

AD-A007 286

NEGOTIATIONS AND VIETNAM: A CASE
STUDY OF THE 1954 GENEVA CONFERENCE.
PART 2. A FULLY DOCUMENTED ACCOUNT

Melvin Gurtov

RAND Corporation

Prepared for:

Advanced Research Projects Agency
Assistant Secretary of Defense
(International Security Affairs)

July 1968

DISTRIBUTED BY:

NTIS

National Technical Information Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

~~TOP SECRET~~

"UNCLASSIFIED"

AD/A007286

MEMORANDUM

RM-5617-ISA/ARPA (Part II)

JULY 1968

16-DBEG91874

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN DOWNGRADED

TO "UNCLASSIFIED"

Per Director ARPA/TIO

NEGOTIATIONS AND VIETNAM:
A CASE STUDY OF THE 1954
GENEVA CONFERENCE (U)

Melvin Gurtov

~~This material contains information affecting the national defense of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, Title 18, U.S.C., Secs. 793 and 794, the transmission or the revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.~~

This research is supported by the Department of Defense under Contract DAHC15 67 C 0113, monitored by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) and by the Advanced Research Projects Agency. RAND Memoranda are subject to critical review procedures at the research department and corporate levels. Views and conclusions expressed herein are nevertheless the primary responsibility of the author, and should not be interpreted as representing the official opinion or policy of ISA, ARPA or of The RAND Corporation.

Reproduced by
NATIONAL TECHNICAL
INFORMATION SERVICE
US Department of Commerce
Springfield, VA. 22151

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for public release
Distribution Unlimited

The RAND Corporation

700 MAIN ST. • SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA • 90406

~~EXCLUDED FROM GDS
GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

"UNCLASSIFIED"

UNCLASSIFIED

-85-

PART TWO

A FULLY DOCUMENTED ACCOUNT

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-87-

X. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE¹ (U)

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

(U) The Eisenhower Administration found as much difficulty in persuading France and Great Britain that fundamental changes in the war were necessary before the start of the conference as in accepting the notion of a negotiated solution in Indochina. The troubles with France had begun in mid-1953 when the U.S. Government gave its conditional approval to the Navarre Plan, which provided for radically new French field tactics and a buildup of the Vietnamese National Army (VNA). American hopes that assistance in money and war matériel would elicit a French commitment to a program to attract native Indochinese into close military and political collaboration with the colonial governments, especially in Vietnam, were not

(U) ¹This chapter is based on the author's The First Vietnam Crisis: Chinese Communist Strategy and United States Involvement, 1953-1954, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-88-

(U) fulfilled. Nor was France hospitable to American suggestions for greater involvement of the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) in French planning. As was to be the case almost throughout the Indochina crisis, France capitalized on American fears of National Assembly rejection of the European Defense Community (EDC) treaty and of a French pull-out from Indochina to gain U.S. aid without having to make commensurate concessions on Vietnamese independence or tactical planning. American attempts to tie aid to such concessions were never followed through, and whatever leverage on French policy-making in Indochina the United States possessed was left largely unexploited.

(U) For the most part, France's rejection of American conditions and suggestions was based on the Laniel government's conviction, implemented zealously by French civil and military authorities in Indochina, that the United States would be intruding in France's domain. A policy of systematic restrictions on American officials in the field prevented the United States from making independent evaluations of the war's progress, with the result that the Government was for many months badly informed and unwarrantedly optimistic about the French Union army's chances against the Viet Minh. In late March and April 1954, when it became clear to Washington that the Navarre Plan had failed and that (in Secretary of State Dulles' words) "united action" was necessary to prevent Indochina from falling to the Communists, the French revealed that their distrust of American "interference" extended to any plans for overt American air-naval involvement. The Laniel government was perfectly amenable to localized American

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-89-

(U) intervention at Dienbienphu to save the besieged French army from disaster; but it stood firmly opposed to Dulles' concept of collective (Western-Asian) defense in a security organization that would, if necessary, intervene to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. France's requests for assistance at Dienbienphu were entirely consistent with long-standing policy in Paris that looked to a negotiated settlement of the war on "honorable" terms at the same time as it hoped to be in the best possible military position at the time negotiations began.

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

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-90-

(U) would not approve united action and preferred to await the outcome of the negotiations before deciding whether the Indochina situation warranted resort to military alternatives. The British were perfectly willing to talk about regional defense in the Far East, but only after the results were in on the negotiations. Until then, they said, they would limit themselves to providing full diplomatic support to the French in search of a peaceful solution.

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

(U) Contrasting Communist unity on the eve of the conference was more a matter of Sino-Soviet agreement on the desirability of negotiations than of complete accord among the three parties. In the aftermath of Stalin's death, Soviet foreign policy under Malenkov had altered considerably. Domestic priorities no doubt influenced the regime's proclaimed hopes for a reduction in international tension. Peking, more intimately involved in the Viet Minh cause, stepped up its assistance to General Giap's forces between February and April 1954, but also agreed with Moscow on the desirability of convening an international

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-91-

(U) conference, which China would attend, to end the fighting. The limited available evidence suggests that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) alone among the three Communist parties considered the call for negotiations premature and urged that they be preceded by intensified military efforts. Ho's much-publicized offer in late November 1953 to talk with the French was intended more to influence French domestic and official opinion and to demoralize Franco-Vietnamese troops than to evince sincere interest in arriving at an equitable settlement. In ensuing months, DRV broadcasts showed a far greater interest in first achieving a clear-cut military victory in the Tonkin Delta and parts of Laos than in engaging in discussions while French forces remained scattered throughout Indochina.²

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

(U) ² For a discussion of the DRV position on negotiations during late 1953 and early 1954, see Central Intelligence Agency, Research Memorandum No. 0017/66, Asian Communist Employment of Negotiations as a Political Tactic (U) (Secret/NoForDis/Controlled Dis).

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-93-

Preceding page blank

XI. THE CONDUCT AND STRUCTURE OF DIPLOMACY (U)

(U) One of the first agreements reached at the Geneva Conference occurred in the course of a conversation between V. M. Molotov and Anthony Eden on May 5, when the Soviet foreign minister endorsed the foreign secretary's assertion that this negotiation was the most difficult he had ever encountered.¹ Indeed, it seems at first glance somewhat paradoxical that the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference (May 8-July 21) should have resulted in a settlement within less than a dozen weeks, given the unusual difficulties facing the negotiators on both sides.* Key issues were postponed until the eleventh hour while debate wore endlessly on over relatively insignificant matters; contact among the delegations was limited by ideological prejudices and political antagonisms, forcing some delegates to act as mediators no less than as representatives of national interests; and major agreements were reached outside the special framework for discussions that the conferees had taken a month to build.

1. THE REPRESENTATION QUESTION

(U) The first major roadblock in the negotiations was the Communist claims concerning the representation of parties not present at the conference. Since the conference

(U) ¹ Anthony Eden, Memoirs: Full Circle, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1960, p. 131.

(U) * The chief negotiators are listed on the following page.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-94-

TABLE I

CHIEF NEGOTIATORS AT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINA

United Kingdom

Anthony Eden

USSR

Vyacheslav Molotov

United States

General Walter Bedell Smith
U. Alexis Johnson

France

Georges Bidault
Jean Chauvel
Pierre Mendès-France

Chinese People's Republic

Chou En-lai
Chang Wen-t'ien
Li K'e-nung

Vietnam

Dac Khe
Tran Van Do

Cambodia

Tep Phan
Sam Sary

Laos

Phoui Sananikone

Viet Minh

Pham Van Dong

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-95-

(U) had already begun when these claims were forwarded, the chances of expanding the list of invited parties were very limited. Nevertheless, through fourteen restricted and seven plenary sessions,² bitter controversy raged over Communist insistence that the Viet Minh-led Free Cambodian (Khmer Issarak) and Free Laotian (Pathet Lao) forces were entitled to be seated beside representatives of the Royal Governments of Cambodia and Laos. Not until June 16, when Premier Chou En-lai, China's foreign minister and chief delegate, indicated to Eden that Viet Minh forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia and Laos, was the debate resolved and the way opened for serious efforts to bring about cease-fires throughout Indochina.

(U) The time-consuming exchanges over the authenticity of Communist "resistance forces" in Laos and Cambodia were, interestingly enough, not duplicated when it came to determining the status of the DRV. The Berlin Conference final communiqué had specified that the Indochina deliberations would be attended by the United States, Great Britain, Communist China, the Soviet Union, France, "and other states concerned." Invitations to the participants would, it was further agreed, be issued only by the Berlin

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

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-96-

(U) conferees, i.e., by the Big Four but not by Peking. Yet, as Molotov admitted at the first plenary session (May 8), Peking as well as Moscow invited the DRV, a move vigorously assailed by France and the United States.³ No attempt was made, however, to block the DRV's participation. Despite the antagonism of the Vietnamese government nominally headed by Bao Dai,⁴ the DRV was generally considered one of the principal combatants whose consent to a cease-fire, being indispensable, required its participation. Moreover, the Soviet Union indicated to the French that it would not accept the presence of delegates from the Associated States of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) unless the DRV was admitted to the conference.⁵

(U) ³U.S. Department of State, The Geneva Conference, Verbatim Transcript of the First Plenary Session, Indochina Phase, May 8, 1954, pp. 18, 23. (Cited hereafter as U.S./VerbMin.) The American objection was based on longstanding opposition to any move that would accord China de facto or de jure recognition, or the status of a major power deserving membership in a "Big Five."

(U) ⁴The Bao Dai government, when informed of French Premier Georges Bidault's agreement to DRV representation, decided that Vietnam would go to the conference only upon invitation of the Western Big Three. The invitation arrived May 2, at which time the Soviets were informed that Vietnam's participation would in no way confer de jure recognition on the DRV. (See Jean Lacouture and Philippe Devillers, La fin d'une guerre: Indochine 1954 [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960], pp. 122-23.) Bao Dai's consistent position, supported by Ngo Dinh Diem when he took over the premiership on June 18, was that his was the only legitimate government in Vietnam, while the Viet Minh were not political competitors but merely armed rebels.

(U) ⁵Ibid., p. 122.

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) By the time of Dienbienphu's fall (May 7), all parties were agreed that there would be nine delegations (though not States) discussing Indochina; and on May 8 the first session got underway.

2. THE COMMUNICATION GAPS

(U) Nine delegations seated at a roundtable to exchange views, about every second day, obscured the fact that true bargaining was not taking place. Proposals were, of course, tabled and debated; but actual give-and-take was reserved for private discussions, usually in the absence of the pro-Western Indochinese parties. Even then, the Geneva talks on Indochina were hardly dominated by Big Power cabals; political and ideological differences were so intense, particularly between the American and Chinese representatives, that diplomacy had to be conducted circuitously, with Eden and Molotov frequently acting as mediators and messengers for delegates unwilling to be found together.⁶

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

I was conscious that time was not on our side. Since neither the Americans nor the French had established any contacts with the Communist

⁶ As one example of the American attitude, Dulles told reporters just prior to the first session that the only way he could possibly meet with Chou En-lai was if their cars collided. Dulles tel. SECTO 6 from Geneva, April 25, 1954 (Confidential).

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

-98-

(U) representatives [in mid-June], I had been compelled to adopt the role of intermediary between the Western powers and the Communists. My activities in this respect were open to every kind of misrepresentation. I was concerned about their effect on Anglo-American relations. On the other hand, I was encouraged by the close accord maintained throughout the conference between ourselves and the other members of the Commonwealth, including those, like Mr. Nehru, who were not represented at Geneva. They sent me messages of thanks and encouragement. I needed them, for I began to feel that we should never make effective headway. I had never known a conference of this kind. The parties would not make direct contact and we were in constant danger of one or another backing out of the door.⁷

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

The problem of contact was no more acutely felt than by the delegation of the State of Vietnam. Although finally granted complete independence by France under

(U) ⁷ Edén, Full Circle, p. 144.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

(S) treaties initialed in Paris April 28 and approved by both governments June 4, Vietnam did not gain the concurrent power to negotiate its own fate. The French, clearly anxious lest the Vietnamese upset the delicate state of private talks with the Viet Minh, avoided Bao Dai's representatives whenever possible and sought to exploit close Vietnamese-American relations in informing the Vietnamese only after agreements had been reached. During June, for instance, Jean Chauvel, head of the French delegation, on several occasions approached the Americans with information on the "underground" negotiations with the Viet Minh and with the hope that, once partition had been fixed, the United States would "sell" that solution to Saigon.⁸ In the same month, Chauvel, evincing complete understanding of American determination to avoid approving or acquiescing in a partition settlement, nevertheless asked if the United States would soften Vietnamese opposition to it by indicating it was the best solution obtainable. Chauvel described Diem and his predecessor, Buu Loc, as difficult, unrealistic, and unreasonable on the subject.⁹

(U) ⁸ Dulles priority tel. TEDUL 212 to Smith at Geneva, June 17, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) ⁹ W. Bedell Smith from Geneva priority tel. DULTE 195, June 18, 1954 (Secret). In an aide-memoire delivered to Dulles and Eden on June 26 by Henri Bonnet, the French ambassador to Washington, Paris urged Washington not to encourage an adverse Vietnamese reaction to partition. The United States was also asked "to intervene with the Vietnamese to counsel upon them wisdom and self-control and to dissuade them from refusing an agreement which, if it is reached, is dictated not by the spirit of abandoning them, but on the contrary by the desire to save in Indochina all that can possibly be saved, and to give the

(S) To these approaches, the United States consistently reacted negatively in the undoubtedly correct belief that the French were merely attempting to identify the United States in Vietnamese eyes with the partition concept. By refusing to act as intermediaries for the French, the American delegation kept free of association with a "French solution" to the Vietnam problem.

(S) French aloofness from the Vietnamese continued into July. Despite American requests of the French delegation that the Vietnamese be kept informed of developments, the French demurred. Chauvel informed U. Alexis Johnson, chief deputy to the head of the USDEL, General Walter Bedell Smith, that "he was handling this [liaison with the Vietnamese] through members of his staff and was avoiding direct contact with Vietnamese in order not to have to answer their questions."¹⁰ When Offroy, another member of the French delegation, suggested that the United States placate the Vietnamese with assurance of Free World political, economic, and military support after the settlement, Johnson replied that this was a matter for the French to handle.¹¹ Not until late in the Conference did the Vietnamese government become aware of the strong possibility that partition would become part of the settlement; on this and other developments, as we shall see, the Vietnamese

(S) Vietnamese state, under peaceful conditions, opportunities which have not always been possible heretofore because of the war." See Dulles' tel. No. 4852 to the American Embassy, Paris, June 28, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁰ Johnson from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 560, July 6, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹¹ Johnson from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 574, July 8, 1954 (Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-101-

(S) were kept in the dark, a circumstance that was to solidify Vietnamese hostility to and dissociation from the final terms.

(S) But the Vietnamese loyal to Bao Dai were not alone in being denied important information, although they suffered worst from it. The United States delegation itself several times suspected that it was not receiving all the news the French were in a position to provide. The fault, however, lay as much with the ambiguous status under which the delegation operated as with the French who were to act as messengers. On the one hand, the Americans wanted to use their influence to ensure that the French not sell out Western interests for the sake of a quick settlement; on the other, they were determined not to become so involved in the bargaining process as to link the Administration to the final terms. The resolution of these apparently conflicting aims was offered by Dulles on the eve of the conference in a background briefing to newsmen at Geneva.¹² He said that primary responsibility for decisions taken at the conference belonged to the French and Vietnamese on one side, and to the Viet Minh on the other. The United States "would be inclined not to try to interpose [its] veto in any sense as against what they might want to do." As to whether this attitude applied equally to substantive provisions of any settlement, the Secretary indicated that the United States would, if necessary, refuse to acknowledge results contrary to American "interests":

(U) ¹²The briefing was reported in a priority cable by Dulles from Geneva tel. SECTO 6, April 25, 1954 (Confidential).

~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET

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

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

~~It~~ Whatever the rationale for French behavior, the USDEL complained to Washington that it was not being kept fully informed of developments in the "underground" Franco-Viet Minh talks. The change in government in Paris during June from Laniel to Pierre Mendès-France helped matters somewhat. But though it was conceded that Mendes-France's representatives had done better than

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) their predecessors in keeping the United States apprised,¹³ the United States still felt, as Dulles put it, that while Paris was not willfully concealing information, there remained a "certain lack of any intimacy...."¹⁴

(S) The British also felt locked out of news that vitally affected them. Particularly during May, when Washington and Paris were frequently in touch about possible military intervention, the British were highly disturbed to find newspapers their best source of information on the intentions of their foremost allies. Since London was no longer considered essential to "united action" (see Section IV), the Americans and the French had evidently agreed that their negotiations should be kept under wraps until such time as a decision was made.¹⁵ Only after Eden confronted Under Secretary Smith with the newspaper stories (which may have been deliberate "leaks" to influence the Geneva deliberations) did Dulles direct that the British, Australian, and New Zealand ambassadors be informed "in general terms" regarding U.S.-French talks.¹⁶ Diplomacy among the Western Big Three clearly reflected the rifts that had developed in the alliance over intervention

(U) ¹³ See, e.g., Dillon's tel. from Paris No. 40, July 4, 1954 (Top Secret).

(J) ¹⁴ Dulles priority tel. No. 85 to Dillon in Paris, July 8, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁵ This was the substance of Smith's reply to Eden when the foreign secretary, made aware of intervention discussions by a New York Herald Tribune story of May 15 and a conversation with an advisor to Bidault, broached the subject. Eden, Full Circle, p. 134.

(U) ¹⁶ Dulles "eyes only" tel. to Smith at Geneva TEDUL 75, and to Dillon at Paris No. 4104, May 17, 1954 (Top Secret).

[REDACTED]

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

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

(U) As will be argued in greater detail subsequently, the frequent meetings of the Communist delegations did not result in a uniformity of views. The Chinese and Soviets evidently worked independent of the Viet Minh whenever their separate interests dictated the need for advancement of progress in the negotiations. At times when the Viet Minh were intransigent, Chou and Molotov frequently took the initiative to break log jams that threatened to plunge the conference into irresolvable deadlock. Much like Eden, Chou and Molotov sometimes found themselves playing

[REDACTED]

UNCLASSIFIED

-105-

(U) the role of mediator, a role which they, and particularly Chou, relished for what Fred Iklé has called the "side-effects" of negotiations -- benefits deriving from, but incidental to, negotiations, such as enhanced prestige.¹⁷ In the end, the Viet Minh advantage of close rapport with Moscow and Peking did not prevent the Viet Minh from sharing with their non-Communist compatriots the ignominious distinction of having been undercut by allies.

(U) ¹⁷ Fred Charles Iklé, How Nations Negotiate, Harper & Row, New York, 1964, ch. IV.

UNCLASSIFIED

Preceding page blank

XII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BARGAINING POSITIONS (U)

1. THE UNITED STATES AND THE NEGOTIATIONS

~~It~~ In underwriting the Navarre Plan and proceeding with utmost caution in urging France to improve its relationship with the non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists, the United States hoped to influence Paris to postpone a commitment to negotiations until French forces were at least on the threshold of military victory. While aware of the strong pressures on the Laniel government from the National Assembly and the French public for a peaceful settlement, the United States, clearly influenced by the experience at Panmunjom, sought to persuade the premier not to let the clamor for peace drive him to the bargaining table. As late as December 1953 Laniel agreed that Washington's aversion to premature negotiations was well-advised;¹ but two months later, at Berlin, his government joined with the Soviet Union in calling for an international conference to end the Indochina conflict. The French government found it could no longer ignore anti-war sentiment at home without jeopardizing its survival, while the Americans, however strongly opposed to bringing the war to the conference table with victory nowhere in sight and with Communist China as a negotiating opponent, felt compelled to approve the Berlin decision if only to blunt the French threat of scuttling EDC.

(U) ¹Memorandum of Conversation between Douglas MacArthur II (State, Europe) and Laniel at Bermuda, December 4, 1953 (Secret).

~~(S)~~ Forced to go along with French preference for negotiating with the Communists, the United States remained unalterably pessimistic about the probable results. This attitude was first set out fully by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1954.² The Chiefs examined the alternatives to military victory and found them all infeasible or unacceptable to the United States. A cease-fire prior to a political settlement, the JCS paper states, "would, in all probability, lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position." A coalition government would lead to Communist control by keeping any outside assistance from preventing a seizure of power from within. Partition, on the other hand, would mean recognizing Communist success by force of arms, ceding the key Tonkin Delta to the Communists, and, even if confined to only one of the three Indochinese states, undercutting our containment policy in Asia.

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

Such factors as the prevalence of illiteracy, the lack of suitable educational media, and the absence of adequate communications in

(U) ²Memorandum by the Chairman of the JCS (Admiral Arthur W. Radford) to the Secretary of Defense (Charles E. Wilson), March 12, 1954 (Top Secret).

[REDACTED]

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

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

~~(S)~~ The JCS position reflected Government policy, for in the remaining months before the Conference the United States privately stood opposed to any course of action other than full prosecution of the war. Dulles, speaking with French Ambassador Henri Bonnet on April 3, reasoned that a negotiated settlement would lead only to face-saving formulae for either a French or a Viet Minh surrender. The Secretary termed a division of Indochina "impractical" and a coalition government the "beginning of disaster;" neither arrangement could prevent a French surrender.³ The President himself echoed this either-or

(U) ³ Dulles "eyes only" tel. No. 3476 to American Embassy, Paris (Ambassador Dillon) and No. 5175 to American Embassy, London (Ambassador Aldrich), April 3, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ approach. Writing to Churchill April 4, Eisenhower proposed: "There is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement." And, as already observed, it was precisely to bring about the latter -- China's "discreet disengagement" from support of the Viet Minh -- that the President wanted British cooperation in united action.⁴

~~(S)~~ Concomitantly, the United States was concerned that a disaster at Dienbienphu would propel the French into acceptance of an immediate, unsupervised cease-fire even before the conference was to begin. Dulles obtained assurances from Bidault that the French would not agree to such a cease-fire.⁵ But the Secretary found the British less inflexible, with Eden doubting the American view that a sudden cease-fire would lead either to a massacre of the French by the native people or to large-scale infiltration of French-held terrain by Viet Minh forces.⁶

~~(TS)~~ Thus assured by the French but mindful of both French and British preference for trying to bargain with the Communists before resorting to further military steps,

(U) ⁴ In Dulles "eyes only" tel. NIACT 5179 to American Embassy, London (Aldrich), April 4, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁵ Dulles "eyes only" tel. DULTE 15 to the Acting Secretary (Smith) for transmittal to the President, April 24, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁶ Dulles "eyes only" tel. DULTE 9 from Geneva for Smith, Dillon, and Aldrich, April 26, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) Washington, in late April and early May, sought to develop guidelines for the American delegation. The National Security Council, less than a week before the opening conference session, carefully examined American alternatives.⁷ Disturbed by what it regarded as peace-at-any-price thinking in Paris, the NSC urged the President to decide not to join the Geneva deliberations without assurance from France that it was not preparing to negotiate the surrender of Indochina. Again, the Korean example was foremost: Communist tactics at Geneva, the NSC forecast, would likely resemble those at Panmunjom; a cease-fire might be announced that the Communists would not comply with for lack of effective supervision; the French would wilt before the Communists' predictable dilatory tactics and end by accepting almost any terms.

(S) The NSC therefore decided that the French had to be pressured into adopting a strong posture in the face of probable Communist intransigence. The President was urged to inform Paris that French acquiescence in a Communist takeover of Indochina would bear not only on France's future position in the Far East, but also on its status as one of the Big Three; that abandonment of Indochina would grievously affect both France's position in North Africa and Franco-U.S. relations in that region; that U.S. aid to France would automatically cease upon Paris' conclusion of an unsatisfactory settlement; and, finally, that Communist domination of Indochina would be of such serious strategic harm to U.S. interests as to

(U) ⁷"United States Position on Indochina to be Taken at Geneva," undated (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ produce "consequences in Europe as well as elsewhere [without]...apparent limitation." In addition, the NSC recommended that the United States determine immediately whether the Associated States should be approached with a view to continuing the anti-Viet Minh struggle in some other form, including unilateral American involvement "if necessary." The NSC clearly viewed the Indochina situation with extreme anxiety, and its action program amounted to unprecedented proposals to threaten France with the serious repercussions of a sell-out in Southeast Asia.

~~(S)~~ Pessimism over the prospects for any meaningful progress in talks with the Communists was shared by Secretary Dulles. In a background briefing for newsmen at Geneva,⁸ Dulles gave the first official indication for public consumption that the United States would dissociate itself from any settlement rather than be party to unacceptable terms. As to the acceptability of partition, the Secretary, in views that would change later, said he did not see how partition could be arranged with the fighting not confined to any single area. He as much as ruled out a territorial division when he commented that the United States would only agree to an arrangement in which all the Viet Minh troops would be placed in a small regroupment area out of harm's way. But that arrangement "might not be acceptable to them," Dulles said coyly.

~~(S)~~ American opinions on the likely ramifications of a settlement were also made known, and with greater

(U) ⁸ The briefing was reported in a priority cable from Dulles at Geneva, tel. SECTO 6, April 25, 1954 (Confidential); emphasis supplied.

~~(S)~~ precision, in private. On May 7, for instance, Livingston Merchant of the State Department presented the American view to the Ministers of New Zealand and Australia. Predicting that the French would finally settle for part of Vietnam and manage to salvage Cambodia and Laos, Merchant said the United States could not accept such a surrender of territory. While we could not prevent the French from making concessions, neither did we have to associate ourselves with the results.⁹ Thus, both publicly and privately, Administration leaders indicated at the outset of the conference that the United States would divorce itself from any settlement that resulted in less than a complete French-Vietnamese victory.

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

(U) ⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, May 7, 1954 (Secret).

