no other Ministry would help, although it was established as an entity of the Presidency and its policy decisions were made in Cabinet meetings.

With 80% of the civil service personnel stationed in the national capital, provincial administrators were so under-staffed that few of them could function with even minimum effectiveness. A French colonial administrative system, super-imposed upon the odd Vietnamese imperial system was still the model for government administration. It left many gaps and led to unusually complex bureaucratic practices. There was no uniform legal code, no uniform procedures for the most basic functions of government. The Communists continued their political dominance of many villages, secretly.

Cung established a training center in Saigon and asked for civil service volunteers, for field duty. With none forthcoming, he then selected a small group of young university trained men from among the . . . refugees from Communist North Vietnam after security screening. His training had added realism in the form of rough living quarters, outdoor classes, and students learning to work with their hands by constructing school facilities. All students had to dress in the "calico noir" of farmers and laborers, which became their "uniform" later in the villages. (Provincial authorities originally refused to recognize Civic Action personnel as government officials, due to the plebian dress; Cung, dressed in the same manner, and as a high functionary close to the President, made a rapid tour of the provinces and gained grudging acceptance of this new style of government employee.)

Originally, four-man teams were formed; during training, the members of each team were closely observed, to judge their abilities, with the weak and unwilling being weeded out. After graduation, each team was assigned to a district of a province, with responsibility for a number of villages. When the team finished its work in the first village, it would move to a second village, revisiting the first village periodically to check on local progress. This would continue until all villages in a district were covered, at which time the civic action team directly under the government in the provincial capital would take over district work, now organized and ready for administration.

When a team entered a village, they would call a village meeting, explain their presence and plans. The following morning, they would set to work to build three community buildings with local materials; if they had been successful in winning over the population, the villagers pitched in and helped. One building was a village hail, for meetings of village officials. Another was a primary school. The third was a combination information hail (news, information about the government, etc.) and dispensary (using the village medical kits developed by ICA). Following up was the building of roads or paths to link the village with provincial roads, if in a remote area, build pit latrines, undertake malaria control, put in drainage, and undertake similar community projects. Villagers were trained to take over these tasks, including primary education and first aid.

The work of Civic Action teams, at the same grass-roots level as that of Communist workers, proved effective. They became the targets of Communist agents, with political attacks (such as stirring up local Cochinese against Tonkinese Civic Action personnel) and then murders. Even while the field work was in its early development stage, President Diem ordered the teams to start working directly with Army commands in pacification campaigns, as the civil government "troops" in what were essentially combat zones. As Civic Action proved itself, it was extended to all provinces south of the 17th Parallel.

Had the cadres been able to confine themselves to these missions, and had the several Saigon ministries, whose field responsibilities they had assumed, been content to have them continue to represent them, matters might have developed differently. As it happened, the cadres became preoccupied with Diem's Anti-Communist campaign, and their operations came under bureaucratic attack from Saigon agencies unwilling to allow the Civic Action teams to carry their programs to the people. Both influences converted the cadre into exclusively propagandistic and political instruments, and drew them away from economic or social activities; in late 1956, Civic Action was cut back severely. In 1957, Kieu Cong Cung died, and Nhu absorbed the remnants into his organization.

4. Land Reform

But the salesmen were less at fault than the product. Diem had to promise much and deliver well to best the Viet Minh. However, his promises were moderate, his delivery on them both slow and incomplete. The anarchy prevalent in the countryside during the First Indochina War had benefited the peasant by driving off the French and Vietnamese large landlords. When the Viet Minh "liberated" an area, they distributed these lands free to the farmers, and generally won their allegiance thereby. Columnist Joseph Alsop visited one such Viet Minh controlled region in December, 1954, just before they withdrew their military forces, and reported that:

It was difficult for me, as it is for any Westerner, to conceive of a Communist government's genuinely "serving the people." I could hardly imagine a Communist government that was also a popular government and almost a democratic government. But this was just the sort of government the palmhut state actually was while the struggle

with the French continued. The Viet Minh could not possibly have carried on the resistance for one year, let alone nine years, without the people's strong, untied support.

One of Diem's primary failures lay in his inability similarly to capture loyalties among his 90 percent agricultural people. The core of rural discontent was the large land holdings: in 1954 one quarter of one percent of the population owned forty percent of the rice growing land. The Diem program to ameliorate this situation for the land-hungry peasants took the form of: (1) resettlement of refugees and others on uncultivated land, begun in 1955; (2) expropriation of all rice land holdings above 247 acres, and redistribution of these to tenant farmers, a program announced in 1956, but delayed in starting until 1958; and (3) regulation of landlord-tenant relations, effected in 1957, which fixed rents within the range 15-25 percent of crop yield, and guaranteed tenant tenure for 3 to 5 years. Both the resettlement and redistribution programs guaranteed payments to former owners of the appropriated land; although the land was reasonably priced, and payment allowed over an extended period, the farmers faced payments, and these immediately aroused opposition. Settlers moved into a wilderness, required to clear and irrigate theretofore unused land, could not see why they should pay for their holdings. Tenant farmers were also disaffected, for though rents of 40 percent of crop had been common before the war, many farmers, after eight or so rent-free years, could see no justice in resuming payments to a long absent owner, particularly since the Viet Minh had assured them the land was theirs by right. Nor were many mollified by redistributed land. Land redistribution suffered according to one American expert, from a "lack of serious, interested administrators and topside command. Government officials, beginning with the Minister for Agrarian Reform, had divided loyalties, being themselves landholders." But even if the goals of the program had been honestly fulfilled--which they were not--only 20% of rice land would have passed from large to small farmers. Ultimately only 10% of all tenant farmers benefited. A bolder program, with a maximum holding of 124 acres, could have put 33 percent of rice land up for transfer. As it happened, however, the distribution program was not only of limited scope, but, by 1958 or 1959, it was virtually inoperative. Bernard Fall has reported that despite Diem's land reforms, 45% of the land remained concentrated in the hands of 2% of landowners, and 75% in the hands of 15%. Moreover, since the immediate beneficiaries were more often than not Northerners, refugees, and Catholics, the programs acquired an aura of GVN favoritism, and deepened peasant alienation. In time there were also rumors of corruption, with widespread allegations that the Diem family had enriched itself through the manipulation of the land transfers.

As an example of Diem's rural programs in action at the village level which serves to demonstrate how they fell wide of the mark of meeting rural expectations, that of the village communal land is instructive. After the long period of disrupted public administration during the Franco-Viet Minh War, land records were chaotic. Under Diem, the GVN seized outright nearly half a million acres of land whose title was unclear. Some of this land was rented, the GVN acting as the landlord; some was farmed by ARVN units; and some was converted into communal land and the title passed to village councils. The village councils were then supposed to hold an annual auction of communal land, in which farmers wishing to use certain plots submitted sealed bids.

Although this seemed to the casual western observer an equitable system, in actuality it was quite vicious. The bidding farmers were usually seeking to rent land they had been farming free for years. Whether this were the case or not, however, rice growing is a labor intensive process which requires of the farmer a substantial capital investment year by year to build up dikes and ditches. To assure himself that he would not lose this investment, a man farming a plot declared communal land felt compelled to raise his bid each succeeding year to avoid loss of that capital, and to preclude losing his hard work. The consequent competition, however modern, shook the roots of traditional Asian farming communities, for the arrangement had the major disadvantage of creating uncertainty over land from year to year-the antithesis of security for the rice-growing peasant. To cap these disadvantages, village councils were often less than honest, and tended to be considerably less willing than a paternal landlord to tide the farmer over after a bad crop year; if his subsequent bid were low, he lost his land.

There is another chapter in the history of GVN-farmer relationships which illustrates similar clumsiness. In 1956, as the GVN launched its land reform program, Ngo Dinh Nhu enlisted the aid of the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, which had been organizing tenant farmers in promoting the government's policies through its rural representatives. The GVN then proceeded to form its own, NRM-connected, Farmers' Associations. The latter, interconnected with province officials and with landowners, actively opposed the union organizers, with the result that many of the latter were jailed. Within a year or two, the union was destroyed for all practical purposes. Few of the NRM Farmers' Associations ever did function on behalf of the farmers; of 288 associations reported in-being by the GVN, a USOM study in 1961 could find only 35 which represented peasant interests in any active sense.

5. Village Government

A further example of Diem's maladroitness was his abolishing elections for village councils, a step he took in June, 1956, apparently out of concern that large numbers of former Viet Minh might win office at the village level. The Vietnamese village had traditionally, even under the French, enjoyed administrative autonomy, and the village council was a coterie of prominent residents who were the government in most simple civic matters, adjudicating disputes, collecting taxes, and managing public funds. Under the national regulation of 1956, members of council and the village chief became appointive officials, and their offices subject to scrutiny by the Diemist apparatus. The results were again a thrusting forward of Northern Catholics, city dwellers, or other non-local trustees of the GVN, to assume control at the key political level of South Vietnam, to handle fiscal matters, and to manage the communal lands. For the same reasons that the villagers had mistrusted the Civic Action cadre, they found the GVN officials strange, and not a little incomprehensible. Also, since these officials were the creatures of the province chiefs, corruption at the province level-then, as in recent years, not uncommon-was transmitted directly to the village. Dang Duc Khoi, a young nationalist who rose to become Diem's press officer, and then turned against him, regarded Diem's decision to abolish the village councils his vital error:

Even if the Viet Minh had won some elections, the danger of doing away with the traditional system of village election was even greater. This was something that was part of the Vietnamese way of life, and the concept should have been retained without interfering with Diem's legitimate desire--indeed, his need--for a strong central government. The security problem existed, but it wouldn't have made much difference if the Viet Minh had elected some village chiefs--they soon established their own underground governments anyway. Diem's mistake was in paralyzing himself. He should have adopted a more intelligent and persuasive policy and concentrated at the outset on obtaining the support of the people. In that way, he could have properly challenged the Viet Minh.

Thus, Ngo Dinh began, in 1956, to place the "security problem" ahead of rural revolution.

6. The Anti-Communist Campaign

Indeed, vocal anti-communism became more central to Diem's rural programs than land reform. Like the Can Lao Party, the GVN borrowed heavily from communist technique in combating the Viet Minh and their residual influence--urged on, in some instances at least, by their American advisers. In the summer of 1955, the government launched an Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign, which included a scheme for classifying the populace into lettered political groups according to attitude toward the Viet Minh, and village ceremonies similar to community self-criticism sessions. Viet Minh cadres and sympathizers would appear before the audience to swear their disavowal of communism. The penitents would tell tales of Viet Minh atrocities, and rip or trample a suitable Viet Minh symbol. In February, 1956, tens of thousands of Saigon citizens assembled to witness the "conversion" of 2,000 former Viet Minh cadres. Tran Chanh Tanh, head of the GVN Department of Information and Youth, announced in May, 1956, that the campaign had "entirely destroyed the predominant communist influence of the previous nine years." According to his figures, 94,041 former communist cadres had rallied to the GVN, 5,613 other cadres had surrendered to government forces, 119,954 weapons had been captured, 75 tons of documents, and 707 underground arms caches had been discovered. One Saigon newspaper boldly referred to Tanh's proceedings as a "puppet show"--for which it was closed down. What relationship GVN statistics bore to reality is not known.

However, for many peasants the Anti-Communist Campaign was considerably more than theatrics. Diem, in a Presidential Ordinance of January 11, 1956, expanded upon an existing system of political re-education centers for communists and active communist supporters. The 1956 order authorized the arrest and detention of anyone deemed dangerous to the safety of the state, and their incarceration in one of several concentration camps. The Secretary of State for Information disclosed in 1956 that 15,000 to 20,000 communists had been in these centers since 1954, a figure probably low at the time, and undoubtedly raised thereafter. On May 6, 1959, the GVN promulgated Law 10/59, which stiffened penalties for communist affiliations, and permitted trial of accused by special military tribunals. That year Anti-Communist Denunciation was also stepped up. In 1960, a GVN Ministry of Information release stated that 48,250 persons had been jailed

between 1954 and 1960, but a French observer estimates the numbers in jail at the end of 1956 alone at 50,000. P. J. Honey, who was invited by Diem to investigate certain of the reeducation centers in 1959, reported that on the basis of his talks with former inmates, "the consensus of the opinions expressed by these people is that . . . the majority of the detainees are neither communists nor pro-communists."

The Anti-Communist Campaigns targeted city-dwellers, but it was in the rural areas, where the Viet Minh had been most strong, that it was applied most energetically. For example, in 1959 the Information Chief of An Xuyen Province (Cau Mau region) reported that a five week Anti-Communist Campaign by the National Revolutionary Movement had resulted in the surrender of 8,125 communist agents, and the denunciation of 9,806 other agents and 29,978 sympathizers. To furnish the organization and spark enthusiasm for such undertakings, Ngo Dinh Nhu organized in 1958 the Republican Youth, which with Madame Nhu's Solidarity Movement, became a vehicle for rural paramilitary training, political, and intelligence activities. Nhu saw the Republican Youth as a means for bringing "controlled liberty" to the countryside, and it seems certainly to have assisted in extending his control.

