



July 12, 2019

NARA Case Number: **NW 57507**

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This is in further response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for access to records in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Our office received your request on June 15, 2018.

The Department of State declassified one document totaling thirty-nine pages.

We have enclosed a copy of this document for your convenience. This document is also available for research use in the research room at the National Archives at College Park.

This now concludes the processing of your request. If you have any questions about the way we handled your request, or about our FOIA regulations or procedures, please contact Dorothy Johnson at [Dorothy.Johnson@nara.gov](mailto:Dorothy.Johnson@nara.gov) or on 301-837-3178.

Sincerely,

DAVID FORT  
Supervisory Archives Specialist  
National Declassification Center

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90-109

This document consists of 35 pages.

No. 4 of 7 copies. Series A

Declassified Case: NW# 57507 Date:  
07-16-2019

UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA,

1940-1954

**FILE COPY - HD/POLICY STUDIES**

Research Project No. 552  
April 1962

Historical Office  
Bureau of Public Affairs  
Department of State

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## FOREWORD

This study has been prepared by the Historical Office at the request of the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, who asked that particular attention be given to

the involvement of OSS with Ho Chi Minh during World War II, President Roosevelt's views with respect to the return of the French in Indochina, our relations with France on the subject following President Roosevelt's death, the circumstances of the French return, our efforts to get the French to give independence to the Indochinese states so as to remove the "colonial war" aspects, the efforts to form an alliance in 1954 to hold the area, the decision not ourselves directly to intervene to support the French in 1954, and our acquiescence in the Geneva Conference.

The information herein was drawn primarily from Department of State files. John Richardson of the Department of Defense provided the figures on deliveries/expenditures in connection with military aid to Indochina for the fiscal years 1950-1953, and Elmer E. Glaser of the Agency for International Development provided information on that part of the aid program for 1954 which took the form of reimbursements to France.

The research and writing for this paper were done by Edwin S. Costrell, with research assistance from Warren H. Reynolds.

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- 1 -

## UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA, 1940-1954

### Summary

American policy on Indochina greatly fluctuated in the decade and a half from 1940 to 1954, but even when the policy was "hands off" the United States tried to influence the destiny of the peninsula. During World War II there were at least three distinct periods: the period of trying to encourage Vichy to bar Japanese troops from Indochina and of trying to induce the Japanese to withdraw; the period, after the liberation of continental France, of refusing to aid Indochinese resistance forces, because President Roosevelt wanted nothing done which, by tending to restore full French control, would prejudice the possibility of setting up a postwar trusteeship for Indochina; and the period after Japan destroyed what remained of French authority in Indochina (March 1945), when the United States undertook limited bombing, intelligence, and sabotage missions in the area.

After the surrender of Japan the United States acquiesced in the return of the French to Indochina, on the assumption that events would bear out French pretensions to local support, but refused to assist in the restoration of French authority by force. The French return--facilitated by the British occupying forces in southern Indochina but blocked at first by the Chinese occupying forces in northern Indochina--was impeded primarily by the Communist-led Viet Minh, who organized a coalition government for Vietnam shortly after Japan's defeat. Open warfare broke out in December 1946 between the French and the Viet Minh, and the United States offered France its good offices, which were not accepted, and urged that the French revise their "outmoded colonial outlook".

The United States looked with skepticism upon governments sponsored by the French for Vietnam, because it doubted that such governments could win popular support. Nevertheless, in the absence of satisfactory alternatives, it recognized the "Associated States" of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in February 1950, following ratification by the French Assembly of accords which had been concluded at various times over the previous 2 1/2 years. These accords recognized the independence of the Associated States within the French Union and provided that they might have their own national armies.

Soon afterwards, in the spring of 1950, the United States arranged through France to provide military and economic aid for Indochina.

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- 2 -

The Communist invasion of South Korea in June 1950 caused a sharp increase in this aid and caused the United States and the United Kingdom to decide that they would assist the French, though probably not with military forces, if Communist China made a synchronized thrust into Indochina. The ending of the Korean War in 1953, which freed Chinese Communist troops for possible action elsewhere, impelled the United States to warn publicly that aggression against Indochina would have "grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina." Moreover, the United States increased further its military assistance, to the point that by January 1954 this assistance covered the greater part of French costs for the military effort in Indochina.

The Communists still gained in Indochina, and sentiment grew in France and elsewhere to discuss Indochina at the political conference provided for in the Korean armistice agreement of July 1953. Agreement to do this was announced in the quadripartite communique issued at Berlin in February 1954.

The United States joined only with reluctance in the decision to hold talks on Indochina. Fearing that the Communists might win decisive victories in Indochina before or during the talks, and unwilling to put faith in such talks, it publicly called for "united action" to meet the Communist threat in Southeast Asia. The British, however, opposed organizing any coalition in advance of the talks, while the French argued that "united action" could not be accomplished in time to save the critical Indochina situation. To a French suggestion that American aircraft intervene immediately to lift the Communist siege of Dienbienphu, the United States replied by listing three conditions for American belligerent acts in Indochina: a full political understanding with the French regarding Indochina, Congressional approval, and a coalition including the United Kingdom.

After the discussions on Indochina began at Geneva, the American Government offered to request Congressional authorization to intervene in Indochina even without the British, provided the French National Assembly approved the American conditions, the French Government and the Associated States formally requested military assistance, and Asian governments indicated they would participate. Further conditions in the American offer were that some aspect of the Indochinese problem be submitted to the United Nations at once, the Associated States be given complete independence, France agree to keep its forces in Indochina throughout the period of united action, and agreement be reached on training the National Army and on the command structure for the allied effort. The United States declared publicly that it would not deal with the Indochina situation unilaterally unless Communist China

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- 3 -

resorted to "open armed aggression", in which case it would resort to the United Nations and consult its allies but "could not escape ultimate responsibility for decisions closely touching our own security and self-defense."

The United States in the next several weeks felt increasingly that the French were not treating seriously its offer to intervene and were merely using it as a talking point at Geneva. It repeatedly warned that the offer was subject to constant review and could not stay open indefinitely while the situation in Indochina deteriorated.

At the Geneva Conference, meanwhile, the United States regarded itself as an "interested" nation but not a belligerent or a principal in the negotiations. It was determined to dissociate itself from any disadvantageous solution, and it opposed, as tantamount to encouraging a French surrender, British pressure for a cease-fire and British inclinations to accept a solution involving partition. It refused to consider joining in any guarantee of such a settlement because this would commit the United States to sustaining Communist domination of territory and thus would cut across basic American principles for dealing with the Communist world.

In late June 1954, after Mendes-France had become French Premier with a pledge to obtain a cease-fire by July 20 or resign, and in the light of the rapid military deterioration in Indochina, the United States reexamined its policy concerning "possible de facto partition" of Vietnam. As a result the United States and the United Kingdom, in a joint message, informed France that they would "respect" an armistice agreement meeting seven criteria, including the preservation of "at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta". The United States feared, however, that the French might agree to a settlement superficially resembling the seven points stipulated in the Anglo-American message but which would in fact lead to the fall of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam within a few months; that the Communists might insist that the United States adhere to the settlement; and that, if the United States did not do so, the Communists might succeed in driving a wedge between it and France.

The United States therefore contemplated avoiding renewed high-level negotiations at Geneva and even considered withdrawing what remained of the American Delegation at the Conference. (The Foreign Ministers, including Under Secretary Walter Bedell Smith for the United States, had ended their Geneva talks on June 19, and in their absence the negotiations proceeded at an ambassadorial level.) The United States told the French that it would not send Smith back to

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- 3a -

Geneva because, not questioning France's right to exercise its own judgment, it did not wish to put itself in the position of seeming to pass "moral judgment upon French action" or of disassociating itself from the settlement "at a moment and under circumstances which might be unnecessarily dramatic."

The French, on the other hand, wanted to restore the Geneva talks to the Ministerial level and insisted that American abstention would signal a Western split and cause the Communists to demand even harsher conditions. The French Premier said that if Secretary Dulles or Under Secretary Smith came to Geneva and had to disavow the settlement--as he understood they would have to do if it were not substantially based on the seven points--he would take the responsibility. All he asked, he said, was that the United States make a unilateral statement that it would take action if the Communists broke a settlement based on the seven points.