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

~~(S)~~ of the Associated States...;" only thereafter should a cease-fire be entertained.¹⁰

~~(S)~~ As previously, the Joint Chiefs' position became U.S. policy with only minor emendations. The President, reviewing the Chiefs' paper, agreed that the Government could not back the French proposal with its call for a supervised cease-fire that the Communists would never respect. Eisenhower further concurred with the Chiefs' insistence on priority to a political settlement, with the stipulation that French forces continue fighting while negotiations were in progress. He added that the United States would continue aiding the French during that period and would, in addition, work toward a coalition "for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia."¹¹

~~(S)~~ These statements of position paved the way for a National Security Council meeting on May 8, which set forth the guidelines of U.S. policy on negotiations for the delegation at Geneva.¹² The decision taken at the meeting simply underscored what the President and the Chiefs had already stated:

The United States will not associate itself with any proposal from any source directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international

(U) ¹⁰ Radford memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, May 7, 1954, Enclosure: "Comments to be Furnished to the Secretary of Defense re Radios SECTO 106 and SECTO 110, Dated 5 May 1954, and DA in 59296, Dated 6 May 1954" (Top Secret).

(U) ¹¹ Ibid.

(U) ¹² Reported in Dulles "eyes only" tel. TEDUL 43 to Smith at Geneva, May 8, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~2/2~~ controls. The United States could concur in the initiation of negotiations for such an armistice agreement. During the course of such negotiations, the French and the Associated States should continue to oppose the forces of the Viet Minh with all the means at their disposal. In the meantime, as a means of strengthening the hands of the French and the Associated States during the course of such negotiations, the United States will continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and promptly activate a Southeast Asian regional grouping for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia.

2. THE COMMUNIST PROPOSALS

(U) Official American perspectives on the likely pattern of the Geneva negotiations were confirmed when the Viet Minh forwarded their first proposal "package" at the second plenary session on May 10.¹³ Pham Van Dong, then the DRV's vice-minister for foreign affairs and already a seasoned negotiator with the French, introduced his case with the argument that the Viet Minh were the "stronger" force in "more than three-fourths of the country." He went on to describe the successful administration of this territory by his government, which he said "represents the will of the entire Vietnamese nation...." The opposition, the Bao Dai regime, characterized as "the government of the temporarily occupied zone," did not enjoy popular support and was merely the tool of the French.

(U) Pham Van Dong did not, however, demand that France concede control of all Vietnam to the DRV. Instead,

(U) ¹³U.S. VerbMin/2, pp. 58ff.

UNCLASSIFIED

-117-

(U) Dong urged that France recognize "the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam," a statement which amounted to a rejection of the Franco-Vietnamese treaties approved April 28 in Paris by Laniel and Premier Nguyen Trung Vinh. The main points of Dong's proposal for a cease-fire and political settlement in Vietnam were as follows:

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

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

(U) The meaning of Dong's proposal was clear. A political settlement would precede a military agreement to a cease-fire rather than the reverse, which the French preferred. Somewhat ironically, the Viet Minh position was

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-118-

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

(U) In the same speech, Dong made clear that the DRV's concern extended beyond Vietnam to Cambodia and Laos. By 1954, Viet Minh coordination with the Pathet Lao and Free Kimer "resistance forces" had been going on for at least three years, or since the formal announcement on

(U) * A map of Viet Minh territorial control at the time of the conference appears following p. 40. Although dated in July, the map generally reflects the military situation after the fall of Dienbienphu.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-119-

(U) March 11, 1951, of formation of a Viet Minh-Free Khmer-Pathet Lao "National United Front." Viet Minh soldiers and cadres were active participants in the fighting there, where they provided the hard core of the "resistance." In addition, forces under General Vo Nguyen Giap had invaded Laos in April and December 1953, and Cambodia in April 1954 (a move which prompted a formal protest by the Royal Khmer Government to the Secretary General of the UN on April 23). Viet Minh battalions were still active in both countries during May and June, with greater priority given operations in Laos. Thus, Dong's proposals on a settlement in Laos and Cambodia reflected not simply the DRV's assumption of the role of spokesman for the unrepresented Free Khmer and Pathet Lao movements, but also direct Viet Minh interests in those neighboring kingdoms.

(U) Dong argued that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces enjoyed widespread popular support and controlled most of the territory of their respective countries. With considerable distortion of history (subsequently corrected by the Laotian and Cambodian delegates), Dong sought to demonstrate that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were de facto governments carrying out "democratic reforms" in the areas their armies had "liberated." France was therefore advised to recognize the "sovereignty and independence" of those movements no less than of the DRV. French forces alone were to withdraw from Cambodia and Laos; the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were not "foreign" troops. The same election procedure offered for Vietnam, without neutral or international supervision, would, Dong proposed, take place in Cambodia and Laos, thereby granting the Pathet Lao and

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-120-

(U) Free Khmer a status equal to that of the lawful governments. And during the electoral process, Dong insisted on "conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations....," agreement to which would have permitted various Communist fronts to function with impunity.¹⁴ The inclusion of the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in the DRV's settlement plan -- in particular, the demand that they merited political and territorial recognition -- very quickly brought the conference to a standstill and, much later, compelled the Soviets and Chinese to work against Viet Minh ambitions.

3. THE AMERICAN REACTION

(U) Pham Van Dong's opening gambit was clearly anathema to the Western delegations. Certainly, from the American standpoint, his proposals met none of the criteria for acceptability outlined by the National Security Council on May 8. Smith said as much at Geneva when he spoke on May 10¹⁵ and again at the third plenary session May 12.¹⁶ Accordingly, Smith did not wholeheartedly embrace Bidault's proposals, for despite giving a general endorsement of the French plan, he departed from it at two important junctures. First, he declined to commit the United States in advance to a guarantee of the settlement despite Bidault's call for all the participants to make such a guarantee; second,

(U) ¹⁴U.S. VerbMin/2, pp. 65ff.

(U) ¹⁵U.S. VerbMin/2, p. 87.

(U) ¹⁶U.S. VerbMin/3, p. 122.

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) he proposed that national elections in Vietnam be supervised specifically by an international commission "under United Nations auspices." As his speeches made clear, the United States believed the UN should have two separate functions -- overseeing not only the cease-fire but the elections as well. Both these points in Smith's remarks were to remain cardinal elements of American policy throughout the negotiations despite French (and Communist) efforts to induce their alteration.

(U) Entirely in keeping with Smith's position at the conference, as well as with the tenor of the Viet Minh proposals, Secretary Dulles, on May 12, sent Smith instructions intended to make the United States an influential, but unentangled and unobligated, participant. As Dulles phrased it, the United States was to be "an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation." Its primary aim would be to

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

Accordingly, Smith was told, the United States should not give its approval to any settlement or cease-fire "which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states or of permanently impairing their territorial integrity or of

~~(S)~~ placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union of Indochina, or which otherwise contravened the principles stated...above."¹⁷

~~(S)~~ The NSC decision of May 8, Smith's comments at the second and third plenary sessions, and Dulles' instructions on May 12 reveal the rigidity of the American position on a Geneva settlement. The United States would not associate itself with any arrangement that failed to provide adequately for an internationally supervised cease-fire and national elections, that resulted in the partitioning of any of the Associated States, or that compromised the independence and territorial integrity of those States in any way. It would not interfere with French efforts to reach an agreement, but neither would it guarantee or otherwise be placed in the position of seeming to support it if contrary to policy. Bedell Smith was left free, in fact, to withdraw from the conference or to restrict the American role to that of observer.¹⁸ The rationale for this approach was clear enough: the United States, foreseeing inevitable protraction of negotiations by the Communists in the manner of Korea, would not be party to a French cession of territory that would be the end result of the Communists' waiting game already begun by Pham Van Dong. Rather than passively accept that result, the United States would withdraw from active involvement in the proceedings, thereby leaving it with at least the

(U) ¹⁷Dulles priority tel. TOSEC 138 to Smith at Geneva, May 12, 1954 (Confidential); emphasis supplied.

(U) ¹⁸Ibid.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ freedom to take steps to recapture the initiative (as by rolling back the Viet Minh at some future date) and the moral purity of having refused to condone the enslavement of more people behind the Iron Curtain.¹⁹ American policy toward negotiations at Geneva was therefore in perfect harmony with the Eisenhower-Dulles global approach to dealing with the Communist bloc.

~~(S)~~ Gloomy American conclusions about the conference, and no doubt the extravagant opening Communist demands, were intimately connected with events on the battlefield. After the debacle at Dienbienphu on May 7, the French gradually shifted their forces from Laos and Cambodia into the Tonkin Delta, leaving behind weak Laotian and Cambodian national armies to cope with veteran Viet Minh battalions. As the French sought to consolidate in northern Vietnam, the Viet Minh pressed the attack, moving several battalions eastward from Dienbienphu. U.S. Army intelligence reported in late May, on the basis of French evaluations, that the Viet Minh were redeploying much faster than anticipated, to the point where of 35,000 troops originally in northwestern Tonkin only 2,000 remained.²⁰ At the same time, two Viet Minh battalions stayed behind in Cambodia and another ten in Laos; and in both those countries, American intelligence concluded that the Viet Minh position was so strong as to jeopardize the political no less than the military stability of the royal governments.²¹

(U) ¹⁹ Dulles tel. TEDUL 180 to Smith at Geneva, June 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²⁰ C.I.A. intelligence report of May 26, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²¹ C.I.A. intelligence reports of May 14, May 26, and June 2, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ To thwart the Communist military threat in Vietnam, the French chief of staff, General Paul Ely, told General J. H. Trapnell, the MAAG chief (on May 30), that French forces were forming a new defensive perimeter along the Hanoi-Haiphong axis; but Ely made no effort to hide the touch-and-go nature of French defensive capabilities during the rainy season already underway.²² This precarious situation was confirmed by General Valluy of the French command staff. In a report in early June to U.S., British, Australian, and New Zealand chiefs of staff assembled in Washington, Valluy held that the Delta was in danger of falling to the Communists, that neither Frenchmen nor Vietnamese would fight on in the south in that eventuality, and that only prompt allied intervention could save the situation.²³ American assessments merely echoed those provided by the French. A National Intelligence Estimate published June 15 determined that French Union forces, despite a numerical advantage, faced defections on a mounting scale that could become very large if the Viet Minh scored major victories or if the French were believed (and Vietnamese suspicions were rife on this score in Hanoi and Saigon) about to abandon Hanoi and portions of the Delta.²⁴ In sum, the tenor of intelligence

(U) ²² Dillon priority tel. No. 134 from Paris, July 11, 1954 (Top Secret).

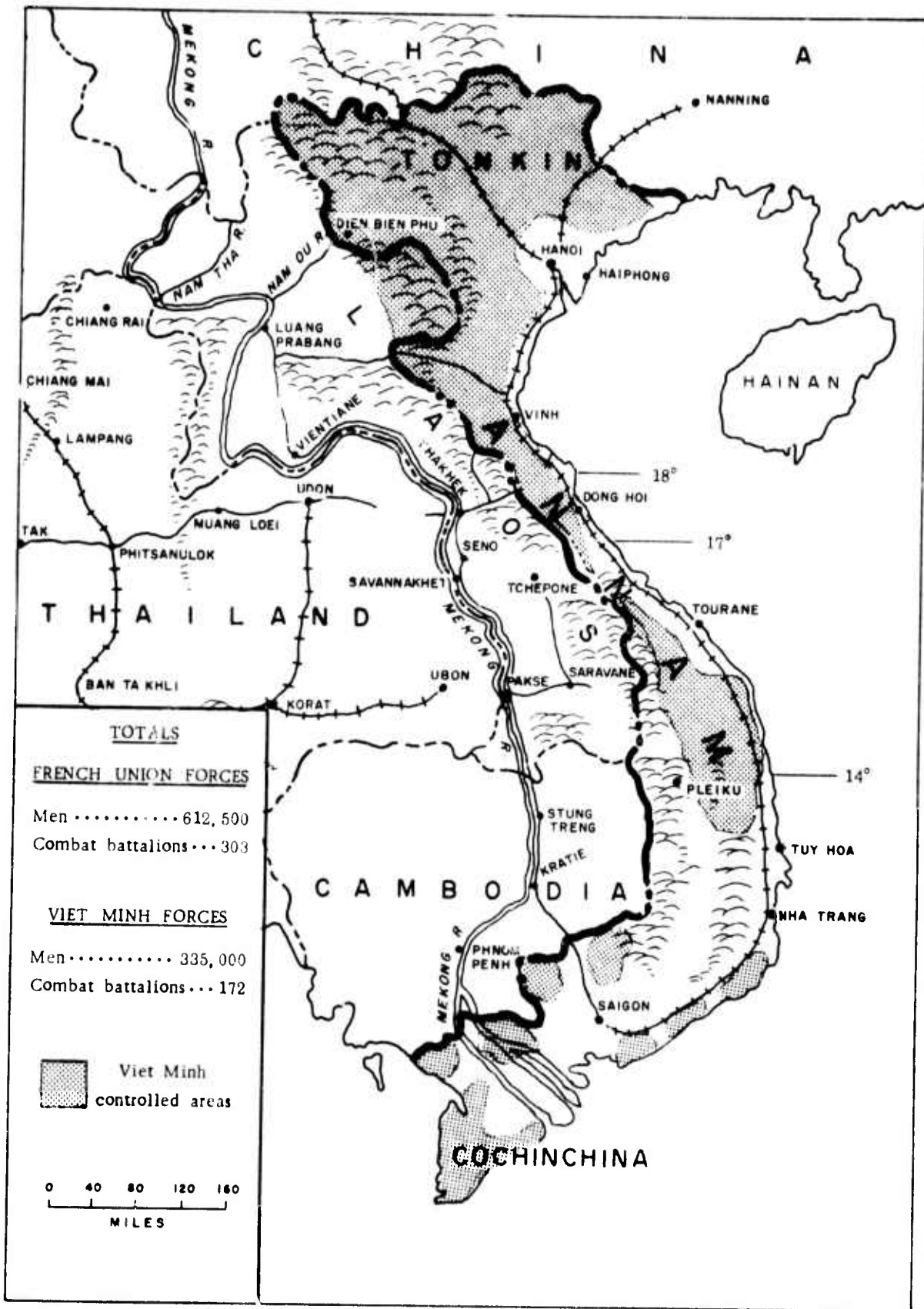
(U) ²³ See Dulles' tel. TEDUL 171 to the American Consul, Geneva (Smith), June 7, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ ²⁴ NIE-63-4-54, "Probable Military and Political Developments in Indochina over the Next 30 Days (15 June-15 July)," June 15, 1954 (Secret). Viet Minh strength in and around the Delta was reported as 94 infantry

~~the~~ reports by French and American sources during this period (from early May through mid-June) was that the Viet Minh armies were solidly entrenched in portions of Cambodia and Laos, were preparing for further advances in the Tonkin Delta, and, if the war were to continue beyond the rainy season, had the capability to destroy positions then being fortified by French Union Forces throughout northern Vietnam.

~~The~~ The upshot of this military deterioration throughout much of Indochina was to reinforce the American conviction that the Communists, while making proposals at Geneva they knew would be unacceptable to the West, would drive hard for important battlefield gains that would thoroughly demoralize French Union troops and set the stage for their withdrawal southward, perhaps precipitating a general crisis of confidence in Indochina and a Viet Minh takeover by default. More clearly than earlier in the year, American officials now saw just how desperate the French really were, in part because French field commanders were being far more sincere about and open with information on the actual military situation. But the thickening gloom in Indochina no less than at Geneva did not give way to counsels of despair in Washington. The Government concluded not that the goals it had set for a settlement were unrealistic, but rather that the only way to attain them, as the President and the JCS had been saying, was through

~~The~~ battalions, 1 artillery division, 110 district companies, and from 40,000 to 50,000 militia. French-Vietnamese strength stood at 109 battalions (of which some 60 percent was VNA) and about 80,000 auxiliary troops and militia.



Indochina, July 1954

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~(S)~~ decisive military victory in conformity with the original united action proposal of March 29. While therefore maintaining its delegation at Geneva throughout the indecisive sessions of May and June, the United States once again alerted France to the possibility of a military alternative to defeat under the pressure of Communist talk-fight tactics.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

XIII. THE UNITED STATES AT GENEVA: THE STAGE OF
FORCE AND DIPLOMACY, MAY TO MID-JUNE (U)

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

~~(S)~~ The issue of united action arose again in early May when Premier Laniel, in a talk with Ambassador Dillon, expressed the view that the Chinese were the real masters of the negotiations at Geneva. This being the case, Laniel reasoned, the Chinese would probably seek to drag out the talks over any number of peripheral issues while the Viet Minh pushed on for a military decision. The French position in the field, with a major redeployment on the order of 15 battalions to the Tonkin Delta probably very soon, would be desperate, Laniel said, unless the United States decided to give its active military cooperation. In the interim, the premier requested that an American general be dispatched to Paris to assist in military planning.¹

~~(S)~~ Laniel's views failed to make an impression in Washington. Although the Administration agreed to dispatch

(U) ¹Dillon tel. from Paris No. 4287 to Dulles, May 10, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ a general (Trapnell), Dulles proposed, and Eisenhower accepted, a series of "indispensable" conditions to American involvement that would have to be met by Paris. Even after those conditions were met, American intervention would not follow automatically; Laniel would have to request further U.S.-French consultations. The conditions were:²

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

~~(S)~~² In forwarding these conditions to the Embassy for transmittal to the French, Dulles noted that a prompt, favorable decision would be premature inasmuch as it might internationalize the war in a way offensive to the British, leaving the French with the difficult choice of internationalization or capitulation. Dulles "eyes only" tel. to Paris NIACT 4023, May 11, 1954 (Top Secret). The conditions are also cited in Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, pp. 176-77.

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

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

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

~~(S)~~ A final point concerned Executive-Congressional relations once a French request, backed by Parliamentary assent, reached Washington. The President felt he should appear before a joint session of Congress and seek a Congressional resolution to use the armed forces in Indochina. He would tell Congress the United States would

[REDACTED]

~~(S)~~ act on the formal invitation of France and the Associated States, and with the cooperation of friends and allies in the region. At Eisenhower's request, Dulles directed that the State Department begin working up a first draft of a Presidential message.³

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

~~(S)~~ Laniel's qualified approval of the preconditions was accompanied by a request for a response to two other

(U) ³ Dulles' words and the deliberations outlined above, are as paraphrased in a State Department memorandum of conversation, May 11, 1954, of a White House conference May 10 attended by the President, Dulles, Wilson, Deputy Defense Secretary Anderson, Radford, Robert Bowie (Chairman of the NSC Planning Board), and Douglas MacArthur II (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) questions: could the United States in some way guarantee the borders and independence of Laos and Cambodia following a French withdrawal from those countries? Could the United States provide written assurance of prompt air intervention to meet a possible Chinese Communist air attack on French forces in the Tonkin Delta?⁴

(S) The American response to Laniel's demurrers and requests was for the most part negative. On the French-Associated States relationship, which Ambassador Dillon had said was the chief barrier to a French request for intervention,⁵ Dulles replied (through Dillon) that the United States might have some flexibility on the matter, but had to remain adamant on complete independence if it ever hoped to gain Thai and Filipino support. Next, on the question of the extent of American involvement, the

(U) ⁴Dillon "eyes only" tel. from Paris to the Under Secretary (for Dulles) No. 4383, May 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) ⁵Dillon commented: "I am certain that unless we can find some way to get around this requirement [that the Vietnamese have the option of leaving the French Union], French will never ask for outside assistance." In ibid.

Dillon proposed that the real objection among Asians to the position of the Associated States rested not on the "purely juridical" problem of the right to leave the Union, but on Indochina's lack of powerful national armies. The Ambassador recommended that American training and equipping of the VNA, coupled with a French statement of intention to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps after the establishment of peace and a national army, would significantly dampen Asian antagonism to the Bao Dai regime. (Dillon from Paris, tel. NIACT 4402 to Dulles, May 17, 1954, Top Secret.) It is difficult to understand why Dillon assumed Asians would significantly change their attitude toward French Indochina when, even with an American takeover of the training and equipping of the VNA, French forces would still be on Vietnamese territory for a lengthy period.

[REDACTED]

~~(S)~~ Government was more flexible: It would not exclude anti-aircraft "and limited U.S. ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by U.S. naval and air forces." As to Laniel's questions, Washington answered that it saw no way, in view of the military and legal impracticalities, to guarantee the security of Laos and Cambodia; the alternative was that Laos and Cambodia join with Thailand in requesting the stationing of a UN Peace Observation Commission (POC) on their territories. The possibility of Chinese MIG intervention, considered extremely remote by the Defense Department, ruled out the need for a written commitment. The French were to be assured, however, that a collective defense arrangement would include protection against that contingency, and that prior to the formation of the organization, Chinese air involvement would prompt a Presidential request for Congressional authorization to respond with U.S. aircraft.⁶

~~(S)~~ Although the setting up of several preconditions to involvement and the qualifications of the French reply by no means made intervention an immediate possibility, the Administration moved ahead on contingency planning. The State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took the lead by producing a hypothetical timetable based on the assumption of U.S.-French agreement in principle to the proposed conditions by May 21.⁷ FEA also outlined a

(U) ⁶ Dulles "eyes only" tel. to Paris (Dillon), NIACT 4094, May 15, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁷ FEA memorandum, "Procedural Steps for Intervention in Indochina," undated (entered into FE files May 17, 1954 (Top Secret)).

(S) full slate of urgent priority studies, including U.S. strategy under differing circumstances of Chinese involvement in the war.⁸ By May 24, FEA had forwarded a contingency study from the Operations Planning Board that proposed, among other things, public and private communications to Peking to prevent, or at least reduce the effectiveness of, direct Chinese intervention.⁹

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

(U) ⁸ FEA, Annex on "Studies to be Undertaken Immediately within United States Government," attached to ibid. (Top Secret).

(U) ⁹ OCB, Studies with Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina, Tab E, "Plan for Political Warfare in Regard to Communist China Intervention in Indochina," undated, in enclosure to memorandum from E. F. Drumright to Robert Murphy, May 24, 1954 (Top Secret).

[REDACTED]

~~(S)~~ would have a broad Asian membership, but would be functionally limited to social and economic cooperation.¹⁰

~~(S)~~ An important input to contingency planning on intervention came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On May 20, the JCS sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense entitled "U.S. Military Participation in Indochina."¹¹ In the paper, the Chiefs requested formulation of a Defense Department position on the size of any American contributions and the nature of the command structure once united action began. They noted the "limited availability of U.S. forces for military action in Indochina" and the "current numerical advantage of the French Union forces over the enemy, i.e., approximately 5 to 3." Pointing out the disadvantages of either stationing large numbers of U.S. troops in Indochina or of basing U.S. aircraft on Indochina's limited facilities, the Chiefs considered "the current greatest need" to be an expanded, intensified training program for indigenous troops. They observed, moreover, that they were guided in their comments by the likely reaction of the CPR to U.S. involvement, as well as by the prescription: "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage."

~~(S)~~ In view of these problems and prospects, the JCS urged the limitation of United States involvement to

(U) ¹⁰This conceptualization stemmed from discussions of the NSC Planning Board, and was part of a broader contingency study program. See the Board's statement in an enclosure to a memorandum from Robert Bowie (the Board's chairman), May 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹¹Memorandum from the JCS to the Secretary of Defense, May 20, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

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

~~(S)~~ The Chiefs were simply taking their traditional position that any major U.S. force commitment in the Far East should be reserved for a war against China in the event the President decided that such a conflict was necessary for the preservation of vital American interests. Recognizing the limitations of the "New Look" defense establishment for large-scale involvement in "brushfire" wars, the Chiefs were extremely hesitant, as had consistently been the case during the Indochina crisis, to favor action along the periphery of China when the strategic advantages of American power lay in decisive direct blows against the major enemy. Thus, the JCS closed their memorandum with the admonition that air-naval commitments beyond those specified

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

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.¹²

(S) The JCS evidently also decided to call a meeting of military representatives from the United States, France, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, the Chiefs suggested the downgrading of the representatives to below chief-of-staff level; but apparently on the strong protest of Under Secretary Smith at Geneva,¹³

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

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

(U) ¹³ Smith from Geneva "eyes only" tel. DULTE 100 to Dulles, May 23, 1954 (Top Secret).

[REDACTED]

~~(S)~~ and of the British too,¹⁴ the Chiefs acquiesced in a meeting at chief-of-staff level. But prior to the meeting, which began the first week of June, important developments occurred in the U.S.-France discussions of intervention.

~~(S)~~ The ticklish problem of bringing France to concede the critical importance of granting full independence to the Associated States occupied center stage once more. On May 27, the State Department, acknowledging France's hesitancy to go too far on this score, still insisted on certain "minimum measures," the most important of which was that France, during or immediately after formal approval of the April 28 draft treaties, announce its willingness to withdraw all its forces from Indochina unless invited by the governments of the Associated States to maintain them or to establish bases. (The United States, the Department added, would be prepared to make a similar declaration if it committed forces.) Beyond that step, the French were also asked to permit Indochinese participation in the programming of economic aid and their direct receipt of all military aid, to find ways to broaden participation of the Vietnamese defense ministry and armed forces in national defense, and to push for the establishment of "representative and authentic nationalist governments" at the earliest possible date.¹⁵

~~(S)~~ Transmitting these new proposals to the French, Dillon (incorrectly as it turned out) found them so well

(U) ¹⁴ Dulles to Smith at Geneva tel. TEDUL 116, May 24, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁵ Dulles tel. to American Embassy, Paris No. 4272, May 26, 1954 (Top Secret). See also Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 192.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ received that he reported on May 29, following a conversation with Laniel, that the two partners "had now reached accord in principle on political side." Laniel, he cabled Dulles, urged immediate military talks to complete arrangements on training of the Vietnamese, a new command structure, and war plans.¹⁶ Inasmuch as Ely and General John W. O'Daniel in Indochina had reached general agreement on American assumption of responsibility for training the VNA,¹⁷ the way was apparently cleared for bilateral military talks in Washington to take place simultaneously with, and therefore disguised by, the five-power staff negotiations.