The GVN also tried to reorganize rural society from the family level up on the communist cellular model. Each family was grouped with two to six others into a Mutual Aid Family Group (*lien gia*), and a like number of *lien gia* comprised a khom. There was an appointed chief for both, serving as a chain of command for the community, empowered to settle petty disputes, and obligated to pass orders and information down from the authorities. Each *lien gia* was held responsible for the political behavior of its members, and was expected to report suspicious behavior (the presence of strangers, unusual departures, and like events). Each house was required to display on a board outside a listing of the number and sex of its inhabitants. These population control measures were combined with improved systems of provincial police identification cards and fingerprinting. The central government thus became visible--and resented--at the village level as it had never been before in Vietnam.

7. Population Relocation

Security and control of the populace also figured in GVN resettlement plans. Even the refugee relief programs had been executed with an eye to national security. Diem visualized a "living wall" of settlers between the lowland populace and the jungle and mountain redoubts of dissidents. From flying trips, or from military maps, he personally selected the sites for resettlement projects (*Khu Dinh Dien*)--often in locales deprived of adequate water or fertile soil--to which were moved pioneering communities of Northern refugees, or settlers from the over-crowded Annam coast. Between April 1957 and late 1961, one GVN report showed 210,000 persons resettled in 147 centers carved from 220,000 acres of wilderness. Some of the resentments over payments for resettled virgin land were mentioned above. More importantly, however, these "strategic" programs drew a disproportionate share of foreign aid for agriculture; by U.S. estimates, the 2% of total population affected by resettlement received 50% of total aid.

The resettlements precipitated unexpected political reactions from the Montagnard peoples of the Central Vietnam Highlands. The tribes were traditionally hostile to the Vietnamese, and proved to be easily mobilized against the GVN. In 1959 the GVN began to regroup and consolidate the tribes into defensible communities to decrease their vulnerability to anti-government agents, and to ease the applying of cultural uplift programs. By late 1961 these relocations were being executed on a large scale. In Kontum Province, for instance, 35,000 tribesmen were regrouped in autumn 1961, about 50 percent of its total Montagnard population. Some of the hill people refused to remain in their new communities, but the majority stayed. In the long run, the relocations probably had the effect of focusing Montagnard discontent against the GVN, and facilitating, rather than hindering, the subversion of the tribes.

But the relocations which catalyzed the most widespread and dangerous antiGVN sentiment were those attempted among the South Vietnamese farmers beginning in 1959. In February, 1959, a pilot program of political bifurcation was quietly launched in the areas southwest of Saigon which had been controlled by the Viet Minh. Its objective was to resettle peasants out of areas where GVN police or military forces could not operate routinely, into new, policed communities of two distinct political colorations. Into one type of these "rural agglomerations," called *qui khu*, where grouped families with relatives among the Viet Minh or Viet Cong, or suspected of harboring pro-Viet Cong sentiments. Into another type, called *qui ap*, where grouped GVN-oriented families. Security was the primary reason for selecting the sites of these communities, which meant that in many instances the peasants were forced to move some distance from their land. The French had attempted, on a small scale, such peasant relocations in 1953 in Tonkin; Diem encountered in 1959, as had they, stiff resistance from the farmers over separation from their livelihood and ancestral landhold. But Diem's plan also aroused apprehensions during *qui khu* designates over the Anti-Communist Campaign. With a rare sensitivity to rural protest, the GVN suspended the program in March, 1959, after only a month.

In July, 1959, however, Diem announced that the GVN was undertaking to improve rural standards of living through establishing some 80 "prosperity and density centers" (*khu tru mat*). These "agrovilles" were to be located along a "strategic route system"--key roads, protected by the new towns. Some 80 agrovilles were to be built by the end of 1963, each designed for 400 families (2,000 to 3,000 people), and each with a surrounding cluster of smaller agrovilles for 120 families. The GVN master plan provided for each community defense, schools, dispensary, market center, public garden--even electricity. The new communities seemed to offer the farmers many advantages, and the GVN expected warm support. But the peasants objected to the agrovilles even more sharply than they had the earlier experiment. The agrovilles were supposed to be constructed by peasants themselves; Corvee labor was resorted to, and thousands of Republican routh were imported to help. For example, at one site--Vi Thanh near Can Tho--20,000 peasants were assembled from four districts, many more than the number who could expect to profit directly from the undertaking. Moreover, even most of those who were selected to move into agrovilles they had helped build, did so unwillingly, for it often meant abandoning a cherished ancestral home, tombs, and

developed gardens and fields for a strange and desolate place. The settler was expected to tear down his old house to obtain materials for the new, and received GVN aid to the extent of a grant of \$5.50, and an agricultural loan to assist him in paying for his allotted 1.5 acres of land near the agrovillage. Peasant resistance, and then insurgent attacks on the agrovillages, caused abandonment of the program, with only 22 out of 80 communities completed.

The agrovillage program was eventually superseded by the GVN strategic hamlet program, formally launched by President Diem in February, 1962, which avoided the mistake of trying to erect whole new communities from the ground up. Rather, the plan aimed at fortifying existing villages, but did include provisions for destroying indefensible hamlets, and relocation of the inhabitants into more secure communities. The strategic hamlet, *ap chien luoc*, also eschewed elaborate social or economic development schemes, concentrating on civil defense through crude fortifications and organizing the populace to improve its military capability and political cohesiveness. In some exposed sites, "combat hamlets" were established, with a wholly militarized population. High goals were established, the GVN announcing that by 1963 some 11,000 of the country's 16,000-17,000 hamlets would be fortified. In this instance, as before, the GVN encountered opposition from the peasants, and as before, the insurgents attacked it vigorously. Despite its relative sophistication, the strategic hamlet program, like its predecessors, drove a wedge not between the insurgents and the farmers but between the farmers and the GVN, and eventuated in less rather than more security in the countryside.

8. Rural Security Forces

Security was the foremost consideration of the GVN's rural programs, and American aid was lavished on the GVN security apparatus in general. It is surprising, therefore, that the GVN tolerated so ineffective a security apparatus at the village level. The Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Guard (CG), charged with rural security, were poorly trained and equipped, miserably led, and incapable of coping with insurgents; they could scarcely defend themselves, much less the peasantry. Indeed, they proved to be an asset to insurgents in two respects: they served as a source of weapons; and their brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness induced innumerable villagers to join in open revolt against the GVN. Nor was the ARVN much better, although its conduct improved over the years; in any event, the ARVN seldom was afield, and its interaction with the rural populace through 1959 was relatively slight. It should be noted that the SDC and the CG, the security forces at the disposal of the provincial administration, were often no more venal nor offensive to the peasants than the local officials themselves. Corrupt, arrogant, and overbearing, the men the people knew as the GVN were among the greatest disadvantages of the GVN in its rural efforts.

The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960"
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

E. URBAN POLITICAL ALIENATION

The rigidity of GVN rural political policy was mirrored in the cities: the regime became preoccupied with security to the exclusion of other concerns, with the result that step by step it narrowed its active or potential supporters, aroused increasing fears among its critics, and drove them toward extremism. In a step similar to that he took on village council elections, Diem abolished elections for municipal councils in 1956. The Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign had its urban counterpart, but communist strength in the French-occupied cities had been less than in the countryside. Opposition to Diem formed around the old nationalist movements, including the pro-Bao Dai groups Diem labeled "feudalists," around intellectual and individual professional politicians, and eventually around military leaders. Diem's policies successively alienated each.

1. "Feudalists"

The Civic Action teams which Diem projected into the former Viet Minh areas in 1955 trumpeted against "Communism, Colonialism, and Feudalism," the last inveighing against Bao Dai, who was, at the time, still Head of state. "Feudalist" was one epithet applied sweepingly to the religious sects, and to all those whose position or fortune depended upon Bao Dai, from the Binh Xuyen who had purchased its control over Saigon-Cholon from the Emperor, to civil servants and army officers loyal to Bao Dai. The label was virtually as damning as "Communist" in incurring the ungentle attentions of Nhu or Can. In the early years "feudalists" and "communists" were often tarred by the same brush. For example, the Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign got underway in Quang Tn Province in 1955, under Ngo Dinh Can. But Can was also in pursuit of the anti-communist Dai Viet (Great Vietnam) Party there, which had armed units and, for a time, an anti-government radio station. As with the communists, many Dai Viet were killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. Diem's defeat of Bao Dai at the polls in October, 1955, strengthened his hand against pro-Bao Dai groups. With the withdrawal of the French the following spring, it became imprudent for any politician or group who wished to avoid Can Lao and NRM scrutiny to maintain ties with "feudalists" in hiding in Vietnam, or operating from abroad. Despite the fact that opposition Vietnamese nationalist parties had been strongly influenced in their organization and methods by the Kuomintang, they had never developed sufficient internal discipline, cohesion or following to admit of challenging Diem after 1956. Such opposition political forces as developed centered around individuals. (Only two non-Diem, non-communist political parties survived the Diem era: the Nationalist Party of Greater Vietnam (*Dai Viet Qhoc Dan Dang*, the Dai Viet) and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang*, the VNQDD)).

2. Dr. Dan

Until November, 1960, Diem's most prominent political opponent was Doctor Phan Quang Dan. Dr. Dan was a northern physician who had been caught up in nationalist politics in 1945, and lived in exile after 1947. He returned to Vietnam in September, 1955, to head up a coalition of opposition to the GVN arrangements for the March, 1956, elections for the National Assembly. He was arrested on the eve of those elections, accused of communist and colonialist activities, and though released, deprived of his position at the University of Saigon Medical School. His subsequent political career underscores the astringent nature of Diem's democracy. In May, 1957 Dr. Dan formed another opposition coalition, the Democratic bloc, which acquired a newspaper called Thoi Luan. Thoi Luan became the best-selling newspaper in South Vietnam (all papers were published in Saigon, except Can's government paper in Hue), with a circulation of about 80,000 copies. After a series of statements critical of the GVN, Thoi Luan was sacked by a mob in September, 1957. Unheeding of that warning, the paper continued an opposition editorial policy until March, 1958, when the GVN closed the paper, and gave the editor a stiff fine and a suspended prison sentence for an article including the following passage:

What about your democratic election?

During the city-council and village council elections under the "medieval and colonialist" Nguyen Van Tam Administration [under Bao-Dai, in 1953], constituents were threatened and compelled to vote; but they were still better than your elections, because nobody brought soldiers into Saigon by the truckload "to help with the voting."

What about your presidential regime?

You are proud for having created for Viet-Nam a regime that you think is similar to that of the United States. If those regimes are similar, then they are as related as a skyscraper is to a tin-roofed shack, in that they both are houses to live in.

In the U.S.A., Congress is a true parliament and Congressmen are legislators, i.e., free and disinterested men who are not afraid of the government, and who know their duties and dare to carry them out. Here the deputies are political functionaries who make laws like an announcer in a radio station, by reading out loud texts that have been prepared [for them] beforehand. . .

A month later, the Democratic Bloc collapsed. Dr. Dan attempted to obtain GVN recognition for another party, the Free Democratic Party, and permission to publish another paper. No GVN action was ever taken on either application, but a number of Dr. Dan's followers in the new party were arrested. When in March, 1959, the newspaper *Tin Bac* published an article by Dr. Dan, it was closed down. In June, 1959, the newspaper *Nguoi Viet Tu Do* was similarly indiscreet, and met the same fate. In August, 1959, Dr. Dan ran for a seat in the National Assembly, was elected by a six-to-one margin over Diem's candidate running against him, but was disqualified by court action before he could take his seat. Dr. Dan's career of opposition to Diem ended in November, 1960,

when he became the political adviser to the group who attempted a *coup d'etat*. Dan was arrested and jailed, and remained there until the end of the Diem regime three years later.

3. *The Caravelle Group, 1960*

But Dr. Dan was an exceptionally bold antagonist of Diem. No other politician dared what he did. Even he, however, was unable to bring any unity to the opposition. Such other leaders as there were distrusted Dan, or feared the GVN. There was, however, one occasion in the spring of 1960 when opposition to Diem did coalesce. There was change in the international political winds that year—a students' revolt in Korea, an army revolt in Turkey, demonstrations in Japan which resulted in cancellation of President Eisenhower's planned visit. Diem remembered 1960 well, as a "treasure chest for the communists."

The United States press and the world press started saying that democracy was needed in the under-developed countries. This came just in time for the communists. Some of the United States press even incited people to rebellion.

That year was the worst we have ever had . . . We had problems on all fronts. On the one hand we had to fight the communists. On the other, we had to deal with the foreign press campaign to incite rebellion vis-a-vis Korea. These were sore anxieties, for some unbalanced people here thought it was time to act. Teachers in the private secondary schools began to incite the students to follow the example of the Korean students. And then there were our amateur politicians who were outdated and thought only of taking revenge.