The United States agreed to this course. It felt that the requested statement would present no problem. In addition, it sent Smith back to Geneva.

Within a week cease-fire agreements were concluded and related declarations were issued. They provided, inter alia, for the regrouping of the armed forces in Vietnam and their separation by a demilitarized zone running approximately along the 17th parallel; for the withdrawal of the invading Communist forces from Laos and the regrouping, in two Laotian provinces, of the Communist Pathet Lao; and for the withdrawal of all French Union forces and other foreign troops from Cambodia and the demobilization of the "resistance" forces in Cambodia.

The United States, in a unilateral declaration, said that it would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the agreements and "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern as seriously threatening international peace and security." Pending the formulation of a new aid program for the area, it terminated direct military aid to Indochina. (The American aid program for Indochina, including reimbursements to France, had increased to more than \$1300 million for the fiscal year 1954 and had come to represent about two-thirds of the material and financial burden of the war.)

Explaining American policy to the public, President Eisenhower said that the primary responsibility for the Indochina settlement rested on the belligerent nations and that the United States was not itself a party to, or "bound by", the Conference decisions and did

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- 3b -

not like some features of the agreements, though much depended on how they worked in practice. He announced that the United States was asking Laos and Cambodia to agree to the establishment of permanent American missions at their capitals and was actively discussing with other free nations "the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area."

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- 4 -

## UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA, 1940-1954

### Effort To Prevent Japanese Occupation

The United States tried unsuccessfully in 1940 to keep the Vichy Government of France from letting Japan station troops in northern Indochina. In this effort it called attention to increasing American economic and diplomatic pressure on Japan and to the basing of the American fleet on Hawaii.

Later the United States sought to induce withdrawal of the Japanese, who by mid-1941 had extended their occupation throughout the peninsula, although they retained the French administration in Indochina. The United States suggested in July-August 1941 that Indochina might be neutralized through agreement among China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, and Japan. Finally, on the eve of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt declared in a message to Emperor Hirohito that the United States had "absolutely no thought ... of invading Indo-China" if the Japanese withdrew; that he thought he could obtain the same assurance from the Governments of the East Indies, Malaya, and Thailand; and that he would even ask for such assurance from the Government of China.

### Roosevelt Idea of a Trusteeship

As a belligerent the United States pledged that French sovereignty would be re-established "throughout all the territory, metropolitan and colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939." President Roosevelt repeatedly stated, however, that after nearly 100 years of French rule the people of Indochina were worse off than before and that he believed Indochina should not go back to France but should be administered by an international trusteeship.

Stalin strongly agreed, at both the Tehran and Yalta Conferences. The British, however, opposed this idea, apparently because, in the President's words, they feared "the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch." To British requests for French military participation in the liberation of Indochina, and to Department of State and OSS proposals for collaboration with the French to provide equipment and supplies to resistance groups, the President replied that the Indochina issue was a matter for postwar decision and that the United States should not get involved in any military effort to liberate Indochina from the Japanese.

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- 5 -

Military and OSS Operations in Indochina, March-October 1945

Coup of March 1945. The destruction of all French authority in Indochina by the Japanese, in a coup of March 10, 1945, caused a shift in American policy. The Japanese interned French officials and military units that could not escape into China and sponsored "independent" governments in the area, including a government for Vietnam headed by Bao Dai, Emperor of the Court of Annam.

U.S. Air Missions and U.S. Aid to French Troops, March-April 1945. Even as the French were requesting assistance, and before the United States had arrived at a firm policy, the U.S. Fourteenth Air Force in China flew (between March 12 and 28) a series of 34 bombing and reconnaissance missions in support of the Indochina resistance; it performed an additional "appreciable" number of missions between March 29 and April 13. Moreover, the United States parachuted Tommy guns and ammunition to the retreating "Tonkin Army" of French troops and supplied food, clothing, shoes, medical relief, and transport to those elements of the French force which crossed the Chinese border.

OSS Operations, March-August 1945. Also, at the direction of the China Theater Command, the OSS established intelligence channels in Indochina. The orders from OSS operational headquarters at Kunming were to deal impartially with all groups that were actively anti-Japanese, to arm and supply such groups only "to the extent necessary to provide escorts or protection for our own personnel", and to avoid getting "chummy" with French military mission personnel, who were to be dealt with on an individual basis.

Annamese intelligence teams under the command of a French officer and American OSS team leaders moved into Indochina starting in late March. OSS Operational Group teams which had been training Chinese Nationalist Army elements in guerrilla warfare went in later. An advance party of the DEER Mission operational group, which parachuted into Tonkin in July to sabotage strategic installations, was welcomed by a "Mr. Hoo"--later identified as Ho Chi Minh, Communist leader of the Viet Minh--who refused to allow a French officer in the party to remain. Ho made available his facilities and 100 of his best men for guerrilla training, and the OSS sent in from Kunming supplies and additional personnel.

Washington Policy of Limited Aid to the French Resistance. In Washington the subject of assistance for the resistance groups underwent continuous study. Less than ten days after the coup of March 10, Admiral William D. Leahy, at the White House, approved sending

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- 6 -

assistance that could be spared from the China Theater. In the following months the Joint Chiefs envisaged continuing United States assistance to French resistance forces in Indochina, but no "large-scale military operations aimed directly at the liberation of Indochina" and no use of American troops there "except in American military operations against the Japanese."

The United States declined a French request to conclude an agreement with respect to Indochina analagous to the Franco-Allied agreement respecting civil affairs in France which had been signed in London on August 25, 1944.

Missions Resulting From Japan's Surrender. When Japan surrendered in mid-August, the United States sent into Indochina military missions which evacuated American prisoners of war and civilian internees, obtained the release of some Frenchmen from prison, appealed the cases of others who had been treated badly by the Vietnamese, and tried to reduce tensions between the Chinese, Vietnamese, and French. Approximately 15 American technical personnel with no command function accompanied the Chinese troops which occupied north Indochina in mid-September.

As for the OSS personnel in Indochina, the original objectives of the DEER Mission were abandoned, and the members were evacuated to Kunming on September 16. Another OSS detachment, proceeding from China to Hanoi late in August, was accompanied by a number of French officers, including Major Jean Sainteny, who later became French Commissioner for northern Indochina. OSS officers also talked with Ho Chi Minh about relations between Indochina and the Allies and arranged conferences between the French and the Annamese. The China Theater Command, concerned about possible violation of standing orders, warned the Americans in Indochina not to engage in activities other than those concerning prisoners of war.

American uniformed personnel, with a few exceptions, withdrew from Indochina in October.

Abandonment of Trusteeship Idea and Acquiescence in French Return

Meanwhile, beginning in the spring of 1945, the United States showed a disposition to accept the restoration of French rule in Indochina. Recommending this course to President Truman, the Department of State referred to a statement issued by Secretary of State Stettinius with Roosevelt's approval on April 3, relative to the plans approved at Yalta. The Department interpreted the statement to mean

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- 7 -

that trusteeship should apply only to mandated and enemy territory and to territories which the states responsible for the administration volunteered to place under trusteeship. The Department felt that France clearly would not consent to a trusteeship for Indochina and that the colonial powers, notably Great Britain and the Netherlands, would oppose putting pressure on France.

Acknowledgement of French Sovereignty. As early as May 1945, when the French pointed out that American newspapers were still implying a special status for Indochina, Secretary Stettinius told French Foreign Minister Bidault and the French Ambassador that the record was entirely innocent of any official statement by the United States Government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over the area. At the same time the Secretary said that certain elements of American public opinion condemned French policies and practices in Indochina. The Secretary did not press this point, but in trusteeship discussions at San Francisco and elsewhere the United States stressed the need to provide progressive measures of self-government for dependent areas. President Truman contemplated, moreover, asking the French at an appropriate time for positive indications of their intentions regarding establishment of civil liberties and advancement of self-government for Indochina.