~~(S)~~ Dillon's optimistic assessment proved premature, however, on several grounds. When he reported May 28 on talks with Schumann, he had added Schumann's and Defense Minister René Pleven's concern about Chinese air intervention, which they felt would be so damaging as to warrant a deterrent action in the form of a Presidential request to the Congress for discretionary authority to defend the Delta in case of CCAF attack. The French wanted a virtually instantaneous U.S. response, one that

(U) ¹⁶ Dillon priority tel. from Paris No. 4596, May 29, 1954 (Top Secret). See also Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 331, May 28, 1954 (Top Secret) and Dillon from Paris (reporting talks with Schumann) tel. No. 4580, May 28, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ ¹⁷ McClintock from Saigon tel. No. 2468 to Dulles, May 19, 1954 (Secret); Dillon from Paris "eyes only" tel. for Dulles, Smith, and McClintock No. 4566, May 27, 1954 (Top Secret), reporting the Trapnell-Ely talks. Ely and O'Daniel were still at odds, Dillon noted, over structural changes in the VNA, war strategy, and the role of U.S. advisors.

~~SECRET~~

(S) would be assured by a Presidential request before rather than after overt Chinese aerial intervention.¹⁸

The State Department's retort was that the French first had to satisfy the previously reported conditions before any such move by the President could be considered.¹⁹

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

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

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

(U) ¹⁸ Ibid.; also, Dillon priority tel. from Paris No. 4612, May 31, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁹ Robert Murphy (acting Secretary) to American Embassy, Paris tel. NIACT 4325, May 29, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(~~TS~~) in Western Europe, and to the U.S. position against the Communists' world strategy if a Chinese attack was not met.²⁰

(~~TS~~) Despite Dillon's protestations, the Department stuck by its initial position of May 15, namely, that Chinese air attack was unlikely and that the United States would meet that problem when it arose.²¹ Clearly, the Administration was unwilling to make any advance commitments which the French could seize upon for political advantage at Geneva without having to give a quid pro quo in their Indochina policy. Eisenhower affirmed this view and went beyond it: The conditions for united action, he said, applied equally to Chinese direct and indirect involvement in Indochina. The United States would make no unilateral commitment against any contingency, including overt, unprovoked Chinese aggression, without firm, broad allied support.²²

(U) ²⁰ Dillon from Paris tel. No. 4607, May 30, 1954 (Top Secret). See also Dillon from Paris tel. No. 4625, June 1, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²¹ Murphy to American Embassy, Paris tel. NIACT 4332, May 31, 1954 (Top Secret).

(~~TS~~) ²² Eisenhower's unwavering attitude toward action in Asia only in concert with allies put him at odds with Dulles, who was prepared to act unilaterally in cases of overt aggression. When the issue of possible CPR air intervention came before the President, he is reported to have reacted sharply. Evidently supposing that conflict in the air would mean a Sino-American war, the President

said the United States would not intervene in China on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) There were other obstacles to U.S.-French agreement, as brought into the open with a memorandum to the President from Foreign Minister Georges Bidault on June 1.²³ One was the question of timing involved in American insistence on French Assembly approval of a government request for U.S. intervention. The French

(TS) States should in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese communist overt aggression.

See memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Robert Cutler, the President's special assistant, June 1, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) The rationale for the President's difference of view with his Secretary was laid out more fully the next day. Eisenhower said that since direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including "new weapons") in reply, he would need to have much more than Congressional authorization. Thai, Filipino, French, and Indochinese support would be important but not sufficient; other nations, such as Australia, would have to give their approval, for otherwise he could not be certain the public would back a war against China. (Memorandum of conversation in the President's office, June 2, 1954, involving also Dulles, Anderson, Radford, MacArthur, and Cutler [Top Secret].) At its 200th meeting on June 3, the NSC received, considered, and agreed upon the President's views.

(U) ²³Memorandum from Bidault to Eisenhower, Geneva, June 1, 1954 (Top Secret). See also Smith from Geneva tel. DULTE 156, June 6, 1954 (Top Secret).

[REDACTED]

(S) cabinet considered that to present a program of allied involvement to the Assembly except under the circumstance of "a complete failure of the Geneva Conference" attributable to the Communists "would be literally to wish to overthrow the [French] Government." A second area of continuing disagreement concerned the maintenance of French forces in the field and the nature of a U.S. commitment. The French held that the United States could bypass Congress by committing perhaps one division of Marines without a declaration of war.²⁴ Although assured by Washington that the Marines would not be excluded from a U.S. air-naval commitment,²⁵ the French were not satisfied. In his memorandum, Bidault asked that the United States take account of France's defense obligations elsewhere, an indirect way of asking that Washington go beyond a token ground-troop commitment. Confronted by a war-weary Parliament on one side and opponents of EDC on the other, Bidault doubtless believed that the retention of French soldiers in Indochina without relief from American GIs was neither militarily nor politically acceptable.²⁶

(S) 24. Dillon tel. to Dulles No. 4766, June 9, 1954 (Top Secret). Also, Dulles tel. to American Embassy, Paris No. 4286, May 27, 1954 (Top Secret); here, the American position was that French forces would be maintained during united action except for normal troop rotation, replacement by native forces as the military situation permitted, and consultation with allies engaged in the united action.

(U) 25. This was the substance of Admiral Radford's remarks to General Valluy, as reported in a memorandum for the record, June 3, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) 26. This evaluation is offered in Dillon's telegram from Paris to Dulles, tel. No. 4766, June 9, 1954 (Top Secret), and in Smith from Geneva to Dulles, tel. DULTE 183, June 15, 1954 (Top Secret).

Ⓢ A final but by no means negligible French objection to the American proposals concerned the independence issue. Far from having been settled, as Dillon supposed, the French were still unhappy about American pressure for concessions even after the State Department's May 27 revisions. The French were particularly disturbed (as Bidault implied) at the notion that the Associated States could leave the Union at any time, even while French fighting men were in the field on Indochina's behalf. "Such a formula," Bidault wrote, "is unacceptable to the French Government, first because it is incompatible with the French Constitution, and also because it would be extremely difficult to explain to French opinion that the forces of the French Union were continuing the war in Indochina for the benefit of States that might at any moment leave the Union." France was perfectly willing, Bidault remarked, to sign new treaties of association with the three Indochinese States, to allow them a larger voice in defense matters, and to work with them toward formation of truly national governments; but, to judge from his commentary, Paris would not go the whole route by committing itself in advance to Indochina's full freedom of action in the French Union. And while this and other issues remained unresolved, as Dulles observed June 4, Laniel's reported belief that the United States and France were politically agreed was a "serious overstatement."²⁷

(U) ²⁷ Dulles to American Embassy, Paris tel. No. 4421, June 4, 1954 (Top Secret).

By early June the unsettled issues separating the United States from France began to lose their relevance to the war. Even if they could be resolved, it was questionable whether American involvement could any longer be useful, much less decisive. On the matter of training the VNA, for instance, the United States was no longer certain that time would permit its training methods to take effect even if the French promptly removed themselves from responsibility in that area. The State Department now held that the Vietnam situation had deteriorated "to point where any commitment at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider U.S. training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for U.S. participation war Indochina."²⁸ Morale of the Franco-Vietnamese forces, moreover, had dropped sharply, the whole Tonkin Delta was endangered, and the political situation in Saigon was reported to be dangerously unstable.²⁹ Faced with this uniformly black picture, the Administration determined that the grave but still retrievable military situation prevailing at the time united action was proposed and pursued had, in June, altered radically, to the point where united action might have to be withdrawn from consideration by the French.

(U) ²⁸ Murphy (acting Secretary) "eyes only" tel. to American Embassy, Paris (Dillon), No. 4508, June 10, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²⁹ Dulles "eyes only" priority tel. to American Embassy, Paris, No. 4579, June 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) By mid-June American diplomacy was therefore in an unenviable position. At Geneva, very little progress had been made of a kind that could lead any of the Allies to expect a satisfactory outcome. Yet the alternative which the United States had reopened no longer seemed viable either. As Dulles told Smith, any "final agreement" with the French would be "quite impossible," for Paris was moving farther than ever from a determination that united action was necessary. "They want, and in effect have, an option on our intervention," Dulles wrote, "but they do not want to exercise it and the date of expiry of our option is fast running out."³⁰ From Paris, in fact, Ambassador Dillon urged the Secretary that "the time limit be now" on U.S. intervention.³¹ And Dulles was fast concluding that Dillon was correct.

(S) In view of France's feeling that, because of strong Assembly pressure for a settlement, no request could be made of the United States until every effort to reach agreement at Geneva had been exhausted,³² Dulles in effect decided, on June 15, that united action was no longer tenable. In a conversation with Bonnet, in which the French Ambassador read a message from Bidault which indicated that the French no longer considered the United States bound to intervene on satisfaction of the seven

(U) ³⁰ Dulles priority tel. to American Consul, Geneva (Smith), TEDUL 197, June 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³¹ Dillon "eyes only" tel. from Paris to Dulles, No. 4841, June 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³² See, e.g., Schumann's remarks to Dillon in the latter's cable from Paris No. 4766, June 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ conditions, the Secretary put forth the difficulty of the American position. He stated that the United States stood willing to respond to a French request under the conditions of May 11, but that time and circumstance might make future intervention "impracticable or so burdensome as to be out of proportion to the results obtainable." While this offer would be unsatisfactory to Bidault, especially in his dealings with the Communists at Geneva, Dulles "could not conceive that it would be expected that the United States would give a third power the option to put it into war at times and under conditions wholly of the other's choosing."³³ With this, united action was shelved, and it never appeared again in the form and with the purpose originally proposed.

~~(S)~~ As a break with France on united action became likely, American interest focused on a collective defense arrangement after a Geneva settlement with British participation. The French and British roles in U.S. planning were in effect reversed; Paris, it was felt, could no longer be counted on as an active participant in regional security. As their delegate to Geneva, Jean Chauvel, told Smith, Bidault was still hopeful of getting "something" from the conference.³⁴ On the other hand, Eden told Smith on June 9 of his extreme pessimism over the course of the negotiations. Eden believed a recess in the talks was likely within a few days (it came, in fact, ten days later),

(U) ³³ Dulles to American Consul, Geneva (Smith), tel. TEDUL 208, June 16, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³⁴ Smith "eyes only" tel. for the Secretary from Geneva, DULTE 164, June 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) and proposed that the Cambodian and Laotian cases be brought before the United Nations immediately after the end of the conference, even if France opposed the move. Smith drew from the conversation the strong impression that Eden believed negotiations to have failed and would now follow the American lead on a coalition to guarantee Cambodia and Laos "under umbrella of some UN action" (Smith's words).³⁵ Days later, Dulles likewise anticipated a British shift when he observed sardonically that events at Geneva had probably "been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known. I would assume," Dulles went on, "that the departure of Eden [from Geneva] would be evidence that there was no adequate reason for further delaying collective talks on Southeast Asia defense."³⁶ But whether the United States and Great Britain would see eye-to-eye on their post-settlement security obligations in the region, and whether joint diplomatic initiatives to influence the nature of the settlement could be decided upon, remained outstanding questions.

(S) The rebirth and demise of united action was a rare case of history repeated almost immediately after it had been made. The United States, having failed to interest Britain and France in united action prior to the

(U) 35 Ibid.

(U) 36 Dulles to Smith at Geneva, tel. TEDUL 196, June 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) start of the Geneva Conference, refused to be relegated to an unimportant role and determined instead to plunge ahead without British participation. But the conditions for intervention which had been given the French before the fall of Dienbienphu were now stiffened, most importantly by a greater detailing of the process the French government would have to go through before the United States would consider direct involvement.

~~(S)~~ Even while the French pondered the conditions, urged their refinement and redefinition to suit French policies, and insisted in the end that they saw no political obstacles separating the United States and France, Washington anticipated that the French were very unlikely to forward a request for U.S. involvement. Having learned something of French government priorities from the futile diplomatic bargaining in April, Department of State representatives in Paris and Washington saw that what the French wanted above all was not the military advantages of active U.S. intervention but the political benefits that might be derived from bringing into the open the fact that the two allies were negotiating American participation in the fighting. Thus, Dillon correctly assessed in mid-May that French inquiries about American conditions for intervention represented a "wish to use possibility of our intervention primarily to strengthen their hand at Geneva." The French hoped they would not have to call on the United States for direct support; they did hope the

(S) Communists would sense the dangers of proposing unacceptable terms for a settlement.³⁷ Dillon's sensitivity to the French position was proven accurate by Bidault's memorandum to the President: France would, in reality, only call on the United States if an "honorable" settlement could clearly not be obtained at Geneva, for only under that circumstance could the National Assembly be persuaded that the Laniel government had done everything possible to achieve peace.

(S) Recognition of the game the French were playing did not keep the United States from posing intervention as an alternative for them; but by adhering tenaciously to the seven conditions, it ruled out either precipitous American action or an open-ended commitment to be accepted or rejected by Paris. The State Department, guided on the military side by strong JCS objections to promising the French American combat troops in advance of a new and satisfactory command structure and strategic plan, became increasingly distraught with and suspicious of French motivations. "We cannot grant French an indefinite option on us without regard to intervening deterioration" of the military situation, Dulles wrote on June 8.³⁸ As much as the Administration wanted to avoid a sell-out at

(S) 37 Dillon priority tel. to Dulles No. 4424, May 18, 1954. Cf. Dulles' comment of June 7 in a cable to Geneva (priority tel. TEDUL 169, Top Secret): "I have long felt and still feel that the French are not treating our proposal seriously but toying with it just enough to use it as a talking point at Geneva."

(U) 38 Dulles priority tel. to American Consul, Geneva (Smith), TEDUL 175, June 8, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-152-

(S) Geneva, it was aware that events in Indochina might preclude effective U.S. action even if the French suddenly decided they wanted American support. Put another way, one of the primary differences between American diplomacy before and after the fall of Dienbienphu was its ability to project ahead -- to weigh the factors of time and circumstance against the distasteful possibility that Vietnam, by French default at the negotiating table or defeat on the battlefield, might be lost. As the scales tipped against united action, American security planning began to focus on the future possibilities of collective defense in Southeast Asia, while the pattern of diplomacy shifted from disenchantment with the Geneva Conference to attempts to bring about the best possible settlement terms.

~~TOP SECRET~~

XIV. THE MAJOR ISSUES AT THE CONFERENCE, MAY-JUNE (U)

(U) Washington's sense that the conference had essentially gotten nowhere -- a view which Smith and Dulles believed was shared by Eden, as already noted -- was not entirely accurate; nor was it precisely the thinking of other delegations. Following the initial French and Viet Minh proposals of May 8 and 10, respectively, some progress had in fact been made, although certainly not of an order that could have led any of the chief negotiators to expect a quick settlement. As the conference moved ahead, three major areas of contention emerged: the separation of belligerent forces, the establishment of a framework for political settlements in the three Indochinese states, and provision for effective control and supervisor of the cease-fire.

1. SEPARATION OF THE BELLIGERENTS

(U) The question how best to disentangle the opposing armies was most acute in Vietnam, but was also hotly debated as it applied to Cambodia and Laos. In Vietnam, Viet Minh forces were concentrated in the Tonkin Delta, though large numbers had long been active in Annam (central Vietnam) and Cochinchina (the south). The original French and Viet Minh proposals sought to take account of this situation by dismissing (although for separate reasons) the concept of single regroupment areas and forwarding instead the idea of perhaps several concentration points to facilitate a cease-fire. To this point, the Vietnamese delegation was in agreement: regroupment of the belligerents should in no way have the effect of

dividing the country into makeshift military zones that could have lasting political implications.

(U) It was an entirely different matter where the regroupment areas should be located; whether "foreign" (i.e., French) troops should be withdrawn, and if so, from what areas and during what period; whether irregular troops (i.e., Viet Minh guerrillas) should be disarmed and disbanded, and if so, whether they and their comrades in the regular forces should be integrated (as the Bao Dai delegation proposed) into the VNA; and, of crucial importance, whether a cease-fire should be dependent upon success in the regroupment process or, as Pham Van Dong proposed, upon an overall political settlement.

~~(S)~~ This last question was tackled first by the negotiators. On Eden's initiative, the conference had moved in mid-May from plenary to restricted sessions, where fewer delegates were present, no verbatim record was systematically kept, and the press was barred.¹ Eden's expectation that the opportunities for greater intimacy among the delegates would enhance the possibility of making some headway was partially fulfilled. At the first restricted session on May 17,² Molotov responded to Bidault's implication that one cause of continuing irresolution in the negotiations was the Viet Minh's insistence on coupling a military with a political settlement, whereas the French proposal had been geared to

(U) ¹Eden, Full Circle, p. 133.

(U) ²U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/1, pp. 4-5 (Confidential).

~~(S)~~ dealing only with the military portion before going on to discuss the political side. The Soviet delegate argued that while military and political matters were obviously closely linked, the conference might do best to address the military settlement first, since it was a point common to the French and Viet Minh proposals. Dong objected that military and political matters were so closely knit that they could not be separated;³ however, he agreed (although, we may surmise, with some reluctance) that the two problems could be dealt with in that order.

~~(S)~~ With a basic procedural obstacle removed, it was finally agreed that a cease-fire should have priority in the conference's order of business.⁴ Toward that goal, the problem of regroupment and disarmament of certain forces was taken up. At the fifth restricted session on May 24, Foreign Minister Bidault proposed, among other things, that a distinction be admitted between "regular"

(U) ³ Ibid., p. 8 (Confidential).

~~(S)~~ ⁴ On May 20, Chou En-lai told Eden that military and political matters should indeed be dealt with separately, and that priority should be given to the attainment of a cease-fire. (Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954 [Secret].) The Communists were quick to point out thereafter, though, that a political settlement should not be dropped from consideration. In fact, at the fifth restricted session, Molotov returned to the issue of military versus political settlements by proposing that they be considered at alternate meetings. The Western side held fast to concentrating on the cease-fire and turning to political matters only when agreement had been reached on the military side; this position was tacitly adopted. U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/5, May 24, 1954, pp. 18-19 (Confidential).

~~SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ and "irregular" forces. Regular troops, he said, included all permanently organized forces, which for the Viet Minh meant regional as well as regular units. These, he suggested, should be regrouped into demilitarized zones, whereas loosely organized irregulars should be disarmed under some form of control.⁵ Pham Van Dong, in his reply, agreed on the urgency of a cease-fire and on the importance of disarming irregulars; but, in contrast to Bidault's proposal, Dong asserted that inasmuch as each side would have responsibility for all forces in areas under its control after the cease-fire, disarmament would take place naturally. Dong implicitly rejected the idea of controlled disarmament, therefore, by placing the problem in the post- rather than pre-cess-fire period.⁶

~~(S)~~ The issues of regroupment and disarmament might have brought the conference to a standstill had not Pham Van Dong, at the sixth restricted session (May 25), suddenly reversed his position on regroupment and proposed what amounted to the partitioning of Indochina. Following only moments after the Vietnamese delegate, Nguyen Quoc Dinh, had offered a plan based on the maintenance of his country's territorial integrity,⁷ Dong suggested that in

(U) ⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-7 (Confidential).

(U) ⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-12 (Confidential).

~~(S)~~ ⁷ The GVN's position called for the disbandment and disarming of Viet Minh forces and their later integration into a national army under international control; international supervision of elections to be conducted by the Bao Dai government at an unspecified future date; and recognition of the integrity of the Vietnamese state. The GVN also insisted that the withdrawal of foreign forces come after all other issues had been resolved. See Smith from Geneva, tel. SECTO 197, May 13, 1954 (Secret), and U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/6, pp. 4-5 (Confidential).

the course of the regroupment, specific territorial jurisdictions be established such that each side would have complete economic and administrative, no less than military, control. So as not to be misunderstood, Dong further urged that a temporary line of demarcation be drawn that would be topographically suitable and appropriate for transportation and communication within each zone thus created.⁸ The American delegate, General Smith, immediately dismissed Dong's proposal and advised that the conferees return to discussion of the original cease-fire issues.⁹ But, as was to become clear very soon, Dong's new move struck a responsive chord among the French even as it confirmed to the Bao Dai delegation its worst fears.

[REDACTED] What had prompted Dong to introduce a partition arrangement when, at previous sessions, the Viet Minh had pushed repeatedly for a settlement procedure that would facilitate their consolidation of control over the entire country? What evidence we have is circumstantial, but it suggests that the Viet Minh delegation may have come under Sino-Soviet pressure to produce an alternative to cease-fire proposals that were consistently being rejected by the West. The partition alternative, specifically at the 16th parallel, had been intimated to American officials as early as March 4 by a member of the Soviet Embassy in London, apparently out of awareness of Franco-American objections to a coalition arrangement

(U) ⁸ Ibid., p. 7 (Confidential).

(U) ⁹ Ibid., p. 10 (Confidential).

[REDACTED] for Vietnam.¹⁰ On the opening day of the conference, moreover, Soviet officials had again approached American officials on the subject, this time at Geneva, averring that the establishment of a buffer state to China's south would be sufficient satisfaction of China's security needs.¹¹ While these events do not demonstrate that Dong's partition proposal¹² was the direct outgrowth of Sino-Soviet disposition toward a territorial division, they do reveal that partition was a solution, albeit temporary, which Moscow, at least, early found agreeable.

(U) Whatever lay behind Dong's gambit, the French were put in the position of being challenged on their prior commitments to the Vietnamese. At the time the conference began, Bao Dai's government, perhaps mindful of past instances of partition-type solutions in Korea and Germany, and almost certainly suspicious of ultimate French intentions in the face of Viet Minh territorial demands, urged Paris to provide written assurance it would neither seek nor accept a division of Vietnam at

(U) ¹⁰C.I.A. Memorandum RSS No. 0017/66, p. 39 (Secret/NoForDis/ControlledDis).

(U) ¹¹Ibid., p. 41 (Secret/NoForDis/ControlledDis).

(U) ¹²The DRV, it should be added, refused to call its proposal one for partition. As the official newspaper, Nhan Dan (The People) put it, the proposal amounted merely to "zonal readjustment" necessary to achieving a cease-fire. The readjustment "is only a stage in preparation for free general elections with a view toward the realization of national unity." Vietnam News Agency (VNA) broadcast in English to Southeast Asia, June 7, 1954.

[REDACTED]

Geneva. To make his own position perfectly clear, Bao Dai, through his representatives in the French capital, issued a communique (in the name of the GVN cabinet) which took note of various plans in the air for partition. The communique stated that partition "would be in defiance of Vietnamese national sentiment which has asserted itself with so much strength for the unity as well as for the independence of the country. Neither the Chief of State for the national government of Vietnam admit that the unity of the country can be severed legally...." The cabinet warned that an agreement compromising that unity would never receive Vietnam's approval:

...neither the Chief of State, nor the Vietnamese Government will consider themselves [sic] as bound by decisions running counter to the interests, i.e., independence and unity, of their country that would, at the same time, violate the rights of the peoples and offer a reward to aggression in opposition to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and democratic ideals.¹³

(U) In response to this clear-cut statement, the French came forward with both oral and written promises. On May 3, Maurice Dejean, the Commissioner General for Indochina, said in Saigon:

The French Government does not intend to seek a settlement of the Indochina problem on the basis of a partition of Vietnamese territory.... Formal assurances were given on this subject last April 25 by the French minister for foreign affairs to the minister for foreign affairs of Vietnam, and they were confirmed to him on May 1.¹⁴

(U) ¹³ G. McMurtrie Godley (First Secretary) from Paris tel. No. 2757, April 29, 1954.

(U) ¹⁴ Quoted in Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 123, n. 3.

~~TOP SECRET~~

-160-

(U) Written assurance came from Bidault on May 6 when he wrote Bao Dai that the task of the French government was to establish peace in Indochina, not "to seek here [at Geneva] a definitive political solution." Therefore, the French goal would be, said Bidault, to obtain a cease-fire with guarantees for the Associated States, hopefully with general elections in the future. Bidault continued:

As of now, I am however in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing would be more contrary to the intentions of the French government than to prepare for the establishment, at the expense of the unity of Vietnam, two States having each an international calling (vocation).¹⁵

(~~U~~) Bidault's support of Vietnam's opposition to partition, which he repeated privately before Eden and Smith at Geneva,¹⁶ collapsed once the new government of Pierre Mendès-France took over in mid-June. Mendès-France, keenly aware of the tenor of French public opinion, was far more disposed than the Laniel-Bidault administration to making every effort toward achieving a reasonable settlement. While by no means prepared for a sell-out, Mendès-France quickly foresaw that agreement with the Viet Minh was unlikely unless he accepted the concept of partition. His delegate at Geneva, who remained Chauvel, and the new Commissioner General for Indochina, General Ely,

(U) ¹⁵Quoted in ibid., pp. 123-24.

(U) ¹⁶Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 217, May 15, 1954
(Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) reached the same conclusion.¹⁷ At a high-level meeting in Paris on June 24, the new government thoroughly revised the French negotiating position. The objective for subsequent talks, it was decided, would be: (1) the regroupment of forces of both sides, and their separation by a line about at the 18th parallel;¹⁸ (2) the establishment of enclaves under neutral control in the two zones, one for the French in the area of the Catholic bishoprics at Phat Diem and Bui Chu, one for the Viet Minh at an area to be determined; (3) the maintenance of Haiphong in French hands in order to assist in the regroupment. The meeting also decided that, for the purpose of psychological pressure on the Viet Minh if not military preparedness for future contingencies, France should break with past practice and announce plans to send a contingent of conscripts (later

(U) ¹⁷ Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 234.

(U) ¹⁸ French insistence on the 18th parallel originated in the recommendation of General Navarre, who was asked several questions by the French delegation at Geneva regarding the likely impact of the then-existing military situation on the French negotiatory position. Navarre's responses were sent April 21. On the demarcation line, Navarre said that the 18th parallel would leave "us" the ancient political capital of Hue as well as Tourane (Da Nang), and permit the retention of militarily valuable terrain. (See General Ely's Mémoires: l'Indochine dans la Tourmente [Paris: Plon, 1964], p. 112, and Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 126.) Thus, the choice of the 18th parallel was based on military considerations, and apparently assumed a continuing French role in southern Vietnam after partition.

