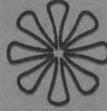


II U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh
War, 1950-1954(1 Vol.)

- A. U.S., France and Vietnamese Nationalism
- B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS
1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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II

U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE

FRANCO-VIET MIINH WAR

1950 - 1954

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PART II

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN
THE FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR
1950-1954

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. Section A examines the triangular relationship of France, the U.S., and the Bao Dai regime. Section B analyzes the intervention issue, and the antecedents to the Geneva Conference.

- A. United States, France, and Vietnamese Nationalism
- B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

A. UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND
VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

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II. A. UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

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.

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, non-communist 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. (Tab 1)

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

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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. (Tab 2)

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. (Tab 3)

DISCUSSION

- II. A. Tab 1 - U.S. Policy and the Bao Dai Regime
- Tab 2 - Leverage: France Had More Than the United States
- Tab 3 - Perceptions of the Communist Threat to Southeast Asia and to Basic U.S. Interests

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 1.

UNITED STATES POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. <u>The Bao Dai Solution</u> | A-5 |
| a. The French Predicament..... | A-5 |
| b. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, 1948..... | A-5 |
| c. Elysee Agreement, 1949..... | A-7 |
| d. Bao Dai's Governments..... | A-7 |
| e. The Pau Negotiations, 1950..... | A-9 |
| 2. <u>U.S. Policy Towards Bao Dai</u> | A-11 |
| a. Qualified Approval, 1947-1949..... | A-11 |
| b. Recognition, 1950..... | A-13 |
| c. U.S. Aid to Indochina..... | A-17 |
| d. French Intransigence..... | A-18 |
| (1) 1950-1951: De Lattre and "Dynamisme"..... | A-18 |
| (2) 1951-1953: Letourneau and "Dictatorship"..... | A-20 |
| e. Bao Dai <u>Attentiste</u> | A-22 |
| f. The American Predicament..... | A-26 |

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 1. U.S. POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

1. The Bao Dai Solution

a. 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." 1/ 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." 2/

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.

b. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, 1948

Bao Dai's mandarin 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. ^{3/} 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. ^{4/} 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."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

c. 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..." 5/

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..." 6/

d. 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..." 7/

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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..." 8/

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." 9/

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,"

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 10/ 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." 11/

e. 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..." 12/

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. 13/

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." 14/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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."

(Quoted in same reference above)

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

2. U.S. Policy Towards Bao Dai

a. 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." 15/

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. 16/ 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."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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 irretrevably 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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.

b. 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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: 17/

"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:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-15 and A-16)

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington

February 2, 1950

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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

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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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

9(signed)

Harry S. Truman

February 3, 1950

RESTRICTED

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c. U.S. Aid to Indochina

On February 16, 1950, France requested U.S. military and economic assistance in prosecuting the Indochina War. 18/ 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..." 19/

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." 20/

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..." 21/

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved \$10 million for urgently needed military assistance items for Indochina. 22/ The President's

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 23/ 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. 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..." 24/

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?

d. 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." 25/

(1) 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:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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." 26/

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." 27/

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." 28/ 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

that would fight in the way de Lattre meant was the absence, at Dienbienphu, of any Vietnamese fighting elements. It was a French show." 29/

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: 30/

Garrison of Dien Bien Phu

| | <u>Officers</u> | <u>NCO's</u> | <u>EM's</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Vietnamese | <u>11</u> | <u>270</u> | <u>5,119</u> | <u>5,480</u> |
| 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. 31/

(2) 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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 à la française 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." 32/

The Parliamentary Mission described Saigon: "where gambling, depravity, love of money and of power finish by corrupting the morale and destroying will-power ..."; 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 laissez-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." 33/

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 ..." 34/ 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." 35/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

e. 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:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-23 thru A-25)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

OUTGOING TELEGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SECRET

OCT 18 1950
2 P.M.

PRIORITY

AMLEGATION
SAIGON
384

DEPT wishes to have FOL MSG delivered to Bao Dai personally by MIN IMMED after Chief of State's arrival in Saigon. It SHLD be delivered informally without submission written text with sufficient emphasis to leave no doubt in Emperor's mind that it represents DEPTS 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.