Refusal To Assist French Restoration by Force. Although the United States decided not to oppose re-establishment of French control in Indochina, it refused after the defeat of Japan to assist the French in restoring their authority by force, and it predicated its willingness to see French control re-established on the assumption that future events would bear out the French claim to have the support of the local population. The United States forbade purchase of American military material for use by France in Indochina and declined to allow United States flag vessels to transport troops or war supplies to the area. The one exception to this refusal of military assistance was that the United States did permit British forces, in January 1946, to transfer to the French 800 Lend-Lease jeeps and trucks already in Indochina.

#### Return of the French

British Help and Chinese Reluctance. When the British entered Indochina in September 1945 to accept the surrender of Japanese forces south of the 16th parallel--the Chinese performing the same function north of that line--they promptly released and rearmed interned French personnel in southern Vietnam and Cambodia, helped bring in additional

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- 8 -

French units, and paved the way for the French, acting against scattered guerrilla resistance, to regain their authority. The last British forces left Indochina on March 5, 1946.

The Chinese, on the other hand, were reluctant to leave their zone and hand over the reins to the French. The Chinese disarmed the French in northern Indochina, refused to allow French administrators to enter Tonkin or Laos, and cooperated with the Viet Minh, who had formed their World War II underground resistance with Chinese support and after the war had emerged as the strongest political force on the peninsula, particularly in the north.

Viet Minh Role in the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam". Before the Chinese forces arrived on the scene, the Viet Minh forced Bao Dai to abdicate and--after a brief period of bitter fighting--induced non-Communist nationalist groups to join them in the organization of a coalition government, headed by Ho Chi Minh, which continued to function during the Chinese occupation. Ho and the other Communists in this so-called "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" presumably were a minority, and they tried to obscure their Communist ties and the Communist ties of the coalition regime, which Bao Dai, under the assumed name of M. Vinh Thuy, joined as "Supreme Councillor".

Franco-Chinese Treaty and Franco-Vietnamese Accord. A breakthrough for the French came when they signed a treaty with the Chinese on February 28, 1946, and an accord with the Ho government six days later. In the treaty, the French gave up their concessions and other rights and privileges in China, while the Chinese recognized French sovereignty in Indochina and agreed to the relief by the French Army of the Chinese occupation forces.

In the accord, signed at Hanoi on March 6, the French recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as "a free state with its own government, parliament, army and finances, forming part of the Indo-chinese Federation and the French Union", while the "Government of Vietnam" agreed to admit into the areas it controlled a specified number and type of French troops. The accord looked to a referendum on "eventual union" of Vietnam and provided for further negotiations, to deal mainly with diplomatic relations between Vietnam and foreign states, the future status of Indochina, and French economic and cultural interests in Vietnam.

Gradual Chinese Departure and Limited French Entry Into Northern Indochina. Immediately after the signing of the March 6 accord some French troops entered northern Indochina, and in April the Combined

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- 9 -

Chiefs of Staff formally approved movement of French forces into the northern zone. An American "water lift" of Chinese troops from Indochina to China began on March 25.

But the Chinese troops left only in slow stages. The Department of State feared that this would embitter Franco-Chinese relations and obstruct improvement in Franco-Vietnamese relations. In May it requested the views of General Marshall (then in Nanking) on what it might do to expedite the Chinese evacuation, and ~~in August~~ *on July 31* it instructed Embassy Nanking to take action to this end. Just when the Embassy was about to act the Chinese Government announced that Chinese vessels were en route to Hanoi to remove the remaining Chinese forces to Shanghai.

As the Chinese departed, the French gradually crushed local resistance in Laos, finally signing a modus vivendi with Laotian representatives on August 27, 1946. In Vietnam, however, where there was intermittent guerrilla fighting, the negotiations called for in the March 6 accord proved unproductive.

Return of Territory by Siam. In effecting their return to Indochina, the French also were interested in the restoration of parts of Laos and Cambodia which had been transferred under duress to Siam in 1941. The United States informed Bangkok in April 1946 that it considered that this territory must be restored to Indochina, and it encouraged Franco-Siamese negotiations which resulted in retrocession of the disputed areas in November 1946.

American Reaction to Outbreak of French-Viet Minh Hostilities: Offer of Good Offices and Pressure for Reform

Open warfare erupted in Vietnam in December 1946. The United States, while interested in the development of non-Communist leadership, had supported the conduct of negotiations between the French and Vietnamese; it now offered France its good offices but, certain that France would resent third-power interference, stated that it would not offer to mediate. The French declined the proffered good offices.

Continuing to impress upon the French the need to find a solution, even though it had none to suggest itself, the United States indicated early in 1947 that it would find it difficult to oppose a U.N. investigation of the problem in the absence of direct negotiations between the contending parties. It mentioned multiplying signs of anti-Western "consciousness" in Asia, noted the striking unanimity of support among

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- 10 -

Asian nations for the fight in Vietnam against the French, and observed that the "Vietnam cause" was proving a "rallying-cry for all anti-Western forces" and playing into the hands of Communists in all areas. The United States urged the French to revise their "outmoded colonial outlook" and recognize the legitimate desires of the Vietnamese.

Decision To Support the French-Sponsored Bao Dai Government

By the end of 1947 the French had control of all major cities in northern Indochina, and they developed a new program for a solution in Vietnam--namely, to establish within the French Union an independent non-Communist government of Vietnam headed by Bao Dai, who had gone into voluntary exile in April 1946. After many months of off-and-on negotiations the French finally persuaded Bao Dai to return to Indochina, where he arrived on April 28, 1949.

The United States, however, was unwilling to commit itself irretrievably to the support of any native government which, by failing to develop appeal among the Vietnamese, might become a mere French puppet. It urged the French to facilitate unification of Indochina and strengthen true nationalists there and so to encourage supporters of the Communist-dominated Viet Minh to shift to the non-Communist side. Alternative non-Communist leadership failed to emerge, however, and the Communist triumph in neighboring China in 1949 worsened the military-political situation in Indochina.

The United States gradually came to support Bao Dai. It recognized his embattled Government (and also the relatively stable Governments of Laos and Cambodia) early in 1950, after the French Assembly ratified various accords with the three "Associated States", signed in 1947-1949, which recognized their independence within the French Union and provided that they might have their own national armies.

Initiation of Military and Economic Aid, May-June 1950

Soon afterwards, in the spring of 1950, the United States arranged through France to provide military and economic aid for Indochina. It did so as France stressed that it would be able to discharge its responsibilities in Southeast Asia only within the framework of close and active cooperation with the United Kingdom and the United States, including long-term American aid. On May 1 the President approved allocation of \$10 million to cover early shipment of urgently needed military aid items, and by the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 1950, deliveries/expenditures had been made amounting to \$300,000. The

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French were informed, also, that new credits would be sought from the Congress for the next fiscal year; that Indochina would receive part of \$60 million in economic and technical assistance slated for Southeast Asia; and that the United States would establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States.

Effect of the Korean War on American Policy Regarding Indochina

Increase in U.S. Aid. After the outbreak of the Korean war--which evoked fears of possible diversionary efforts elsewhere by the Communists--the United States intensified and enlarged the programs of aid to Indochina until the military aid program acquired, in 1951, a priority just behind that for Korea. In his statement of June 27, 1950 announcing cover and support by United States air and sea forces for Korean Government troops, the President announced that he had directed "acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indo China and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces." In October 1950 the United States promised to divert from the Korean pipeline to Indochina a squadron of B-26 aircraft and to send American officers to participate in operational military talks in the field. In January 1951 the United States announced it would relax restrictions on French use of the American aircraft carrier Langley (transferred earlier in the month to the French Navy) so that it could be employed in Indochinese waters.

In June 1952 Secretary of State Acheson observed at a news conference that "the 150th ship bearing American arms and munitions to Indochina" had arrived in Saigon a few weeks before and that the United States was "now bearing a considerable portion of the total burden of the war in Indochina expressed in financial terms," although the French Union and the Associated States were carrying "the entire combat burden". Military equipment and services supplied to Indochina (deliveries/expenditures) amounted to \$104.3 million in the fiscal year 1951; \$140.5 million in fiscal 1952; and \$362.8 million in fiscal 1953.