(~~is~~) determined as two divisions) to Indochina.¹⁹ Thus, by late June, the French had come around to acceptance of the need to explore a territorial settlement without, as we have already observed, informing the Vietnamese that Bidault's and Dejean's assurances had been superseded. On June 26, Paris formally notified Washington and London that Chauvel would soon begin direct talks with Pham Van Dong on a partition arrangement that would provide the GVN with the firmest possible territorial base.²⁰

~~is~~ While ground had been broken on the cease-fire for Vietnam, debate continued on Laos and Cambodia. Prior to and after Dong's proposal of May 25, the delegates argued back and forth without progress over the relationship between the conflict in Vietnam and that in Cambodia and Laos. The Khmer and Laotian delegates insisted they represented free and independent governments which were being challenged by a handful of indigenous renegades assisted by the invading Viet Minh. Thus, the delegates reasoned, their situations were quite different from the "civil war" in Vietnam, and therefore cease-fires could readily be established in Laos and Cambodia by the simple expedient of removing the aggressors. These delegates saw no reason -- and they received solid support from the American, French and British representatives -- for acceding

(U) 19 Ibid., pp. 235-36.

(U) 20 The notification came in an aide-memoire handed to Dulles and Eden by Henri Bonnet. See Dulles' tel. No. 4852 to Paris, June 28, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ to the Viet Minh demand that cease-fires in their two countries be contingent upon, and hence forced to occur simultaneously with, one in Vietnam.²¹

~~(S)~~ The Communists' retorts left little room for compromise. Pham Van Dong held, as before, that he spoke for "governments" which were being refused admission to the conference. The Pathet Lao and the Free Khmer were separate, genuine "national liberation movements" whose stake in their respective countries, Dong implied, would have to be acknowledged before a cease-fire could be arranged anywhere in Indochina. Molotov buttressed this argument with the claim that Laos and Cambodia were no more "independent" than Vietnam. Using a common negotiating tactic, he excerpted from a public statement by Dulles to point out how France was still being urged by the United States in May to grant real independence to all three Indochinese states, not just Vietnam. Molotov's only retreat was on the extent of Pathet Lao and Free Khmer territorial control. He admitted that while the Viet Minh were dominant in Vietnam, the Khmer-Laotian resistance movements controlled some lesser amount of territory.²²

~~(S)~~ For a while it seemed that the conference would become inextricably bogged down on the question whether the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were creatures of the Viet Minh or genuine nationalist forces. Certainly the Viet Minh delegation remained steadfast. At the

(U) ²¹The debate on Laos and Cambodia occupied the whole of the restricted sessions of May 18 and 19. U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/2, 3, passim (Confidential).

(U) ²²Ibid.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

-164-

~~the~~ fourth restricted session (May 21), Pham Van Dong made his implication of the previous sessions clearer when he said he had always understood the French cease-fire proposal to have applied to all Indochina (an outright fabrication) inasmuch as the problems in the three states were different only in degree, not in nature. If Cambodia and Laos were detached from Vietnam in the discussions, Dong said, the cease-fire issue would be attacked in the wrong way and a satisfactory solution would not be reached.²³ The warning of no cease-fire settlement for Cambodia and Laos without one for Vietnam was clear.

~~the~~ These last remarks by Dong, however, were no longer wholly in accord with what the Chinese were privately indicating. Chou En-lai, in the same conversation with Eden on May 20 in which Chou had agreed to separate military from political matters, also admitted that political settlements might be different for the three Indochinese states. Chou thus moved one step closer to the Western position, which held that the Laotian and Cambodian cases were substantially different from that in Vietnam and hence should be decided separately. The concession, however small, paved the way for agreement to Eden's proposal on May 25 that the problem of a cease-fire in Vietnam be dealt with separately and directly by having the Viet Minh and French military commands meet in Geneva and on the spot in Vietnam (later determined as Trung Gia) to discuss technical aspects of the regroupment.²⁴ The military

(U) ²³U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/4, pp. 3-4
(Confidential).

(U) ²⁴U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/6, p. 6
(Confidential).

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This page is CONFIDENTIAL)

-165-

~~(S)~~ staffs would report their findings to the conferees.²⁵ On June 2 formal agreement was reached between the commands to begin work; but it was not until June 10, apparently, that the Viet Minh actually consented that their secret talks with the French, like the discussions of the military commands, should be concerned only with Vietnam to the exclusion of Laotian and Cambodian problems.²⁶ Thus, it would seem that the Viet Minh position on the indivisibility of the three Indochinese states for purposes of a settlement was undercut by the Chinese (doubtless with Soviet support); yet for about three weeks following Chou's talk with Eden, the Viet Minh had privately refused to deal with the French on Vietnam alone.

2. POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

(U) Communist agreement to treat Laos and Cambodia separately as well as to consider a territorial division did not, however, signal imminent progress on the substance of military or political settlements for those countries any more than for Vietnam. Several additional plenary and restricted sessions made no headway at all during late May

(U) ²⁵ Acceptance of Eden's proposal came May 29. See Eden, Full Circle, p. 141.

~~(S)~~ ²⁶ Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 215. The conference agreed June 19, in restricted session, to hold separate military command talks on Cambodia and Laos -- to involve only Cambodian, Laotian and Viet Minh representatives -- in those two countries and at Geneva. See U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/16, p. 12 (Confidential). These talks actually began during the last week of June.

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This Page is CONFIDENTIAL)

and the first weeks of June. Eden's disappointment led him to state to his fellow delegates:²⁷

In respect...to the arrangements for supervision and to the future of Laos and Cambodia, the divergencies are at present wide and deep. Unless we can narrow them now without further delay, we shall have failed in our task. We have exhausted every expedient procedure which we could devise to assist us in our work. We all know now what the differences are. We have no choice but to resolve them or to admit our failure. For our part, the United Kingdom Delegation is still willing to attempt to resolve them here or in restricted session or by any other method which our colleagues may prefer.

But, gentlemen, if the positions remain as they are today, I think it is our clear-cut duty to say so to the world and to admit that we have failed.

Days later, his pessimism ran even deeper as the conference indeed seemed close to a breakdown. The Americans did not help matters, either: "Bedell Smith," Eden has since divulged, "showed me a telegram from President Eisenhower advising him to do everything in his power to bring the conference to an end as rapidly as possible, on the grounds that the Communists were only spinning things out to suit their own military purposes."²⁸

~~For~~ For reasons which will be speculated on subsequently, the Soviets and Chinese were not prepared to admit that the conference had failed and were willing to forestall that prospect by making concessions sufficient to justify its continuation. While the Americans may have

(U) ²⁷ U.S. VerbMin/7, June 10, 1954, p. 301.

(U) ²⁸ Eden, Full Circle, p. 144.

(S) wished to see a breakdown, Eden was not yet convinced that was inevitable. Again, his patience was rewarded. On June 16, Chou told the foreign secretary that the Cambodian resistance forces were small, making a political settlement with the Royal Government "easily" obtainable. In Laos, where those forces were larger, regroupment areas along the border with Vietnam (in Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces) would be required, Chou thought. Asked by Eden whether there might not be difficulty in gaining Viet Minh agreement to the withdrawal of their troops from the two countries, Chou replied it would "not be difficult" in the context of a withdrawal of all foreign forces.²⁹ The CPR would even be willing to consider the royal governments as heading independent states that could maintain their ties to the French Union, provided no American bases were established in their territories. China's preeminent concern, Eden deduced, was that the United States might use Laos and Cambodia as jump-off points for an attack on the mainland.³⁰

(S) From the conversation, Eden "received a strong impression that he [Chou] wanted a settlement and I accordingly urged Georges Bidault to have a talk with him and to discuss this new offer."³¹ On the next day (June 17),

(U) ²⁹ Smith tel. DULTE 193 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (Top Secret). See also Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, pp. 217 and 219.

(U) ³⁰ Eden, Full Circle, p. 145, and Smith's tel. SECTO 463 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ³¹ Ibid., emphasis supplied. It is noteworthy that Eden should have referred to a Chinese statement relating specifically to Viet Minh interests as an "offer" rather than as a proposal. For the difference between the two terms, see Iklé, How Nations Negotiate, pp. 193-94.

[REDACTED]

(S) Bidault met with Chou for the first time, as well as with Molotov, and reported the Communists' great concern over a break-up of the conference.³² Two days later a French redraft of a Chinese proposal to broaden the military staff conferences to include separate talks on Laos and Cambodia was accepted.³³

(U) This first major breakthrough in the negotiations, with the Chinese making an overture that evidently had full Soviet backing,³⁴ seems not to have had Viet Minh approval. At the same time as the Chinese were saying, for example in a New China News Agency (NCNA) broadcast of June 17, that all three Communist delegations had "all along maintained that the conditions in each of the three Indochinese countries are not exactly alike," and hence that "conditions peculiar to each of these countries should be taken into consideration,"

(U) ³²Smith tel DULTE 193 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³³Eden, Full Circle, p. 145.

(S) ³⁴When Molotov met with Smith on June 19, the Soviet representative said he saw the possibility of agreement on Laos and Cambodia so long as neither side (i.e., the French and Viet Minh) "adopted one-sided views or put forward extreme pretensions." Molotov said about 50 percent of Laotian territory was not controlled by the royal government (putting the Pathet Lao case in the negative), with a much smaller movement in Cambodia. The tone of Smith's report on this conversation suggests that Molotov saw no obstacles to Viet Minh withdrawal of its "volunteers." Smith tel. DULTE 202 from Geneva, June 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

the Viet Minh were claiming that "the indivisibility of the three questions of Vietnam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao" was one of several "fundamental questions" which the conference had failed to resolve.³⁵ In fact, of course, that question had been resolved; yet the Viet Minh continued to proclaim the close unity of the Viet Minh, Pathet Lao, and Free Khmer under the banner of their tri-national united front alliance formed in 1951.³⁶ No doubt the Viet Minh were seeking to assure their cadres and soldiers in Cambodia and Laos that Pham Van Dong would not bargain away their fate at the conference table, but it may also be that the broadcasts were meant to imply Viet Minh exceptions to objectionable Sino-Soviet concessions.

~~(S)~~ Those concessions, first on the separability of Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam and subsequently on Viet Minh involvement there, compelled the DRV delegation to take a new tack. On the former question, Viet Minh representatives indicated on June 16 during "underground" discussions with the French that insofar as Vietnam was concerned, their minimum terms were absolute control of the Tonkin Delta, including Hanoi and Haiphong.³⁷ While

(U) 35 VNA broadcast, quoting from Nhan Dan, in English to Southeast Asia, June 18, 1954.

(U) 36 Message from Ton Duc Thang, vice-president of the DRV and president of the Vietnam National United Front, to the Khmer Issarak United Front, as broadcast by VNA, June 19, 1954. Other expressions of Viet Minh-Pathet Lao-Free Khmer unity were broadcast by VNA on June 21 and June 28 (in English), and by the Voice of Nambo on June 19 (in Cochinchinese).

(U) 37 Smith priority tel. from Geneva DULTE 187, June 16, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) the French were reluctant to yield both cities, which they still controlled, a bargaining point had been established inasmuch as the Viet Minh were now willing to discuss specific geographic objectives. On the second question, the Viet Minh, apparently responding to Chou En-lai's "offer" of their withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos, indicated flexibility at least toward the latter country. A Laotian delegate reported June 23, following a meeting with Pham Van Dong in the garden of the Chinese delegation's villa, that the Viet Minh were in apparent accord on the withdrawal of their "volunteers" and even on Laos' retention of French treaty bases. The Viet Minh's principal demand was that French military personnel in Laos be reduced to a minimum. Less clearly, Dong alluded to the creation in Laos of a government of "national union," Pathet Lao participation in 1955 elections for the national assembly, and a "temporary arrangement" governing areas dominated by Pathet Lao military forces.³⁸ But these latter points were interpreted as being suggestive; Dong had come around to the Western view (shared now by the Soviets and Chinese) that the Pathet Lao not be accorded either military or political weight equal to that of the royal government. Later in the conference, Dong would make a similar retreat on Cambodia.

3. CONTROL AND SUPERVISION

(U) Painstakingly slow progress toward cease-fires and political settlements for the Indochinese

(U) ³⁸ Johnson from Geneva tel. SECTO 514, June 23, 1954 (Secret).

(U) states also characterized the work of devising supervisory organs to oversee the implementation and preservation of the cease-fire. Yet here again, the Communist side was not so intransigent as to make agreement impossible.

(U) Three separate but interrelated issues dominated the discussions of control and supervision at this stage of the conference and afterward. First, there was sharp disagreement over the structure of the supervisory organ: Should it consist solely of joint commissions composed of the belligerents, or should it have superimposed above an international authority possessing decisionmaking power? Second, the composition of any supervisory organ other than the joint commissions was also hotly disputed: Given agreement to have "neutral" nations observe the truce, which nations might be considered "neutral"? Finally, if it were agreed that there should be a neutral control body, how would it discharge its duties?

~~(U)~~ In the original Viet Minh proposals, implementation of the cease-fire was left to joint indigenous commissions, with no provision for higher, international supervision. Vehement French objections led to a second line of defense from the Communist side. At the fourth plenary session (May 14), Molotov suggested the setting up of a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) such as existed in Korea, and said he did not foresee any insurmountable problem in reaching agreement on its

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

-172-

membership.³⁹ But Molotov's revision left much to be determined and, from the Western standpoint, much to be desired too. Serious debate on the control and supervision problem did not get underway until early June. At that time, Molotov expressly rejected the American plan, supported by the Indochinese delegations and Great Britain, to have the United Nations supervise a cease-fire. He argued that the UN had nothing to do with the Geneva Conference, especially as most of the conferees were not UN members. Returning to his plan for an NNSC, Molotov reiterated his view that Communist countries could be as neutral as capitalist countries; hence, he said, the problem was simply one of choosing which countries should comprise the supervisory organ, and suggested that the yardstick be those having diplomatic and political relations with both France and the Viet Minh.⁴⁰ As to that body's relationship to the joint commissions, Molotov shied away from the Western proposal to make them subordinate to the neutral commission. "It would be in the interest of our work to recognize," Molotov said, "that these commissions should act in coordination and in agreement between each other, but should not be subordinate to each other." No such hierarchical relationship had existed in Korea, so why one in Indochina? Finally, the foreign minister saw no

(U) ³⁹U.S. VerbMin/4, pp. 156-157. Molotov subsequently proposed, on June 14, that the NNSC include nationals of India, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Pakistan.

(U) ⁴⁰U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/12, June 4, 1954, p. 9 (Confidential).

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~(S)~~ reason why an NNSC could not reach decisions by unanimous vote on "important" questions. Disputes among or within the commissions, Molotov concluded, would be referred to the states guaranteeing the settlement, which would, if necessary, take "collective measures" to resolve them.⁴¹

(U) The Western position was stated succinctly by Bidault.⁴² Again insisting on having "an authority remote from the heat of the fighting and which would have a final word to say in disputes," Bidault said the neutral control commission should have absolute responsibility for the armistice. It would have such functions as re-grouping the regular forces, supervising any demilitarized zones, conducting the exchange of prisoners, and implementing measures for the nonintroduction of war materiel into Indochina. While the joint commission would have an important role to play in these control processes, such as in working out agreement for the safe passage of opposing armies from one zone to another or for POW exchange, its functions would have to be subordinate to the undisputed authority of a neutral mechanism. Bidault did not specify which nations fitted his definition of "neutrality" and whether they would decide by majority or unanimous vote. These omissions were corrected by Eden a few days later when he suggested the Colombo Powers (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia), which he argued were all Asian, had all been actively discussing

(U) ⁴¹Ibid., pp. 10-11 (Confidential) and Indochina Restricted/13, June 14, 1954, pp. 5-9 (Confidential).

(U) ⁴²Ibid., Indochina Restricted/12, June 4, 1954, pp. 13ff (Confidential).

(U) Indochina outside the conference, were five in number and hence impervious to obstruction by a two-to-two vote (as on the NNSC) or requirement for unanimity, and were truly impartial.⁴³

(U) The basis for agreement on the vital question of supervising a cease-fire seemed at this stage non-existent. The Communists had revised their position by admitting the feasibility of a neutral nations' control organ in addition to joint commissions of the belligerents. But they clearly hoped to duplicate in Indochina the ineffective machinery they had foisted on the United Nations command at Panmunjom, one in which effective peacekeeping action was basically proscribed by the built-in veto of a four-power authority evenly divided among Communist and non-Communist representatives. The West, on the other hand, absolutely refused to experiment again with an NNSC; a neutral organ was vital, but it could not include Communist representatives, who did not know the meaning of neutrality. If the United Nations was not acceptable to the Communists, the Colombo Powers should be.

(U) However remote these positions, various kinds of trade-offs must have been apparent to the negotiators. Despite differing standards of "neutrality" and "impartiality," for instance, compromise on the membership problem seemed possible. The real dilemma was the authority of a neutral body. Unless superior to the joint commissions, it would never be able to resolve disputes, and unless it had the power to enforce its own decisions, it would never be

(U) ⁴³U.S. VerbMin/5, June 8, 1954, pp. 230-31.

(U) more than an advisory organ. Whether some new formula could be found somewhere between the Communists' insistence on parallel authority and the West's preference for a hierarchical arrangement remained to be seen.

~~On~~ On June 19 the Korea phase of the conference ended without reaching a political settlement. The conferees at that point agreed to a prolonged recess by the delegation leaders on the understanding that the military committees would continue to meet at Geneva and in the field. Eden wrote to the Asian Commonwealth prime ministers that "if the work of the committees is sufficiently advanced, the Heads of Delegations will come back."⁴⁴ Until that time, the work of the conference would go on in restricted session. Chauvel and Pham Van Dong remained at their posts; Molotov returned to Moscow; Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, made important stopovers in New Delhi, Rangoon, and Nanning that were to have important bearing on the conference. Smith remained in Geneva, but turned the delegation over to Johnson. It was questionable whether the Under Secretary would take over again; gloom was so thick in Washington over the perceived lack of progress in the talks and the conviction that the new Mendès-France government would reach a settlement as soon as the conference reconvened, that Dulles cabled Smith: "Our thinking at present is that our role at Geneva should soon be restricted to that of observer...."⁴⁵ As for Eden, he prepared to accompany

(U) ⁴⁴Eden, Full Circle, p. 146.

(U) ⁴⁵Dulles to American Consulate, Geneva, tel. TOSEC 478, June 24, 1954 (Secret).

[REDACTED]

~~SECRET~~ Churchill on a trip to Washington for talks relating to the conference and prospects for a Southeast Asia defense pact.

XV. THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT

(U) With its preconceptions of Communist negotiating strategy confirmed by the harshness of the first Viet Minh proposals, which Washington did not regard as significantly watered down by subsequent Sino-Soviet alterations, and with its military alternatives no longer considered relevant to the war, the United States began to move in the direction of becoming an influential actor at the negotiations. This move was not dictated by a sudden conviction that Western capacity for inducing concessions from the Communist side had increased; nor was the shift premised on the hope that we might be able to drive a wedge between the Viet Minh and their Soviet and Chinese friends. Rather, Washington believed that inasmuch as a settlement was certain to come about, and even though there was near-equal certainty it could not support the final terms, basic American and Western interests in Southeast Asia might still be preserved if France could be persuaded to toughen its stand. Were concessions still not forthcoming -- were the Communists, in other words, to stiffen in response to French firmness -- the Allies would be able to consult on their next moves with the confidence every reasonable effort to reestablish peace had been attempted.

(S) As already observed, the American decision to play a more decisive role at the conference depended on gaining British support. The changing war situation now made alignment with the British necessary for future regional defense, especially as Washington was informed of the probability that a partition settlement (which London had foreseen months before) would place all

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ Indochina in or within reach of Communist hands.¹
The questions remained how much territory the Communists could be granted without compromising non-Communist Indochina's security, what measures were needed to guarantee that security, and what other military and political principles were vital to any settlement which the French would also be willing to adopt in the negotiations. When the chief ministers of the United States and Great Britain met in Washington in late June, these were the issues they had to confront.

(U) The British and American representatives -- Eden, Churchill, Dulles, and Eisenhower -- brought to the talks positions on partition and regional security that, for all the differences, left considerable room for a harmonization of viewpoints. The UK, as the Americans well knew, was never convinced either that Indochina's security was inextricably linked to the security of all Asia, or that the Franco-Viet Minh war would ever bring into question the surrender of all Indochina to the Communists. London considered partition a feasible solution, but was already looking beyond that to some more basic East-West understanding that would have the effect

~~(S)~~¹ Intelligence reports coming into Washington during the last week of June suggested that the Geneva settlement would likely include: partition of Vietnam on terms highly favorable to the Communists, with a final political agreement postponed; neutralization of Laos, with the Communists retaining either or both territory already under their control and a coalition government; neutralization of Cambodia, with some form of recognition accorded the Free Khmer movement. C.I.A. intelligence report of June 30, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) of producing a laissez-faire coexistence between the Communist and Western powers in the region. As Eden recalled his thinking at the time, the best way of keeping Communism out of Southeast Asia while still providing the necessary security within which free societies might evolve was to build a belt of neutral states assisted by the West. The Communists might not see any advantage to this arrangement, he admitted. But:

If we could bring about a situation where the Communists believed that there was a balance of advantage to them in arranging a girdle of neutral states, we might have the ingredients of a settlement.²

Once the settlement was achieved, a system for guaranteeing the security of the neutral states thus formed would be required, Eden held. Collective defense, of the kind that would ensure action without unanimity among the contracting parties -- a system "of the Locarno type" -- seemed most reasonable to him.³ These points, in broad outline, were those presented by him and Churchill.

~~(U)~~ The United States had from the beginning dismissed the viability of a partition solution. Dulles' public position in his major speech of March 29 that Communist control even of part of Indochina would merely be the prelude to total domination was fully supported in private by both State and Defense. Nevertheless, the Government early recognized the possibility that partition,

(U) ²Eden, Full Circle, p. 139.

(U) ³Ibid., p. 148.

~~(S)~~ however distasteful, might be agreed to among the French and Communist negotiators. As a result, on May 5, the Defense Department drew up a settlement plan that included provision for a territorial division.⁴ As little of Vietnam as possible should be yielded, Defense argued, with the demarcation line fixed in the north and "defined by some defensible geographic boundary (i.e., the Red or Black Rivers, or the Annamite Mountains)...." In accord with the French position that evolved from the meeting of Mendès-France's cabinet on June 24, Defense urged provision for a Vietnamese enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area or, alternatively, internationalization of the port facilities there. Fairly well convinced, however, that partition would be fragile, Defense also called for "sanctions" against any form of Communist aggression in Laos, Cambodia, or Thailand, and for allied agreement to united action in the event the Communists violated a cease-fire by conducting subversive activities in the non-Communist area of Vietnam.

~~(S)~~ The Defense proposal amounted to containing the Communist forces above the 20th parallel while denying them sovereign access to the sea. This position⁵ went much further than that of the French, who also favored a demarcation line geared to military requirements but were willing to settle on roughly the 18th parallel. Moreover, when the five-power military staff conference met in

(U) ⁴Memorandum from Lt. Col. Black of ISA, "Courses of Action in Indochina," May 5, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁵No comparable discussion of partition lines has been found from the State Department side.

(S) Washington in early June, it reported (on the 9th) that a line midway between the 17th and 18th parallels (from Thakhek in Laos westward to Dong Hoi on the north Vietnam seacoast) would be defensible in the event partition came about.⁶ Undercutting the Defense plan still further was the French disposition to yield on an enclave in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were the Viet Minh to press for their own enclave in southern Vietnam. As Chauvel told U. Alexis Johnson, should the choice come to a trade-off of enclaves or a straight territorial division, the French preferred the latter.⁷ Thus, by mid-June, a combination of circumstances made it evident to the Administration that some more flexible position on the location of the partition line would have to be, and could be, adopted.

(S) American acceptance of partition as a workable arrangement put Washington and London on even terms. Similarly, on the matter of an overall security "umbrella" for Southeast Asia, the two allies also found common ground. While the United States found "Locarno" an unfortunate term,⁸ the Government did not dispute the need to establish a vigorous defense mechanism capable of acting despite objections by one or more members. It will be recalled that the NSC Planning Board, on May 19, had outlined three possible regional groupings dependent upon

(U) ⁶ Dulles "eyes only" tel. TEDUL 222 to Smith at Geneva, June 18, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁷ Smith from Geneva priority tel. DULTE 195, June 18, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ⁸ Eden, Full Circle, p. 150.

~~TOP SECRET~~

-182-

~~(S)~~ the nature and timing of a settlement at Geneva.⁹ Now, in late June, circumstances dictated the advisability of concentrating on the "Group 2" formula, in which the UK, the United States, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand would participate but not France (unless it was decided that the pact would apply to Indochina). The concerned states would exchange information, act as a united front against Communism, provide actual assistance to Asian members against external attack or "Communist insurrection," and make use of Asian facilities and/or forces in their defense assistance program.

~~(S)~~ American planning for what was to become SEATO evinced concern, however, about the commitment of American forces in cases of Communist infiltration and subversion. As the Planning Board's paper notes, the role of the United States and other countries should be limited to support of the country requesting assistance; Asian member nations would be expected to "contribute facilities and, if possible, at least token military contingents."¹⁰ The Board's paper did not represent a final policy statement; but it did reflect American reluctance, particularly on the part of the President and the Joint Chiefs, to have American forces drawn into the kind of local conflict the Administration had steered clear of in Vietnam. On this question of limiting the Western commitment, the British, to judge from their hostility toward involvement against the Viet Minh, were also in general agreement.

(U) ⁹ See supra, pp. 45-46.

(U) ¹⁰ "Regional Grouping for Southeast Asia," summary of discussions of the NSC Planning Board, submitted by the Chairman, Robert Bowie, May 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(U) Aside from partition and regional security, a basis also existed for agreement to assisting the French in their diplomatic work by the device of some carefully worded warning to the Communists. The British, before as well as after Dienbienphu, were firmly against issuing threats to the Communists that involved military consequences. When united action had first been broached, London rejected raising the threat of a naval blockade and carrying it out if the Chinese continued to assist the Viet Minh.¹¹ Again, when united action came up in private U.S.-French discussions during May, the British saw no useful purpose in seeking to influence discussions at Geneva by making it known to the Communists that united action would follow a breakdown in negotiations.¹² The situation was different now. Instead of threatening direct military action, London and Washington apparently agreed, the West could profit from an open-ended warning tied to a lack of progress at Geneva. When Eden addressed the House of Commons on June 23 prior to emplaning for Washington, he said: "It should be clear to all that the hopes of agreement [at Geneva] would be jeopardized if active military operations in Indochina were to be intensified while negotiations for an armistice are proceeding at Geneva. If this reminder is needed, I hope that it may be heeded."¹³ Eden was specifically thinking of a renewed Viet Minh offensive in the Delta, but was not saying what might happen once negotiations were placed in jeopardy.