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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 is 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 COMMIE 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 NATL armies and his own intention assume role Commander in Chief. He SHOULD take full advantage of FR official declaration of intention to form NATL armies (confirmed yesterday by MIN ASSC States Letourneau) and set up precise plan for such formation IMMEDIATE.

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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Finally, it SHLD 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 IMMEDIATELY inform Letourneau and Pignon of action. Saigon advise Paris in advance to synchronize informing FONOFF

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A-25

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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..." 36/

Dr. Dan agreed that the effectiveness of the National Army was a central issue; he pointed out that there were but three Viet generals, none 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." 37/ 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.

f. 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." 38/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 39/

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." 40/

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." 41/ 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 42/

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." 43/

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 knew 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 44/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

North Atlantic Treaty Organization concept. Our degree of leverage was being drastically reduced." 45/

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." 46/

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 1.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 58.
2. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 245.
3. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967, 2 vols.), II, 706-707.
4. Ibid., 712.
5. Ibid., 724; Shaplen, op. cit., 63.
6. Ibid., 64. Cf., Ellen Hammer, "Genesis of the First Indochinese War, 1946-1950," in Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., Viet Nam (New York: Fawcett, 1965), 81.
7. Ibid., 82.
8. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, op. cit., 246. General Revers' "Secret" report was widely publicized in 1950, and occasioned a political scandal in Paris known as "the affair of the generals."
9. Shaplen, op. cit., 64-65.
10. Ibid., 78.
11. Ibid., 79.
12. Ibid., 65.
13. Ibid., 76.
14. Hammer, op. cit., 280.
15. Ibid., 278.
16. Buttinger, op. cit., II, 722-723; Shaplen, op. cit., 60, 84.
17. Hammer, op. cit., 269-270.
18. Paris 837 to State, February 22, 1950.
19. Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of Defense, dated 6 March 1950 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

20. Charles Wolf, Jr., Foreign Aid: Theory and Practice in Southern Asia, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 82. The quotation is from an Economic Cooperation Administration Report to Congress of June 30, 1950.
21. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the JCS, April 5, 1950, "Strategic Assessment of Southeast Asia," (TOP SECRET).
22. State to London 2049, May 3, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
23. Department of State, Bulletin, May 22, 1950.
24. White House Press Release, June 27, 1950.
25. Quoted in Hammer, op. cit., 271.
26. Shaplen, op. cit., 80.
27. Ibid., 81.
28. Ibid., 87.
29. Ibid., 81-82.
30. Bernard B. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place (New York: Lippencott, 1967), 479 ff.
31. Shaplen, op. cit., 81.
32. Hammer, op. cit., 283.
33. Ibid., 299-300.
34. Ibid., 300.
35. Ibid.
36. Shaplen, op. cit., 78.
37. Ibid.
38. George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (New York: Dial Press, 1967), 33.
39. Shaplen, op. cit., 94.
40. Kahin and Lewis, loc.cit.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

41. Shaplen, op. cit., 86; 90.
42. Ibid., 90, 87 .
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 88-89 .
45. Ibid., 66, 84-85.
46. Ibid., 91 .

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 2.

LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| 1. <u>American Leverage on France</u> | A-35 |
| a. NATO and Marshall Plan..... | A-35 |
| b. Military Assistance Program..... | A-35 |
| c. U.S. Supports Independence for Associated States..... | A-37 |
| d. Limitation on American Leverage..... | A-38 |
| 2. <u>French Leverage on the United States</u> | A-38 |
| a. Primarily it was France's War..... | A-38 |
| b. Expectation of French Success..... | A-39 |
| c. American Policy in Europe: the EDC..... | A-40 |
| d. French Desire for Negotiations..... | A-40 |
| e. Conclusion: Incompatibility of American and French Objectives..... | A-41 |

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 2. 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.

1. American Leverage on France

a. 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.

b. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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...." 1/

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." 2/

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." 3/ 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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.

c. 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. 4/ 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. 5/

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;...." 6/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

d. 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. ^{7/} 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 Guillion, 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. ^{8/}

2. 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.

a. 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 --

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 9/ 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.

b. 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. 10/

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. 11/ 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,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

concurrent 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. 12/

c. 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. 13/

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." 14/

d. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 15/

e. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. Paris Embtel 837 to SecState February 22, 1950 (SECRET).
2. The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, NSC 64, February 27, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
3. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, April 5, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
4. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), pp. 301-302.
5. Summary and Comments, NSC 161st Meeting, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
6. Deptel 868, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
7. An experienced French journalist in Indochina wrote: "To be sure, American officers also tried to supervise strategy; but after a few fruitless brushes with a high command that was ferociously attached to its prerogatives they decided to leave it entirely to the French. In the end all the experts of the Military Aid Advisory Group kept in the background, resigning themselves to letting this Indochinese war be fought in the French way."