Allied Discussions on Action if Communist China Should Intervene. The Communist aggression in Korea also affected contingency planning with respect to Indochina. Specifically, the United States and the United Kingdom decided that they would aid France to the extent of their ability if the Chinese Communists invaded Indochina. The two powers would not commit themselves, however, on the extent or character of the military assistance to be provided in such a contingency, and



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- 12 -

it was understood that they probably would not provide military forces. Nor did the United States, Britain, and France issue a proposed tripartite warning to Communist China, because they could not agree on what action to take if the warning went unheeded. (The United States thought along lines of a naval blockade and air action to upset the economy of Communist China and lessen its will to continue aggression, but the British feared the implications of a blockade for Hong Kong.) The United States did agree to help remove French forces from Indochina if Chinese Communist intervention forced their evacuation.

Need for Indigenous Leadership. The problem of developing more effective indigenous leadership in Indochina continued, meanwhile, to receive close American attention. The United States prodded the French to organize a national army in Vietnam; urged Bao Dai--who spent extended periods in France or in seclusion at Dalat--to show greater seriousness of purpose; welcomed a French statement in November 1950 that the independence of the Associated States within the French Union was assured; and promoted participation of the Associated States in signing the Japanese Peace Treaty (1951) in order to widen their international recognition.

NATO Resolution and Dispatch of U.S. Air Force Mechanics. In December 1952 the NATO Council unanimously adopted a resolution stating that "the campaign waged by the French Union forces in Indochina deserves continuing support from the NATO governments." At about the same time, in response to a French request for the loan for one month of 150 U.S. Air Force mechanics to service C-47's in Indochina, the United States decided to permit 25 to 30 airmen to be detailed to Nha Trang airfield.

#### Policy of the Eisenhower Administration, 1953

Warning to Communist China. The Eisenhower administration, coming into office committed to ending the Korean war, sought to keep the Chinese Communists from using their disentangled troops for large-scale intervention in Indochina. The United States publicly linked the wars in Korea, Malaya, and Indochina and openly warned the Chinese Communists, after the signing of the Korean armistice in July 1953, that aggression against Indochina would have "grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina"--a clear suggestion that the United States might not again refrain from action against Communist China as it had in the Korean war.

Factors Leading To Increased Aid. In addition, the new administration increased the tempo and volume of American military assistance for the French Union and national forces. It acted in the light of

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- 13 -

continued Chinese Communists assistance to the Viet Minh; extension of Viet Minh warfare into Laos (invaded for the first time in the spring of 1953); deepening war-weariness in France; and strong French requests during the summer of 1953 that the United States assume financial responsibility for the expansion of Associated States forces.

Demands on the French. From the French the new administration obtained assurances that they would implement the "Navarre Plan" to enlarge the national forces and bring organized warfare in Indochina to an end in approximately two years; perfect the independence of the Associated States (pledged by France in a declaration of July 3, 1953); exchange information with United States military authorities, whose views were to be taken into account in French planning; and make no basic change in French commitments to NATO. The United States took the position that military assistance for Indochina would be contingent upon American screening of French military and political plans for the peninsula.

Reaction to Attack on Laos. When the Viet Minh invaded Laos, the United States rushed supplies there and to Thailand and provided six C-119's for the airlift into Laos. Although initially in favor of having the U.N. Security Council consider the Viet Minh aggression, the United States bowed to emphatic, almost hysterical, French views to prevail upon Thailand not to raise the issue in the world organization.

Extent of Military Aid. Secretary of State Dulles told the British on February 4, 1953, several weeks before the invasion of Laos, that the United States was already carrying about one-third of the financial burden of the Indochina operation. In April the French were told of plans of the new administration for a still larger program in fiscal 1954; and those plans were revised drastically upward later in the year, after General Henri-Eugene Navarre became Commander-in-Chief of French Union forces in Indochina. By January 1954 it was estimated that United States aid covered the greater part of French costs for the military effort in Indochina and that it would amount to about \$870 million for the fiscal year.

Quadrupartite Decision To Discuss Indochina at Geneva, February 1954

Following the conclusion of the Korean armistice, which provided for the holding of a multilateral Korean political conference, there were suggestions in France and elsewhere that there should also be negotiations on the problem of Indochina. The United States was unenthusiastic about the idea. Dulles told the French in July 1953 that negotiations with no other alternative usually ended in ✓✓

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- 14 -

capitulation. He told a press conference in September, however, that he did not rule out talks on Indochina if the Korean political conference went well and if the Chinese Communists showed "a disposition to settle in a reasonable way such a question as Indochina."

Then in November Ho Chi Minh put out a "peace feeler" through a Swedish newspaper. This was on the eve of the British-French-American conference of heads of government at Bermuda, at which the French expressed the hope that following a successful Korean political conference a similar meeting might be convened to give France an honorable way out of Indochina. The Bermuda communiqué indicated partial Anglo-American acceptance of this French position by calling for a Korean political conference to settle the Korean question and to make "progress in restoring more normal conditions in the Far East and South East Asia."

At the Berlin Foreign Ministers meeting of January-February 1954 the Soviet Union pressed for a five-power conference on Indochina which would include Communist China but exclude the Associated States. The United States successfully opposed this effort. It did agree, however, to the holding of a conference attended by the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Communist China, "and other interested states" if no diplomatic recognition not already accorded would be implied either in the invitation to, or the holding of, the conference. This stipulation was incorporated in the Berlin communiqué, which called for a political conference on Korea to begin April 26, 1954, with the problem of restoring peace in Indochina also to be discussed at the conference.

The French accepted a further American condition for agreeing to the Indochina talks--that France would not agree to any arrangement which would directly or indirectly result in the turnover of Indochina to the Communists. Dulles emphasized to the French that the prospect of a conference would increase the Communist effort for a knock out in Indochina in the current season and must be met with a corresponding determination to win a good negotiating position.

Dulles explained to the Department of State that he agreed to the conference on Korea and Indochina, with the full knowledge that it might "give us trouble", because it was inescapable owing to pressure on the French Government. Apart from this, he said, the agreement was "acceptable" because, among other reasons, the principle of having no five-power conference was upheld and Communist China would not be promoted to a position of authority and prestige.

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Reactions to Further Communist Advances in Indochina in Early 1954

In January 1954 the National Security Council decided that in the event of overt Chinese Communist intervention the United States should seek allied military and other action to repel the aggression, hold Indochina, and restore security and peace in the area. The United States also considered what further steps it might take to strengthen the increasingly unfavorable position of the anti-Communist forces in Indochina.

Additional Emergency Aid. The United States sent approximately 200 Air Force technicians to Indochina to service previously provided aircraft; they arrived by early February. Then, after the Viet Minh assaulted the fortress of Dienbienphu in northern Vietnam beginning March 12, 1954, the United States sent additional transport planes and bombers to Indochina and airlifted from North Africa and Europe to Indochina two battalions of French paratroops. The fortress nevertheless fell on May 7.

United States Proposal of "United Action". Potentially the most far-reaching step by the United States came in an address by Secretary of State Dulles on March 29, 1954. The Secretary called for "united action" to meet the possibility of "the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally". Dulles had discussed this idea in advance with members of Congress and had informed the British and French in a general way.

Dulles put his idea in more concrete form in discussions that followed with the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Associated States, and Thailand: he suggested that these nations and the United States organize, before the Geneva Conference, a ten-nation coalition for Southeast Asia. The United States explained that it was thinking of a joint declaration in essence warning against a Communist take-over in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or anywhere else in Southeast Asia or the Western Pacific, and contemplating potentially both political and military measures to accomplish the purposes of the declaration. Participation in the declaration would be left flexible, but, if invitations were sent to India and Pakistan, that would raise the question of also inviting the Chinese National Government, the Republic of Korea, and possibly Japan. President Eisenhower wrote to Prime Minister Churchill that the idea of the proposed "ad hoc grouping or coalition" was to increase the chances that the Chinese Communists would discreetly disengage themselves from Indochina.