The last reference was to the Caravelle Group, who issued at the Caravelle Hotel in late April, 1960, a "manifesto" of grievances against the GVN. The eighteen signers were all old-time politicians, leaders of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, the Dai Viet and the VNQDD parties, and dissenting Catholic groups. Eleven had been Cabinet ministers; four had been in other high government positions. They organized themselves as the Bloc for Liberty and Progress, with a platform of constitutional revision toward greater power for the National Assembly against the Presidency. Dr. Dan could not be induced to join the Caravelle Group, but in the Diem cleanup after the November, 1960 coup attempt, the GVN arrested most of the eighteen, and their Bloc disintegrated. The Caravelle Manifesto is reproduced below:

MANIFESTO OF THE EIGHTEEN

The President of the Republic of Viet-Nam
Saigon

Mr. President:

We the undersigned, representing a group of eminent citizens and personalities, intellectuals of all tendencies, and men of good will, recognize in the

face of the gravity of the present political situation that we can no longer remain indifferent to the realities of life in our country.

Therefore, we officially address to you today an appeal with the aim of exposing to you the whole truth in the hope that the government will accord it all the attention necessary so as to urgently modify its policies, so as to remedy the present situation and lead the people out of danger.

Let us look toward the past, at the time when you were abroad. For eight or nine years, the Vietnamese people suffered many trials due to the war: They passed from French domination to Japanese occupation, from revolution to resistance, from the nationalist imposture behind which hid communism to a pseudo-independence covering up for colonialism; from terror to terror, from sacrifice to sacrifice-in short, from promise to promise, until finally hope ended in bitter disillusion.

Thus, when you were on the point of returning to the country, the people as a whole entertained the hope that it would find again under your guidance the peace that is necessary to give meaning to existence, to reconstruct the destroyed homes, put to the plow again the abandoned lands. The people hoped no longer to be compelled to pay homage to one regime in the morning and to another at night, not to be the prey of the cruelties and oppression of one faction; no longer to be treated as coolies; no longer to be at the mercy of the monopolies; no longer to have to endure the depredations of corrupt and despotic civil servants. In one word, the people hoped to live in security at last, under a regime which would give them a little bit of justice and liberty. The whole people thought that you would be the man of the situation and that you would implement its hopes.

That is the way it was when you returned. The Geneva Accords of 1954 put an end to combat and to the devastations of war. The French Expeditionary Corps was progressively withdrawn, and total independence of South Viet Nam had become a reality. Furthermore, the country had benefited from moral encouragement and a substantial increase of foreign aid from the free world. With so many favorable political factors, in addition to the blessed geographic conditions of a fertile and rich soil yielding agricultural, forestry, and fishing surpluses, South Viet Nam should have been able to begin a definitive victory in the historical competition with the North, so as to carry out the will of the people and to lead the country on the way to hope, liberty, and happiness. Today, six years later, having benefited from so many undeniable advantages, what has the government been able to do? Where has it led South Viet Nam? What parts of the popular aspirations have been implemented?

Let us try to draw an objective balance of the situation, without flattery or false accusations, strictly following a constructive line which you yourself have so often indicated, in the hope that the government shall modify its policies so as to extricate itself from a situation that is extremely dangerous to the very existence of the nation.

Policies

In spite of the fact that the bastard regime created and protected by colonialism has been overthrown and that many of the feudal organizations of factions and parties which oppress the population were destroyed, the people do not know a better life or more freedom under the republican regime which you have created. A constitution has been established in form only; a National Assembly exists whose deliberations always fall into line with the government; antidemocratic elections--all those are methods and "comedies" copied from the dictatorial Communist regimes, which obviously cannot serve as terms of comparison with North Viet Nam.

Continuous arrests fill the jails and prisons to the rafters, as at this precise moment; public opinion and the press are reduced to silence. The same applies to the popular will as translated in certain open elections, in which it is insulted and trampled (as was the case, for example, during the recent elections for the Second Legislature). All these have provoked the discouragement and resentment of the people.

Political parties and religious sects have been eliminated. "Groups" or "movements" have replaced them. But this substitution has only brought about new oppressions against the population without protecting it for that matter against Communist enterprises. Here is one example: the fiefs of religious sects, which hitherto were deadly for the Communists, now not only provide no security whatever but have become favored highways for Viet Minh guerrillas, as is, by the way, the case of the rest of the country.

This is proof that the religious sects, though futile, nevertheless constitute effective anti-Communist elements. Their elimination has opened the way to the Viet Cong and unintentionally has prepared the way for the enemy, whereas a more realistic and more flexible policy could have amalgamated them all with a view to reinforcing the anti-Communist front.

Today the people want freedom. You should, Mr. President, liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments, opposition to which now constitutes for the people their sole reason for existence. When this occurs, the people of South Viet Nam, in comparing their position with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and of authentic democracy. It is only at that time that the people will make all the necessary efforts and sacrifices to defend that liberty and democracy.

Administration

The size of the territory has shrunk, but the number of civil servants has increased, and still the work doesn't get done. This is because the government, like the Communists, lets the political parties control the population, separate the elite from the lower echelons, and sow distrust between those individuals who are "affiliated with the movement" and those who are "outside the group." Effective power, no longer in the hands of those who are usually responsible, is concentrated in fact in the hands of an irresponsible member of the "family," from whom emanates all orders; this slows down the administrative machinery,

paralyzes all initiative, discourages good will. At the same time, not a month goes by without the press being full of stories about graft impossible to hide; this becomes an endless parade of illegal transactions involving millions of piastres.

The administrative machinery, already slowed down, is about to become completely paralyzed. It is in urgent need of reorganization. Competent people should be put back in the proper jobs; discipline must be re-established from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy; authority must go hand in hand with responsibility; efficiency, initiative, honesty, and the economy should be the criteria for promotion; professional qualifications should be respected. Favoritism based on family or party connections should be banished; the selling of influence, corruption and abuse of power must be punished.

Thus, everything still can be saved, human dignity can be reestablished; faith in an honest and just government can be restored.

Army

The French Expeditionary Corps has left the country, and a republican army has been constituted, thanks to American aid, which has equipped it with modern materiel. Nevertheless, even in a group of the proud elite of the youth such as the Vietnamese Army-where the sense of honor should be cultivated, whose blood and arms should be devoted to the defense of the country, where there should be no place for clannishness and factions-the spirit of the "national revolutionary movement" or of the "personalist body" divides the men of one and the same unit, sows distrust between friends of the same rank, and uses as a criterion for promotion fidelity toward the party in blind submission to its leaders. This creates extremely dangerous situations, such as the recent incident of Tay~Ninh.*

* This refers to the penetration of the compound of the 32d ARVN Regiment in January, 1960, when communist forces killed 23 soldiers and captured hundreds of weapons.

The purpose of the army, pillar of the defense of the country, is to stop foreign invasions and to eliminate rebel movements. It is at the service of the country only and should not lend itself to the exploitation of any faction or party. Its total reorganization is necessary. Clannishness and party obedience should be eliminated; its moral base strengthened; a noble tradition of national pride created; and fighting spirit, professional conscience, and bravery should become criteria for promotion. The troops should be encouraged to respect their officers, and the officers should be encouraged to love their men. Distrust, jealousy, rancor among colleagues of the same rank should be eliminated.

Then in case of danger, the nation will have at its disposal a valiant army animated by a single spirit and a single aspiration: to defend the most precious possession-our country, Viet Nam.

Economic and Social Affairs

A rich and fertile country enjoying food surpluses; a budget which does not have to face military expenditures,** important war reparations; substantial profits

* * The military expenditures of the Vietnamese budget are paid out of U.S. economic and military aid.

from Treasury bonds; a colossal foreign-aid program; a developing market capable of receiving foreign capital investments--those are the many favorable conditions which could make Viet Nam a productive and prosperous nation. However, at the present time many people are out of work, have no roof over their heads, and no money. Rice is abundant but does not sell; shop windows are well-stocked but the goods do not move. Sources of revenue are in the hands of speculators--who use the [government] party and group to mask monopolies operating for certain private interests. At the same time, thousands of persons are mobilized for exhausting work, compelled to leave their own jobs, homes and families, to participate in the construction of magnificent but useless "agrovilles" which weary them and provoke their disaffection, thus aggravating popular resentment and creating an ideal terrain for enemy propaganda.

The economy is the very foundation of society, and public opinion ensures the survival of the regime. The government must destroy all the obstacles standing in the way of economic development; must abolish all forms of monopoly and speculation; must create a favorable environment for investments coming from foreign friends as well as from our own citizens; must encourage commercial enterprises, develop industry, and create jobs to reduce unemployment. At the same time, it should put an end to all forms of human exploitation in the work camps of the agrovilles.

Then only the economy will flourish again; the citizen will find again a peaceful life and will enjoy his condition; society will be reconstructed in an atmosphere of freedom and democracy.

Mr. President, this is perhaps the first time that you have heard such severe and disagreeable criticism--so contrary to your own desires. Nevertheless, sir, these words are strictly the truth, a truth that is bitter and hard, that you have never been able to know because, whether this is intended or not, a void has been created around you, and by the very fact of your high position, no one permits you to perceive the critical point at which truth shall burst forth in irresistible waves of hatred on the part of a people subjected for a long time to terrible suffering and a people who shall rise to break the bonds which hold it down. It shall sweep away the ignominy and all the injustices which surround and oppress it.

As we do not wish, in all sincerity, that our Fatherland should have to live through these perilous days, we--without taking into consideration the consequences which our attitude

may bring upon us--are ringing today the alarm bell, in view of the imminent danger which threatens the government.

Until now, we have kept silent and preferred to let the Executive act as it wished. But now time is of the essence; we feel that it is our duty--and in the case of a nation in turmoil even the most humble people have their share of responsibility--to speak the truth, to awaken public opinion, to alert the people, and to unify the opposition so as to point the way. We beseech the government to urgently modify its policies so as to remedy the situation, to defend the republican regime, and to safeguard the existence of the nation. We hold firm hope that the Vietnamese people shall know a brilliant future in which it will enjoy peace and prosperity in freedom and progress.

Yours respectfully,

1. TRAN VAN VAN, Diploma of Higher Commercial Studies, former Minister of Economy and Planning
2. PHAN KHAC SUU, Agricultural Engineer, former Minister of Agriculture, former Minister of Labor
3. TRAN VAN HUONG, Professor of Secondary Education, former Prefect of Saigon-Cholon
4. NGUYEN, LUU VIEN, M.D., former Professor at the Medical School, former High Commissioner of Refugees
5. HUYNH-KIM HUU, M.D., former Minister of Public Health
6. PHAN HUY QUAT, M.D., former Minister of National Education, former Minister of Defense
7. TRAN VAN LY, former Governor of Central Viet-Nam
8. NGUYEN TIEN HY, M.D.
9. TRAN VAN DO, M.D., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of Vietnamese Delegation to the 1954 Geneva Conference
10. LE NGOC CHAN, Attorney at Law, former Secretary of State for National Defense
11. LE QUANG LUAT, Attorney at Law, former Government Delegate for North Viet-Nam, former Minister of Information and Propaganda
12. LUONG TRONG TUONG, Public Works Engineer, former Secretary of State for National Economy
13. NGUYEN TANG NGUYEN, M.D., former Minister of Labor and Youth
14. PHAM HUU CHUONG, M.D., former Minister of Public Health and Social Action
15. TRAN VAN TUYEN, Attorney at Law, former Secretary of State for Information and Propaganda
16. TA CHUONG PHUNG, former Provincial Governor for Binh-Dinh
17. TRAN LE CHAT, Laureate of the Triennial Mandarin Competition of 1903
18. HO VAN VUI, Reverend, former Parish Priest of Saigon, at present Parish Priest of Tha-La, Province of Tay-Ninh

The November, 1960, coup marked the end of opposition by professional politicians against Diem. In fact, all the Caravelle group were arrested and jailed. Such political activity among them as occurred in 1962 and 1963 was perforce subdued to the point that

it captured attention neither from opponents of Diem, nor Diem himself. But 1960 was altogether too late for effective "loyal opposition" to form. By that time the GVN's ability to control the press, to manage demonstrations, to limit travel, and to imprison (and worse) at will, had virtually paralyzed the intellectual elite of Vietnam. Nor were labor unions politically active, despite their power potential. As early as 1956 the GVN had become alarmed over Communist influence in rubber workers' unions in Binh Duong Province, and had arrested union leaders. Farmers' unions were crippled by arrests of union cadre, and the Can Lao proved itself quite capable of engineering elections within the unions as effectively as it rigged those for the National Assembly. The threat to Diem, when it came, arose from more traditional sources of power--the religious sects and the armed forces.