Lucien Bodard, The Quicksand War: Prelude to Vietnam. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), pp. 224-225.
8. Henri Navarre, Agonie de l'Indochine, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 27-28; 137-138; Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume II (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 811, 1079; Robert McClintock, The Meaning of Limited War (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1967), p. 174.
9. Summary and Comments, NSC 161st Meeting, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
10. U.S. Joint Military Mission to Indochina, Progress Report on Military Situation in Indochina as of 19 November 1953, 19 November 1953 (SECRET).
11. Undated appendix to Summary of Progress Report of [O'Daniel] Joint Military Mission to Indochina (SECRET).
12. Dept of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 (Intelligence), November 24, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
13. Raymond Aron, "Historical Sketch of the Great Debate," in Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron, eds., France Defeats EDC (New York: Praeger, 1957).
14. McClintock, The Meaning of Limited War, p. 175.
15. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, p. 328.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 3.

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. "Domino Principle" Before Korea..... | A-45 |
| 2. Importance of Indochina..... | A-46 |
| 3. Impact of Start of Korean War..... | A-47 |
| 4. Republican Administration and Far East..... | A-49 |
| 5. Impact of Korean Armistice..... | A-50 |
| 6. Deepening of U.S. Commitment to Containment..... | A-50 |
| 7. Conclusion..... | A-51 |

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 3. 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.

1. "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." 1/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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."

2. 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) was adopted as policy on March 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":

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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." 2/

3. 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 Korea war program. 3/

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) 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 4/

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 materiel assistance being given to the Viet Minh. The NIE of December 1950 considered direct Chinese intervention to be "impending." 5/ 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. 6/ 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. 7/ 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

naval action "against all suitable military targets in China," when possible in conjunction with British and French forces. 8/

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." 9/

4. 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. 10/ 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." 11/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

5. 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." 12/

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.

6. 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-119's with civilian crews for the airlift into Laos. 13/ 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. 14/ 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. 15/ 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 16/ NSC 5405 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/

7. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. A. 3.

FOOTNOTES

1. NSC 48/1, "A Report on...The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," December 23, 1949 (TOP SECRET).
2. NSC 64, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina," February 27, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
3. Historical Office, Dept. of State, Research Project No. 370, "United States Policy on Indochina, 1945-1954," p.6.
4. NSC 124/2, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25, 1952 (TOP SECRET).
5. NIE-5, "Indochina: Current Situation and Probable Developments," December 29, 1950 (SECRET).
6. NIE-35, "Probable Developments in Indochina during the Remainder of 1951," August 7, 1951 (SECRET).
7. NIE-35/1, "Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1952," March 3, 1952 (SECRET).
8. NSC 124/2.
9. Ibid.
10. John Foster Dulles, War or Peace (New York, 1950), p. 231; Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 25-26.
11. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report of the Special Study Mission to Pakistan, India, Thailand and Indochina, pursuant to H. Res. 113, H. Rpt. No. 412, 83d long., 1st Sess., May 6, 1953, p. 53, as quoted in Gurtov, op.cit., p. 26.
12. Speech before the American Legion, St. Louis, Missouri, September 2, 1953.
13. Memorandum to Secretary of State from Asst Secy for Far East, Mr. Walter E. Robertson, April 28, 1953 (SECRET); AmEmbassy Paris telegram to Dept. State, No. 5766, May 3, 1953 (SECRET).
14. Historical Office, State Dept., Research Project No. 354, Summary, pp. 8-9.
15. Memorandum of Conversation, Acting Secretary Walter Bedell Smith and Minister Doridou, French Embassy, August 8, 1953 (SECRET).
16. NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

B. TOWARD A NEGOTIATED
SETTLEMENT

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B.