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- 16 -

Rejection of the American Proposal. Neither France nor Britain would agree to the "united action" proposal. France said that there was inadequate time to deal in this way with the critical military situation in Indochina, and it suggested immediate intervention at Dienbienphu by United States carrier-based aircraft. Britain opposed the organizing of any coalition in advance of the Geneva Conference. In response to United States suggestions for an Anglo-American military intervention at Dienbienphu and for prompt organization of Southeast Asian collective defense, the British indicated that they would make no such military commitment and that collective defense talks should be postponed until after the Geneva Conference, but they expressed a readiness to discuss possible military measures in Southeast Asia.

Conditions for American Belligerent Acts. The United States, for its part, turned down the French suggestion of an immediate American air strike at Dienbienphu. Following a special National Security Council meeting to consider the question, it replied that the United States could not commit belligerent acts in Indochina without a full political understanding with the French regarding Indochina, Congressional approval, and a coalition including the United Kingdom. Apr '54

Agreement To Hold Five-Power Military Talks in Washington. On May 2 Dulles raised the question of early military talks that might strengthen the French position at the Geneva Conference. He found ready agreement for talks to be held in Washington by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, and possibly Thailand. The United States decided to participate in such talks on the understanding that they were supplementary to and not a substitute for the organization of a regional grouping.

Allied Disagreement Concerning Positions To Be Taken at the Geneva Conference

Discussions among the Americans, British, and French in late April produced no common policy concerning the positions they would take in the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference. The United Kingdom was ready to help France reach a "satisfactory" settlement and join with the United States in guaranteeing such a settlement; if no settlement were reached, it would join with others in examining the situation urgently. The United States, on the other hand, was determined either to prevent a disadvantageous solution in the area or, failing in this, to dissociate itself from that solution; and it did not favor a solution involving partition, toward which the British were tending. Dulles asserted that the British were encouraging

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 17 -

a French surrender to the Communists by pressing for a cease-fire in Indochina. Denying that he sought a cease-fire of that nature, Eden stated that he wanted the French to concentrate on a cease-fire with adequate safeguards and controls.

The French planned to offer to the Conference a proposal which called for considering Vietnam a civil war area and Laos and Cambodia as objects of external aggression. In all three countries peace would be restored by a cease-fire guaranteed by military and administrative controls under "international" supervision, with regular troops regrouped into delimited areas and all other forces disarmed. After peace had been restored by the cease-fire, political and economic problems would be examined. By presenting this proposal, the French representatives said, they might actually delay a cease-fire, increase Communist uncertainty as to united action or United States intervention in the conflict, and yet satisfy the French public that these conditions for a cease-fire were required in order to safeguard French forces in Indochina.

#### Instructions To Restrict the American Role at the Conference

The United States conceived a narrowly defined role for itself in the Conference discussions on Indochina. The American Delegation was not to deal with the Chinese Communist delegates or those of other regimes not recognized by the United States except as "necessary ... on a de facto basis in order to end aggression, or the threat of aggression, and to obtain peace." Also the United States considered that it was an "interested" nation but not a belligerent or a principal in the Indochina negotiations.

The object of American participation in the Conference, according to the Delegation's instructions, was "to assist in arriving at decisions which will help the nations of that area peacefully to enjoy territorial integrity and to expand their economies, to realize their legitimate national aspirations, and to develop security through individual and collective defense against aggression, from within or without. This implies that these people should not be amalgamated into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship." The United States would not approve any armistice or other agreement which would have the effect of "subverting the existing lawful governments ... or of permanently impairing their territorial integrity or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union in Indochina." If the American Delegate found that continued participation in the Conference appeared likely to "involve the United States in a result inconsistent with its policy", he was to recommend either withdrawal or limitation of the American role to that of an observer.

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- 18 -

### Continued American Interest in Providing Alternatives to Surrender

During the Geneva discussions on Indochina, which began on May 8, 1954, Secretary of State Dulles continued his efforts to provide France, as he put it, with an alternative to surrender. He believed that to await the final outcome at Geneva before acting would be to play into the hands of the Communists, who would stall at Geneva and continue their drive into Indochina until it was too late to salvage the situation.

Accordingly, the United States maintained its general interest in the organization of a coalition including the United Kingdom and in the early negotiation of a regional defense pact; it participated in the five-power military talks at Washington which had been agreed upon early in May but did not begin until June; it encouraged Thailand to submit a request to the United Nations for a peace observation commission, which the United States hoped to be able to extend to Indochina; and it issued new warnings to China against overt intervention in Indochina.

### Revised Proposals for United Action

Willingness To Act Without Britain. The main American effort, however, was an offer communicated to the French, without notification to the British, radically altering the conditions for American intervention. The most far-reaching change, with possible dramatic implications, was to eliminate the requirement that Britain participate in the coalition effort to save Indochina. The other changes represented new or more detailed prerequisites for American action.

Five Conditions. Under the new offer to the French the President would ask Congress for authority to use American armed forces in Indochina if five conditions were met. The conditions, and reactions to them, were as follows:

1. Request for Assistance: France and the Associated States should formally request military assistance from the United States, Great Britain, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. British participation would not be necessary provided the other countries agreed.

The French said that they would not consider making such a request until the Geneva Conference had failed. Also, it appeared that none of the British Commonwealth countries would participate in the proposed collective action, though Thailand and the Philippines would

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~~TOP SECRET~~

- 19 -

probably do so. Apparently Thai and Philippine participation-- considered essential because the United States would not intervene "purely as part of [a] Western coalition which is shunned by all Asian states"--would have sufficed for the United States had agreement been reached with France,

2. U.N. Role: Some aspect of the Indochinese problem would have to be submitted to the United Nations at once, possibly through a request from Laos, Cambodia, or Thailand for a peace observation commission.

Thailand did formally request the U.N. Security Council to create a subcommission of the Peace Observation Commission with authority to send observers to any part of the general area of Thailand if the States having jurisdiction gave their consent. Britain and France, however, opposed extending the activities of the proposed subcommission to Laos and Cambodia, and the Thais therefore changed the proposal to limit its scope to their own territory. Because of British and French attitudes the proposal for a subcommission was not carried to the General Assembly after a Soviet veto prevented action by the Security Council.

3. Independence for Associated States: The French should give the Associated States their complete independence, including the right to withdraw from the French Union.

The French Government objected that the Associated States had not asked for the right of secession, that it would be awkward for French public opinion, and that it would cause trouble in Africa as well as complications with regard to the European Defense Community. The United States replied that there could be some flexibility as to the right to withdraw but no equivocation on independence itself.

In June Franco-Vietnamese treaties of independence and association were initialed, but the French declined to sign the treaties until related conventions were concluded. Dulles said that initialing the treaties did not fulfill the condition of independence, whereupon the French said that they were willing to sign the treaties and to take all the actions the Americans had asked for subject to changes in a declaration which the United States had proposed that the French should make concerning the withdrawal of French forces from Indochina. The American wording called for withdrawal of the French expeditionary force "at the earliest practical date after the end of hostilities, consistent with France's obligations to the Associated States, unless invited by the respective governments of the Associated States to

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 20 -

maintain their forces." The French proposed that the words "after the end of hostilities" be changed to "after the reestablishment of peace and within a period to be determined in agreement with the Government of Vietnam." The United States had already determined this was unsatisfactory.

4. Military Agreements: France must also agree not to withdraw her forces from Indochina during the period of united action, and agreement would have to be reached on training the National Army and the command structure for the allied effort.

The French agreed to a formula proposed by Dulles whereby American and other allied forces would be "supplementary" to their own forces and existing French forces would be maintained except for normal rotation, with gradual French and allied withdrawals to take place as the Vietnamese National Army developed and the military situation permitted. France wished to specify, however, that account would be taken of its "international obligations, requirements for metropolitan defense and its obligations toward countries in the French Union and its protectorates." In the absence of an understanding with the French Government based on the general United States proposal for united action, Dulles opposed French suggestions to conduct military conversations, lest such talks ease the United States "into a series of piecemeal commitments".