4. Religious Dissenters

Diem's clash with the armed sects in 1954 and 1955 had the unfortunate political consequence of casting his regime in religious overtones which deepened as the Ngo Dinh Catholicism became more widely known. Together with Diem's obvious U.S. backing, these had the effect of accentuating his Occidental, and especially American, identity. The British Catholic writer and commentator on Vietnam, Graham Greene, observed in 1955 that:

It is Catholicism which has helped to ruin the government of Mr. Diem, for his genuine piety has been exploited by his American advisers until the Church is in danger of sharing the unpopularity of the United States. An unfortunate visit by Cardinal Spellman . . . has been followed by those of Cardinal Giliroy and the Archbishop of Canberra. Great sums are spent on organized demonstrations for visitors, and an impression is given that the Catholic Church is occidental and an ally of the United States in the cold war. . .

In the whole of Vietnam the proportion of Catholics to the population is roughly the same as in England--one in ten, a ratio insufficient to justify a Catholic government. Mr. Diem's ministers are not all Catholic, but Mr. Diem, justifiably suspicious of many of his supporters, has confined the actual government to himself and members of his family. He undertakes personally the granting of exit and entry visas. . . . The south, instead of confronting the totalitarian north with evidences of freedom, had slipped into an inefficient dictatorship: newspapers suppressed, strict censorship, men exiled by administrative order and not by judgment of the courts. It is unfortunate that a government of this kind should be identified with one faith. Mr. Diem may well leave his tolerant country a legacy of anti-Catholicism...

While Vietnam has an ample record of religious intolerance--especially intolerance for Catholics--calling into question Mr. Greene's contrary characterization, his prediction of Diem's impact proved correct. Open opposition to his government by civilians finally manifested itself on the issue of "religious freedom" in Hue and Saigon in 1963, coalescing around militant Buddhists and students--two groups that were, theretofore, for all practical purposes politically mute. There is no doubt, however, that Diem's Catholicism from 1954 on acted to his disadvantage among the non-Catholic masses, and

enhanced the My-Diem image of his government's being an instrument of alien power and purpose.

F. TENSIONS WITH THE ARMED FORCES

The soldiers of Vietnam presented Diem with his first, and his last political challenges. Part of the Army's political involvement stemmed from patent military inefficiency in Diem's tight control, for which RVNAF leaders correctly held Diem responsible. Part also correctly can be attributed to vaulting ambition and venality among certain of Diem's officers. And since the United States paid, schooled, and advised the RVNAF, it would also be correct to consider the U.S. involved, if not responsible. The record of Diem's relations with RVNAF, like his relations with other parts of Vietnamese society, is a history of increasing tensions, and of lowering mutual understanding and support.

1. Clashes with Francophiles, 1954-1955

Diem's first interactions with his army were inauspicious. From September to November, 1954, Army Chief of Staff General Nguyen Van Hinh—a French citizen who held a commission in the French Air Force seemed on the verge of overthrowing Diem. Diem ordered Hinh out of the country; Hinh defied him. An apparent coup d'etat in late October was blocked by adroit maneuvering by Colonel Landsdale, and by assurance from General Collins to Hinh that American support would be promptly withdrawn from Vietnam were his plot to succeed. As Hinh recalled it:

I had only to lift my telephone and the coup d'etat would have been over. . . . Nothing could have opposed the army. But the Americans let me know that if that happened, dollar help would be cut off. That would not matter to the military. If necessary, we soldiers could go barefoot and eat rice but the country cannot survive without American help.

Diem removed Hinh on 29 November 1954. The Acting Chief of Staff, General Nguyen Van Vy, Diem found "insufficiently submissive," and replaced him on 12 December 1954 with General Le Van Ty, kicking Vy upstairs to be Inspector General. In April 1955, during the turmoil of the sect rebellion, Bao Dai attempted to appoint Vy as Chief of Staff with full military powers, and to recall Diem to France. As Diem committed his army to battle with the sects, Vy announced that, in the name of Bao Dai, and with the backing of all but ten percent of the Army, he had assumed control of the government. However, General Ty, Diem's Chief of Staff, remained loyal, rallied key local commanders around Diem, and Vy fled. Within weeks both Generals Hinh and Vy were afield against Diem in the Mekong Delta, maneuvering a disparate army of Hoa Hao, French "deserters," and others--Diem's forces again beat them, and both then went into exile.

2. Militarizing Public Administration

What Diem remembered from these experiences was that personal loyalty was the prime requisite for high command. As a result, he took an intense and direct interest in the appointments of military officers, and--as in other endeavors--found it easier to place his trust in Northerners and Catholics. Before long, the upper echelons of the officer corps were preponderantly from these groups, and closely netted to the Diem family web of preferment. As GVN demands for loyal civil servants willing to forego the advantages of Saigon multiplied, Diem was impelled to shift trusted military officers into his civil administration. The head of the General Directorate of Police and Security was a military officer from 1956 forward; his subordinates in the police apparatus included a growing number of military officers--for example, all the Saigon district police chiefs appointed in the year 1960 were soldiers. The government in the provinces reflected similar moves toward militarization:

TRENDS TOWARD MILITARY OFFICERS AS PROVINCE CHIEFS

	No. Provinces	No. Military Chiefs	% Military Chiefs
1958	36	13	36
1960	36	21	58
1962	41	36	88

There was a coextensive militarization of public administration at district and lower levels.

3. Dissatisfaction in the Officer Corps

But if Vietnam's soldiers found the Diem family a way to political power, wealth, and social prominence, they had ample reason to be dissatisfied with Diem's intervention in their professional concerns. The propensity of Ngo Dinh Diem to control his military with a tight rein extended to deciding when and where operations would be conducted, with what forces, and often how they would be used. Moreover, he involved himself with the arming and equipping of the forces, showing a distinct proclivity to heavy military forces of the conventional type, even for the Civil Guard, which reinforced American military leanings in the same direction. There were a few soldiers, like General Duong Van Minh, who sharply disagreed with the President on both points. And there was a growing number of young officers who resented the Catholic-Northern dominant clique within the military, who were dissatisfied with Diem's familial interference in military matters, and who were willing to entertain notions that the GVN had to be substantially modified. Nonetheless, until 1963, there was little apparent willingness to concert action against Diem.

4. The Early Coup Attempts, 1960 and 1962

On November 11, 1960, three paratroop battalions stationed in Saigon--considered by Diem among his most faithful--cooperated in an attempted *coup d'etat*. The leadership consisted of a small group of civilians and military officers: Hoang Co Thuy, a Saigon Lawyer; Lt Colonel Nguyen Trieu Hong, Thuy's nephew; Lt Colonel Vuong Van Dong, Hong's brother in law; and Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, the commander of the paratroops, who was apparently brought into the cabal at the last moment. The coup failed to arouse significant general pro-coup sentiment, either among the armed forces, or among the populace. Troops marched on Saigon, and rebels surrendered. In February, 1962, two Vietnamese air force planes bombed the Presidential palace in an unsuccessful attempt on President Diem and the Nhus--properly, an assassination attempt rather than a *coup d'etat*.

But the abortive events of 1960 and 1962 had the effect of dramatizing the choices open to those who recognized the insolvency of Diem's political and military policies. When Diem was overthrown in November, 1963, he was attacked by an apparatus that had been months in preparation. Unlike the earlier incident, the 1963 coup was actively supported by virtually all the generals of RVNAF, and was openly condoned by large sectors of the populace.

G. THE VIET CONG

1. Diem and Communists

Ngo Dinh Diem presided over a state which, for all the lip service it paid to individual freedom and American style government, remained a one party, highly centralized familial oligarchy in which neither operating democracy, nor the prerequisites for such existed. On 11 January, 1956, in GVN Ordinance Number 6, President Diem decreed broad governmental measures providing for "the defense of the state and public order," including authority to detain "individuals considered a danger to the state" or to "national defense and common security" at re-education centers. One month after the date of the scheduled Geneva plebescite, on 21 August 1956, the Government of Vietnam proclaimed Ordinance Number 47, which defined as a breach of law punishable by death any deed performed in or for any organization designated as "Communist." Moreover, the GVN was forced to use violence to establish itself in its own rural areas. In July, 1956, the month the Geneva elections were scheduled to have been held, the U.S. Army attache in Saigon noted in his monthly report that:

Orders have reportedly been issued to all Viet Minh cadres in Free Viet Nam to increase their efforts to reorganize and revitalize the military units in their zones of responsibility. These cadres have, however, encountered considerable difficulty in motivating their adherents to work for the Communist cause. The military and political cadres are making little progress due to the Communist Denunciation Campaigns promoted by the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam...

The same report submitted an ARVN estimate of 4,300 armed Viet Minh in all of Free Viet Nam, and recorded small ARVN skirmishes with Viet Minh

south of Saigon, clashes with 10 Hoa Hao battalions, 8 Cao Dai battalions north and west of Saigon, and incidents of banditry north of Bien Hoa by Binh Xuyen. But, in a relatively short time, the fighting subsided, the Vietnamese Army was withdrawn from the countryside for retraining, reorganization, and modernization under the US MAAG, and South Vietnam ostensibly settled into the first peace it had known in a decade. Peace rested, however, on a strong central government. In an article published in the January, 1957, *Foreign Affairs*, an American analyst stated that:

South Viet Nam is today a quasi-police state characterized by arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, strict censorship of the press and the absence of an effective political opposition. . . . All the techniques of political and psychological warfare, as well as pacification campaigns involving extensive military operations have been brought to bear against the underground.

Police states, efficiently organized and operated, have historically demonstrated much greater ability at countering insurgency than other sorts of governments. South Vietnam in fact succeeded in 1955 and 1956 in quelling rural dissidence through a comprehensive political and military assault on sect forces and other anti-government armed bands using its army, the civic action cadre, the Communist Denunciation campaign, and a broad range of promised reforms. Moreover, at its worst, the Government of South Vietnam compared favorably with other Asian regimes with respect to its degree of repressiveness. Nor did it face endemic violence markedly different from that then prevalent in Burma, Indonesia, South Korea. And its early "counterinsurgency" operations were as sophisticated as any being attempted elsewhere in Asia. In 1957, the Government of Viet Nam claimed that its pacification programs had succeeded:

We believe that with clear, even elementary ideas based upon facts...we can imbue . . . first the youth and ultimately the entire population with the spirit and essential objectives of . . . civic humanism. We believe that this above all is the most effective antidote to Communism (which is but an accident of history)....

We can see that the Viet-Minh authorities have disintegrated and been rendered powerless.

P. J. Honey, the British expert on Vietnam, agreed; his evaluation as of early 1958 was as follows:

The country has enjoyed three years of relative peace and calm in which it has been able to carry on the very necessary work of national reconstruction. The most destructive feature in the national life of Vietnam throughout recent years has been the lack of security in the countryside, which obliged farmers and peasants to abandon the ricefields and to flee to the large cities for safety. Today it is possible to travel all over South Vietnam without any risk. The army and security forces have mopped up most of the armed bands of political opponents of the Government, of Communists and of common bandits. One still hears of an isolated raid, but the old insecurity is fast vanishing. . .

After a 1959 trip, however, Honey detected dangerous unease in the countryside:

For the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese, heirs to experience of a century of French colonial rule, the Government is a remote body which passes laws, collects taxes, demands labour corvées, takes away able-bodied men for military service, and generally enriches itself at the expense of the poor peasant. "Government" is associated in the minds of the villagers with exactions, punishments, unpaid labour, and other unpleasant matters. These people are members of families and members of villages, and their loyalties to both are strong. But these loyalties do not extend beyond the village, nor has any past experience taught the peasants why they should. The idea that the peasants should assume any responsibility for the [extra-village] government themselves would be so alien to their thinking as to be comic. Educated Vietnamese are well aware of this, as many of their actions show....

Such political parties as existed in Vietnam before the advent of independence were all clandestine, so that any political experience acquired from these by the Vietnamese peasants will have been of secret plotting for the overthrow of the Government. Since independence, they will probably have been subjected to attempted Communist indoctrination by the Viet Cong, but this too will have had an anti-Government slant. Since 1954, the peasants have been fed on a diet of puerile, and frequently offensive slogans by the Ministry of Information. These serve, if indeed they serve any purpose at all, to make the peasant distrust the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem. The peasants, for all their naïveté, are far from foolish and they are not deceived by slogans alleging to be true things which they know, from their own personal experience, to be untrue. Any political experience among the peasantry, then, is more likely to prove a liability than an asset to any Government.

Diem knew that his main political dissent was centered not among his fellow mandarins, in his press, or among his military officers, but in the peasantry. And the prime challenge was, as Diem saw it, communism, precisely because it could and did afford the peasants political experience.

Communism was, from the outset of Diem's rule, his bete noire. In 1955, after the victory over the sects, and just before General John W. O'Daniel ended his tour as Chief, MAAG Vietnam, Diem talked to the General about Vietnam's future:

He spoke about the decentralization of government that he had been advised to undertake, but felt that the time was not yet right. He felt that, since his country was involved in a war, warlike control was in order. He remarked that the Vietminh propaganda line never mentioned Communism, but only land reform. . . . Diem wants land reform too....