(U) ¹¹Eden, Full Circle, p. 104.

(U) ¹²Ibid., p. 135.

(U) ¹³Ibid., p. 147.

This type of warning was sounded again at the conclusion of the Anglo-American talks, and encouragement for it came from Paris. In the same aide-memoire of June 26 in which the French Government had requested that the United States counsel Saigon against a violent reaction to partition, Washington was also urged to join with London in a declaration. The declaration would "state in some fashion or other that, if it is not possible to reach a reasonable settlement at the Geneva Conference, a serious aggravation of international relations would result...."¹⁴ The French suggestion was acted upon. Eisenhower and Churchill issued a statement on June 29 that "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated."¹⁵ In retrospect, the statement may have had an important bearing on the Communists' negotiating position -- a point to which we shall return subsequently.

(U) The joint statement referred to "an acceptable agreement," and indeed the ramifications of that phrase constituted the main subject of the U.S.-UK talks. In an unpublicized agreement, the two governments concurred on a common set of principles which, if worked into the settlement terms, would enable both to "respect" the armistice. These principles, known subsequently as the

(U) ¹⁴In Dulles' tel. No. 4852 to the American Embassy, Paris, June 28, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁵New York Times, June 29, 1954, p. 2.

(U) Seven Points, were communicated to the French. As reported by Eden, they were:¹⁶

- (1) Preservation of the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia, and assurance of Viet Minh withdrawal from those countries
- (2) Preservation of at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta, with the line of demarcation no further south than one running generally west from Dong Hoi
- (3) No restrictions on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers"
- (4) No "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"
- (5) No provision that would "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means"
- (6) Provision for "the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam"
- (7) Provision for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement."

~~TOP SECRET~~ The Seven Points represented something of an American diplomatic victory when viewed in the context of the changed Administration position on partition. While any loss of territory to the Communists predetermined the official American attitude toward the settlement -- Eden

(U) ¹⁶Eden, Full Circle, p. 149.

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) was told the United States would almost certainly be unable to guarantee it¹⁷ -- the terms agreed upon with the British were sufficiently hard that, if pushed through by the French, they would bring about a tolerable arrangement for Indochina. The sticking point for Washington lay not in the terms but in the unlikelihood that the British, any more than the French, would actually stand by them against the Communists. Thus, Dulles wrote: "...we have the distinct impression that the British look upon this [memorandum of the Seven Points] merely as an optimum solution and that they would not encourage the French to hold out for a solution as good as this." The Secretary observed that the British, during the talks, were unhappy about finding Washington ready only to "respect" the final terms reached at Geneva. They had preferred a stronger word, yet they "wanted to express these 7 points merely as a 'hope' without any indication of firmness on our part." The United States, quite aside from what was said in the Seven Points, "would not want to be associated in any way with a settlement which fell materially short of the 7 point memorandum."¹⁸ Thus, the seven points, while having finally bound the United States and Great Britain to a common position on the conference, did not allay Washington's anxiety over British and French readiness to conclude a less-than-satisfactory settlement. The possibility of a unilateral American withdrawal from the conference was

(U) ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

(U) ¹⁸ Dulles to American Embassy, Paris, "eyes only" priority tel. for Dillon, No. 52, July 3, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ still being "given consideration," Dulles reported,¹⁹ even as the Seven Points were agreed upon.

~~(S)~~ Despite reservations about our Allies' adherence to the Seven Points, the United States still hoped to get French approval of them. On July 6, Dillon telegraphed the French reaction as given him by Parodi, the secretary-general of the cabinet. With the exception of Point 5, denoting national elections, the French were in agreement. They were confused about an apparent conflict between the elections provision and Point 4, under which political provisions, which would include elections, were not to risk loss of retained Vietnam. In addition, they, too, felt American agreement merely to "respect" any agreement was too weak a term, and requested clarification of its meaning.²⁰

~~(S)~~ Dulles responded the next day (July 7) to both matters. Points 4 and 5 were not in conflict, he said. It was quite possible that an agreement in line with the Seven Points might still not prevent Indochina from going Communist. The important thing, therefore, was to arrange for national elections in a way that would give the South Vietnamese a liberal breathing spell:

...since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements [in South Vietnam] best chance. . We believe important that no date should

(U) 19 Ibid.

(U) 20 Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 50, July 6, 1954 (Secret).

be set now and especially that no conditions should be accepted by French which would have direct or indirect effect of preventing effective international supervision of agreement ensuring political as well as military guarantees.

And so far as "respect" of that agreement was concerned, the United States and Britain meant they "would not oppose a settlement which conformed to Seven Points.... It does not of course mean we would guarantee such settlement or that we would necessarily support it publicly. We consider 'respect' as strong a word as we can possibly employ in the circumstances.... 'Respect' would also mean that we would not seek directly or indirectly to upset settlement by force."²¹

(U) Dulles' clarification of the American position on elections in Vietnam, together with his delimitation of the nation's obligation towards a settlement, did not satisfy the French completely but served the important purpose of enlightening them as to American intentions. Placed beside the discussions with Eden and Churchill, the thrust of American diplomacy at this time clearly was to leave no question in the minds of our allies as to what we considered the elements in a reasonable Indochina settlement and what we would likely do once a settlement were achieved.

²¹ Dulles to American Embassy, Paris, tel. No. 77, July 7, 1954 (Secret). Regarding the U.S. view of a Ho Chi Minh electoral victory, we not only have the well-known comment of Eisenhower that Ho, at least in early 1954, would have garnered 80 percent of the vote. (See Mandate for Change [Garden City, New York: Doubleday], pp. 337-38.) In addition, there is a Department of State memorandum of conversation of May 31, 1954, in which Livingston Merchant reportedly "recognized the possibility that in Viet Nam Ho might win a plebiscite, if held today." (Top Secret)

XVI. TOWARD A SETTLEMENT: THE LAST THIRTY DAYS (U)

1. THE BARGAINING CONTINUES

[REDACTED] While the French and British pondered the implications of the Seven Points, bargaining continued behind the scenes against a background of further military advance by the Viet Minh. At about the same time the Viet Minh made their first specific partition proposal, their forces in the field completed their deployment from the Dienbienphu area. By mid-June, according to American intelligence, the Viet Minh were believed prepared for a massive attack in the Delta.¹ Another report spoke of their renewed attention to southern Annam and of an apparent buildup of military strength there.² Not surprisingly in light of these developments, the Viet Minh, in late June, responded to the French proposal of a division at the 18th parallel with a plan for a line in southern Annam running northwest from the 13th to the 14th parallel, i.e., from Tuy Hoa on the coast through Pleiku to the Cambodian border.³ Moreover, in secret talks with the French, the Viet Minh's vice-minister for national defense, Ta Quang Buu, also insisted on French withdrawal from the Delta within two months of a cease-fire, in contrast to French

(U) ¹ C.I.A. Intelligence report of June 16, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ² C.I.A. Intelligence reports of July 7 and 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³ See Chauvel's report in Johnson's priority tel. SECTO 553 from Geneva, July 2, 1954 (Top Secret), and Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 238.

[REDACTED]

(S) demands for a four-month interval.⁴ As suggested by Lacouture and Devillers, the Viet Minh may have been seeking to capitalize not only on their improved military position in the Delta, where French Union forces were still in retreat, but also on Mendès-France's reputation as a man of peace obviously desirous of a settlement.⁵

(S) This resurgence of Viet Minh toughness on terms for a cessation of hostilities applied also to Laos and Cambodia. In the military staff conferences that had begun separately on those two countries in late June, no progress was made. The Viet Minh indicated, in the Laotian case, that they had already withdrawn; if forces opposing the royal government remained (as in fact some 15,000 did), negotiations with the resistance groups would have to be undertaken.⁶ Thus, despite Chou En-lai's claim that Viet Minh withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia could easily be accomplished, the Viet Minh were hardly ready to move out unless they received substantial guarantees (such as a permanent regroupment area), which the royal governments refused to give.

(S) Whether because of or in spite of Viet Minh intransigence, the Chinese forcefully made known their earnest desire to keep the conference moving. In an important encounter at Bern on June 23, Chou En-lai

(U) ⁴ Ibid., pp. 238-39, and Dillon's tel. from Paris No. 32, July 2, 1954 (Top Secret)

(U) ⁵ La fin d'une guerre, pp. 239-40.

(U) ⁶ C.I.A. Intelligence report of June 30, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ several times emphasized to Mendès-France that the main thing was a cease-fire, on which he hoped progress could be made before all the heads of delegation returned to Geneva. Regarding Laos and Cambodia, Chou thought regroupment areas for the insurgents would be necessary, but reiterated that national unity was the affair of the royal governments; he hoped the resistance elements might find a place in the national life of their respective countries. Chou told the French premier, as he had told Eden previously, that no American bases could be permitted in those countries; yet Chou spoke sympathetically of the French Union. Turning finally to the Viet Minh, Chou urged that direct contact be established between them and the Vietnamese. He promised that for his part, he would see that the Viet Minh were thoroughly prepared for serious discussions on a military settlement.⁷ Clearly, the Chinese were far more interested in moving forward toward a cease-fire than were their Viet Minh counterparts.

~~(S)~~ Even though the Viet Minh were making demands that the French, Cambodians, and Laotians could not accept, the debate was narrowing to specifics. The question when national elections in Vietnam should be held is illustrative. The Viet Minh did not budge from their insistence that elections occur six months after the cease-fire. But the French, attempting to make some headway in the talks, retreated from insistence on setting no date (a position the Vietnamese had supported) and offered to hold elections 18 months after completion of the regroupment process,

(U) ⁷ Johnson tel. SECTO 517 from Geneva, June 24, 1954 (Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(S) or between 22 and 23 months after the cessation of hostilities.⁸ The French now admitted that while they still looked forward to retaining Haiphong and the Catholic bishoprics as long as possible, perhaps in some neutral environment, total withdrawal from the north would probably be necessary to avoid cutting up Vietnam into enclaves.⁹ But partition in any manner faced the French with hostile Vietnamese, and it was for this reason that Chauvel not only suggested American intervention to induce Vietnamese self-control, but also received Pham Van Dong's approval, in a conversation July 6, to having the military commands rather than governments sign the final armistice so as to avoid having to win Vietnamese consent.¹⁰ As Ngo Dinh Diem, who became prime minister June 18, suspected, the French were prepared to pull out of Tonkin as part of the cease-fire arrangements.¹¹

~~(S)~~ On the matter of control and supervision, the debate also became more focused even as the gulf between opposing views remained wide. The chief points of contention were, as before, the composition and authority of

(U) ⁸ Dillon from Paris tel. No. 32, July 2, 1954
(Top Secret).

(U) ⁹ See Dulles tel. No. 4852 to Paris, June 28, 1954
(Top Secret), and Smith's tel SECTO 560, July 6, 1954
(Top Secret).

(U) ¹⁰ In ibid.

~~(S)~~ ¹¹ Based on a C.I.A. source, a nationalist southern Vietnamese with "extensive" political contacts, who reported in addition that Diem had come to believe that the French wanted only to maintain a foothold in the south through such independent sources as the religious sects. C.I.A. report CS-42198, July 14, 1954, from Saigon (Secret). Lacouture and Devillers hold that Diem first

[REDACTED]

the neutral supervisory body; but the outlines of an acceptable arrangement were beginning to form. Thus, on composition, the Communist delegations, in early July, began speaking in terms of an odd-numbered (three or five) neutral commission chaired by India, with pro-Communist and pro-Western governments equally sharing the remaining two or four places.¹² Second, on the powers of that body, dispute persisted as to whether it would have separate but parallel authority with the joint commissions or supreme authority; whether and on what questions it would make judgments by unanimous vote; and whether it would (as the French proposed) be empowered to issue majority and minority reports in case of disagreement. These were all fundamental issues, but the important point is that the Communist side refused to consider them irremovable obstacles to agreement. As Molotov's understudy, Kuznetsov (the deputy foreign minister), put it, the Soviet and French proposals on control and supervision revealed "rapprochement in the points of view on certain questions. It is true with respect to the relationships between the mixed commission and the international supervisory commission. This rapprochement exists also in regard to the question of the examination of the functions and

learned of partition on July 12, when Ambassador Heath handed him a personal letter from Eisenhower; the prime minister was said to have been stupefied. La fin d'une guerre, pp. 256-57.

(U) ¹² See, e.g., U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/21, July 6, 1954, p. 4 (Confidential) for comments by Li K'e-nung, deputy head-of-delegation for the CPR.

[REDACTED]

✓) duties of the commission...."¹³ In fact, a "rapprochement" did not exist; but the Soviets, interestingly, persisted in their optimism that a solution could be found.

2. CHINESE DIPLOMACY

(U) While the negotiations went on among the second-string diplomats, a different kind of diplomacy was being carried on elsewhere. Chou En-lai, en route to Peking, advanced Communist China's effort, actually begun in late 1952, to woo its Asian neighbors with talk of peaceful coexistence. This diplomatic offensive, which was to have an important bearing on the outcome at Geneva, had borne its first fruit in April 1954, when Chou reached agreement with Nehru over Tibet. At that time, the Chinese first introduced the "five principles" they vowed to follow in their relations with other nations.¹⁴

(U) Chou's first stopover was in New Delhi, the scene of his initial success. On June 28 he and Nehru reaffirmed the five principles and expressed the hope that a peaceful settlement in Indochina would be concluded in conformity with them.¹⁵ Similar sentiments appeared in a

(U) ¹³ Ibid., July 2, 1954 (20th Restricted Session), pp. 9-10 (Confidential).

(U) ¹⁴ The five principles are: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

(U) ¹⁵ NCNA (New Delhi), June 28, 1954, in U.S. Consulate General, Hong Kong, Survey of China Mainland Press, No. 838 (June 29, 1954), pp. 5-6.

UNCLASSIFIED

-195-

(U) joint statement from Rangoon, scene of talks with Prime Minister U Nu. Promises were exchanged, moreover, for the maintenance of close contact between China and Burma, and support was voiced for the right of countries having different social systems to coexist without interference from outside. "Revolution cannot be exported," the joint statement proclaimed; "at the same time outside interference with the common will expressed by the people of any nation should not be permitted."¹⁶

(U) Peking made full use of these diplomatic achievements by contrasting them with the American policy of ruthless expansionism, which Peking said was carried out by Washington under the label of opposing Communism. Peking proclaimed that the era of colonialism which the United States was seeking to perpetuate in Indochina had come to an end. "A new era has dawned in which Asian countries can coexist peacefully and establish friendly relations on the basis of respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty and mutual non-aggression," said Jen-min jih-pao.¹⁷ Another newspaper, Kuang-ming jih-pao, offered similar testimony to the inspirational effect of the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese agreements, considering them to conform to the interests of all Asian peoples. The daily castigated the American

(U) ¹⁶NCNA (Peking), broadcast of June 29, 1954.

(U) ¹⁷People's Daily, July 2, 1954, as broadcast by NCNA, same date.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-196-

"policy of strength" as being totally incompatible with the five principles.¹⁸ Clearly, China was exploiting its gains through diplomacy not simply to acquire Asian support (and thus detract from pro-Westernism in the region), but more broadly to muster recognition for China as the leading Asian power in the fight against "imperialism" and "colonialism."

(U) Chou's diplomatic efforts took a different turn, it seems, when he met with Ho Chi Minh at Nanning, on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, from July 3-5. Although the final communique merely stated that the two leaders "had a full exchange of views on the Geneva Conference with respect to the question of the restoration of peace in Indochina and related questions,"¹⁹ it subsequently appeared that much more may have taken place. According to observers in Hong Kong, Chou pressed for the meeting out of fear that the Viet Minh might engage in intensified military action that would destroy chances for an armistice and upset China's budding role as an Asian peacemaker.²⁰ Conceivably, Chou sought to persuade Ho that his territorial gains were about as much as he could expect at that juncture without risking an end to negotiations and renewed American attempts to forge a military alliance for intervention. To judge from the Viet Minh reaction to the

(U) ¹⁸ Kuang-ming jih-pao editorial of July 4, 1954, in NCNA broadcast of same day.

(U) ¹⁹ NCNA (Peking) broadcast of July 7, 1954.

(U) ²⁰ Agence France-Presse report from Hong Kong, broadcast July 7, 1954.

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) talks, Ho was not completely satisfied with Chou's proposed tactics.²¹

~~(U)~~ Momentarily leaving aside Chou's motivations, it is vital to note the impact of the talks on the Geneva negotiations. On July 9, Chauvel dined with Li K'e-nung and Chang Wen-t'ien, a vice-minister for foreign affairs and CPR ambassador to the Soviet Union. Chauvel opened the conversation -- as he later recounted to Johnson -- by complaining that discussions with the Viet Minh were not going well, that Viet Minh demands were exorbitant²² and well beyond Chou En-lai's stated position. The Chinese delegates evinced surprise but said nothing in direct reply. However, Chang did report that Chou had had a "very good meeting" with Ho Chi Minh, the results of which

(U) ²¹ This is the interpretation the author would attach to a Nhan Dan article of July 8 (broadcast in Vietnamese by VNA, same date). Pointing out that Chou and Ho had "examined various methods" for achieving peace in Indochina, the article noted that peace required the efforts of the other side (the French) as well. Thus, while the Nanning talks had "brought our people new hopes," it was stressed that "we must intensify our fighting efforts and always remember President Ho's teachings: 'Like the military struggle, the diplomatic struggle must necessarily be long, drawn-out and hard to achieve [victory].'" (Emphasis supplied.)

(U) ²² Chauvel reported that at a July 8 meeting with Viet Minh representatives, presumably in an "underground" session, they proposed fixing the demarcation line some 40 kilometers north of Tuyhoa and neutralizing the Delta for three months to permit evacuation of the French Expeditionary Corps. These proposals, although improvements on the Viet Minh's earlier positions, were rejected outright by the French.

~~(S)~~ "would be helpful to French." Chauvel received the impression -- one which seems, in retrospect, to have been accurate -- that the Viet Minh had been given a free hand by the Soviets and Chinese up to the point where their demands were unacceptable to the French, at which time the Soviets and/or Chinese felt compelled to intervene.²³ If such was the case, Chou's talk with Ho, coming after Mendès-France and his negotiators showed no sign of being more compromising than their predecessors, Laniel and Bidault, may have been intended to inform the Viet Minh that the "point" had been reached and that they had to soften their demands if a settlement were ever to be attained.

3. THE FRANCO-AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING

~~(S)~~ Precisely how Chou's stopover in Nanning would be "helpful" to the French did not become apparent until four days after Chauvel's conversation with Li and Chang. By that time, the French had been engaged in intensive conversations with the Americans, the aim of which was to convince Washington that the United States, to be truly influential at the conference -- to realize, in other words, a settlement in line with the Seven Points -- had to back the French with a high-level representative in Geneva. Unless the United States did more than offer its views from afar on an acceptable settlement, Mendès-France argued, France could not be expected to present a strong front when Molotov and Chou resumed their places. As

(U) ²³ In Johnson's tel. SECTO 578 from Geneva, July 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ though to prove his determination to stand fast against Communist demands, Mendès-France told Ambassador Dillon in Paris that if a cease-fire was not agreed to by July 20, the premier would approve the dispatch of conscripts to Indochina and would introduce a law into Parliament to that effect on July 21. His government would not resign until that law passed; the ships would be prepared to transport the conscripts to Indochina beginning July 25.²⁴

~~(S)~~ Despite Mendès-France's willingness to establish a deadline and, for the first time in the history of French involvement in Indochina, to conscript soldiers for service there, Washington remained opposed to upgrading its Geneva delegation. Sensitive as much to any proposal that might implicate the United States in the final settlement terms as to Mendès-France's difficulties at the conference table, Dulles believed the French would end by accepting a settlement unsatisfactory to the United States whether or not the USDEL were upgraded.²⁵ As he explained to Dillon, were he (the Secretary) or Smith to return to Geneva only to find the French compelled to negotiate an unacceptable agreement anyway, the United States would be required to dissociate itself in a manner "which would be deeply resented by the French as an effort on our part to block at the last minute a peace which they ardently desire," with possible "irreparable injury to Franco-

(U) ²⁴ Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 66, July 6, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²⁵ Dulles "eyes only" tel. NIACT 101 to Aldrich in London, July 7, 1954 (Top Secret).

(S) American relations...." The least embarrassing alternative, Dulles felt, was to avoid the probability of having to make a "spectacular disassociation" by staying away from the conference altogether.²⁶

(S) When Dulles' position was reported to Mendès-France, the premier said he understood the Americans' reluctance but considered it misplaced. The American fear of in some way becoming committed to the settlement, he said, was precisely his dilemma, for he had no idea what the Communists would propose in the crucial days ahead. The French negotiating position was the Seven Points, he went on, and would not deviate substantially from them. With great feeling, Mendès-France told a member of the American Embassy that the presence of Dulles or Smith was "absolutely essential and necessary"; without either of them, the Communists would sense and seek to capitalize on a lack of unity in the allied camp. "Mendès indicated that our high-level presence at Geneva had direct bearing on where Communists would insist on placing line of demarcation or partition in Vietnam."²⁷

(S) These arguments did not prove convincing to Washington. On July 10, Dulles wrote Mendès-France a personal message reiterating that his or General Smith's presence would serve no useful purpose. And Dulles again raised doubts that France, Britain, and the United States were really agreed on a single negotiating position:

(U) ²⁶ Dulles priority tel. to Dillon in Paris No. 85, July 8, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²⁷ Dillon priority tel. No. 118 from Paris, July 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ What now concerns us is that we are very doubtful as to whether there is a united front in relation to Indochina, and we do not believe that the mere fact that the high representatives of the three nations physically reappear together at Geneva will serve as a substitute for a clear agreement on a joint position which includes agreement as to what will happen if that position is not accepted by the Communists. We fear that unless there is the reality of such a united front, the events at Geneva will expose differences under conditions which will only serve to accentuate them with consequent strain upon the relations between our two countries greater than if the US does not reappear at Geneva, in the person of General Smith or myself.²⁸

The Secretary questioned whether the Seven Points truly represented a common "minimum acceptable solution" which the three Allies were willing to fight for in the event the Communists rejected them. Charging that the Seven Points were actually "merely an optimum solution" for Paris no less than for London, Dulles sought to demonstrate that the French were already moving away from the Seven Points. He cited apparent French willingness to permit Communist forces to remain in northern Laos, to accept a demarcation line "considerably south of Donghoi," to neutralize and demilitarize Laos and Cambodia, and to permit "elections so early and so ill-prepared and ill-supervised as to risk the loss of the entire area to Communism" as evidences of a "whittling-away process" which, cumulatively, could destroy the intent of the Seven Points.²⁹ Unquestionably, the Secretary's firm opposition

(U) ²⁸Dulles tel. No. 127 to Dillon in Paris, July 10, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ²⁹Ibid.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-202-

~~(S)~~ to restoring to the American delegation its high rank was grounded in intense suspicion of an ultimate French sell-out, yet suspicion based on apparent misinformation concerning both the actual French position and the degree of French willingness to stand firm.

~~(S)~~ Thus believing that the French had already gone far toward deflating some of the major provisions of the U.S.-UK memorandum, Dulles reiterated the Administration's position that it had the right "not to endorse a solution which would seem to us to impair seriously certain principles which the US believes must, as far as it is concerned, be kept unimpaired, if our own struggle against Communism is to be successfully pursued." Perhaps seeking to rationalize the impact of his rejection, Dulles wrote in closing that the American decision might actually assist the French: "If our conduct creates a certain uncertainty in the minds of the Communists, this might strengthen your hand more than our presence at Geneva...."³⁰ Mendès-France had been rebuffed, however, and while Dulles left the door slightly ajar for his or Smith's return if "circumstances" should change, it seemed more probable that France would have to work for a settlement with only the British alongside.

~~(S)~~ The Dulles-Mendès-France exchanges were essentially an exercise in credibility, with the French premier desperately seeking to persuade the Secretary that Paris really did support and really would abide by the Seven Points. When Mendès-France read Dulles' letter, he

(U) ³⁰Ibid.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ protested that France would accept nothing unacceptable to the United States, and went so far as to say that Dulles' presence at the conference would give him a veto power, in effect, on the decisions taken. Beyond that, Mendès-France warned of the catastrophic impact of an American withdrawal on the American position in Europe no less than in the Far East; withdrawal, he said, was sure to be interpreted as a step toward isolationism. Asked what alternative his government had in mind if the conference failed even with an American high-level presence, Mendès-France replied there would have to be full internationalization of the war.³¹

~~(S)~~ Mendès-France's persistence was sufficiently persuasive to move Dulles, on July 13, to fly to Paris to document the premier's support of the Seven Points. On the 14th, the Secretary and the premier signed a memorandum which duplicated that agreed to by the United States and Great Britain.³² In addition, a position paper was drawn up the same day reiterating that the United States was at

~~(S)~~ ³¹ Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 134, July 11, 1954 (Top Secret). The same day, Mendès-France had told Dillon again of France's intention to send conscripts, with parliamentary approval, by July 25, with two divisions ready for action by about September 15. The premier said that while he could not predict how the Assembly would react, he personally saw the need for direct American involvement in the war once negotiations broke down and the conscripts were sent. Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 133, July 11, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³² "Memorandum of Points Referred to in Paragraph 2 of the France-United States Position Paper," July 14, 1954 (Secret).