The French hoped that American intervention would include the use of marines and ground troops, and when they heard reports to the contrary they complained that this was inconsistent with what they had understood to be American intentions. They declared unacceptable a suggestion to use Korean divisions.

Secretary Dulles replied that the use of marines would not be excluded if an agreed plan required their presence. In a message to Under Secretary Smith at Geneva and Ambassador Dillon at Paris, he said that if the United States joined in collective action it would do "whatever seemed necessary to win the war" and the "question of what disposition of various forces would best serve this purpose... could only be determined at the time and in the light of the situation as it developed, including the reaction if any of the Chinese Communists", who might well have a "determining influence in this matter."

5. Approval by French National Assembly: All the American conditions should be approved by the French National Assembly, and if the French Premier, after receiving this approval, wished to go ahead, he should make a formal request to the United States.

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 21 -

The Laniel Government believed that it would fall if it submitted such a request to the National Assembly. Nor would its successor, the Mendès-France Government, make the move; it came into office determined to conclude a cease-fire or resign.

Counteraction in the Event of Overt Chinese Communist Intervention

At times discussion of the conditional offer of American intervention became entangled in the subject of action to be taken if Communist China openly intervened in Indochina. On May 28 the French asked whether, if they reinforced the Delta region, President Eisenhower would request discretionary authority from Congress to use American air power to defend the Delta if it were attacked by Chinese planes. They said they doubted that united action would be ready in time and felt that to ask Congress for authority after the event would involve a fatal delay.

Acting Secretary of State Murphy thought the suggestion was disturbing if it indicated that the French were again thinking in terms of an American commitment to intervene alone. He assumed, he said, that the French fully understood the conditions for American participation in a "broader collective effort". He explained later that there was no change in the position laid down earlier by the United States, namely, that in case of a Chinese air strike before the conclusion of collective defense arrangements, the United States reaction would have to be judged in the circumstances of the moment and the President would have to obtain Congressional authorization.

When Dulles pointed out to President Eisenhower that Chinese Communist aggression would bring into operation the security treaty with Australia and New Zealand, the President stated that he wanted preparations to be made to make sure that some country would go along with the United States if such aggression occurred. He said that, if all the allies deserted the United States, further consideration would have to be given to the problem, for the Pacific Ocean must be kept an American lake.

Dulles discussed the subject with the Australian and New Zealand Ambassadors. In public statements the following week he said that the United States had no intention of dealing with the situation unilaterally unless Communist China resorted to "open armed aggression". Such aggression, he said, would be considered a "deliberate threat to the United States itself", and in this case the United States would resort to the United Nations and consult its allies but "could not escape ultimate responsibility for decisions closely touching our own security and self-defense."

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- 22 -

Warning of Possible Expiration of Conditional Offer To Intervene

During the discussions with the French Dulles felt increasingly that they were not treating seriously the American offer to intervene but were "toying with it just enough to use it as a talking point at Geneva." He disagreed with the French estimate in late May and early June that the two countries had reached agreement in principle on the political side, and he said that the Franco-American talks were at a standstill because the French had never decided whether they wanted the war "internationalized" on the conditions laid down by the United States.

Dulles repeatedly warned that he would not give the French a commitment for use in internal political maneuvering or in the Geneva negotiations that would in effect constitute a permanent option on American intervention. The American offer, he said, had been made in the light of conditions at the time, was subject to constant review, and could not stay open indefinitely while the situation in Indochina deteriorated.

American Willingness To Discuss Intervention With New Government in France

Dillon's Fear of Building Up False Hopes. After the resignation of the Laniel Government on June 13, following National Assembly rejection of a motion approving the government's policy at the Geneva Conference, Ambassador Dillon repeated earlier warnings that the United States might be accused of building up French hopes and then failing in a crisis. He noted that there was a real danger of a major military defeat for France in Indochina and no real prospect of United States intervention. To avert a possible shift to neutralism or even a Franco-Soviet alliance, Dillon recommended that the United States inform the French that the President would not request Congressional authority for intervention and that they should accept the Viet Minh armistice proposals and save their troops from disaster.

Readiness To Open New Talks. Dulles confirmed to Dillon that the steady deterioration of the military situation in Indochina had reduced the American disposition to intervene, but he did not rule out intervention on the terms outlined a month earlier. When the French inquired the following day whether there was any point in continuing the conversations, in the absence of any United States counterpart for a French commitment, Dulles said that the Laniel Government had never asked for American intervention and had never met the basic condition of expressing a firm intention to continue the fighting in Indochina. Dulles doubted that any successor to Laniel would take a

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 23 -

such a resolute position either, but he said that the United States would immediately reopen negotiations with any French government which seriously intended to carry on the war in the absence of honorable terms with the Communists. Similarly, President Eisenhower wrote to President Coty that, though time and events had created a new situation, the United States was ready to open discussions with the new French government if it wished.

Cease-Fire Deadline of Mendès-France. Coty had designated Pierre Mendès-France as the new Premier. Appearing before the National Assembly on June 17 for investiture, Mendès-France declared that his primary aim would be to achieve peace in Indochina to avert the atomic world war which would otherwise take place. He said that he did not seek peace at any price and that France would take all necessary military and legislative measures to "retain its presence in the Far East" (i.e., if the Geneva negotiations failed, he would request authority to send conscripts to Indochina). But he said that he was sure a cease-fire could be concluded and declared that if he could not get one by July 20 he would consider that he had failed in his mission and resign.

Change of American Policy: Agreement With Britain To "Respect" Partition of Vietnam

Decision To Review American Policy. At about the same time the United States began, in Dulles' words, to "reexamine possible de facto partition" of Vietnam. It was led to do so by the rapid military deterioration in Indochina and by the report of the five-power military conference held in Washington June 4-11, which concluded that any armistice "should provide for the retention by the French Union Forces of the Hanoi-Haiphong area, the communications between those two places and at least the area south of the line Thakhek-Dong Hoi."

As early as June 9 Dulles had agreed with Smith that the deteriorating military situation might lead to de facto partition, but at that time he had declared that the United States should try not to be identified with such a result. On June 17 he was still taking the outward position that there could be "no question of US participation in any attempt to 'sell' a partition to the non-Communist Vietnamese."

Anglo-American Talks. A change in the American position emerged in talks held with Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden at Washington near the end of June. In these talks Eden expressed the view that it would be better to divide Vietnam and save something than to hold elections and risk everything. Dulles, while he pointed

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 24 -

out that a de facto partition created problems, especially if it had to be guaranteed, conceded that under existing conditions this might be the better way. If it were possible to restore morale and set up an effective government within a year, elections might be preferable, Dulles remarked, but even so there would probably be a coalition regime and an eventual seizure of power by the Communists. Dulles said that it would be difficult for the United States to guarantee a Communist success in north Vietnam or anywhere else but that it could perhaps acquiesce in a settlement which it disliked but would not upset by force.

Seven-Point Paper. As a result of the talks, the United States and Britain set up study groups to consider Indochina and a possible SEATO, and they sent France a message stating their willingness to "respect" an armistice agreement meeting seven criteria, among them the preservation of "at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta". The message also stipulated that the armistice agreement should preserve "the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia" and assure "the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces therefrom"; that it should "not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"; and that it should "not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means". The remaining points called for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement"; "peaceful and humane transfers, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam"; and avoidance of "any restrictions materially impairing" the capacity of Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "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".

Temporary Reduction of American Participation in the Geneva Conference

Reduction in Size and Level of the Delegation. Meanwhile, on June 19, Eden, Molotov, and Smith had ended their discussions at Geneva, and in their absence the Conference continued at the ambassadorial level. U. Alexis Johnson, American Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, headed a greatly reduced American delegation.

Dulles on June 14 had suggested to Smith a conference kept "nominally alive". Subsequently, both before and after Smith's departure, the delegation was reminded that it was present only in a "quasi-advisory or observer capacity", and it was instructed to "avoid being drawn into the French effort" to give the Conference a "semblance of vitality by means of a series of committee operations."