In his message to the American Friends of Vietnam in June, 1956, Diem acknowledged progress, but warned that:

We have arrived at a critical point. . . . We must now give meaning to our hard sought liberty. . . . To attain that goal we need technicians and machines. Our armed forces

which are considerably reduced must however undertake an immense task from the military as well as the cultural and social point of view. It is indispensable that our army have the wherewithal to become increasingly capable of preserving the peace which we seek. There are an infinite number of tasks in all fields to complete before the year's end.

Diem's preoccupation with security paradoxically interfered with his ability to compete with the communists in the countryside. In effect, he decided on a strategy of postponing the politicizing of the peasants until he had expunged his arch-foes. Diem's official biography underscores this point:

The main concern of President Ngo Dinh Diem is therefore to destroy the sources of demoralization, however powerful, before getting down to the problem of endowing Vietnam with a democratic apparatus in the Western sense of the word.

Madame Nhu, his sister-in-law, was vehement that any political liberalization would have operated to Viet Cong advantage: "If we open the window, not only sunlight, but many bad things will fly in, also." To hold a contrary view does not necessarily argue that democratization was the only way Diem could have met his political opposition in the villages; it does seem, however, that in failing to meet aspirations there by some departure from inefficiently repressive course he adopted, Diem erred. In concluding that he did not have to reckon with peasant attitudes, Diem evidently operated from two related misapprehensions: that somehow the peasants would remain politically neutral while he eliminated the communists, and that the Viet Cong were essentially a destructive force. It was not that Diem could not vocalize a sound estimate of the communist political threat; his own description of communist operations to an Australian journalist was quite accurate:

In China, during the Indo-China war and now here, the Communists have always sheltered in open base areas of difficult access, in areas where there are no roads. They have made their headquarters in the jungle. Cautiously, sometimes only one man at a time, they move into a village and establish a contact, then a cell until the village is theirs to command. Having got one village, they move to a second village and from a second to third, until eventually they need not live in any of these villages, but merely visit them periodically. When this stage is reached, they are in a position to build training camps and even start crude factories and produce home-made guns, grenades, mines, and booby traps.

This is all part of the first phase. The second phase is to expand control and link up with Communist groups in other bases. To begin with, they start acts of violence through their underground organizations. They kill village chiefs, headmen, and others working for the government and, by so doing, terrorize the population, not necessarily by acts of violence against the people but by demonstrating that there is no security for them in accepting leadership from those acknowledging the leadership of the government. Even with much smaller numbers of troops than the constituted authority, it is not difficult now for the Communists to seize the initiative. A government has responsibility for maintaining supply to the civil population of keeping railways, rivers, and canals open for traffic, of

ensuring that rural crops reach the markets and that in turn commodity goods are distributed throughout the country. The Communists have no such responsibility. They have no roads and bridges to guard, and no goods to distribute.

Diem failed to perceive that the "first phase" was crucial, or that the VC were, from the very outset, constructing while they destroyed, building a state within South Vietnam with more effective local government than his own.

Like many another issue in Vietnam, the problem was in part semantics. "Communists" during this period formally recanted for the GVN by the thousands; thousands more "communists" were incarcerated by the GVN for "political reeducation." But Ordinance 47 of 1956 notwithstanding, "communist" is a term which has not been used since the 1940's by Vietnamese serving the Marxist-Leninist Party headed by Ho Chi Minh of the DRV. These referred to themselves as members of the Vietnam Workers Party (Dang Lao Dong), as members of one Front or another, or as resistance fighters, or fighters for national liberation. Nor was "Viet Minh" a useful name, since Viet Minh, a nationalist front, included numerous non-communist, or at least non-party members. In 1956, the Saigon press began to distinguish between the Viet Minh and communists by referring to the latter as "Viet Cong," a fairly precise, and not necessarily disparaging, rendition of "Viet Nam Cong-San," which means "Vietnamese Communist." The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) much later condemned the term as "contemptuous," and pointed out that the GVN had applied it indiscriminately to all persons or groups "who are lukewarm toward the pro-U.S. policy even on details." There can be no doubt that Diem and his government applied the term somewhat loosely within South Vietnam, and meant by it North as well as South Vietnamese communists, whom they presumed acted in concert.

2. The Viet Minh Residue

At the close of the Franco-Viet Minh War, some 60,000 men were serving in organized Viet Minh units in South Viet Nam. For the regroupments to North Vietnam, these units were augmented with large numbers of untrained young men-who were later known among the regroupees in North Vietnam as "soldiers of Geneva." A reported 90,000 soldiers were taken to North Vietnam in the evacuated units, while the U.S. and the GVN estimated that 5,000 to 10,000 trained men were left behind as "cadre." If French estimates are correct that in 1954 the Viet Minh controlled over 60 to 90 percent of South Vietnam's villages outside the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao regions, those 5,000 to 10,000 cadre must have represented only a small fraction of the remaining Viet Minh apparatus-cadre, local workers, sympathizers-in the countryside. GVN figures themselves attest to this. In 1955 and 1956 alone, the GVN claimed 100,000 communist "cadre" rallied or surrendered.

Neither Diem's GVN nor the U.S. knew a great deal about the Viet Minh in the period 1954-1960. By 1967, however, new information had begun to accumulate from interrogations of prisoners and defectors, and captured documents. For example, in March, 1967, a study was published of 23 Viet Minh who stayed behind during the

regroupment of 1954-1955. All the men of the sample told consistent stories, and although an admittedly narrow basis for generalization, the stories ring true. Upon departure, the Viet Minh leaders assigned some of these stay-behinds active roles; others were simply told to return to their homes as inactives, and wait for further instructions. It is quite clear that even the activists were not instructed to organize units for guerrilla war, but rather to agitate politically for the promised Geneva elections, and the normalization of relations with the North. They drew much reassurance from the presence of the ICC, and up until mid-1956, most held on to the belief that the elections would take place. They were disappointed in two respects: not only were the promised elections not held, but the amnesty which had been assured by the Geneva Settlement was denied them, and they were hounded by the Anti-Communist campaign. After 1956, for the most part, they went "underground." They were uniformly outraged at Diem's practices, particularly the recurrent GVN attempts to grade the populace into lettered categories according to previous associations with the Viet Minh. Most of them spoke of terror, brutality and torture by GVN rural officials in carrying out the Communist Denunciation campaigns, and of the arrest and slaying of thousands of old comrades from the "resistance." Their venom was expended on these local officials, rather than on Diem, or the central government, although they were prepared to hold Diem ultimately responsible. A veteran who had been a Party member since 1936 characterized the years 1955-1959 as the most difficult years of the entire revolution.

What these cadres did in those years is revealing. Only four of the 23 were engaged in military tasks. Most spent their time in preparation for a future uprising, in careful recruitment in the villages--concentrating on the very families with Viet Minh ties who were receiving priority in the GVN's attentions--and in constructing base areas in the mountains or jungles. The Viet Minh activists sought out the inactives, brought them back into the organization, and together they formed the framework of an expanding and increasingly intricate network of intelligence and propaganda. Few spoke of carrying weapons, or using violence before 1959, although many boasted of feats of arms in later years. They felt that they lacked the right conditions to strike militarily before 1959; their mission was preparation. In several instances, the Viet Cong used terror to recruit former Viet Minh for the new movement, threatening them with "treason" and elimination; caught between the GVN and the VC, many old Resistance members joined the "New Resistance." But most spoke of making person-to-person persuasion to bring in new members for the movement, relying mainly on two appeals: nationalism and social justice. They stressed that the Americans had merely substituted a new, more pernicious form of tyranny for that of the French, and that the My-Diem combine was the antithesis of humane and honest government. One respondent spoke of this activity in these terms:

From 1957 to 1960 the cadres who had remained in the South had almost all been arrested. Only one or two cadres were left in every three to five villages. What was amazing was how these one or two cadres started the movement so well.

The explanation is not that these cadres were exceptionally gifted but the people they talked to were ready for rebellion. The people were like a mound of straw, ready to be ignited....

If at that time the government in the South had been a good one, if it had not been dictatorial, if the agrarian reforms had worked, if it had established control at the village level, then launching the movement would have been difficult.

These interviews underscored three points on which the GVN was apparently in error. First, with respect to the stay-behinds themselves, by no means were all dedicated communists in the doctrinaire sense. Many reported that they resented and feared the communists in the Viet Minh, and apparently might have been willing to serve the GVN faithfully had it not hounded them out of the society. There were several among the group, for example, who had entered Saigon, and there found a degree of freedom which kept them off the Viet Cong roles for years. Second, with regard to the peasants in general, the Viet Minh were widely admired throughout the South as national heroes, and the GVN therefore committed a tactical error of the first magnitude in damning all Viet Minh without qualification as communists. Third, the GVN created by its rural policy a climate of moral indignation which energized the peasants politically, turned them against the government, sustained the Viet Cong, and permitted "communists" to outlast severe GVN repressions and even to recruit during it.

The foregoing precis of the 1967 study presents views which are paralleled in a captured Viet Cong history, written around 1963, which describes the years after 1954 as follows:

EXPERIENCES OF THE SOUTH VIETNAM REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS

During the past nine years, under the enlightened leadership of the Party Central Committee, the people and the Party of South Vietnam have experienced many phases along the difficult and complicated path of struggle but they have also gained many victories and experiences while pushing the South Vietnam liberation revolution and creating the conditions for peaceful reunification of the country....

After the armistice, the South Vietnam people reverted to political struggle through peaceful means by demanding personal rights, freedom and negotiations concerning general elections in accordance with the stipulations of the Geneva Agreement so that the country could be peacefully reunified.... The Party [words illegible] party were changed in order to guarantee the leadership and forces of the Party under the new struggle conditions.....

From the end of 1954 until 1956 several important changes occurred in the South Vietnam situation. Imperialist America ousted and replaced imperialist France, turning South Vietnam into a colony (a new type of colony) based on U.S. military power. The Ngo Dinh Diem government was clearly shown to be a government composed of bureaucratic, dictatorial and family-controlled feudalists and capitalists who committed crimes for the American imperialists and massacred the people, massacred revolutionaries and massacred the oppositionists. Both the Americans and Diem made every effort to oppose the implementation of the Geneva Agreement and made every effort to subvert the peaceful reunification of our fatherland.....

Immediately after the re-establishment of peace, the responsibility of South Vietnam was to use the political struggle to demand the implementation of the Geneva Agreement. The struggle responsibilities and procedures were appropriate for the situation at that time and corresponded with the desires of the great majority of the masses who wished for peace after nearly 10 years of difficult resistance.

At that time, although the Americans-Diemists used cruel force to oppose the people and the revolution, and the masses struggled decisively against this repression in many places and at many times, the contradictions had not yet developed to a high degree and the hatred had not yet developed to a point where the use of armed struggle could become an essential and popular struggle tactic. In South Vietnam since 1955, thanks to the armed movement of the sects, we were able to avoid the construction of an armed propaganda force, since we only had a few former bases which were needed in the political struggle and for the creation of a reserve force.

From 1957 to 1958, the situation gradually changed. The enemy persistently sabotaged the implementation of the Geneva Agreement, actively consolidated and strengthened the army, security service, and administrative apparatus from the central to the hamlet level, crudely assassinated the people, and truly and efficiently destroyed our Party. By relying on force, the American-Diemist regime was temporarily able to stabilize the situation and increase the prestige of the counterrevolutionaries. At this time, the political struggle movement of the masses, although not defeated, was encountering increasing difficulty and increasing weakness; the Party bases, although not completely destroyed, were significantly weakened, and in some areas, quite seriously; the prestige of the masses and of the revolution suffered. But in reality, the years during which the enemy increased his terrorism were also the years in which the enemy suffered major political losses [words illegible] The masses became more deep seeded and many individuals who formerly supported the enemy now opposed them. The masses, that is to say, the peasants, now realized that it was impossible to live under such conditions and that it was necessary to rise up in drastic struggle. Faced with the fact that the enemy was using guns, assassinations and imprisonment to oppose the people in their political struggle, many voices among the masses appealed to the Party to establish a program of armed resistance against the enemy. Within the Party, on the one hand, the members were saturated with the responsibility to lead the revolution to a successful overthrow of the enemy, but on the other hand, the majority of the party members and cadres felt that it was necessary to immediately launch an armed struggle in order to preserve the movement and protect the forces. In several areas the party members on their own initiative had organized armed struggle against the enemy....

Up to 1959, in South Vietnam, the Americans-Diemists had fully constructed a large army, equipped with modern weapons, along with a large and well armed administrative, police and security apparatus. During the years in which the masses were only using political struggle, the Americans- Diemists used the military, security and administrative apparatus to launch various campaigns to terrorize, mop up and oppress the movement, no different from during the period of warfare. Because they were determined to crush

the revolution and control the people at every moment, they could not avoid using every type of repression.