TOWARD A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

SUMMARY

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 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. (Tab 1)

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. (Tab 2)

DISCUSSION

- II. B. Tab 1 - The Interagency Debate over U.S. Intervention in Indochina
- Tab 2 - The Attempt to Organize "United Action"

B1

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B. 1.

THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE
OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. <u>The General Policy Context</u> | B-5 |
| a. The Final Truman Program (NSC 124)..... | B-5 |
| b. Eisenhower Administration's "Basic National Security Policy"..... | B-5 |
| 2. <u>The Question of Intervention with Ground Forces</u> | B-5 |
| a. The Problem is Presented..... | B-5 |
| b. NSC: State and Defense Views..... | B-6 |
| c. The JCS View..... | B-7 |
| d. Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina..... | B-7 |
| e. Erskine Report, Part I: Motivate the French..... | B-8 |
| f. The Erskine Report, Part II: Intervention Only After Geneva?..... | B-8 |
| g. NSC 177 Annex Raises Intervention Question Anew..... | B-9 |
| h. Army Questions Feasibility of Air-Naval Intervention and Outlines Ground Forces Requirements..... | B-10 |
| i. Defense-JCS "Solution": Rectify French Deficiencies.... | B-11 |
| 3. <u>The New Approach: "United Action"</u> | B-11 |
| a. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"... | B-12 |
| b. Rejection of Unilateral Intervention..... | B-13 |

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B. 1. THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

1. 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.

a. 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. 1/

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

NSC 162/2, 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. 2/

2. The Question of Intervention with Ground Forces

a. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 3/

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. 4/ 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." 5/

b. 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, 6/ 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

According to summary notes taken of the meeting, 7/ 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.

c. 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. 8/

d. Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina

Dissatisfaction with NSC 177 and the NSC's subsequent failure in NSC 5405 9/ 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

e. 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.

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

The second part of the Erskine Report 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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.

g. 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. 10/ 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

h. 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 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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..." 11/

i. 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.

3. 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." 12/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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." 13/

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. 14/

a. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"

Meanwhile, the President decided, following a meeting of Secretary Dulles 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. 15/

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. 16/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

b. 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B. 1.

FOOTNOTES

1. NSC 124, A Report to the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia, February 13, 1952 (TOP SECRET).
2. A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on Basic National Security Policy (NSC 162/2), October 30, 1953 (TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE). The Report was adopted October 29, 1953, at the 168th Council meeting.
3. Memorandum from Col. George W. Coolidge (GS, Acting Chief, Plans Division) to Defense Member, NSC Planning Board (att: Col Bonesteel), December 8, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
4. Anderson to Wilson, January 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
5. Davis letter to Bonesteel, January 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. NSC Planning Board, A Report to the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 177), December 30, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
7. Summary and Comments of the 179th NSC meeting, January 8, 1954.
8. See memorandum from Lt. Gen. F. F. Everest (USAF), for the JCS, to the Secretary of Defense, January 15, 1954 (TOP SECRET); also, the comments of Radford as reported in a memorandum from Capt. G. W. Anderson, Jr. (USN) to Lt. Gen. Jean Valluy, French Military Mission to the U.S., January 30, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
9. United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 5405), January 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET). NSC 5405 differs from NSC 177 in only two respects: a paragraph on the U.S. response to a Chinese move into Thailand, and a deleted reference in the earlier paper to France's decline as a world power, with repercussions on her position in Europe and North Africa, if Indochina should be lost.
10. The Annex was recirculated on March 29, 1954.
11. Army Position on NSC Action No. 1074A, undated (early April 1954).
12. Department of State Press Release No. 165, March 29, 1954.
13. Draft: Special Committee Report on Southeast Asia - Part II, April 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
14. See the undated State Department position paper apparently written between April 2 and 5, just prior to the French request made through

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Dillon for direct U.S. air intervention at Dien Bien Phu. The State paper, with minor changes, became NSC Action No. 1074A, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

15. Summary and Content of 192nd NSC Meeting, April 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
16. Secretary Wilson memorandum to the JCS and the Army, Navy, and Air Force Secretaries, April 15, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