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- 25 -

Question of Complete Withdrawal. In his message of June 14, Dulles had notified Smith that the United States thought that final adjournment was desirable if it could be managed without making the French feel that at the critical moment they had been deserted by the United States and the United Kingdom. After Smith left Geneva, the United States continued to consider possible complete withdrawal from the Conference.

Dulles feared that the French might agree to a settlement superficially resembling the seven points mentioned above but which would in fact lead to the fall of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam within a few months; that the Communists might insist that the United States adhere to the settlement; and that, if the United States did not do so, the Communists, at the very time when they were striving for defeat of the European Defense Community, might succeed in driving a wedge between France and the United States. Accordingly, Dulles told Dillon, the United States was considering "various possibilities such as the withdrawal of the remnants of our delegation from Geneva or clarification of our position as regards the French position."

French Desire for Resuming Talks at Foreign Ministers Level. The French, on the other hand, were interested in raising the Geneva talks again to the Ministerial level. Mendes-France told Dillon that the technical committees had clearly been unsuccessful, that he hoped that higher-level talks could be promptly resumed in view of his own July 20 deadline for a solution, and that he did not wish to be in the position of talking only to Molotov (who reportedly would return to Geneva on July 8) and to Chou En-lai. The French Premier said that it was "absolutely essential" that either Dulles or Smith come to Geneva, for the Communists would conclude from their absence that the Western powers were split and would demand even harsher conditions. He stressed that he would not accept any terms which did not substantially meet the seven points.

Tripartite Debate Concerning American Participation. The question was debated further in messages between Washington, Paris, and London and finally in a tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting at Paris on July 13-14. The United States said that in the absence of an agreed position it feared that events at Geneva would only expose Allied differences even more than if Smith or Dulles did not return. It expressed doubt that the three Western countries were so firmly committed to the seven points that they would let negotiations break off and the warfare resume if the Communists refused them. For the Americans, Dulles said, the seven points were the minimum terms, while for the French and perhaps also for the British they might be "merely

~~TOP SECRET~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 26 -

an optimum solution". Dulles asserted that the United States could not be put in the position of apparently approving the sale of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into Communist captivity in a settlement which would be portrayed as a second Yalta.

At the same time, Dulles said, the United States did not question France's right to exercise its own judgment and did not wish to put itself in the position of seeming to pass "moral judgment upon French action" or of disassociating itself from the settlement "at a moment and under circumstances which might be unnecessarily dramatic." Nor did he want France to say that it would stick to the seven points only if the United States would fight as an alternative. Dulles said that, if it would help the French, he was ready to say publicly that he was 100 percent behind their demands.

Mendès-France replied that without the presence of Dulles at Geneva the effect of a public statement would not be the same and peace at any price would be easier. There were definite limits beyond which France would not go, he said, and if there were no settlement the war would be intensified. The Communists knew that French reinforcements could not reach the theater until September, and meanwhile it would be impossible to hold Hanoi, or even to keep Haiphong without naval and air support. There might be a question of what the United States would do in that situation. Mendès-France said that he could understand Dulles' absence from Geneva if there were great differences between France and the United States, but that this was not true.

Eden agreed with the French Premier and said that the presence of Dulles or Smith might well be the deciding factor in reaching a settlement based on the seven points. Eden thought that the important thing was to get the best possible settlement and to make it clear that if the Communists broke it they would be faced with a united front, preferably one also including the countries of Southeast Asia.

Affirmative Response to Urgent Plea by Mendès-France. Mendès-France finally said that if Dulles or Smith came to Geneva and had to disavow the settlement--as he understood they would have to do if it were not substantially based on the seven points--he would take the responsibility. He said that all he asked was that the United States make a unilateral statement that it would take action if the Communists broke a settlement based on the seven points. Dulles promptly replied that such a statement would present no problem, and on the next day he reported that he and Eisenhower would ask Smith to go back to Geneva.

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Franco-American Position Paper, July 14

It was also decided at the tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting that a Franco-American position paper should be drawn up, with Eden concurring in a separate letter. This paper covered the following points:

1. France and the Associated States were the countries primarily interested in the Geneva Conference, while the chief interest of the United States was that of a friendly nation which desired to help in arriving at a just settlement.
2. France believed that a settlement based on the seven points, acceptable both to itself and to the Associated States, could be obtained; the United States was prepared to "respect" these terms, but France would neither ask nor expect this Government to respect terms which in its judgment "materially" differed, and the United States might publicly dissociate itself from a different settlement.
3. If the United States could respect a settlement, its position would be expressed "unilaterally or in association only with non-Communist states in terms which apply to the situation the principles of non-use of force ... in Articles 2 (4) and (6) of the Charter of the United Nations."
4. 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 following any settlement."
5. If there were no settlement, the two countries would "consult together on the measures to be taken", and the United States could take the question to the United Nations if it so desired.
6. France reaffirmed the "principle of independence for the Associated States in equal and voluntary association as members of the French Union".

The seven points were attached to the position paper.

Return to High-Level Talks and United States Acquiescence in the Geneva Agreements

Smith's Instructions. Smith returned to Geneva with instructions which included the seven points and the position paper. He was told



~~TOP SECRET~~

- 28 -

that the United States would not seek to impose its views on France and the Associated States and would not go beyond the role of "a nation friendly to the non-Communist states primarily interested" and of assisting, "where desired, in arriving at a just settlement." He was authorized to make the declaration described in the Franco-American position paper if the seven points were substantially met.

Smith was cautioned to avoid participating in any negotiations which would give the Communists "a plausible case for contending that the United States was so responsible for the result" that it would be "honor bound to guarantee that result to the Communists." Also, since the United States was not prepared to commit itself to intervene in the Indochinese war if the Geneva Conference failed, Smith was to "avoid as far as possible exerting any pressures or giving advice to the French" that would enable them, if the negotiations failed, to say that failure was due to American pressure and that the United States was therefore "morally obligated to intervene at once in a military way."

The Geneva Agreements, July 20-21, 1954. The Geneva Conference now moved to an end. Cease-fire agreements were concluded and a Conference Declaration was issued. Since the United States would not join in any declaration with the Communists, the Conference Declaration contained no signatures but merely listed the participants in the Indochina proceedings of the Conference. Other documents issued at the Conference included a Vietnamese draft amendment to the Conference Declaration and one or more unilateral declarations each by Cambodia, Laos, France, and the United States.

The cease-fire agreements and related declarations provided, inter alia, for the regrouping of the armed forces in Vietnam and their separation by a demilitarized zone running approximately along the 17th parallel; for the withdrawal of the invading Communist forces from Laos and the regrouping, in two Laotian provinces, of the Communist Pathet Lao; and for the withdrawal of all French Union forces and other foreign troops from Cambodia and the demobilization of the "resistance" forces in Cambodia. Prisoners of war and civilian internees were to be exchanged, and there were varying prohibitions and restrictions on the introduction of troop reinforcements or additional military equipment; on the establishment of new military bases, and on the joining of military alliances. Control machinery was provided for each state, consisting of a Joint Commission and an International Commission, with the latter adopting recommendations by majority vote except in the case of questions which "might lead to a resumption of hostilities", when unanimity was required.

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~~TOP SECRET~~

- 29 -

United States Declaration. The United States, in its unilateral declaration, noted the cease-fire agreements for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and paragraphs 1 to 12 of the Conference Declaration and said that "(i) it will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them, in accordance with Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with the obligation of members to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force; and (ii) it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern as seriously threatening international peace and security." It made no mention of paragraph 13 of the Conference Declaration, which referred to consultation among Conference members on questions referred to them by the International Supervisory Commission. Smith had previously made it clear that the United States could not agree to any such provision, since it did not wish to perpetuate the Conference.

With regard to the statement in the Conference Declaration concerning the holding of Vietnamese elections under international supervision in July 1956, the United States quoted a declaration made in Washington on June 29, 1954 in which it had expressed its position as follows:

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.