In opposing such an enemy, simple political struggle was not possible. It was necessary to use additional armed struggle, but not merely low level armed struggle, such as only armed propaganda, which was used to support the political struggle. The enemy would not allow us any peace, and in the face of the enemy operations and destructive pursuit, the armed propaganda teams, even if they wished to avoid losses, would never be able to engage the enemy in warfare and would never be able to become an actual revolutionary army. This is an essential fact of the movement and the actual movement in South Vietnam illustrates this fact. Therefore, at the end of 1959, when we launched an additional armed struggle in coordination with the political struggle against the enemy, it immediately took the form in South Vietnam of revolutionary warfare, a long range revolutionary warfare. Therefore, according to some opinions at the beginning of 1959, we only used heavy armed propaganda and later developed "regional guerrillas. . .

This version of events from 1954 through 1959 is further supported by the report of interrogation of one of the four members of the Civilian Proselyting Section of the Viet Cong Saigon/Gia Dinh Special Zone Committee, captured in November, 1964; the prisoner stated that:

The period from the Armistice of 1954 until 1958 was the darkest time for the VC in South Vietnam. The political agitation policy proposed by the Communist Party could not be carried out due to the arrest of a number of party members by RVN authorities. The people's agitation movement was minimized. However, the organizational system of the party from the highest to the lowest echelons survived, and since the party remained close to the people, its activities were not completely suppressed. In 1959 the party combined its political agitation with its military operations, and by the end of 1959 the combined operations were progressing smoothly.

Viet Cong "political agitation" was a cunning blend of the Viet Minh nationalist charisma, exploitation of GVN shortcomings, xenophobia, and terror. Drawing on the years of Viet Minh experience in subversive government and profiting from Viet Minh errors, the Viet Cong appealed to the peasants not as Marxist revolutionaries proposing a drastic social upheaval, but quite to the contrary, as a conservative, nationalist force wholly compatible with the village-centered traditionalism of most farmers, and as their recourse against "My-Diem" modernization. One American authority summed the Viet Minh experience evident in Viet Cong operations as ten political precepts:

1. Don't try for too much; don't smash the existing social system, use it; don't destroy opposition organizations, take them over.
2. Use the amorphous united front to attack opposition political forces too large or too powerful for you to take over; then fragment their leadership, using terror if necessary, and drown their followers in the front organization.
3. At all times appear outwardly reasonable about the matter of sharing power with rival organizations although secretly working by every means to eliminate them. Don't posture

in public.

4. Divide your organization rigidly into overt and covert sections and minimize traffic between the two. The overt group's chief task is to generate broad public support; the covert group seeks to accumulate and manipulate political power.
5. Use communism as dogma, stressing those aspects that are well regarded by the people; don't hesitate to interpret Marxism-Leninism in any way that proves beneficial. Soft-pedal the class-struggle idea except among cadres.
6. Don't antagonize anyone if it can be helped: this avoids the formation of rival blocs.
7. Bearing in mind that in Vietnam altruism is conspicuous by its absence, blend the proper mixture of the materialistic appeals of communism and the endemic feelings of nationalism. Win small but vital gains through communism, large ones through nationalism. Plan to win in the end not as Communists but as nationalists.
8. Use the countryside as the base and carry the struggle to the cities later; in rural areas political opportunities are greater and risks smaller. Avoid the lure of the teahouse.
9. But forge a city alliance. Mobilization of the farmer must create a strong farmer-worker bond.
10. Work from the small to the large, from the specific to the general; work from small safe areas to large liberated areas and then expand the liberated areas; begin with small struggle movements and work toward a General Uprising during which state power will be seized.

The same expert termed General Uprising "a social myth in the Sorelian sense, perhaps traceable back to the Communist myth of the general strike," and cited Viet Cong documents which describe how the 2500 villages of Vietnam will be led toward a spontaneous final and determinant act of revolution:

The Revolution, directed toward the goal of the General Uprising, has these five characteristics: . . . It takes place in a very favorable worldwide setting. . . . It is against the neocolonialism of the U.S.A. . . . The government of Vietnam is unpopular and growing weaker. . . . The people have revolutionary consciousness and are willing to struggle. . . . It is led by the Party, which has great experience.

Ho and Giap thus coated Marx and Mao with French revolutionary romanticism. Diem, the moral reformer, also drew heavily upon the same traditions for "personalism." One of the tragedies of modern Vietnam is that the political awakening of its peasants was to these, the most virulent, and vicious social theories of the era.

But doctrine was not the sole heritage the Viet Cong received from the Viet Minh. Perhaps more important was the "Resistance" organization: the hierarchy extending upward from hamlet and village through provincial to regional authorities capable of coordinating action on a broad scale. The Viet Minh complied with military regroupments under the Geneva Accords but were not obligated to withdraw the "political" apparatus; in fact, the Settlement provided guarantees for it in its provisions against reprisals (Armistice, Article 14c, and Conference Final Declaration, Article 9), and for liberation of political prisoners (Armistice, Article 21). Knowledge of the techniques of clandestine politics, appreciation for the essentiality of tight discipline, and

trained personnel constituting a widespread, basic organizational framework were all conferred on the Viet Cong.

3. Rural Violence and GVN Counters, 1957-1960

By early 1958, Saigon was beginning to sense that pacification had eluded the GVN even as it had the French. In December, 1957, the ill-fated newspaper, *Thoi Luan*, pointed out that terrorism was on the rise, and that:

Today the menace is heavier than ever, with the terrorists no longer limiting themselves to the notables in charge of security. Everything suits them, village chiefs, chairmen of liaison committees, simple guards, even former notables. . . . In certain areas, the village chiefs spend their nights in the security posts, while the inhabitants organize watches....

The most urgent need for the population today is security—a question to which we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the authorities.

Spectacular assassinations have taken place in the provinces of An Giang and Phong-Dinh [in the Mekong Delta]. In the village of Than-My-Tay, armed men appeared in the dead of night, awakened the inhabitants, read a death sentence, and beheaded four young men whose heads they nailed to the nearest bridge. . .

The security question in the provinces must be given top priority: the regime will be able to consolidate itself only if it succeeds in finding a solution to this problem.

Besides the incidents cited, there had been a mass murder of 17 in Chau-Doc in July, 1957; in September the District Chief at My Tho with his whole family was gunned down in daylight on a main highway; on 10 October a bomb thrown into a Cholon cafe injured 13 persons, and on 22 October, in three bombings in Saigon, 13 Americans were wounded.

Also in October a clandestine radio in Vietnam purporting to speak for the "National Salvation Movement" was backing armed insurgents against Diem. In Washington, U.S. intelligence indicated that the "Viet Minh underground" had been directed to conduct additional attacks on U.S. personnel "whenever conditions are favorable." U.S. intelligence also noted a total of 30 armed "terrorist incidents initiated by Communist guerillas" in the last quarter of 1957, as well as a "large number" of incidents carried out by "Communist-lead [sic] Hoa Hao and Cao Dai dissident elements," and reported "at least" 75 civilians or civil officials assassinated or kidnapped in the same period.

Robert Shaplen wrote that:

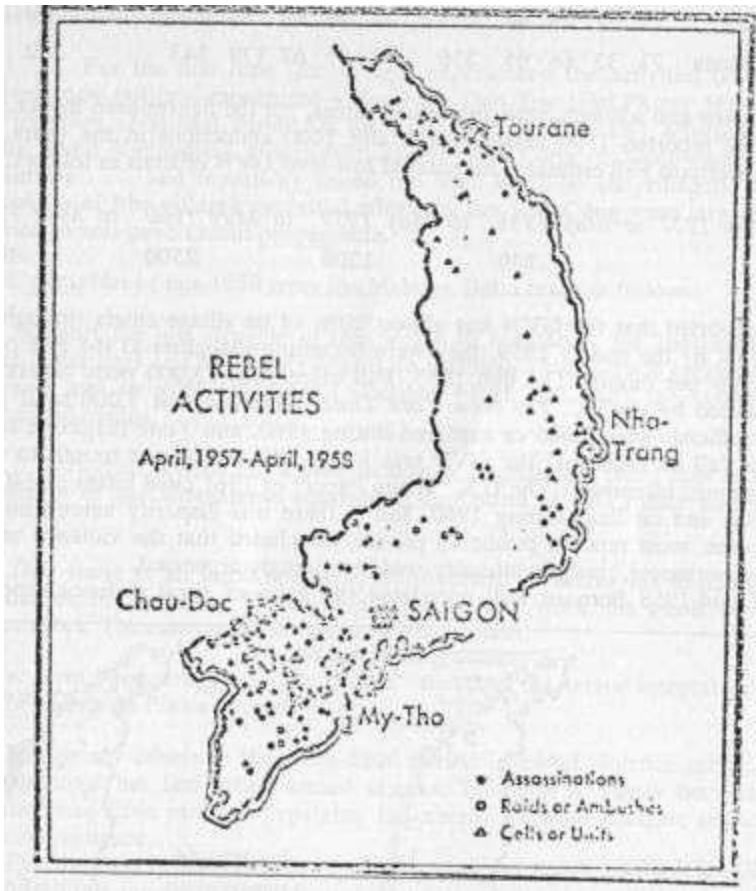
By 1958, the Vietminh had fully resumed its campaign of terror in the countryside, kidnapping government officials and threatening villagers....in an average month the local and regional units were becoming involved in a score of engagements. Usually, these

were hit-and-run Communist attacks on Self-Defense Corps or Civil Guard headquarters, the purpose of which was both to seize weapons and to heighten the atmosphere of terror.

Guns should have been plentiful in the countryside of Vietnam. The Japanese, the French and even the GVN armed the sect forces. And both the sects and the Viet Minh had operated small arms factories—for instance, General Lansdale visited a Cao Dai weapons factory at Nui Ba Den in Tay Ninh in 1955. The Viet Minh cached arms as they withdrew from their "liberated areas" in 1954 and 1955. ARVN veterans and deserters from the force reductions of 1954 and 1955 carried weapons into the hinterland. The VC attacked for weapons to make up for losses to the GVN, and to equip units with similar types to simplify logistics.

In January, 1958, a "large band" of "communist" guerrillas attacked a plantation north of Saigon, and in February, an ARVN truck was ambushed on the outskirts of the capital. In March, the Saigon newspaper Dan-Cung complained that: "our people are fleeing the villages and returning to the cities for fear of communist guerrillas and feudalistic officials Bernard Fall published an article in July, 1958, in which he mapped the pattern of assassinations and other incidents from April 1957 to April 1958, and announced the onset of a new war: Fall's thesis was challenged by a senior U.S. adviser to the GVN, who argued that the increasing casualty figures represented not a structured attempt to overthrow the GVN, but were simply a product of police reporting in the hinterlands. There can be no doubt that the latter view was partially correct: neither the U.S. nor the GVN knew what was "normal" in the rural areas, and police reporting, with U.S. aid, had been improved. But the deadly figures continued to mount. George A. Carver of the CIA, in his 1966 *Foreign Affairs* article, agreed with Fall:

A pattern of politically motivated terror began to emerge, directed against the representatives of the Saigon government and concentrated on the very bad and the very good. The former were liquidated to win favor with the peasantry; the latter because their effectiveness was a bar to the achievement of Communist objectives. The terror was directed not only against officials but against all whose operations were essential to the functioning of organized political society, school teachers, health workers, agricultural officials, etc. The scale and scope of this terrorist and insurrectionary activity mounted slowly and steadily. By the end of 1958 the participants in this incipient insurgency, whom Saigon quite accurately termed the "Viet Cong," constituted a serious threat to South Viet Nam's political stability.