~~the~~ the conference as "a friendly nation" whose role was subordinate to that of the primary non-Communist parties, the Associated States and France. The Seven Points were described, as they had been some two weeks earlier, as those acceptable to the "primarily interested nations" and which the United States could "respect." However, should terms ultimately be concluded which differed markedly from the Seven Points, France agreed that the United States would neither be asked nor expected to accept them, and "may publicly disassociate itself from such differing terms" by a unilateral or multilateral statement.³³

~~the~~ One of Dulles' objections had been that a true united front did not exist so long as agreement was lacking on allied action in the event of no settlement. On this point, too, the French were persuaded to adopt the American position. In the event of a settlement, it was agreed in the position paper that the United States would "seek, with other interested nations, a collective defense association designed to preserve, against direct and indirect aggression, the integrity of the non-Communist areas of Southeast Asia...." Should no settlement be forthcoming, U.S.-France consultations would take place; but these would not preclude the United States from bringing "the matter" before the UN as a threat to the peace. Previous obstacles to French objections to UN involvement were nonexistent, for France reaffirmed in the position paper its commitment under the June 4 treaty of independence with Vietnam that Saigon,

(U) ³³ Annex A to Dulles letter to Smith of July 16, 1954, signed July 14 by Dulles and Mendès-France (Secret).

~~as~~ as well as Vientiane and Phnom Penh, was an "equal and voluntary" partner in the French Union, and hence no longer subject in its foreign policy to French diktat.

~~On~~ On all but one matter, now, the United States and France were in complete accord on a negotiating strategy. That matter was, of course, the American delegation. Mendès-France had formally subscribed to the Seven Points and had agreed to American plans for dealing with the aftermath of the conference; yet he had gained nothing for the French delegation. Writing to the Secretary, the premier pointed out again:

In effect, I have every reason to think that your absence would be precisely interpreted as demonstrating, before the fact, that you disapproved of the conference and of everything which might be accomplished. Not only would those who are against us find therein the confirmation of the ill will which they attribute to your government concerning the reestablishment of peace in Indochina; but many others would read in it a sure sign of a division of the western powers.³⁴

Once more, Mendès-France was putting forth the view that a high-level American representation at the conference would do more to ensure a settlement in conformity with the Seven Points than private U.S.-French agreement to them.

~~For~~ For reasons not entirely clear, but perhaps the consequence of Eisenhower's personal intervention, Mendès-France's appeal was now favorably received in Washington. Dulles was able to inform the premier on July 14: "In the light of what you say and after

(U) 34. In Dulles priority tel. No. 179 from Paris, July 14, 1954 (Secret).

~~(S)~~ consultation with President Eisenhower, I am glad to be able to inform you that the President and I are asking the Under Secretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith, to prepare to return at his earliest convenience to Geneva to share in the work of the conference on the basis of the understanding which we have arrived at."³⁵ For the first time since late 1953, the United States and France were solidly joined in a common front on Indochina policy.

~~(S)~~ In accordance with the understandings reached with France, Smith was sent new instructions on July 16 based upon the Seven Points.³⁶ After reiterating the passive formal role the United States was to play at the conference, Dulles informed his Under Secretary he was to issue a unilateral (or, if possible, multilateral) statement should a settlement be reached that "conforms substantially" to the Seven Points. "The United States will not, however, become cosignatory with the Communists in any Declaration," Dulles wrote with reference to the procedure then being discussed at Geneva of drafting military accords and a final declaration on a political settlement. Nor should the United States, Smith's instructions went on, be put in a position where it could be held responsible for guaranteeing the results of the conference. Smith's efforts should be directed, Dulles summed up, toward forwarding ideas to the "active negotiators," France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

(U) ³⁵Ibid.

(U) ³⁶Dulles letter to Smith, July 16, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~SECRET~~ This last point of guidance referred to the possibility of a breakdown in the negotiations. Should no settlement be reached, the United States delegation was to avoid permitting the French to believe that outcome was the result of American advice or pressure, and that in some way the United States was morally obligated to intervene militarily in Indochina. The United States, Dulles wrote, was "not prepared at the present time to give any commitment that it will intervene in the war if the Geneva Conference fails...." While this stricture almost certainly reflected the President's and the Joint Chiefs' extreme reluctance to become committed, in advance, to a war already past the point of return, it was also doubtless a reaction to Mendès-France's intimations to Dillon of French willingness to reconsider active American involvement if the conference failed.

~~SECRET~~ With French and British adherence to the Seven Points promised by written agreement, the United States had gone about as far as it could toward ensuring an acceptable settlement without becoming tied to it. The Administration still apparently believed that the final terms would violate the Seven Points in several significant respects;³⁷ but by making clear in advance that any

~~SECRET~~ ³⁷ Thus, on July 15 (one day after the Franco-American agreements), the National Security Council, after being briefed on the Geneva situation, decided that the likely settlement would go against the Seven Points. The NSC was told the Communists would: (1) seek partition of Vietnam somewhere between the 14th and 18th parallels; (2) demand control of some part of Laos, neutralization of the remainder, and agreement on the formation of a coalition government; (3) ask neutralization of Cambodia

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~the~~ settlement would be met with a unilateral American declaration rather than Bedell Smith's signature, the United States had at least guaranteed its retention of a moral advantage, useful particularly in placating domestic public opinion. In the event of an unsatisfactory settlement, Washington would be in a position to say that it had stood steadfastly by principle only to be undercut by "soft" Allies and Communist territorial ambitions.

4. THE FINAL WEEK OF BARGAINING

~~the~~ Prior to Smith's return, positions had tended to harden rather than change at Geneva, although the Viet Minh had yielded a trifle on partition. Chang Wen-t'ien's encouraging remark to Chauvel of July 9 had been fulfilled four days later, as already indicated. The final signal was Chou's comment to Mendès-France on the 13th that both sides, French and Viet Minh, had to make concessions on the demarcation problem, but that this "does not signify that each must take the same number of steps."³⁸ That same day, Pham Van Dong told the French premier the Viet Minh were willing to settle on the 16th parallel.³⁹

~~the~~ and some form of recognition for the Free Khmer movement. Were the Communists to accept the Dong Hoi line for Vietnam, they would then demand an enclave in southern Vietnam plus part of Laos, or simply extend the Dong Hoi line through Laos. (Top Secret).

(U) ³⁸ Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, pp. 257-58; see in addition a C.I.A. intelligence report of July 13 from the U.S. Delegation, July 14, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³⁹ Ibid.

(U) Dong's territorial concession meant little to the French, however, and, as the negotiations continued, it became plain that the Viet Minh were not concerned about Mendès-France's July 20 deadline. Yet the Chinese remained optimistic, at least publicly. Jen-min jih-pao's Geneva reporter, for instance, wrote July 12 that while no solution had yet been worked out on the control and supervision problem, "there seems no reason why agreement cannot be reached." As for defining the regroupment areas, the correspondent asserted that "speedy agreement would seem probable after the return of the Foreign Ministers of the Big Powers...." So long as all parties were "sincere," he wrote, agreement would indeed come about.⁴⁰

~~✍~~ The miniscule progress made on settling the Vietnam problem loomed large in comparison with the seemingly unbreakable log jam that had developed over Laos and Cambodia. Since the major Communist concessions of mid-June, which had at least paved the way for separating Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam for discussion purposes, virtually nothing had been accomplished toward cease-fires. Debate on Laos and Cambodia occupied the spotlight again on July 9 when, from the remarks of the Chinese delegate (Li K'e-nung), it quickly became apparent that for all their willingness to discuss the withdrawal of Viet Minh troops, the Chinese remained greatly concerned about possible Laotian and Cambodian rearmament and alignment. Simply put, the Chinese were negotiating for their own security, not for Viet Minh territorial advantage.

(U) ⁴⁰ People's Daily, July 12, 1954, in an NCNA broadcast of same date.

~~As~~ As Chou had pointed out to Eden in June, the CPR's major concern was that Cambodia and Laos might, after a settlement, be left free to negotiate for a permanent American military presence. In his presentation, therefore, Li K'e-nung insisted that the two countries not be permitted to acquire fresh troops, military personnel, arms, and ammunition except as might be strictly required for self-defense; nor should they, he held, allow foreign military bases to be established. Li formalized Chou's passing remark to Eden that China was not much disturbed by French Union (as opposed to American) technicians. Li allowed that French military personnel to assist the training of the Laotian and Cambodian armies was a matter that "can be studied."⁴¹

~~The~~ The Cambodian case, presented by Foreign Minister Sam Sary, revealed a stubborn independence that was to assist the country greatly in the closing days of the conference. Sam Sary said that foreign bases would indeed not be authorized on Khmer soil "only as far as there is no menace against Cambodia.... If our security is imperiled, Cambodia will keep its legitimate right to defend itself by all means." As for foreign instructors and technicians, his government wished to retain those Frenchmen then in Cambodia; he was pleased to note Li K'e-nung's apparent acceptance of this arrangement. Finally, with regard to the importation of arms, Sam Sary differentiated between a limitation on quantity (which his

(U) ⁴¹U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted/22, July 9, 1954, pp. 3-4 (Confidential).

~~TOP SECRET~~

-211-

~~the~~ government accepted) and on quality (which his government wished to have a free hand in determining).⁴²

~~the~~ While the Chinese publicly castigated the Cambodians for working with the Americans to threaten "the security of Cambodia's neighboring countries under the pretext of self-defense,"⁴³ the Americans gave the Cambodians encouragement. In Washington, Phnom Penh's ambassador, Nong Kimny, met with Dulles on July 10. Nong Kimny said his government would oppose the neutralization and demilitarization of the country; Dulles replied that hopefully Cambodia would become a member of the collective security arrangement envisaged in American-British plans. Cambodia, the Secretary said, possessed a kind of independence superior to that in Vietnam and Laos, and as such should indeed oppose Communist plans to neutralize and demilitarize her. As an independent state, Cambodia was entitled to seek outside military and economic assistance.⁴⁴

~~the~~ The Laotian delegation was also experiencing difficulties, though with the Viet Minh rather than the Chinese. The Viet Minh negotiators, in the military command conferences, insisted on making extraneous demands concerning the Pathet Lao. The Laotians were concerned not so much with the demands as with the possibility of a private French deal with the Viet Minh that would subvert the Laotian position. A member of the royal

(U) ⁴² Ibid., pp. 10-11 (Confidential).

(U) ⁴³ NCNA (Peking) broadcast of July 10, 1954.

(U) ⁴⁴ Memorandum of conversation between Ambassador Nong Kimny and Dulles, July 10, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ government's delegation went to Johnson to be assured that a behind-the-scenes deal would not occur. The delegate said Laos hoped to be covered by and to participate in a Southeast Asia collective security pact.⁴⁵ Johnson did not guarantee that this arrangement could be worked out; but as the conference drew to a close, as we shall see, the United States made it clear to the Cambodians and Laotians that their security would in some fashion be taken care of under the SEATO treaty.

~~(S)~~ Irresolution over Cambodia and Laos, a continuing wide gap between French and Viet Minh positions on the partition line, and no progress on the control and supervision dilemma were the highlights of the generally dismal scene that greeted General Smith on his return July 16 to the negotiating wars. Smith apparently took heart, however, in the steadfastness of Mendès-France, although the Under Secretary also observed that the Communists had reacted to this by themselves becoming unmoving. Smith attributed Communist intransigence to the probability that "Mendès-France has been a great disappointment to the Communists both as regards the relatively firm position he has taken on Indochina and his attitude toward EDC. They may therefore wish to force him out of the government by making settlement here impossible."⁴⁶

~~(S)~~ Actually, what had disturbed the Communists most was not so much Mendès-France's firmness as Smith's

(U) ⁴⁵ Johnson tel. SECTO 593, July 12, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ⁴⁶ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 636, July 17, 1954 (Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(~~TS~~) return. That became clear following a private meeting requested by a member of the CPR delegation, Huang Hua, with Seymour Topping, the New York Times correspondent at Geneva. Topping, as the Chinese must have expected, reported the conversation to the American delegation. He said Huang Hua, speaking in deadly earnest and without propagandistic overtones, had interpreted Smith's return as an American attempt to prevent a settlement. Indeed, according to Huang Hua, the Paris talks between Dulles and Mendès-France on July 13 and 14 had been primarily responsible for Mendès-France's stubbornness; the French premier had obviously concluded a deal with the United States in which he agreed to raise the price for a settlement.⁴⁷

(U) Overt Chinese statements in this period lent credence to Topping's report. First, Peking was far from convinced that continued discussions on the restoration of peace in Indochina removed the possibility of dramatic new military moves by the United States. Washington was accused, as before the conference, of desiring to intervene in Indochina so as to extend the war there into "a new military venture on China's southern borders."⁴⁸ In support of this contention, Peking cited such provocative moves as trips during April and June by General James A. Van Fleet ("the notorious butcher of the Korean War") to Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, for the purpose of establishing a North Pacific military alliance; American intentions of

(U) ⁴⁷ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 661, July 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁴⁸ People's Daily, July 13, 1954, in NCNA (Peking) broadcast of same date.

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

-214-

(U) concluding a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan as the first step in Chiang Kai-shek's invasion plans; American efforts, through the five-power and later Eisenhower-Churchill talks, to create a Southeast Asia alliance for a military thrust into Indochina; and stepped-up U.S. military assistance, including training, for the Thai armed forces.⁴⁹

(U) Second, Peking was clearly disturbed that the French were still heeding American advice when the path to a settlement lay before them. In a People's Daily editorial of July 14, for instance, the French people and National Assembly were said to be strongly desirous of peace. Thus: "A policy running counter to French interests cannot work. France is a major world power. She should have her own independent and honorable path. This means following an independent foreign policy consistent with French national interests and the interests of world peace." The American alternative -- a Southeast Asia coalition with French participation -- should be rejected, the editorial intoned, and a settlement conforming to the five principles achieved instead.⁵⁰ In keeping with its line of previous months, Peking was attempting to demonstrate -- for Asian no less than for French ears -- that it had a keen interest in resolving the Indochina problem rather than seeing the conference give way to new American military pressures and a possibly wider war.

(U) ⁴⁹ Kuang-ming jih-pao, July 13, 1954, in NCNA (Peking) broadcast of same date; NCNA (Peking) broadcast of July 14, 1954.

(U) ⁵⁰ In an NCNA (Peking) broadcast of July 14, 1954.

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) Finally, Peking paid considerable attention to Dulles' stay in Paris and to his dispatch of Smith to Geneva. Dulles' sudden trip to the French capital was said to reveal American determination to obstruct progress in the negotiations by pressuring Mendès-France not to grasp the settlement that lay just around the corner.⁵¹ Dulles originally had no intention of upgrading the American delegation, according to Peking. "But Bedell Smith had to be sent back to Geneva because of strong criticism in the Western press, and Washington was fearful lest agreement could be reached quickly despite American boycotting of the conference."⁵² Yet China's optimism over a settlement did not diminish: "Chinese delegation circles," NCNA reported, "see no reason whatsoever why the Geneva Conference should play up to the U.S. policy and make no efforts towards achieving an agreement which is acceptable and satisfactory to all parties concerned and which is honorable for the two belligerent sides."⁵³ If Smith's return, then, was viewed from Peking as a challenge to its diplomatic ingenuity, the Chinese (and, we may surmise, the Soviets) were prepared to accept it.

~~53~~ In doing so, however, the Chinese evidently were not about to sacrifice in those areas of dispute where they had a special interest, namely, Laos and Cambodia. On July 14, Chou called on Nong Kimny to state China's

(U) ⁵¹ NCNA report from Geneva, broadcast from Peking July 14, 1954.

(U) ⁵² NCNA report from Geneva, broadcast from Peking July 15, 1954.

(U) ⁵³ NCNA report from Geneva of July 13, as broadcast in Peking, July 14, 1954.

~~S~~ position. The premier said first that, in accord with his recent talks with Nehru, U Nu, and Ho Chi Minh, he could report a unanimous desire for peace in Indochina, for the unity of each of the three Associated States, and for their future cordial relationship with the Colombo Powers. Chou then asked about the status of Cambodian talks with the Viet Minh. When Nong Kimny replied that Pham Van Dong, in two recent get-togethers, had insisted on interjecting political problems into discussions of a military settlement -- as by requesting Cambodia's retention of certain provincial officials appointed by the Free Khmers, and by suggesting the royal government's preservation of a Free Khmer youth movement -- Chou is said to have laughed off these claims and to have replied that these were indeed matters for Cambodia to handle by herself.

~~S~~ Chou had his own views on what Cambodia should and should not do, however, Khmer sovereignty should not mean discrimination against the resistance elements, the establishment of foreign military bases in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, or the conclusion of military alliances with other states. Chou was less adamant only on the subject of Cambodia's importation of arms and military personnel; when Nong Kimny flatly stated that Phnom Penh would absolutely reject any limitations inasmuch as these would be incompatible with Cambodian sovereignty, Chou did not contradict him. Instead, he promised to study the matter further and asked to know precisely what quantities of arms and personnel the royal government had in mind. Later on, he became a bit more flexible by saying that a prohibition

~~SECRET~~

-217-

~~on~~ on arms and personnel should apply only to the armistice period, not permanently. Only in Vietnam, Chou said, should there be a flat proscription against military equipment and troops.⁵⁴

~~Chou~~ Chou and Nong Kimny met again three days later, on July 17. On this occasion, Chou was obviously less conciliatory (as Nong Kimny reported), stating China's position more in terms of demands than suggestions. He urged the Cambodian government to incorporate resistance elements into the army, police, and civil service. But he reserved his emphasis for Cambodia's future security position. In a thinly-veiled warning, Chou said that should Cambodia join the pact, permit foreign bases on its territory, or accept American military instructors, "the consequences would be very serious and would aggravate the situation with unfortunate consequences for Cambodian independence and territorial integrity" (Smith's paraphrase). Cambodia could have French or British instructors, Chou said. But his three-fold limitation, obviously directed at assuring against future Cambodia-U.S. defense ties, remained -- and, he added, it applied to Laos and Vietnam as well.⁵⁵

~~The~~ The Chinese were clearly out to get from the conference what they could, without Russian assistance, before a settlement was concluded. Chou did not stop at warning Nong Kimny, either. On July 17 he took his case

(U) 54 Johnson tel. SECTO 616 from Geneva, July 15, 1954 (Secret).

(U) 55 Smith tel. from Geneva SECTO 635, July 17, 1954 (Secret).

(S) to Eden, telling the foreign secretary that while the CPR stood ready to join in guaranteeing the freedom and independence of all three Indochinese states, their membership in a Southeast Asia pact would change everything. Evidently intent on removing what he may have sensed was a possible last-minute obstacle, Eden replied that he knew of no proposal for including the Associated States in the pact, although he did not deny Anglo-American interest in forming a defense organization for Southeast Asia. Chou said he had no objections to ANZUS (it was directed against Japan, he thought), but he went into a lengthy discourse on the danger to China of having foreign bases in Indochina.⁵⁶

(S) Eden's assurances evidently did not impress Chou deeply. On July 18 Chou met with the Laotian foreign minister and presented "unofficial" but extravagant demands which the latter found totally unacceptable. Laos was willing to provide the resistance elements with regrouping zones in the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua; Chou proposed, additionally, portions of Luang Prabang and Xien Khouang provinces. The royal government was further willing to concede the insurgents freedom of movement in those zones, but Chou demanded administration by joint royal-insurgent committees and a supervisory joint committee in Vientiane until the general elections of August 1955. Finally, where the Laotians thought the issue of French Union bases had been resolved in their

(U) ⁵⁶ Smith tel SECTO 636 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (Secret), and Eden, Full Circle, p. 158.

~~the~~ favor, Chou now said the bases should be completely eliminated even though established by Franco-Laotian treaty.⁵⁷

~~the~~ Chou's obsession with foreign military bases and related issues led to an effort to make a settlement contingent upon Western acceptance of Chinese neutralization plans. A Chinese informant (probably Huang Hua) told Seymour Topping that Western willingness to bar foreign military bases from Indochina and to deny the Associated States admission to any military blocs would assure agreement by July 20. More than that, the informant said, the United States had also to subscribe to and guarantee the final settlement, evidently in the belief that America's signature would make Indochinese participation in SEATO illegal.⁵⁸ A more direct statement was made by NCNA's "special correspondent" in Geneva, who drew a harsh characterization of a cease-fire agreement that left the door open to Indochinese involvement in a military alliance:

If efforts are made at the same time negotiations for peace are taking place to drag the three Indochinese countries into an aggressive military bloc whose purpose is to unleash war, then the cease-fire would mean nothing other than a respite for adjusting battle lines and dispositions of strength in order to start the fighting again on an even larger scale. In such circumstances, the armistice agreement would become no more than a scrap of paper.⁵⁹

(U) ⁵⁷ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 663, July 19, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ⁵⁸ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 639, July 18, 1954 (Top Secret). The cable is an advance copy of Topping's dispatch to the New York Times citing a responsible Chinese informant who reflected Chou En-lai's views.

(U) ⁵⁹ NCNA (Peking) broadcast of July 18, 1954.

~~(S)~~ Whether the Chinese seriously believed either that the United States would sign the accords in order to achieve a settlement, or that Laos and Cambodia really could be kept out of the Southeast Asia collective defense system, is at best debatable. There seems little doubt, however, that Peking sincerely considered a written prohibition in the accords against Indochinese alliances or foreign bases as a major step toward the neutralization of Southeast Asia and the area's eventual dissociation from the American defense system.

~~(S)~~ General Smith felt that Topping's report dovetailed with growing Communist intransigence in the last few days, particularly on the part of Molotov. Smith believed that Molotov, who had urgently requested a restricted session for the 18th, would likewise raise the question of explicit American acquiescence in a final settlement.⁵⁰ When the meeting came, however, Molotov did not reiterate Huang Hua's implication that America's failure to sign the accords might scuttle the conference. Perhaps aware that a warning of that kind would not work, Molotov instead limited himself to talking of the conference's achievements to date. He complimented those who had been engaged in private negotiations, and went so far as to voice confidence that a settlement of outstanding problems relating to Laos and Cambodia could be achieved. He closed by pointing out that two drafts were before the conference relating to the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam and Laos, two on Cambodia, and two on a final declaration dealing with political matters. That ended

(U) ⁶⁰ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 639, July 18, 1954
(Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ Molotov's contribution, leaving the Americans, and probably others, wondering why the Soviet foreign minister had hastily summoned the meeting.⁶¹

5. AGREEMENT

(U) If Molotov's refusal at the July 18 restricted session to warn the conference of failure signaled renewed Communist efforts toward agreement, his subsequent actions proved the point. Between July 18 and 21, the conferees were able to iron out their differences sufficiently to produce agreements now commonly referred to as the Geneva "accords." In fact, the accords consist of military agreements for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to fulfill the conference's primary task of restoring peace to Indochina, and a Final Declaration designed to establish the conditions for future political settlements throughout Indochina. The nature of the eleventh-hour compromises reached, and a broad outline of the settlement, are treated below.

Vietnam

~~(S)~~ The Geneva accords temporarily established two zones of Vietnam separated by a line running roughly

~~(S)~~ ⁶¹ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 654, July 18, 1954 (Confidential), relating activities at the 23rd restricted session. Smith described the meeting as the "strangest performance to date." But he may have provided the clue to Molotov's call for the meeting when he commented in the same cable that Molotov had told Mendès-France just before sitting down that he intended to underline the conference's progress as a way of demonstrating how close the negotiations were to agreement.

~~TOP SECRET~~

-222-

(S) along the 17th parallel and further divided by a demilitarized zone. Agreement to the demarcation line was apparently the work of Molotov, who gained French acceptance of the 17th parallel when he found the French flatly opposed to the 16th, a late Viet Minh compromise perhaps prompted by Molotov himself.⁶² Precisely what motivated Molotov to make his proposal is not clear. Speculatively, he may simply have traded considerable territorial advantage which the Viet Minh enjoyed for a specific election date he, Chou, and Pham Van Dong wanted from the outset. The Western negotiators certainly recognized the trade-off possibility: Eden considered a line between the 17th and 18th parallels worth exchanging for a mutually acceptable position on elections;⁶³ and Mendès-France observed in a conversation with Molotov that the election and demarcation questions might be linked in the sense that each side could yield on one of the questions.⁶⁴

~~S~~ Whether or not a trade-off actually took place, the fact remains that the French came off much

(U) ⁶² See Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 632, July 17, 1954 (Secret) and Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 268. French refusal to accept the 16th parallel but to agree on the 17th apparently stemmed from the advice of General Ely, who responded to a telegram of July 15 from Mendès-France that a division at the 17th, by still retaining for France the cities of Hue and Tourane, as well as a direct route for Laos to the sea (Route 9), was an acceptable line. Ely, Mémoires, p. 203.

(U) ⁶³ Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 638, July 18, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ⁶⁴ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 632, July 17, 1954 (Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This page is SECRET)

~~SECRET~~

~~68~~ better in the matter of partition than on elections, which they had insisted not be given a specific date. On July 16, Molotov had proposed holding elections in 1955, with the exact date to be decided between Vietnamese and Viet Minh authorities.⁶⁵ The Chinese were more flexible. In a talk with a member of the British delegation, Li K'e-nung argued for a specific date, but said his government was willing to set it within two or three years of the cease-fire.⁶⁶ The compromise formula was reportedly worked out by Molotov, who, at a meeting July 19 attended also by Eden, Mendès-France, Chou, and Dong, drew the line at two years.⁶⁷ It was agreed in the Final Declaration that the Vietnamese of the two zones would consult together in July 1955 and reunify Vietnam by national plebiscite one year later. Importantly for the Viet Minh, the demarcation line was said to be "provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary." Representatives of the member states on the ICC would act as a commission to supervise the national elections, which were to be freely conducted by secret ballot. As shall be pointed out later, however, the evident intention of all the conferees (including the United States and the Government of South Vietnam) to see Vietnam reunified was to a large extent undercut by the nature of the military and political settlements.

(U) ⁶⁵Ibid.

(U) ⁶⁶Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 645, July 18, 1954
(Secret).

(U) ⁶⁷Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre,
p. 268.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

-224-

(U) The military accords on Vietnam also stipulated that the Joint Commission, which was to take over the work of the military commission that had met at Trung Gia, would have general responsibility for working out the disengagement of forces and implementation of the cease-fire. French Union soldiers were to be removed from North Vietnam in stages within 300 days (article 15), a lengthy period in keeping with French demands. Thereafter, the introduction into the two zones of fresh arms, equipment, and personnel was prohibited with the exception of normal troop rotation and replacement of damaged or destroyed matériel (articles 16 and 17). The establishment of new military bases in Vietnam, and the adherence of either zone to military alliances, were also proscribed under articles 18 and 19.