B2

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B. 2. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. <u>The Berlin Conference of 1954</u> | B-17 |
| a. Viet Minh Strategy and French Attitudes..... | B-17 |
| b. Early U.S. Opposition to Negotiations..... | B-18 |
| 2. <u>The Ely Mission (March 20 - 24)</u> | B-19 |
| a. Dien Bien Phu Begins..... | B-19 |
| b. Operation Vulture (Vautour)..... | B-19 |
| 3. <u>"United Action" as an Alternative to Either Negotiations or to Unilateral U.S. Intervention</u> | B-20 |
| a. Formulation of U.S. Policy..... | B-20 |
| b. Initial Allied Reaction to "United Action"..... | B-22 |
| c. French Call for U.S. Intervention at Dien Bien Phu (April 4 - 5)..... | B-22 |
| d. U.S. Decision Not to Intervene Unilaterally..... | B-23 |
| e. British Oppose "United Action"..... | B-24 |
| f. French Oppose "United Action"..... | B-26 |
| g. Aborted Working Group on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia (April 20)..... | B-27 |
| h. Continued French Prodding for U.S. Intervention (April 21 - 25)..... | B-27 |
| 4. <u>Final U.S. Position Before Geneva</u> | B-28 |
| a. Exchanges with the French..... | B-28 |
| b. Exchanges with the U.K..... | B-29 |
| c. The Washington Viewpoint..... | B-30 |
| 5. <u>Reappraisal of Domino Theory After Dien Bien Phu</u> | B-30 |

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. B. 2. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

1. 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."

a. 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. 1/

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 -- seek 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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/

b. 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. 3/ 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. 4/ 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." 5/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 6/

2. The Ely Mission (March 20 - 24)

a. 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. 7/ 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. 8/ 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. 9/ As to the supply of bombers, twenty-five additional B-26's were promised.

b. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 10/

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. 11/ Nevertheless, such an operation probably was the subject of informal discussions both in Vietnam, and between Radford and Ely.

3. "United Action" as an Alternative to Either Negotiations or to Unilateral U.S. Intervention

a. 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 (see Tab 1).

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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"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." 12/

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?..." 13/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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.^{14/}

b. 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." ^{15/}

c. 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. ^{16/} 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 17/ 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.

d. 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. 18/ 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 19/ 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.'" 20/

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. 21/

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." 22/

e. 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. 23/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 24/

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." 25/ 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." 26/

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. 27/

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." 28/ While Dulles kept telling the British that only united action through the formation of a coalition could ensure

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 29/ 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. 30/ 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." 31/

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.

f. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to await the results of the Geneva Conference and that they could not give the impression in advance that they believed Geneva would fail. 32/

g. 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. 33/ 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." 34/ 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 now by putting our boys in" in order to avoid "further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina." 35/

h. 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. 36/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 37/

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. 38/

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. 39/

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). 40/

4. Final U.S. Position Before Geneva

a. 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. 41/ 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. 42/

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 43/ 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." 44/

b. 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. 45/

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. 46/ 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." 47/ 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. 48/

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. 49/

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. 50/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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. 51/

c. 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. 52/ 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), 53/ 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. 54/

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." 55/

5. 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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

consider the whole situation hopeless and we would give up in despair ..."
56/ 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. 57/

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 trans-
formed 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.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

FOOTNOTES

1. Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works, Vol. III, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp. 408-9; Peter V. Curl, ed. Documents on American Foreign Relations 1953, (New York, 1954), p. 162; both as cited in Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 18, 48, 171-2.
2. Telegram from Theodore C. Achilles, deputy chief of mission, Paris, to Dulles No. 2110, November 30, 1953 (CONFIDENTIAL).
3. Dulles telegram No. 180 to American Embassy - Paris, July 15, 1953, (TOP SECRET) following bilateral talks of July 12. This position was reaffirmed in NSC 177 of December 30, 1953.
4. See Dulles' September 2, 1953, address to the American Legion, in which he said: "We want peace in Indochina, as well as in Korea. The political conference about to be held relates in the first instance to Korea. But growing out of that conference could come, if Red China wants it, an end of aggression and restoration of peace in Indochina. The United States would welcome such a development." Cf. a French memorandum, undated, following tripartite (U.S.-U.K.-France) talks in Washington in July 1953. Here, it is urged that the Chinese representative to the Korean political conference be sounded out on China's intentions toward Indochina. China must be made to conclude "that her best interest is to cut down her support of the Viet Minh, in order to enjoy the benefits which she might expect to derive from a prolonged or final cessation of hostilities on the 38th parallel." (CONFIDENTIAL).
5. New York Herald Tribune, February 19, 1954, p. 3, as quoted in Gurtov, op.cit., p. 76.
6. Department of State, U.S. Policy on Indochina, 1945 - May 8, 1954, Research Project No. 370, July 1955, p. 11.
7. According to the Defense Department, Chinese aid was constant at 1000 tons a month from March 1953 to March 1954, with the exceptions of June 1953 (2200 tons) and March 1954 (2500 tons). See memorandum of Robert H. B. Wade (OASD) to Brig. Gen. Bonesteel (OASD, ISA), April 13, 1954 (SECRET).
8. Dulles reminded Ely that once the U.S. committed any of its armed forces to the war, we would want to have a success, which in turn meant "a greater degree of partnership than had prevailed up to present time, notably in relation to independence for Associated States and training of indigenous forces." Dulles priority telegram to American Embassy - Paris (eyes only for Ambassador Dillon) No. 3277, March 23, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