Like most other statistics concerning Vietnam, figures on the extent of the terrorism varied widely. The GVN reported to the ICC that in 1957, 1958, and the first half of 1959, Viet Cong murdered 65 village officials, 51 civilians, 28 Civil Guardsmen, and 10 soldiers. GVN official reports provided the U.S. Embassy in Saigon recorded a significantly greater toll of civilians:

CIVILIAN ASSASSINATIONS AND KIDNAPPINGS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

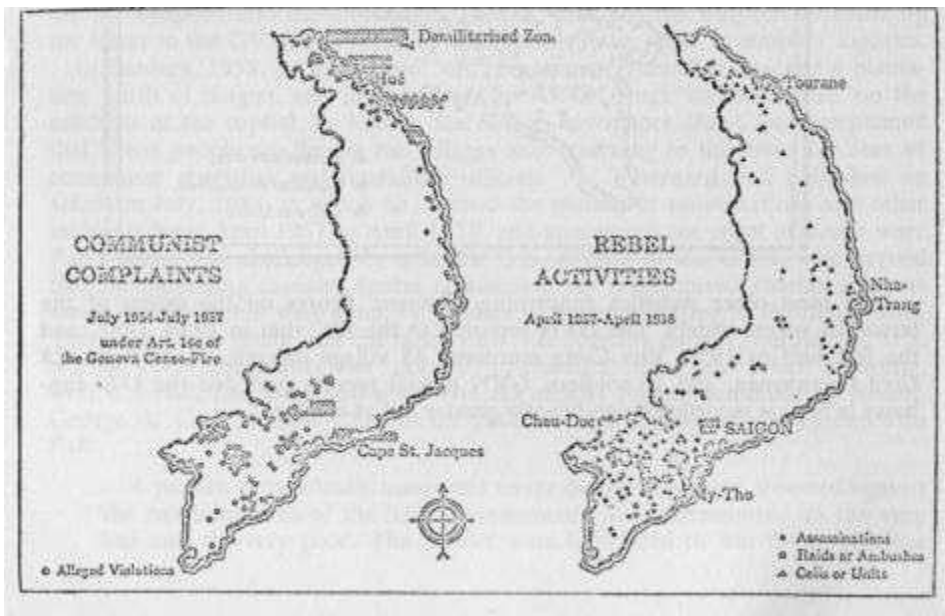
By Quarter, From GVN Reports to U.S. Embassy

	1958					1959					1960
	1	2	3	4	Total	1	2	3	4	Total	First 5 months
Murders	72	51	26	44	193	52	34	46	97	233	780
Abductions	73	32	66	65	236	44	53	67	179	343	282

Journalists and scholars, studying open sources, put the figures even higher. Douglas Pike reported 1700 assassinations and 2000 abductions in the years 1957- 1960. Bernard Fall estimated murders of low-level GVN officials as follows:

May 1957 to May 1958	to May 1959	to May 1960	to May 1961
700	1200	2500	4000

Fall reported that the GVN lost almost 20% of its village chiefs through 1958, and that by the end of 1959, they were becoming casualties at the rate of more than 2% per month. Through 1963, Fall calculated, 13,000 petty officials were eliminated by the VC. The New York Times estimated that 3,000 local government officials were killed or captured during 1960, and Time magazine reported in the fall of 1960 that the GVN was losing 250 to 300 per month to a "new Communist offensive": The U.S. "White Paper" of 1961 cited losses of 1400 local officials and civilians during 1960. But if there was disparity among numerical estimates, most reports, public or private, concluded that the violence was real, anti-government, rising in intensity, and increasingly organized.



In mid-1958 Bernard Fall correlated the locus of rural violence reported in South Vietnam with complaints lodged with the ICC in Hanoi by the DRV on behalf of "Former Resistance members," alleging GVN violations of the "no reprisals" provisions of the Geneva Accords (Armistice, Article 14c). The detail in these complaints indicated an intelligence apparatus in South Vietnam.

"The conclusion is inescapable," he wrote, "that there must be some coordination between the rebels and the North Vietnamese Government." About that same time, U.S. intelligence reported that Viet Cong-bandit operations north of Saigon seemed to be part of

a calculated campaign of economic sabotage. According to one description of the village near My Tho which was studied very intensively around mid-1958:

...For the first time [the village] experienced the activities of a relatively new political movement--*Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam* (National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam) referred to by the South Vietnamese government as the Viet Cong or Vietnamese Communists . . . and invariably called the Viet Minh by the villagers. In the vicinity of [the village] the initial efforts of the Viet Cong were largely confined to anti-government propaganda.

One VC pamphlet of late 1958 from the Mekong Delta reads as follows:

Support the just struggle of the people to overthrow the government of the Americans and Diem [My-Diem], to establish a democratic regime in the South, and to work for general elections which will unify the country by peaceful means.

But, if "struggle" sounds innocuous enough in English, the word fails to carry the intensity of the Vietnamese equivalent, *dau tranh*. A VC rallier put it this way:

Dau tranh is all important to a revolutionist. It marks his thinking, his attitudes, his behavior. His life, his revolutionary work, his whole world is *dau tranh*. The essence of his existence is *dau tranh*.

And, the term "just struggle of the people" sheathed the terror integral to Viet Cong operations. In Pike's estimate:

Insurgency efforts in the 1958-1960 period involved violence such as assassinations but few actual armed attacks. This was so partly because the cadres had little military capability but chiefly because doctrine counseled against violence....

For the true believers operating throughout the South this was a time of surreptitious meetings, cautious political feelers, the tentative assembling of a leadership group, and the sounding out of potential cadres whose names went into a file for future reference. It meant working mainly with non-Communists and, in many cases, keeping one's Communist identity a secret.....

Diem's own party newspaper, the NRM's *Cach Mang Quoc Gia*, published an article in February, 1959 which reported that "the situation in the rural areas is rotten," and described communist cells established in the villages collecting taxes and conducting "espionage," supporting local guerrilla forces responsive to a hierarchy of provincial and regional committees.

From mid-1959 onward, there was a definite upsurge in Viet Cong activity, marked not only by the increase in terrorism noted in the statistics presented above, but also by the fielding of large military units which sought, rather than avoided, engagement with units of Diem's regular army. On 26 September 1959 two companies of the ARVN 23d

Division were ambushed by a well-organized force of several hundred identified as the "2d Liberation Battalion"; the ARVN units lost 12 killed, 14 wounded, and most of their weapons.

On 25 January 1960 the same Viet Cong battalion launched an attack coordinated with four guerrilla companies—a total force of 300 to 500 men—which penetrated the compound of the 32d Regiment, 21st ARVN Division at Tay Ninh, killed 23 ARVN soldiers, and netted a large haul of arms and ammunition. On 29 January 1960 an insurgent band seized the town of Dong Xoai, some sixty miles north of Saigon, held the place for several hours, and robbed a French citizen of 200,000 piasters. In the same month, large VC forces opened operations in the Camau peninsula and the Mekong Delta. In Kien Hoa province VC units numbering hundreds effectively isolated the province capital from six of its eight districts. Bernard Fall, in his continuing study of Viet Cong operations, detected a new strategy operating: a shift during 1959 and early 1960 from base development in the Delta to isolation of Saigon. Whether or not the incidents plotted by Fall constituted a strategy as he thought, they were patently more coherent. A U.S. intelligence assessment submitted 7 March 1960 described VC plans, confirmed from a variety of U.S. and GVN sources, to launch large scale guerrilla warfare that year "under the flag of the People's Liberation Movement," which was identified as "red, with a blue star." The VC were reportedly moving into position to exercise one or more of three strategic options by the end of 1960: (1) incite an ARVN revolt; (2) set up a popular front government in the lower Delta; (3) force the GVN into such repressive countermeasures that popular uprisings will follow.

An ARVN coup d'etat did ensue, although it was neither VC incited nor successful; nor was there any general revolt in the ranks. No popular front government was set up. But the GVN was prompted to a succession of repressive countermeasures which may have aided the Viet Cong much as they had expected. Prodded by the rural violence, Diem began his "counterinsurgency" in early 1959 with the reintensification of population classification and relocation programs. On 6 May 1959, the GVN promulgated Law 10/59, which set up three military tribunals which could, without appeal, adjudge death for crimes under Ordinance 47 of 1956—the anti-communist law. In actuality, these tribunals were used sparingly, usually for show-case trials of terrorists. But the existence of Law 10/59 furnished grist for VC propaganda mills for years.

On 7 July, 1959, the GVN launched its "prosperity and density centers"—the "agroville" program—and Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife plunged into organizing rural youth, women, and farmers' organizations. However, just as the VC Tet offensive of 1968 attenuated ~'Revolutionary Development," the VC upsurge of late 1959 and early 1960 disrupted the new GVN organizational efforts, and reinforced Diem's conviction that security was the paramount consideration. The U.S. assessment of March 1960 cited widespread abuse of police powers by local officials for extortion and vendetta, and pointed out that arbitrary and corrupt local officials compromised GVN efforts to root out the VC "undercover cadres." Moreover:

....While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations through community development, the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, etc., these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment. Basically, the problem appears to be that such projects have been imposed on the people without adequate psychological preparation in terms of the benefits to be gained. Since most of these projects call for sacrifice on the part of the population (in the form of allegedly "volunteer" labor in the case of construction, time away from jobs or school labor in the case of rural youth groups, leaving homes and lands in the case of regrouping isolated peasants), they are bound to be opposed unless they represent a partnership effort for mutual benefit on the part of the population and the government....

The situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment.

4. The Founding of the National Liberation Front

Despite their expanding military effort, the Viet Cong remained a formless, "faceless" foe until late in 1960, when the National Liberation Front was announced as the superstructure of the insurgent apparatus, and the political voice of the rebellion. Thereafter, the Viet Cong sought publicity, and thereby acquired identity as a South Vietnam-wide organization of three major components: the NLF itself, the Liberation Army of South Vietnam, and the People's Revolutionary Party.

a. Organization and Objectives

The precise dates of the forming of the NLF constitutes one of the puzzles of the war. As mentioned above, in the years 1954 to 1960, peasants, captured documents and prisoners referred frequently to "the Front," meaning the insurgent movement, and "Front" flags had been captured as early as 1959. These were probably references to Viet Minh carry-over organizations, such as they were, rather than a specific leadership group or structure, with a set of defined objectives. Nguyen Huu Tho, the first Chairman of the NLF, stated in a 1964 interview over Radio Hanoi that:

Although formally established in December 1960, the Front had existed as a means of action without by-laws or program since 1954 when we founded the Saigon-Cholon Peace Committee. . . . Many of the members of the [NLF] Central Committee were also members of the Peace Committee.....

Huynh Tan Phat, Tho's Vice Chairman in the NLF, was reported in late 1955 serving on the "Executive Committee of the Fatherland Front" (Mat Tren To Quoc), controlling joint Viet Minh-Hoa Hoa operations against the GVN in the plain of Reeds. Communists have been joining front organizations linking anti-government minorities. . . . [Examples are] the 'Vietnamese Peoples' Liberation Movement Forces' [and] . . . , the 'Vietnam-Cambodian Buddhist Association.'

A number of authorities, mainly French, have lent credence to an assertion that the NLF was formed by a group of Viet Minh veterans in March, 1960, somewhere in Cochinchina; but the NLF, as such, received no international publicity until after December 20, 1960. On January 29, 1961, Hanoi Radio broadcast in English to Europe and Asia its first announcement concerning the NLF:

A "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam" was recently formed in South Vietnam by various forces opposing the fascist Ngo Dinh Diem regime. This was revealed by Reuters in Saigon and by different papers published in . . . Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. This Front was created after a period of preparation and after a conference of representatives of various forces opposing the fascist regime in South Vietnam. According to these forces, the "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam" on December 20, 1960, issued a political program and a manifesto....[the manifesto] reads: "For a period of nearly a hundred years, the Vietnamese people repeatedly rose up to fight against foreign aggression for national independence and freedom. . . . When the French colonialists invaded our country for the second time, our compatriots-determined not to return to the former slavery-made tremendous sacrifices to defend national sovereignty and independence. The solidarity and heroic struggle of our compatriots during nine years led the resistance war to victory. The 1954 Geneva Agreements reinstalled peace in our country and recognized the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam. Under these circumstances, our compatriots in South Vietnam would have been able to live in peace, earn their livelihood in security and build a life of plenty and happiness. However, American imperialists who had in the past helped the French colonialists massacre our people have now replaced the French in subjugating the southern part of our country through a disguised colonial regime. . . . The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam calls on the entire people to unite and heroically rise up and struggle with the following program of action:

"NORTH VIETNAM

"Jan. 31, 1961

- '1. To overthrow the disguised colonial regime of the imperialists and the dictatorial administration, and to form a national and democratic coalition administration.
- '2. To carry out a broad and progressive democracy, promulgate the freedom of expression, of the press, of belief, reunion, association and of movement and other democratic freedoms; to carry out general amnesty of political detainees, dissolve the concentration camps dubbed "prosperity zones" and "resettlement centers," abolish the fascist law 10-59 and other anti-democratic laws.
- '3. Abolish the economic monopoly of the United States and its henchmen, protect homemade products, encourage the home industry, expand agriculture, and build an independent and sovereign economy; to provide jobs to unemployed people, increase wages for workers, army men, and office employees; to abolish arbitrary fines and apply

an equitable and rational tax system; to help forced evacuees from North Vietnam who now desire to rejoin their native places; and to provide jobs to those who want to remain.

'4. To carry out land rent reduction, guarantee the peasants' right to till their present plots of land, and redistribute communal land in preparation for land reform.

'5. To eliminate the U.S.-style culture of enslavement and depravation; to build a national and progressive culture and education, eliminate illiteracy, open more schools, and carry out reform in the educational and examination system.

'6. To abolish the system of American military advisers, eliminate foreign military bases in Vietnam, and to build a national army defending the fatherland and the people.

'7. To realize equality between men and women, and among different nationalities, and realize the right to autonomy of the national minorities in the country; to protect the legitimate interests of foreign residents in Vietnam; to protect and take care of the interests of overseas Vietnamese.

'8. To carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality; to establish diplomatic relations with all the countries which respect the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.

'9. To reestablish normal relations between the two zones of Vietnam for the attainment of peaceful reunification of the country.

'10. To oppose aggressive wars, actively defend world peace.

"The manifesto concludes by calling on various strata of the people to close their ranks and to carry out the above program. The appeal was addressed to the workers, peasants, and other working people, to the intellectuals, the industrialists, and trades, national minorities, religious communities, democratic personalities, patriotic armymen, and young men and women in South Vietnam.