Referring also to a Vietnamese statement made at the eighth plenary meeting, the United States reiterated "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join in an arrangement which would hinder this." Nothing in the American declaration, it was stated, was intended to indicate any departure from this policy.

Military Aid to Indochina During and Immediately After the Geneva Conference

Increased Aid. In the period of the Geneva Conference the United States increased further its military assistance to Indochina. In July 1954 this was estimated to represent about two-thirds of the current material and financial burden of the war, military assistance and special support for Indochina for the fiscal year 1954 having climbed to more than \$1300 million, including funds recently transferred from programs outside the region. In June, furthermore, a request from the head of the MAAG in Vietnam for 90 additional officers

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- 30 -

was granted, and he was authorized to continue discussions with French military authorities concerning MAAG advice in the training activities of the Vietnamese National Army.

Refusal To Send Training Mission. The MAAG was cautioned, however, not to construe this authorization as approval for a MAAG training mission, a decision "still awaiting clarification [of the] complex political-military situation." The United States felt, as the American Chargé d'Affaires at Saigon was told on June 10, that it might be contrary to American interests to enter into a commitment to train Vietnamese troops, in view of the degeneration of the situation in Vietnam, and it did not wish to consider a training mission or program separately from an "over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled" for American participation in the war in Indochina.

Suspension of Aid After the Armistice. As a consequence of the cease-fire agreements concluded in July the United States terminated MDA supply actions in Indochina and diverted ships that were en route there. The MAAG, moreover, ceased all formal training operations. In subsequent weeks and months a new program of aid for free Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was developed as part of a new approach to the entire Indochina problem in the light of the Geneva agreements.

American Comments on the Conclusion of the Conference

Eisenhower Statement. As the Geneva Conference ended, President Eisenhower told a news conference that the primary responsibility for the settlement rested on the belligerent nations and that the role of the United States had been to try to be helpful to France and the Associated States. The United States was not itself a party to, or "bound by", the Conference decisions and did not like some features of the agreements, he said, but a great deal depended on how they worked in practice. The President announced that the United States was asking Laos and Cambodia to agree to the establishment of permanent American missions at their capitals. He said also that 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."

Dulles Statement. Secretary Dulles, in a press statement of July 23, said that "the Geneva negotiations reflected the military developments in Indochina", for the French Union forces "had lost control of nearly one-half of Vietnam, their hold on the balance was precarious, and the French people did not desire to prolong the war."

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- 31 -

The important thing now, however, was "not to mourn the past but to seize the future opportunity to prevent the loss in Northern Vietnam from leading to the extension of communism throughout Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific." He drew the lesson that resistance to Communism needed popular support and that "the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions." A second lesson was that collective defense should be set up before aggression took place and not after it was under way. Dulles said that the United States believed that it would now be practical to bring about a collective-security system in Southeast Asia, and he stressed that not only naked aggression but also Communist subversion, feeding on "economic dislocations and social injustice", had to be prevented. "If the free nations which have a stake in this area will now work together to avail of present opportunities in the light of past experience," Dulles concluded, "then the loss of the present may lead to a gain for the future."

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY

FAR EAST 90-110  
7991

May 10, 1962

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR: S - The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S *CSL*

FROM: G - U. Alexis Johnson *[Signature]*

SUBJECT: Historical Study of U. S. Involvement in  
Indochina.

In the light of our increasing involvement in Viet-Nam and the background questions that continue to arise, I asked the Historical Office to prepare a summary history of our records with respect to Indochina from 1940 through the 1954 Geneva Conference. A copy of this study is attached.

The first five pages constitute a summary. The events leading up to the 1954 Geneva Conference are detailed beginning on page 13. The French request for a unilateral air strike by the United States at the time of Dienbienphu is covered on page 16.

I am sending a copy of the paper to Mac Bundy for his own information and help in giving the President background information.

Enclosure:

United States Involvement in Indochina,  
1940-1954. Research Project No. 552,  
April 1962.

G:UAJohnson:ges

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

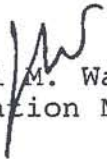
Washington, D.C. 20520

UNCLASSIFIED, WITH  
~~TOP SECRET~~ ATTACHMENTS

February 27, 1975

MEMORANDUM TO: Dr. Edwin S. Costrell  
Chief, Historical Studies Division  
PA/HO

I am returning copy no. 2 of your Research Project No. 552 on United States Involvement in Indochina (1940-1954), which is dated April, 1962. Also attached is the covering memo of May 10, 1962 to the Secretary from U. Alexis Johnson.

  
Paul M. Washington  
Director, Information Management Section

Attachments:

a/s

HISTORICAL OFFICE  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

FEB 28 1975

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TOP SECRET ATTACHMENTS

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY

February 14, 1962

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR: P/HO - Mr. Noble

THROUGH: S/S

FROM: G - U. Alexis Johnson

SUBJECT: History of our Involvement in Indochina.

Do you have readily available, or could you compile, anything in the way of a confidential summary of the record of our involvement in Indochina from the time of World War II up to the Geneva Agreements in 1954?

What I have in mind is a relatively succinct memorandum based on the historical record suitable for the background information of the Secretary and the President. I have in mind the involvement of OSS with Ho Chi Minh during World War II, President Roosevelt's views with respect to the return of the French in Indochina, our relations with France on the subject following President Roosevelt's death, the circumstances of the French return, our efforts to get the French to give independence to the Indochinese states so as to remove the "colonial war" aspects, the efforts to form an alliance in 1954 to hold the area, the decision not ourselves directly to intervene to support the French in 1954, and our acquiescence in the Geneva Conference.

I know this is a big order, and would be glad to discuss it with you.

cc: SEA

*approved by  
Mr. Zolner  
2/19/62  
HBN*

G:UAJohnson  
HISTORICAL OFFICE  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTORCONFIDENTIAL

FEB 15 1962

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

NW#: 57507

DocId: 32911249



# OSS Activity (1945) from Dept. 2 State files

Material for possible use in OSS section

Captain Archimedes Patti established contact with the ~~#####~~ Annamese in early April near Hanoi where he met Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh who had helped escort downed Allied fliers into China. He organized the sabotage and espionage activities of the Viet Minh which culminated in successful attacks on small Japanese elements in July and August. (3)

While Chinese and American military officers prevented Major Jean Sainteny, who later became French Commissioner for northern Indochina, from boarding a plane at Kunming for Indochina on August 17 (3), Sainteny and other French officers accompanied the OSS detachment led by Patti which went into Hanoi on August 22. (3) Patti claims to have helped prevent the populace

from attacking French ~~#####~~ civilians by his representations to the Viet Minh who made requests for United States recognition and aid to the Annamite independents. Patti also reported that General Lu Han, Commander of the Chinese occupation troops, requested American advice on the disarming of the Japanese troops. (4) Meanwhile, an OSS headquarters near Saigon moved into the city in September when Colonel A. Peter Dewey, Chief of the Mission, was shot ~~by him~~ dead by the Vietnamese. (Hammer, 118-119) This

incident prompted ~~###~~ Ho Chi Minh, "President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam" to write a letter of condolences ~~#####~~ which was delivered to General Gallagher at Hanoi and forwarded to the American Embassy at Chungking. (5)

1. Memorandum by Sharp (SEA) of conversation held by Moffat (SEA) with Major A. Patti (OSS), Dec. 5, 1945, unclassified (file 851G.00/12-545).
2. Memorandum from Ballantine (EE) to WE, August 23, 1945, secret (file 851G.00/8-2345).
3. See memorandum cited in footnote 1. ~~###~~ This information was confirmed by WH Reynolds in telephone conversation with Kirk of the SSU in CIA, March 8, 1962, ~~#####~~
4. See memorandum cited in footnote 1. Also from Shanghai, desp. 6, Dec. 1, 1945, confidential (file 851G.00/12-145).
5. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle For Indochina (Stanford University Press, 1954), pp. 118-119.
6. From Chungking, tel. 1820, via War, Oct. 18, 1945, secret (file 851G.00/10-1845).