(U) The membership and powers of the International Control Commission were finally resolved (Chapter VI of the accords). Apparently through Chou En-lai's efforts, agreement was reached that India, Poland, and Canada should be the member states of the ICC.⁶⁸ The ICC was empowered to form fixed and mobile inspection teams and to have full freedom of movement in both zones of Vietnam. In the performance of these tasks, the ICC was to expect complete cooperation from local civil and military officials. Its functions extended to control of the movement of armed forces and the release of prisoners of war, and to supervision of the demarcation line, frontiers, ports, and airfields.

(U) ⁶⁸Eden, Full Circle, p. 159.

~~SECRET~~

(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

UNCLASSIFIED

-225-

(U) Less clearly decided was the delicate question of the ICC's relationship to the Joint Commission. Generally, the plan adopted was close to that originally submitted by the French in early July, wherein the ICC's supremacy was tacitly admitted. The ICC was to be informed by the Joint Commission of disputes arising out of differences of interpretation, either of a provision or of fact, that the Joint Commission could not resolve. The ICC would then (article 40) have the power of recommendation; but, quite aside from the limited effectiveness of a recommendation, there remained the problem of majority or unanimous voting by the ICC in reaching agreement to recommend. Under article 42, the rule of unanimity was to apply to "questions concerning violations, or threats of violations, which might lead to a resumption of hostilities," namely, a refusal to regroup as provided in the accords, or an armed violation by one party of the territory of the other. The West, which had pushed hard for majority rule, had to settle for its application to those less volatile questions that would not be considered threats to the peace. Furthermore, under article 43, recognition was taken of possible splits among the three members by providing for majority and minority reports; but these, like ICC decisions, could be no more than suggestive, and as such wholly dependent upon the cooperativeness of the conference members who had created it.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-226-

Cambodia and Laos

(U) In conflict with the wishes of the Cambodian and Laotian delegations, cease-fires in their countries occurred simultaneously with the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam. Nevertheless, in most other respects, their persistence was largely responsible for settlements highly favorable to their respective interests.

(U) In the first place, the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Cambodia called for the removal of nonnative Free Khmer troops, whether Communist Vietnamese or Cambodians, ninety days from the cease-fire date (July 20). (French Union units, but not instructors, were also scheduled for departure.) As the Cambodian delegation had promised, those insurgents still in the country would be guaranteed the right to rejoin the national community and to participate, as electors or candidates, in elections scheduled under the constitution for 1955; but the agreement assured their demobilization within one month of the cease-fire. Separate joint and international supervisory commissions for Cambodia were established, as Phnom Penh had demanded. Finally, a declaration issued July 21 by the Cambodian delegation was incorporated into the accord proclaiming, in effect, Phnom Penh's inherent right of self-defense. The royal government vowed not to enter into military alliances "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"; nor, so long as its security was not threatened, would Cambodia permit the establishment of foreign military bases. As for war matériel and military personnel, the delegation made clear that these would not

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) be solicited during the period July 20, 1954, to the election date in 1955 "except for the purpose of the effective defence of the territory." Thus, after the elections, Cambodia proclaimed itself free to take any steps it considered necessary for its security, whether or not such steps were absolutely necessary for self-defense.

~~SECRET~~ Cambodia's acquisition of considerable latitude was entirely in keeping with the royal government's expressed insistence on not being either neutralized or demilitarized. On this point, the Cambodians received indirect assurance from the United States that their security would in some way be covered by the Southeast Asian pact despite their unilateral declaration. Toward the end of the conference, Philip Bonsal of the State Department and the American delegation, told Sam Sary that he (Bonsal) "was confident U.S. and other interested countries looked forward to discussing with Cambodian government" the security problem upon implementation of a cease-fire.⁶⁹ When Sam Sary called a few days later on Smith in the company of Nong Kimny, the Under Secretary recommended that Phnom Penh, at the conference, state its intention not to have foreign bases on its territory and not to enter into military alliances. At the same time, though, Cambodia would be free to import arms and to employ French military instructors and technicians. Cambodia might not be able to join SEATO under this

(U) ⁶⁹ Johnson priority tel. SECTO 627 from Geneva, July 16, 1954 (Secret).

~~the~~ arrangement, Smith said, but it could still benefit from it. Smith

assured the Cambodian Foreign Minister that, in our view, any aggression overt or covert against Cambodian territory would bring pact into operation even though Cambodia not a member. I took position that French Union membership afforded Cambodia adequate desirable means of securing through France necessary arms some of which would be American as well as necessary instructors and technicians some of which might well be American trained.

Nong Kimny replied that Cambodia relied heavily on the United States for protection against future aggression.⁷⁰ The way was thus cleared for the subsequent inclusion of Cambodia in the Protocol to the SEATO treaty.

(U) The cease-fire agreement on Laos followed lines similar to those drawn for Cambodia. A separate joint commission was set up to supervise the withdrawal of Pathet Lao units, although provision was made for their prior regroupment in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua.⁷¹ Although Laos was prohibited from seeking to augment its military establishment, the royal government was specifically permitted a maximum of 1,500 French training instructors. Moreover, the prohibition against

(U) 70 Smith tel. SECTO 650 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (Confidential).

(U) 71 The Laotian Delegation also issued a declaration averring the government's willingness to integrate former insurgents into the national community without reprisal. Elections in Laos were scheduled for September 1955, and former Pathet Lao were promised the right to participate in the balloting as electors or candidates.

~~SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

-229-

(U) the establishment of foreign military bases on Laotian territory did not apply to two French bases in operation under a 1949 treaty, and employing 3,500 Frenchmen. Laos, like Cambodia, was allowed to import arms and other military equipment essential for self-defense; but Vientiane also issued a unilateral declaration on July 21 making clear, in terms that nearly duplicated those used in Cambodia's declaration, that its refrainment from alliances and foreign military bases was limited to situations in which Laotian security was not threatened. In view of Vientiane's expressed hope for American protection, its delegates had succeeded admirably in getting a settlement containing terms that restricted, but did not eliminate, Laotian control over their security requirements.

6. DISSENTING VIEWS: THE AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE POSITIONS

(U) No delegate at the final plenary session on Indochina July 21 should have been surprised when Under Secretary Smith issued a unilateral statement of the American position. The United States had frequently indicated, publicly and privately, directly and indirectly, that it would not be cosignatory with the Communist powers to any agreement and that, at best, it would agree only to "respect" the final settlement. At the restricted session of July 18, Smith had, moreover, indicated the points which were to become basic features of his final statement. Despite the fact that the accords were in line with the Seven Points in nearly every particular, it would have been presumptuous of any delegation to believe that the United States, given the implacable hostility of

~~SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) Administration leaders to Communist China and to any agreement that would imply American approval of a territorial cession to the Communists, would formally sign the Geneva accords.⁷²

~~Bedell~~ Bedell Smith, revealing a considerably more pliant approach to dealing with the Communist world, was able to exact from Washington agreement to partial American acceptance of the Final Declaration. On July 19 he had been approached by Mendès-France, who from the beginning had sought to identify the United States as closely as possible with the final terms, with the proposal that Washington not simply respect any military agreements reached, but in addition take note of them and the political statements that comprised the first nine paragraphs of the proposed conference declaration. Mendès-France indicated the French would be sharply disappointed if the United States could not at least take note of those portions of the declaration. Smith, apparently swayed by the premier's views, recommended to Washington that his instructions be amended to provide for taking note in the event the Final Declaration was substantially as the

(U) ⁷²Whether because they themselves realized the impossibility of obtaining American signature of the accords, or because they were persuaded by the Soviets, the Chinese dropped their intention to make a settlement contingent upon having all the delegations sign the Final Declaration. Eden had to push hard in the final hours of the conference to assure that the Chinese would not press their demand. The foreign secretary sought out Molotov: "...we eventually agreed that, in order to eliminate the problem of signature, the declaration should have a heading in which all the participating countries would be listed." Full Circle, p. 160.

~~(S)~~ French had indicated.⁷³ Dulles gave his approval, demurring only on the second part of paragraph 9 (in the final version, paragraph 13),⁷⁴ which the Secretary said "seems to imply a multilateral engagement with Communists which would be inconsistent with our basic approach and which subsequently might enable Communist China to charge us with alleged violations of agreement to which it might claim both governments became parties."⁷⁵ When Smith, therefore, issued his unilateral statement, note was taken only of the first twelve paragraphs of the Final Declaration; but this was much more than had been called for in his revised instructions of July 16.

(U) In line with his instructions, Smith declared on behalf of the Government that the United States would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the accords. Moreover, the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Finally, Smith reiterated a U.S. policy declaration of June 29, made during the visit of Eden and Churchill, that registered Washington's support of UN supervision of free elections.

(U) ⁷³ Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 669 NIACT, July 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁷⁴ The objectionable paragraph involves agreement by the conferees to consult together on matters referred to them by the ICC.

(U) ⁷⁵ Dulles to Smith at Geneva tel. TOSEC 576 NIACT, July 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(U) reunify countries "now divided against their will...." Smith mentioned on this point that the United States could not associate itself with any arrangement that would hinder "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future...."

(U) Smith's caution against "any renewal of aggression" deserves additional comment inasmuch as it was cited by President Kennedy (in a letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem on December 14, 1961) as the basis for the American commitment to South Vietnam's defense. Viewed in the context of the conference, the statement does not seem to have been intended as an open-ended American commitment to South Vietnam against possible aggression from the North. Rather, the Administration apparently intended the statement as a warning to the Viet Minh that should they, within the two-year interval before general elections, "renew" what Washington and Saigon regarded as their "aggression" since 1946, the United States would be gravely concerned. Smith's statement, in short, seems to have been limited to the period July 1954 to July 1956.

~~(S)~~ That part of Smith's unilateral statement dealing with United Nations supervision of elections is also noteworthy. Coming in the wake of Dulles' expressed concern over provision in the accords for ICC supervision,⁷⁶ Smith's reference to the UN may have forecast American unwillingness to back an electoral process not supervised by the Organization. Inasmuch as the United States delegation had consistently pushed at Geneva for United Nations

(U) ⁷⁶In ibid.

~~It~~ rather than any other form of international machinery, Smith may have meant to give an advance signal of American displeasure with free Vietnamese elections that the UN would be prevented from overseeing.

~~The~~ American qualifications to the Geneva accords paled beside those made by the South Vietnam delegation. However naively, the "South" Vietnamese refused to accept a divided country and believed, to the end of the conference, that the French had brazenly and illegally sold out Vietnamese interests. Vietnam's anger at French manipulation of its political future was reflected in a note handed to the French delegation on July 17 by Nguyen Huu Chau.⁷⁷ The note maintained that not until the day before (an exaggeration by about three weeks, it would appear) did Vietnam learn that at the very time the French High Command had ordered the evacuation of troops from important areas in the Tonkin Delta, the French had also "accepted abandoning to the Viet Minh all of that part situated north of the eighteenth parallel and that the delegation of the Viet Minh might claim an even more advantageous demarcation line." The Vietnamese delegation protested against having been left "in complete ignorance" of French proposals, which were said not to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people."

(U) While it may have been absurd for the Vietnamese to believe that partition was avoidable given Viet Minh

(U) ⁷⁷ The note was also made available to the United States delegation. The text is in Smith's priority tel. SECTO 633 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

-234-

(U) strength, their rationale for keeping the country united was, as matters developed, eminently clear-sighted. In speeches during June and July, their leaders had warned that partition would be merely a temporary interlude before the renewal of fighting. When the Viet Minh first proposed a temporary division of territory, the Defense Minister, Phan Huy Quat, said in Saigon on June 2 that partition would "risk reviving the drama of the struggle between the North and the South."⁷⁸ Diem, in his investiture speech of early July, warned against a cease-fire that would mean partition, for that arrangement "can only be the preparation for another more deadly war...."⁷⁹ And General Nguyen Van Hinh, head of the Vietnamese National Army, declared:

To realize a cease-fire by partition of Vietnamese territory can be only a temporary measure to stop the bloodshed but not to end the war. And it is possible that we shall have to face a cold war as in Korea where both sides' troops have their fingers on the triggers of their guns all the time, and people are thinking only of recovering what has been given up under the pressure of the circumstances.⁸⁰

(U) Although their struggle against partition, which reached a climax in the aftermath of the signing of the accords with huge rallies in the major cities, proved futile, the Vietnamese early gave notice that they would

(U) ⁷⁸Vietnam Press Agency (VPA) broadcast from Saigon, June 3, 1954.

(U) ⁷⁹VPA broadcast from Saigon, July 7, 1954.

(U) ⁸⁰Vietnam Home Service (Saigon) broadcast, July 1, 1954.

~~TOP SECRET~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

~~SECRET~~

-235-

(U) accept neither partition nor a fixed date for national elections. We need only recall the statements by Bao Dai's cabinet in Paris on the eve of the conference to find evidence of Vietnam's early determination that it would not be party to a sell-out of its own territory. When partition became certain in July with the circulation of draft final declarations, the Vietnamese delegation became more vocal. At the final plenary session, Tran Van Do said: "...the Government of the State of Viet-Nam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom." When asked to consent to the military accords and the Final Declaration, Do requested insertion of the following text into the Declaration:

The conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Viet-Nam undertaking:

to make and support every effort to re-establish a real and lasting peace in Viet-Nam;
not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the ceasefire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Viet-Nam has expressed, especially in its final statement.⁸¹

The request was denied.

~~As~~ As for elections, the Vietnamese believed that the war situation compelled the postponement of elections until the country had achieved a measure of internal stability. As early as May, Diem indicated his opposition

(U) ⁸¹U.S. VerbMin/8, p. 355.

~~SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ to elections for a National Assembly, much less to national elections for the presidency.⁸² In its note to the French delegation, moreover, the Vietnamese asserted that a cease-fire without disarmament was incompatible with elections; the regroupment of the armed forces of the belligerents into separate zones was said to compromise their freedom in advance. In Vietnam's view, elections could only be considered after security and peace had been established, thereby excluding a set time interval of two years.⁸³

(U) Having taken these positions, the Vietnamese could hardly adhere to the Final Declaration. At the same time, they protested against the "hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Vietminh High Commanders only..." (as Tran Van Do put it at the July 21 session). Inasmuch as the military accords, by pre-arrangement, were signed by French and Viet Minh commanders precisely to avoid seeking Vietnamese consent, there was nothing Saigon could do but protest. Nevertheless, by having protested, they were asserting that the treaties with France of June 4 had indeed made Vietnam a sovereign state, that the interests of non-Communist Vietnamese were deeply involved in the settlement, and that France's bypassing of the Bao Dai government only made the settlement possible, not legal. Despite article 27 of the agreement on Vietnam, which bound "successors" (such as Vietnam) to

(U) ⁸²Dillon from Paris tel. No. 4538, May 26, 1954 (Secret).

(U) ⁸³Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 633, July 17, 1954 (Secret).

(U) the signatories to respect and enforce the agreement, Vietnam was in a legally persuasive position to argue that France could not assume liabilities in its behalf, least of all to the political provisions contained in the Final Declaration, which was an unsigned document.⁸⁴

7. SUMMARY

~~4~~ Throughout the rapid series of compromises in the last thirty days of the Geneva Conference, American diplomacy revealed a constancy of purpose fully in line with the Eisenhower Administration's global foreign policy. Based largely on the unfortunate experiences at Panmunjom, the Administration could not reconcile itself to the notion that Sino-Soviet negotiating tactics in the post-Stalin period of peaceful coexistence had changed. Consequently, even as the realization dawned that the Communists could not be expelled from Indochina and that some compromise with them by France was inevitable, the Administration stuck fast to the position that the United States delegation to the conference would only assist, but not take an active part, in bringing about an acceptable settlement. From late June on, the delegation was under instructions to remain clear of any involvement in the negotiations such as might implicate or commit the United

(U) ⁸⁴ Article 27, which is frequently cited to demonstrate that Vietnam was bound to abide by the accords, and particularly the elections provision, refers to "signatories of the present [military] Agreement...." Hence, the article would seem not to obligate France's "successor" with respect to any provisions of the Final Declaration, a document to which South Vietnam did not adhere.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

-238-

~~(S)~~ States to the final terms reached, yet simultaneously was to maintain an influential role in making the best of difficult circumstances. British and French agreement to the Seven Points proved a dramatic victory, not because their acceptance of them assured a reasonable settlement, but because, quite contrary to American expectations, they returned to Geneva prepared to hold the line against exorbitant Communist demands. Allied agreement to future discussions of a regional defense system for Southeast Asia was really a hedge against a French sell-out at Geneva; in the event Vietnam, and parts of Cambodia and Laos, were ceded to the Communist insurgents, the United States would at least have Anglo-French consent to protect the security of what remained of Indochina and its neighbors.

~~(S)~~ The Seven Points represented principles, not American objectives. They constituted not a statement of goals to be achieved by the United States, but of principles to be adopted by the British and French negotiators toward concluding a satisfactory settlement. In this manner, the Administration could preserve its dignity before anticipated Vietnamese outrage at partition and domestic displeasure at further Communist inroads in the Far East without losing its ability to influence the terms. Under Secretary Smith's final statement taking note of the agreements and vowing not to disturb them thus culminated a careful policy that rejected an American commitment to the accords such as might identify the Administration with a cession of territory and people to the Communist bloc.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

UNCLASSIFIED

-239-

(U) The Geneva Conference left much work undone, especially on a political settlement for Vietnam. The State of Vietnam, like the United States, had refused to adhere to the Final Declaration and was not signatory to the military accord that partitioned the country. In the next section, the focus is therefore on the practical effect of the Geneva accords, the expectations of the conferees concerning them, and the extent to which the major powers, in reaching a settlement, achieved the objectives they had set for themselves.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-241- Preceding page blank

XVII. THE MEANING OF GENEVA (U)

(U) Much of the controversy surrounding the American involvement in Vietnam relates to the post-Geneva period, in particular to the two-year interval before national elections were to bring about Vietnam's reunification. To address the question whether the United States instigated or colluded with the Government of Vietnam to defy the Final Declaration's stipulation for national elections would broaden this paper beyond its intended scope. What is relevant, however, are the documented or presumed expectations and objectives of the major participants concerning Vietnam, as well as Cambodia and Laos, at the time the conference closed. How had the accords met the aims of the participants, and to what extent were objectives intertwined with, or perhaps divorced from, expectations? To anticipate, the present argument over the failure to hold elections in July 1956 overlooks the relative unimportance of them, for a variety of reasons, to the five major powers at the Geneva Conference; their objectives only secondarily took into account the expectations of the Vietnamese, north and south.

(U) An assessment of the hopes and goals of the Geneva conferees in the immediate aftermath of the conference should, in the first place, be differentiated from the practical effect of the accords they drew up. The distinction not often made, yet highly important to an understanding of the conference and its achievements, is between the intent of the parties regarding Vietnam

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-242-

(U) and the seemingly contradictory consequences of their agreement.

1. THE PRACTICAL NATURE OF THE ACCORDS

(U) With the exception of South Vietnam, every nation represented at the conference came to believe that partition was the only way to separate the combatants, settle the widely disparate military and political demands of the French and Viet Minh, and conclude an armistice. It might further be argued (although the evidence available does not actually permit a definitive statement one way or the other) that these eight delegations intended the partition line to be temporary inasmuch as they all desired Vietnamese elections in 1956. But what needs to be pointed out is that the accords themselves did not further that intent. By creating two regimes responsible for "civil administration" (article 14-a of the Vietnam armistice agreement), by providing for the regroupment of forces to two zones and for the movement of persons to the zone of their choice, and by putting off national elections for two years, the conferees had actually made a future political settlement for Vietnam extremely unlikely. Certainly, the separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel was designed to facilitate the armistice, not to create political subdivisions; but its unintended effect was to allow time for the development of two governments, headed by totally divergent personalities and committed to antithetical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems. Thus, the call for elections in the Final Declaration had as little

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-243-

(U) chance of implementation in Vietnam as previously in Korea and Germany, a point brought home by Vietnamese officials and reinforced by the failure of the same Geneva conferees to agree on a political settlement in Korea. "Elections," Victor Bator has commented,¹ "can, indeed, decide secondary problems of coexistence in circumstances where some measurable minimum basis for political agreement exists. But they are incapable of acceptance by two opposing states, or parts of a state, when diametrically opposite philosophies are involved." If the intent of the Geneva accords was subverted, the subverters were the conferees themselves, who aspired to an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam on July 21, 1954.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE COMMUNIST SIDE

(U) Whether or not one accepts the view offered here that the central political provision of the Final Declaration was decisively undercut by provisions of the military accords and the Declaration itself, an examination of the objectives of the Soviet Union and Communist China can go far toward determining, albeit by surmial, the importance they, as distinct from the DRV, attached to Vietnamese unity. For it is the conclusion here that Vietnamese unity, whether achieved by free elections or

(U) ¹Bator, "One War -- Two Vietnams," Military Review, XLVII, No. 6 (June, 1967), 87. An expanded version of this argument is in Bator's Vietnam, a Diplomatic Tragedy: The Origins of the United States Involvement, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana, 1965.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-244-

(U) the disintegration of South Vietnam, was not a priority objective of Moscow or Peking even though both powers may well have anticipated an all-Communist Vietnam by July 1956. If this is so, we may ask, what were the primary aims of Moscow and Peking in supporting a settlement? Why did the Communists apparently strive for a settlement, and why did Molotov in particular, who was not personally identified in Western eyes at the time as a vigorous proponent of détente, play such a key role in keeping the conference from the brink of failure?

(U) Although it would appear that, on the major issues at least, the Soviet Union coordinated its actions with Communist China, the two Communist powers were clearly pursuing separate national interests in working toward a settlement of the war. The reconciliation of those interests seems to have been achieved not so much through Soviet ability (which did exist) to compel Chinese acquiescence² as through a common desire for a settlement.

Soviet Objectives at the Conference

(U) In retrospect, the Soviet Union seems to have had four major objectives at the conference: (1) to avert a major war crisis over Indochina that would stimulate Western unity, enable the United States to gain support it previously lacked for "united action," and conceivably force Moscow into a commitment to defend the Chinese; (2) to reduce the prospects for successful passage of EDC

(U) ² Interestingly, Molotov told Eden that the Chinese were their own masters in the negotiations. Full Circle, p. 136.

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET~~

-245-

(U) in the French National Assembly; (3) to heighten the prestige of the Soviet Union as a world peacemaker; (4) to bolster the prestige of Communist China, probably more as an adjunct to the Soviet drive for leadership of the "peaceful coexistence" movement than as a means of supporting any Chinese claim to unrivaled leadership in Asia.

~~(S)~~ On the first point, the Soviets were surely aware that the United States, under certain conditions, was prepared to consider active involvement in the war. While united action was a dead issue in Washington by mid-June, the Soviets (and the Chinese as well) could not have known this. Moreover, newspaper reports of the time added both credence and uncertainty to American military plans. In the course of private discussions at Geneva, Molotov indicated his concern that a breakdown of the conference might lead to continued fighting right up to the point of World War III.³ The French and British did nothing to dispel those fears. Chauvel, for instance, told the Russian delegate, Kuznetsov, that France's proposed division of Vietnam at the 18th parallel would be more acceptable to the other conferees than the unreasonable Viet Minh demand for the 13th parallel, and that a settlement along the French line would thereby avert the risk of an internationalization of the conflict.⁴ And Mendès-France vowed to back his call for conscripts by informing Molotov he "did not intend Geneva would turn into a Panmunjom."⁵

(U) ³ Ibid., pp. 131-32.

(U) ⁴ Reported in Johnson's priority tel. SECTO 557 from Geneva, July 3, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ⁵ Dillon priority tel. No. 118 from Paris, July 9, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

(U) The possibility of renewed fighting leading to a wider war was particularly influential on the Soviets, it would seem, as a consequence of Moscow's inner debate during 1953 and 1954 over American strategic intentions and their meaning for the Soviet defense system.⁶ The views of the so-called Khrushchev wing apparently won out in the spring of 1954: The United States was considered fully capable of initiating a nuclear exchange and a new world war. Free-wheeling discussion in the Western press on the foreign policy implications of Eisenhower's "New Look" and Dulles' "massive retaliation" speech of January 12, 1954, was closely followed by the Soviets, who may have been persuaded in their pessimistic assumptions regarding American strategy by the very ambiguity of American "reliance" on nuclear weapons to combat Communist aggression. In fact, it can be argued that even though the United States and its allies went to the conference table from a position of diplomatic weakness, their hands were considerably strengthened because of Soviet uncertainty over what the West might do in the event the conference failed. Inasmuch as Soviet analyses by no means excluded American recklessness with nuclear weapons, Moscow might have been highly reluctant to press too vigorously for the West's acceptance of exorbitant Viet Minh demands. Soviet awareness that the United States had seriously considered active involvement in Indochina prior to the fall of Dienbienphu may therefore have been a significant lever

(U) ⁶ For a fuller discussion of this point, see Herbert S. Dinerstein, War and the Soviet Union (New York: Praeger, 1962), rev. ed., pp. 66ff, and the author's The First Vietnam Crisis, pp. 60-62, 116-19.

(U) for the West in the Geneva negotiations. Had the opposite perception been true -- had the Soviets, that is, been confident that the American Administration would be highly sober, conservative, and cautious in responding to war situations -- Molotov might have been instructed to play a far more audacious game while the Viet Minh intensified their military operations. Dulles' reputation as a militant anti-Communist with tremendous influence on Eisenhower probably served the Western cause well at Geneva.

(U) As a result, to conclude on this point, one of the Soviets' principal aims at the conference was to diminish the possibility of American unilateral or multilateral intervention in the likely belief that intervention would have built up tremendous pressure on Moscow to make new commitments in Southeast Asia. While this outlook did not prevent the Soviets from at first seeking to capitalize on the change in government in Paris from Laniel to Mendès-France, it did work in the general direction of a reasonable settlement that would be honorable for the French and still valuable to the Viet Minh. The Russians evidently believed that so long as the French (and the British) were kept interested in a settlement, the Americans would be hard-pressed to disregard their allies and intervene.

(U) That Moscow may have been anxious about a wider war does not, however, address the incentives it may have had in concluding the cease-fire. Here, the European Defense Community treaty must have been uppermost in Molotov's mind.⁷ No evidence has been found to support

(U) ⁷ For further comments, see ibid., pp. 66, 153.