"Addressing the Vietnamese living abroad, the manifesto called on them 'to turn their thoughts to the beloved motherland and actively contribute to the sacred struggle for national emancipation.'"

It is clear that the NLF was not intended as an exclusively communist enterprise. Rather it was designed to encompass anti-GVN activists, and to exploit the bi-polar nature of politics within South Vietnam. In the period 1954-1960, prior to the NLF's "creation," the objectives of insurgents in the South, other than overthrow of My-Diem, were vague. Communists in the South no doubt shared the overall objectives of the DRV, and were aiming at unification of all Vietnam under the Hanoi government. Some rebel nationalists were no doubt aware of the communists' ambitions, but would have regarded such an outcome as acceptable, if not desirable. Others, disillusioned by the actions of the Diem regime after 1956, simply looked toward the establishment of a genuine democratic government in the South. Some peasants may have been fighting to rid themselves of

government, or to oppose modernization, looking only to village autonomy. The sects, if not struggling for a democratic regime, were fighting for their independence, as were some of the tribal groups who chose to join the NLF. The National Liberation Front formulated and publicly articulated objectives for all these.

George Carver reported that:

On February 11, 1961, Hanoi devoted a second broadcast to the N.L.F.'s manifesto and program, blandly changing the language of both to tone down the more blatant Communist terminology of the initial version. However, even the milder second version (which became the "official" text) borrowed extensively from Le Duan's September speech [at the Third National Congress of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi] and left little doubt about the Front's true sponsors or objectives.

The "tone down" of communism was fairly subtle, if Hanoi so intended its revision, since the alterations consisted mainly in additions to the Ten Points of phraseology drawn from the preamble of the Manifesto; references to "agrarian reform," in those terms, were, however, cut. There was a marked increase in condemnatory citations of "My-Diem," so that, in eight of ten points in the action program, expelling the U.S. was clearly identified as the way the desired goal would be reached.

Pike refers to an "organizing congress" of the NLF held in December, 1960, of 60 participants, at which plans were announced for convening the first regular NLF congress within a year. Several postponements obtruded, and the meeting did not take place until February-March 1962. Nonetheless, a Central Committee continued in the interim to further define NLF purposes; the subsequent statements differed from the 1960 Manifesto mainly on points of emphasis. For example, "reunification of the country" (Point 9 of the Manifesto) was downplayed from 1960 through 1962. On the first anniversary of the NLF Manifesto, 20 December 1961, its leaders issued a supplementary series of interim or "immediate action" demands. These called for:

1. Withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel and weapons from South Vietnam and abolition of the Staley Plan.
2. An end to hostilities.
3. Establishment of political freedoms.
4. Release of political prisoners.
5. Dissolution of the National Assembly and election of a new assembly and president.
6. Ending the resettlement program.
7. Solution of Vietnam's economic problems.
8. Establishment of a foreign policy of non-alignment.

Although "immediate action" was probably intended to open the way toward formation of a coalition government and thence to ties with Hanoi, there was no mention of reunification; nonetheless, Hanoi in December, 1961, listed NLF objectives as "peace, independence, democracy, a comfortable life, and the peaceful unification of the Fatherland." One likely reason for the NLF's omission of reunification from "immediate

action" was its desire to broaden its base on anti-Diem, anti-U.S. grounds-without alienating anti-Communists who might otherwise support the movement. Again, when the first regular NLF congress met from February 16 to March 3, 1962, the earlier basic objectives of the Front were endorsed, excepting reunification. The Radio Hanoi broadcast on the congress added "advancing to peaceful unification of the Fatherland" to a list from which this objective was conspicuously absent in the NLF releases. On July 20, 1962, the anniversary of the Geneva Accords, the NLF issued a declaration that:

The Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam believes that in the spirit of Vietnamese dealing with Vietnamese solving their own internal affairs, with the determination to put the Fatherland's interest above all else, the forces that oppose U.S. imperialism in South Vietnam will, through mutual concessions, be able to reach a common agreement for united action to serve the people.

The same statement contained a new "four point manifesto":

1. The U.S. government must end its armed aggression against South Vietnam, abolish its military command, withdraw all its troops and personnel, as well as the troops and personnel of U.S. satellites and allies, and withdraw all weapons and other war equipment from South Vietnam.
2. Concerned parties in South Vietnam must stop the war, re-establish peace, and establish conditions throughout South Vietnam to enable the South Vietnamese to solve their own internal affairs. The South Vietnam authority [that is, government] must end its terror operations.
3. There must be established a national coalition government, to include representatives of all political parties, cliques, groups, all political tendencies, social strata, members of all religions. This government must guarantee peace. It must organize free general elections in South Vietnam to choose a democratic National Assembly that will carry out the urgently needed policies. It must promulgate democratic liberties to all political parties, groups, religions; it must release all political prisoners, abolish all internment camps and all other forms of concentration [camps], and stop the forced draft of soldiers and the military training of youth, women, public servants, and enterprise, economic independence. It must abolish monopolies and improve the living conditions of all people.
4. South Vietnam must carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality. It must establish friendly relations with all nations, especially with her neighbors. It must not enter any military bloc or agree to let any country establish military bases on her soil. It must accept aid from all countries [if] free of political conditions. A necessary international agreement must be signed in which the big powers of all blocs pledge to respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and neutrality of South Vietnam. South Vietnam, together with Cambodia and Laos, will form a neutral area, all three countries retaining full sovereignty.

As the anticipated fall of the Diem government drew near in 1963, NLF statements of goals increasingly stressed the anti-American, probably to shift the focus of NLF attack away from a disappearing objective--the defeat of Diem, and

possibly because the NLF could not manipulate or adapt to the Buddhist struggle movement. Demands issued by the NLF five days following Diem's fall in November, 1963, were probably intended to take credit for changes in GVN policy then underway, since, except for halting conscription, the Duong Van Minh government was undertaking every reform the NLF called for. However, the first extensive official statement of the NLF Central Committee following Diem's downfall, issued November 17, 1963, did reassert the reunification objective:

Concerning the reunification of Vietnam, as was expounded many times by the South Vietnam National Liberation Front, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the DRV government, it will be realized step by step on a voluntary basis, with consideration given to the characteristics of each zone, with equality, and without annexation of one zone by the other.

Concerning coalition government there was less vacillation in NLF emphasis, although there was some detectable variation in the welcome extended from time to time to anti-communist political movements. Similarly, the objective of "neutralization" was constant. Cambodia was held up as a model, and there was some implication in early NLF statements that it would accept international supervision of "neutralization." Beginning in 1963 NLF statements were couched to convey the notion that "reunification" and "neutralization" were distinct one from the other, apparently out of deference to DRV reaction against proposals to neutralize North Vietnam.

b. Leadership

The NLF founders were shadowy figures most of whom had earned modest repute on the murky fringes of Vietnamese politics. They seem to have been chosen with an eye to avoiding known Communists, and to obtaining wide representation from South Vietnam's complicated society. Although the NLF Central Committee reserved places for 52 members, only 31 names were publicized as founding members, indicating either a large covert membership, or, more likely, simple inability to find eligible persons to fill the posts. A U.S. study of 73 NLF leaders in 1965 indicated that almost all were born in South Vietnam, and almost all were highly educated. Most had histories of anti-French political activity, or identification with religious movements, and it appears that if many were not themselves crypto-communists, they had known and worked with communists for years. The prime example of the group is Nguyen Huu Tho, who was the first formally elected chairman of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the NLF. Tho was a Cochinchinese lawyer, once a socialist, who spent some months with the Viet Minh in the Mekong Delta in 1947. He thereafter led anti-French and anti-US demonstrations, defended a number of Vietnamese before Saigon courts for crimes related to the "Resistance," and served some time in French jails. He also edited a clandestine Viet Minh newspaper aimed at Saigon intellectuals. In August, 1954, he became vice chairman of the leftist Saigon Peace Committee, or Movement for the Defense of Peace (MDP). In November, 1954, according to CIA information, Tho and others in the MDP were arrested, and Tho spent the next seven years in Diem's detention centers. Mysteriously released in December, 1961, the CIA reported him elected to NLF office at

the congress of March, 1962. Douglas Pike's information has Tho active in Saigon politics through 1958, at which time he was jailed. His NLF biography states that "he was liberated by a daring guerrilla raid on the jail in 1961," but Pike, unable to find any record of such a raid, concludes that Tho was provisional chairman and was selected Central Committee Chairman at the organizing meeting.

c. Development

The NLF rapidly took on organizational reality from the Central Committee down through a web of subordinate and associated groups to villages all over Vietnam. Pike estimates that within a few months of its founding in December, 1960, its membership doubled, doubled again by autumn, 1961, and then redoubled by early 1962, at which time 300,000 Vietnamese were on its rolls. These were members of the "liberation associations," NLF *per se*, of which there were administrative associations (e.g., provincial headquarters) and functional associations (e.g., Youth Liberation Association); or, they belonged to one of several political parties, including the communist party, affiliated with the NLF; or, they served in the Liberation Army. Normally, each man, woman and child belonged to many organizations simultaneously. A French analysis of Viet Minh organization aptly described the NLF:

The individual is enchained in several networks of independent hierarchies.... a territorial hierarchy.... running from the family and the block to the interprovincial government, and associations that incorporate male and female youth groups, groups of mothers, of farmers, factory, and plantation workers' syndicates . . . they could just as well include clubs of flute players or bicycle racers; the essential thing is that no one escapes from this enrollment and that the territorial hierarchy is crossed by another one, which supervises the first and is in turn supervised by it, both being overseen by police organizations and the [Communist] Party.

The key operational components of the NLF were the Liberation Army and the People's Revolutionary Party, as the communists within the NLF termed themselves. The former had a lien on the services of every NLF member, man, woman or child, although functionally its missions were usually carried out by formally organized and trained paramilitary or full-time units. All "Viet Cong" units were, from 1961 on, regarded as part of the Liberation Army.

There can be little doubt that communists played a major role in organizing the NLF. Although Diem's Communist Denunciation campaign had foreclosed "Front" activity, the communists of South Vietnam possessed the leadership, tight subordination and conspiratorial doctrine necessary for them to survive; moreover, they were, as Milton Sacks characterized them, "the most persevering, most cohesive, best-disciplined, and most experienced political group in Vietnam. The People's Revolutionary Party was not formed until January, 1962; it was explicitly the "Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam," and it purported to be the "vanguard of the NLF, the paramount member." In 1962, it had some 35,000 members. The Lao Dong Party had continued low level overt activity, as well as covert operations, in South Vietnam throughout the years 1955 to

1962. For example, leaflets were distributed over the Lao Dong imprimatur. But the PRP denied official links with the Lao Dong Party of the DRV beyond "fraternal ties of communism." The denial implies the question: What roles did the DRV and the Lao Dong Party play in the years of patient work necessary to bring the NLF to flower in so short a time after 1960? What role did they play in the insurgency overall?

The official U.S. view has been that the PRP is merely the southern arm of the Lao Dong Party, and one instrument by which Hanoi instigated and controlled the revolt against "My-Diem." Douglas Pike's analysis led him to concur, with reservations:

The Viet Minh elements in South Vietnam during the struggle against the French had of course included many non-Communist elements. . . . After 1954 many Viet Minh entered the ranks of the new Diem government, and even a decade later many of the top military and civilian governmental figures in Saigon were former Viet Minh. Nevertheless the Viet Minh elements, made up chiefly but not entirely of Communists, continued to offer resistance to the Diem government. . . . In terms of overt activity such as armed incidents of the distribution of propaganda leaflets the period was quiet and the Communists within the remnant Viet Minh organization relatively inactive. In addition, much of the activity that did take place apparently was the work of impatient cadres operating in the South independently of Hanoi's orders....

Such action on their part and the religious sects is understandable, and the emergence of a clandestine militant opposition group could be expected....such an effort would be in complete harmony with Vietnamese social tradition and individual psychology. But there is a vast difference between a collection of clandestine opposition political groups and the organizational weapon that emerged, a difference in kind and not just degree. The National Liberation Front was not simply another indigenous covert group, or even a coalition of such groups. It was an organizational steamroller, nationally conceived and nationally organized, endowed with ample cadres and funds, crashing out of the jungle to flatten the GVN. It was not an ordinary secret society of the kind that had dotted the Vietnamese political landscape for decades. It projected a social construction program of such scope and ambition that of necessity it must have been created in Hanoi had imported. A revolutionary organization must build; it begins with persons suffering genuine grievances, who are slowly organized and whose militancy gradually increases until a critical mass is reached and the revolution explodes. Exactly the reverse was the case with the NLF. It sprang full-blown into existence and then was fleshed out. The grievances were developed or manufactured almost as a necessary afterthought. The creation of the NLF was an accomplishment of such skill, precision, and refinement that when one thinks of who the master planner must have been, only one name comes to mind: Vietnam's organizational genius, Ho Chi Minh.