9. Paul Ely, Mémoires: L'Indochina dans la Tourmente, (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 64.
10. Ibid., pp. 76-77, 82-83; Jean Laconture and Philippe Devillers, La Fin d'une Guerre (Paris, 1960), p. 73; Joseph Laniel, Le Drame Indochinois: De Dien Bien Phu au Pari de Geneve, (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 88. Laniel writes of a raid by 300 Philippine-based fighter bombers.
11. Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 79-80; 188; 217.
12. John Foster Dulles, "The Threat of a Red Asia," Department of State Bulletin, April 12, 1954.
13. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963), pp. 346-7.
14. Memorandum by Bonbright (EUR) of conversation among Dulles, Ambassador Spender (Australia) and Ambassador Munro (New Zealand), April 4; memorandum by Bonbright of conversation between Dulles and Munro, April 6, 1954, TOP SECRET - as given in Department of State Research Project No. 370, op.cit., p. 16.
15. Anthony Eden, Full Circle (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 104.
16. Telegram 3729 from American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
17. Telegram 3710 from American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
18. The account of the April 3 meeting is taken primarily from Gurtov, op.cit., pp. 94-96. Gurtov's book draws heavily from Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go to War," The Reporter, XI, September 14, 1954. Corroborative material is to be found in John Robinson Beal, John Foster Dulles, (New York, 1957), pp. 207-8; Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, pp. 346-7.
19. Gurtov, op.cit., pp. 96-97.
20. Deptel 689 to American Embassy, London, August 3, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
21. Deptel 3482 to American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
22. Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), p. 121.
23. Eisenhower, op.cit., p. 347.
24. Eden, op.cit., pp. 106-7.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

25. Dulles "eyes only" telegram DULTE 9 from Geneva for Smith, Dillon, and Aldrich, April 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
26. "View of British JIC [Joint Intelligence Center] on Indochina," April 16, 1954 (SECRET). JIC estimated that the Chinese could deploy about 128,000 men in three field armies to the Indochina frontier within twelve days. In the air, the CCAF would probably provide "only minimum air support," JIC calculated, inasmuch as the Chinese would doubtless want to reserve their air power for defense of the mainland.
27. See Aldrich priority cable "eyes only" No. 4382 from London to Dulles, April 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
28. See Dulles "eyes only" cable NIACT 5177 and 3478 (TOP SECRET), written after a conversation with the British Ambassador, Sir Roger Makins, on April 2, 1954.
29. Dulles telegram No. 5090 to American Embassy - London, April 1, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
30. Dulles "eyes only" telegram from Geneva DULTE 5 for Smith, April 25, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
31. In U.S. Ambassador Aldrich's "eyes only" telegram No. 4725 from London for Dulles, Smith, Wilson, and JCS, April 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
32. Memorandum by MacArthur of conversation with Prime Minister Laniel, in Paris, April 13; memorandum of conversation among Dulles, Ambassador Dillon, MacArthur, Lt. Col. Walter, Laniel, and Foreign Minister Bidault, in Paris, April 14; memorandum by MacArthur of conversation between Dulles and Bidault, April 14; TOP SECRET, from Paris, tel. 3888, April 14, 1954, SECRET. In State Department Research Project No. 370, July, 1955.
33. Memorandum by Merchant (EUR) of conversations between Ambassador Makins and Smith (U) and between Makins and Dulles, April 18, 1954, SECRET; from Paris, tel. DULTE 3, April 22, 1954, TOP SECRET. In Department of State Research Project No. 370, July, 1955. Hereafter cited as "R.P. No. 370."
34. Eden, op.cit., pp. 109-111.
35. Eisenhower, op.cit., p. 353.
36. From Paris, tels. DULTE 2, April 22, and DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET, R.P. No. 370.
37. From Paris, tel. 3972, April 21, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

38. From Paris, tel. DULTE 2, April 22, 1954, TOP SECRET. (See also from Saigon tel. 2096, April 23, 1954, and tel. 2098, April 24, 1954, both TOP SECRET.) From Saigon the Chief of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group reported that the French Commander lacked the ability to wage war on a scale necessary to win, and he suggested that the United States assume operational and training control in southern Indochina. From Saigon, Army tel. MG 1122 A 220400Z and tel. 2072, April 22, 1954, SECRET and TOP SECRET, respectively. R. P. No. 370.
39. Memorandum by MacArthur of conversation among Laniel, Vidal, Bougenot, and himself, in Paris, April 23, 1954, TOP SECRET; from Paris, tel. DULTE 9, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
40. From Paris, tels. DULTE 7 and 10, April 23; DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
41. From Paris, tels. DULTE 2, April 22; DULTE 7 and 10, April 23; DULTE 17, April 24; memorandum by MacArthur of conversation among Laniel, Vidal, Bougenot, and himself, in Paris, April 23, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
42. From Paris, tel. DULTE 17, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET; to Geneva, tel. TEDUL 4, April 25, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
43. From Paris, tel. DULTE 13, April 24; to Paris, tel. TEDUL 8, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET. For comments on American policy by Secretary Dulles at a background meeting with correspondents in Geneva on April 25, see from Geneva tel. SECTO 6, April 25, 1954, CONFIDENTIAL. R.P. No. 370.
44. From Paris, tel. 4058, April 25; from Geneva, tel. DULTE 8, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
45. From Paris, tels. DULTE 3, April 22; DULTE 10, April 23, DULTE 18, April 24, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
46. From Paris, tel. DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
47. From Paris, tel. DULTE 17, April 24; from Geneva, tel. DULTE 7, April 26, 1954, both TOP SECRET. House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, April 27, 1954, p. 1456. R.P. No. 370.
48. From London, tel. 4750, April 27, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
49. From Paris, tel. DULTE 10, April 23, 1954, TOP SECRET. Concerning the reactions of Under Secretary Smith and Secretary Dulles to Eden's proposal, see Geneva, tel. TEDUL 2, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET, and from Geneva, tel. DULTE 25, April 29, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

50. From Geneva, tels. DULTE 7, April 26; DULTE 30, and DULTE 34, April 30, 1954, all TOP SECRET. Secretary Dulles told Mr. Eden that the initial nucleus in the proposed Southeast Asian defense plan should comprise Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Associated States of Indochina (from Geneva, tel. DULTE 33, April 30, 1954, TOP SECRET). R.P. No. 370.
51. Memorandum by McBride (WE) of conversation among Dulles, Smith (U), R. G. Casey (Australia), and T. C. Webb (New Zealand), in Geneva, May 2, 1954, SECRET; see also from Canberra, tel. 257, May 7, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
52. To Geneva, tel. TEDUL 16, April 28, 1954 (containing summary by Robert Cutler of the White House staff, of principal points made by the President), TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
53. For an account of Admiral Radford's conversations with British leaders in London, see from London, tel. 4725, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET; to Geneva, tel. JCS 960578, April 27, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
54. To Geneva, tel. TEDUL 16, April 28, 1954, TOP SECRET; memorandum by Cutler (White House staff) of conversation in the President's office among the President, General Smith (U), Admiral Radford, and himself, April 28, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
55. From Geneva, tel. DULTE 2, April 25, 1954, TOP SECRET; from Paris, tel. 4266, May 7, 1954, CONFIDENTIAL; White House Press Releases (2), May 7, 1954.
56. Department of State Press Release No. 4, May 11, 1954.
57. For the official conference transcript see Department of State Bulletin, XXX, No. 778, May 24, 1954.