UNCLASSIFIED

-248-

(U) the contention that Molotov explicitly baited Mendes-France with a lenient Indochina settlement in return for Assembly rejection of EDC. But Molotov need not have been that obtrusive. Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interests to pressure the Viet Minh for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby probably offset their need for an EDC. Soviet interests thus dictated the sacrifice of Viet Minh goals if necessary to prevent German remilitarization. Given Moscow's belated attention to the Indochina war, it appears that the consolidation of Viet Minh gains short of complete reunification of Vietnam was more than sufficient to justify termination of the struggle in Soviet eyes -- and this perception, it might be added, dovetailed with what seems to have been the Chinese outlook.

(U) Thirdly, the worldwide Soviet peace offensive which gained priority in the aftermath of Stalin's death could be given added impetus through vigorous Soviet support of an Indochina settlement. This point, in fact, was the theme of Molotov's closing remarks to the conference on July 21. He called the accords "a major victory for the forces of peace and a major step towards a reduction of international tensions." Considering that the conference had demonstrated the value of international negotiations to settle dangerous disputes, Molotov said: "The results of the Geneva Conference have confirmed the rightness of the principle which is fundamental to the whole foreign

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-249-

(U) policy of the Soviet Union, namely, that there are no issues in the contemporary international situation which cannot be solved and settled through negotiations and by agreements designed to consolidate peace."⁸ At a time when the United States was alleged to be jeopardizing world peace with its "policy of strength," the Soviet Union could lay claim to sparing no effort in the struggle for ways to avoid a nuclear holocaust.

(U) In this light, Communist China was important to the USSR as a partner in the peace offensive. While Moscow could not have wished to see China so gain in prestige as to rival the Soviet Union in Asia or elsewhere, the Russians do seem, in 1954, to have considered a gain in Chinese influence highly desirable if only because the United States would be bound to suffer a corresponding loss. As Molotov phrased it on July 21:

...the Geneva Conference indicated the great positive importance that the participation of the People's Republic of China has in the settlement of urgent international problems. The course of work at this Conference has shown that any artificial obstacles on the road to China's participation in the settlement of international affairs, which are still being put up by aggressive circles of some countries, are being swept away by life itself.⁹

Noteworthy is Molotov's omission of the additional claim made at the time by Peking that China's participation was absolutely essential to the solution of Asian problems.

(U) ⁸U.S. VerbMin/8, July 21, 1954, pp. 359, 361.

(U) ⁹Ibid., p. 360.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-250-

(U) While the Soviet foreign minister was perhaps thinking in terms of CPR admission to the United Nations, the Chinese apparently were looking beyond the UN to the kind of full-scale diplomatic effort that would earn them Asia's respect as founders of what was later termed the "Bandung spirit." Nor did Molotov assert that China's work at the conference had earned it a status equivalent to one of the major powers. The Soviets were willing to admit that Peking had gained a new importance as a result of the conference, but they refused to go as far as the Chinese in asserting China's first-rank status either in Asia or worldwide.

(U) The Soviets, then, had much to gain from an honorable settlement of the Indochina war and much to risk in permitting the talks to drag on inconclusively. The Viet Minh had proven their strength as a national liberation movement and had been amply rewarded with a firm territorial base assured by international agreement. With overriding interests in Western Europe, Moscow no doubt found great appeal in giving the French a face-saving "out" from Indochina. That EDC was eventually defeated in the National Assembly (in August) was testimony not to the cleverness of any Soviet "deal" with Mendes-France, but simply to a low-cost Soviet diplomatic gamble that paid off handsomely.

Chinese Objectives

(U) For Peking, a negotiated settlement of the Indochina war represented an important opportunity to propel China forward as a major Asian power whose voice

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-251-

(U) in Asian councils could not be ignored. When the Berlin Conference decided in February 1954 to hold an international conference on Indochina, the Chinese applauded the move and prophesied then that the People's Republic, as an invitee, would thereby gain recognition of its major role in Asian affairs. With the Geneva Conference coming at a time of vigorous Chinese diplomatic activity in India and Burma, Peking probably considered a settlement short of a complete Viet Minh victory acceptable, since it would prove China's sincere commitment to peace. Had the CPR spurred the Viet Minh on, it not only would have been in conflict with the Soviets, whose aid was vital to China's economic recovery plans, but would also have lost considerable ground in the support Chou En-lai's travels had earned. The war in Indochina had become, for China, a demonstration test of its sincerity in promoting peaceful coexistence. From the tactical standpoint, devotion to peaceful coexistence may also have been seen as reducing the prospects of widespread Asian support of, or participation in, the American plan for a regional alliance. With the conference ended, China was in a position to offer Asian nations an alternative to alliance with the United States -- the concept of "collective peace and security," sustained by mutual agreement to foster the five principles.¹⁰

(U) The motive force behind China's drive for Asian leadership during the period of the Geneva Conference was

(U) ¹⁰ People's Daily, July 22, 1954, in NCNA (Peking) broadcast of same date.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-252-

(U) the theme that negotiated solutions were possible for all outstanding world problems. By the time of Geneva, Peking had already been party to the armistice in Korea, to agreement with India over Tibet, and to statements of mutual respect issued bilaterally with India and Burma. Moreover, China had joined with Moscow in supporting negotiations of the Indochina war as early as September 1953, while the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese statements also contained calls for an early settlement. The major role played by Chou En-lai at Geneva therefore not simply affirmed China's interest in peace, but as importantly established China's reputation as a flexible bargainer willing to negotiate disputes and make concessions to resolve them.¹¹ Indeed, once the conference ended, Peking declared that the conference had proved that negotiations could resolve such other East-West problems as a final Korea settlement, arms control, nuclear weapons proliferation, German unification, and European security.¹²

(U) Relatedly, China urged that the Geneva Conference was a benchmark in the rise of the People's Republic to

(U) ¹¹ Establishment of a negotiating reputation is elucidated by Iklé as one of the "side effects" negotiators sometimes seek even in the absence of agreement on the major area of dispute. See How Nations Negotiate, p. 192.

(U) ¹² See, e.g., Kuang-ming jih-pao, July 26, 1954, in NCNA (Peking) broadcast of same date. Even though Peking implicitly excluded Sino-American differences from those areas that could be negotiated, it urged America's leaders to abide by the five principles, and it extended "the hand of friendship to the peace-loving people of the United States." See a speech by Kuo Mo-jo, then chairman of the China Peace Committee and vice-chairman of the National Committee of the People's Consultative Conference, on July 24, 1954 (broadcast the same day by NCNA, Peking).

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-253-

(U) new prominence on the international scene. "The great significance of the convening of the Geneva Conference," the People's Daily proclaimed before its close, "lies in the fact that the Chinese People's Republic is participating in the settlement of Asian questions as one of the Great Powers, thus putting an end to the era when the Asian peoples were denied their say in their own problems."¹³ China stood not only for a resurgent, decolonialized Asia, but also as a Great Power. As stated by the authoritative World Culture:

The contributions of the CPR at the Geneva Conference to the search for peace, and its efforts to establish collective security in Asia, have received the universal recognition and trust of the world's peace-loving peoples and nations. Because of this, the position of the CPR as one of the world's great nations has been even more affirmed and its international prestige greatly elevated. The Chinese people feel extraordinary glory because of this.¹⁴

The fact that China had, in Indochina and as was not the case in Korea, been invited to join with the Big Four in discussing measures for the restoration of peace was considered by Peking to have given the CPR still more international authority.¹⁵

(U) ¹³ People's Daily, July 13, 1954, in NCNA (Peking) broadcast of same date.

(U) ¹⁴ "Welcome the Victory of Peace, Continue to Carry Out Firm Struggle," editorial in Shih-chieh chih-shih (World Culture), No. 15 (August 5, 1954), p. 1.

(U) ¹⁵ People's Daily editorial of July 22, 1954, in Chinese international service (Peking) broadcast of same date.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-254-

(U)* Augmentation of Chinese prestige in Asia and throughout the world was a benefit due to the conference; but it does not fully explain why China apparently pressed for a settlement when she did rather than prolong the talks until better terms were available. Having negotiated at Panmunjom for two years, why did she take less than three months to conclude a cease-fire in Indochina? There seem to have been three reasons for China's reluctance to engage in extended discussions: (1) agreement with the Soviets that the United States could intervene to spark a wider war; (2) consideration that Laos and Cambodia had been effectively neutralized; (3) satisfaction that a communist state had been established on China's southern flank.

(U) In the first place, Peking was convinced, to judge from its published comments on the war,¹⁶ that influential men in Washington, including Secretary Dulles and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were quite prepared to move directly against China if circumstances permitted. Washington's warnings to Peking in 1953 left room for the continuation of Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, but Peking could never be certain when that aid might become the pretext for active American intervention. By 1954, moreover, the Chinese had evinced greater concern than before over the military effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Having been through a costly war in Korea, and having decided as early as the fall of 1952 to give priority to "socialist reconstruction" at home, Peking had nothing to gain from

(U) ¹⁶For discussion, see Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis, pp. 62-65, 85-88.

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) provoking the United States. Were the Viet Minh encouraged to strive for the maximum territorial advantage, the United States -- Peking may have calculated -- might withdraw from the conference and change the nature of the war. Once those events occurred, the Chinese advocacy of peace through diplomacy would have been irreparably undercut.

~~the~~ Peking, moreover, was made clearly aware of the dangers inherent in continued fighting. At the conference, Eden used the implied threat of American involvement against Chou in much the same way as Chauvel had used it against Kuznetsov. During late May, for example, Eden warned Chou "again" of the dangers in the Indochina situation; unpredictable and serious results could come about. When Chou said he was counting on Britain to prevent these from happening, the foreign secretary replied Chou was mistaken, since Britain would stand by the United States in a showdown.¹⁷ Furthermore, with the Eisenhower-Churchill warning of June 28 that unacceptable demands made against France would "seriously aggravate" the international situation, with Dulles' perceived pressure on Mendès-France at the Paris meeting of mid-July, and with the return of Smith to the conference table, the Chinese were given unmistakable signs that Western unity had finally been achieved and some kind of coordination worked out on the settlement. At that juncture, the outstanding issue for Peking was not how much territory the DRV would ultimately obtain, but how far Cambodia and Laos could be pressed before the July 20 deadline passed.

(U) ¹⁷ Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954 (Secret).

~~SECRET~~ By the deadline, as we have seen, Chou En-lai's hardened attitude in conversations with the Cambodian and Laotian delegates had not swayed them from their hope of eventual security coverage by the United States. From China's standpoint, however, the vital agreement had been secured: None of the Indochinese states was permitted to join a military alliance or to allow the establishment of foreign military bases on their soil. Whether the Chinese recognized the alternative for the three states of obtaining protection through a device such as the SEATO Protocol is not known. When the accords were signed, Peking greeted them with the remark that the restrictions upon Indochina's military ties to the West had dealt a severe blow to American regional security ambitions.¹⁸ So long as the United States was not permitted to establish bases in the three countries and to introduce military personnel there, China's security requirements were fulfilled even though, in their internal political make-up, the three states might take a strong anti-Communist line. It was perhaps because the CPR had emerged with these advantages that a Chinese journalist confided on July 23: "We have won the first campaign for the neutralization of all Southeast Asia."¹⁹

(U) The supposed "neutralization" of Cambodia and Laos was coupled with the securance of a solid territory for the DRV along China's southern frontier. Further territorial gains by the Viet Minh would augment DRV

(U) ¹⁸ See the People's Daily editorial of July 22, 1954, as broadcast over Chinese international service (Peking), same date.

(U) ¹⁹ Quoted in C.I.A. Memorandum RSS 0017/66, p. 46 (Secret/NoForDis/Controlled Dis).

~~SECRET~~

(U) resources, but would not significantly enhance China's security. With agreement by the conference to stabilize the military assets of both zones of Vietnam and to forbid their military alignment with other nations, China could feel some confidence that a divided Vietnam would not present an immediate threat. Thus, the agreements on Cambodia and Laos complemented the Vietnam accord in bolstering China's security from the south even as it also meant a sacrifice of the Viet Minh's capability for overrunning all Vietnam.

(U) The argument here is, in summary, that the Soviet Union and Communist China were less concerned with the specific terms of the settlement than with attaining it once their basic objectives had been achieved. A settlement along lines that would satisfy the Viet Minh need for territory, give France the satisfaction that it had not sold out, go far toward fulfilling Chinese security requirements and political ambitions in Southeast Asia, and reduce the possibility of a precipitate American withdrawal from the conference was, to Moscow and Peking, acceptable and even desirable. They saw advantages to themselves in an early equitable agreement that clearly conflicted with Viet Minh terms, but not with their own objectives.

~~(S)~~ Precisely how Chou and Molotov reasoned with Ho Chi Minh -- by threat, persuasion, or a combination of the two -- will likely never be known; but it seems reasonable to suppose that, given the precarious political situation in South Vietnam, the multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to the Saigon government, the

(S) continued exacerbating presence of the French, and the economic and social vulnerabilities of a society wracked by war, Peking and Moscow could argue convincingly that South Vietnam would never cohere sufficiently to pose a viable alternative to the DRV. It may thus have been the Communists' expectation that the DRV would as likely assume control of the entire country by default as by an election victory in 1956. The Chinese, to be sure, accepted the notion that the Geneva accords had, temporarily at least, created two Vietnamese governments rather than simply divided the country administratively.²⁰ But it is improbable that either they or the Soviets anticipated that even an American-supported South Vietnam could survive. Put another way, the possibility of a prospering, anti-Communist South Vietnam may simply not have been a serious, and certainly was not an immediate, concern for either Communist power. The Geneva Conference had created French goodwill for Moscow and added security for Peking; what might happen in South Vietnam may, in 1954, have seemed inconsequential.

Viet Minh Objectives

(U) The Viet Minh did not emerge as "losers" in the negotiations. They received the territorial benefits of

~~(S)~~²⁰ In June, for example, Chou told Jean Chauvel that the Chinese recognized the existence of Viet Minh and Vietnamese governments. In talking of a final political settlement, moreover, Chou again stated that it should be achieved by direct negotiations between the two Vietnam governments. What remains unclear, of course, is the permanency Chou attached to the use of the term. See Dillon priority tel. No. 5035 from Paris, June 24, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) the settlement without having to cede the French or any neutral body control of enclaves in northern Vietnam. In addition, the DRV was promised an opportunity within two years to gain full control of the country through a ballot box victory, although it appears that Viet Minh leaders put more stock in a collapse of the southern regime before the election date as the path to complete control of the country.²¹ In Laos, the Pathet Lao had not been disarmed immediately; instead, they were permitted to regroup over a wide expanse of terrain that would make disarmament difficult to accomplish. And in both Laos and Cambodia, the resistance elements were to be accorded full political rights to participate, as individuals, in the 1955 elections.

(U) In their public commentaries on the Geneva accords, Viet Minh leaders displayed full satisfaction. Military victories had gained political recognition, they said, thanks to the support rendered by the Soviet and Chinese delegations. Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity were admitted by Paris, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed. Moreover, the regroupment to two zones in Vietnam was, as he put it, "a temporary action, a transitional step in the realization of a cease-fire, toward restoring peace and attaining the unification of our country by means of general elections." No "administrative partition" was intended; nor would the "zonal

(U) ²¹P. J. Honey writes that Pham Van Dong told a guest at his villa, Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Bich, on July 20, 1954, that the DRV did not expect national elections ever to take place. Victory would be achieved by default of the ineffectual southern government. Honey, "Hanoi and the Vietnam War," Mizan, IX, No. 1 (January-February, 1967), 1.

(U) arrangement" be permitted to interfere with Vietnam's future unification:

...North, Central and South Viet Nam are territories of ours. Our country will certainly be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated. Our compatriots in the South were the first to wage the war of Resistance. They possess a high political consciousness. I am confident that they will place national interests above local interests, permanent interests above temporary interests, and join their efforts with the entire people in strengthening peace, achieving unity, independence and democracy all over the country...our people, army men and cadres from North to South must unite closely. They must be at one in thought and deed.²²

And Ton Duc Thang vowed: "The Vietnam State will undoubtedly be unified through general elections."²³

~~(S)~~ Despite these protestations of satisfaction and confidence, Tillman Durdin's report from Geneva that members of the Viet Minh delegation were sharply disappointed by the results and vexed at pressure applied by their Chinese and Russian comrades seems on the mark.²⁴ The Viet Minh command evidently believed -- and no French authority on the spot doubted this -- that they could eliminate the French from Tonkin with one major offensive

(U) ²² Ho Chi Minh's Appeal to the People, July 22, 1954, in Ho, Selected Works (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), IV, 19.

(U) ²³ Appeal of July 28, 1954, by Ton Duc Thang, broadcast by VNA, July 29, 1954.

(U) ²⁴ New York Times, July 25, 1954, p. 1.

(U) the settlement without having to cede the French or any neutral body control of enclaves in northern Vietnam. In addition, the DRV was promised an opportunity within two years to gain full control of the country through a ballot box victory, although it appears that Viet Minh leaders put more stock in a collapse of the southern regime before the election date as the path to complete control of the country.²¹ In Laos, the Pathet Lao had not been disarmed immediately; instead, they were permitted to regroup over a wide expanse of terrain that would make disarmament difficult to accomplish. And in both Laos and Cambodia, the resistance elements were to be accorded full political rights to participate, as individuals, in the 1955 elections.

(U) In their public commentaries on the Geneva accords, Viet Minh leaders displayed full satisfaction. Military victories had gained political recognition, they said, thanks to the support rendered by the Soviet and Chinese delegations. Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity were admitted by Paris, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed. Moreover, the regroupment to two zones in Vietnam was, as he put it, "a temporary action, a transitional step in the realization of a cease-fire, toward restoring peace and attaining the unification of our country by means of general elections." No "administrative partition" was intended; nor would the "zonal

(U) ²¹P. J. Honey writes that Pham Van Dong told a guest at his villa, Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Bich, on July 20, 1954, that the DRV did not expect national elections ever to take place. Victory would be achieved by default of the ineffectual southern government. Honey, "Hanoi and the Vietnam War," Mizan, IX, No. 1 (January-February, 1967), 1.

[REDACTED] and proceed from there against a weakened, demoralized Franco-Vietnamese army in Annam. Surely Ho Chi Minh must have considered the possibility of American intervention -- although this concern does not emerge as clearly from Viet Minh public commentaries as it does from the official Moscow and Peking organs. But the Viet Minh looked to the Korea experience as having demonstrated that fighting and talking simultaneously was, as put by a mid-May VNA broadcast,²⁵ a tactic they could pursue for two years (like the Chinese during the Panmunjom talks) in order to maximize territorial gains. Whether the Viet Minh ultimately envisaged the conquest of all Vietnam before reaching agreement with the French to cease fire is debatable; at the least, they, like the French, probably regarded maximum control of population and territory as insurance against future elections. Thus, to the Viet Minh, a settlement at the 17th parallel could only have been regarded as a tactical blunder in violation of the guerrilla war theory and practice they had mastered.

(C) Forfeiture of considerable territory in Vietnam was undoubtedly not the only ground for the Viet Minh's displeasure. Their frequent pronouncements on the "indivisibility" of the Viet Minh, Free Khmer, and Pathet Lao were largely ignored by Chou and Molotov, whose agreement on Laos and Cambodia seems to have given priority to

[REDACTED] 25. The commentary stated in part: "We still remember the Korean lesson which taught us that one could negotiate and fight at the same time...for two years." Cited in C.I.A. Memorandum RSS 0017/66, p. 42 (Secret/NoForDis/ControlledDis).

[REDACTED]

() Chinese interests. Account had been taken, as Ch insisted, of the desirability of integrating the resistance forces into the national Khmer and Laotian communities, but those forces were eventually to be disarmed and disbanded, or withdrawn. Conceivably, the Viet Minh leaders never intended to leave Laos, or were assured by the Chinese and Soviets that the agreements reached regarding the Pathet Lao were not meant to exclude future North Vietnamese support. Nevertheless, any future Viet Minh contacts with the rebels would be a clear violation of the Geneva accords and provide the occasion for intensified Laotian ties to the West.

() The Viet Minh also yielded ground on national elections. Their hopes for an all-Vietnamese political settlement soon after the cease-fire were quashed by the Soviets and Chinese, who were disposed to accept a longer waiting period. Furthermore, the political settlement itself was not given the priority the Viet Minh had originally demanded; it would be achieved, as phrased in the Final Declaration, "in the near future," as the result of rather than as the precondition to a military (cease-fire) settlement. Finally, when the time for a political settlement was at hand, the Declaration specified that an international body would supervise it rather than the Viet Minh and "South" Vietnamese alone. The overriding interests of the Soviets and Chinese had taken the heart out of the initial Viet Minh proposals of May 10 and, in addition, had considerably undercut their "fallback" positions expressed in late May and June. Jean Chauvel was apparently correct when he perceived, after private talks with the

~~(S)~~ Chinese, that the Viet Minh were really on the end of a string being manipulated from Moscow and Peking. When they moved forward too quickly, Chou and Molotov were always at hand to pull them back to a more accommodating position. Briefly put, the Viet Minh very likely felt they had been compelled to give away much of what they had earned even as they acquired the attributes of sovereignty for which they had fought.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS: THE WESTERN BIG THREE

The British

(U) For Great Britain, the accords signalled the end of a war that more than once threatened to involve the United States and risk a regional conflagration. Had the point of direct American intervention been reached, the Churchill government would have been faced with an extraordinarily difficult decision: whether to join with an old ally in a war venture that Britain considered politically wrong and militarily foolish, or to break with Washington and thereby throw into question the Anglo-American alliance. Britain's consistent advice to delay irreversible military steps, including formation of a Southeast Asia defense organization, until the Communists had been given an opportunity to make good on their proclaimed devotion to a peaceful solution over Indochina had been grudgingly accepted by the United States; the choice of following or ignoring American leadership was averted.

(U) A diplomatic untangling of the Indochina problem, as Britain's first hope, also became in large measure

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

-264-

(U) its responsibility. If the allies were not to be pressed into a military response, it was as much up to Eden as to Bidault (and, later, Mendès-France), to establish the grounds for a settlement. Although final agreement at the conference required Soviet and Chinese preparedness to offer equitable terms, Eden's own contributions cannot be exaggerated. Working closely with Molotov and Chou, Eden apparently earned their respect as a forthright, flexible, but firm negotiator. That the accords were drawn up testified to Eden's persistence. They were a triumph of British diplomacy to the extent that the Chinese and Soviets, in press commentaries immediately following the close of the Conference, accorded the UK delegation the unusual accolade of having, along with their delegations, rendered the most important services in the agonizing process of reaching agreement.

(U) At the same time as the British successfully pushed through a settlement by diplomatic rather than military means, they also reserved the right to join with the United States in a regional security arrangement immediately after the conference. As Eden had told Chou, the formation of a SEATO would not be put off, even though the Associated States would not become members. British membership in SEATO represented another significant diplomatic victory. They had on several occasions informed the United States that a Southeast Asia pact formed in advance of or during the Geneva deliberations might be interpreted as provocative by the Chinese and reduce, if not eliminate, chances for a settlement. The British never opposed the concept of SEATO, but they cautioned against poor timing.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
(This Page is UNCLASSIFIED)

UNCLASSIFIED

-265-

(U) SEATO's establishment in September 1954 was thus doubly welcomed by London: It satisfied Britain's conviction that a much-needed regional organization should be formed to preserve what remained of Indochina, not to take action to recover it all from the Viet Minh.

(U) Britain's opposition to forming SEATO before or during the conference so as, in part, not to provoke the Chinese fitted with London's aspirations for better Sino-British relations. Quite unlike the dominant voices in Washington, Churchill and Eden were amenable to attempting to achieve some kind of working relationship with Peking, particularly in view of the ongoing guerrilla war in Malaya. The conference, as Eden noted in his June 23 speech to the Commons, had resulted in an improvement of Sino-British relations, demonstrated by Peking's agreement on June 17, after four years of silence, to exchange *chargés d'affaires*. In the remaining month of the conference, moreover, British youth delegations traveled to China, and there were hopeful comments from both countries on the possibilities for stepped up trade and the exchange of cultural delegations. Thus, in sharp contrast to the United States, Great Britain fully exploited this period of harmony through diplomacy to change, rather than preserve, its pattern of contact with Peking.

The French

(U) France probably had as much cause for satisfaction with the outcome at Geneva as any other party to the conference. Paris had extricated itself from la sale guerre with honor, yet had also retained a foothold in

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-266-

(U) South Vietnam and a close relationship with Cambodia and Laos. The French Union lost much of its strength, but not all of its appeal, in Indochina. At least in mid-1954, it appeared that French cultural and economic interests in all three former colonies would be substantially preserved; and even the DRV had indicated, at the close as well as at the beginning of the negotiations, that it aspired to membership in the Union. French military power would have to be surrendered, of course;²⁶ but French influence could (and did) remain in all three countries.

(U) While the British were ready to join with the United States and other interested nations in SEATO, the French clearly intended, as evidenced by their concern over the location of the demarcation line, that South Vietnam have a defensible territory within which to establish a stable regime competitive with the DRV.²⁷ As already observed, Paris was not motivated by altruism alone; a substantial territorial base was as much for the preservation of French economic holdings in the South as for the future security of the Saigon government. To judge from the French attitude, the Paris government, no

(U) ²⁶ Even as most French troops were withdrawn, a French military presence remained for some time. The last troops did not leave Vietnam until February 1956 while, under the military accords, French instructors remained in Laos and Cambodia and two bases continued to function in Laos.

(U) ²⁷ French interest was not confined to South Vietnam after July 21, 1954. Soon thereafter, Paris dispatched Jean Sainteny, its former chief negotiator with the Viet Minh at Fontainebleau and Dalat in 1946, to Hanoi to represent French interests without conferring recognition on the DRV. France recognized only one Vietnam but in fact dealt with two.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-267-

(U) less than the American administration, looked forward to participating fully in the consolidation and rehabilitation of the GVN at least in the two years before nationwide elections.

The Americans

(U) The United States viewed the conference results with mixed emotions. On the one hand, the terms of the settlement conformed surprisingly well to those the Administration had agreed with the French and British would be acceptable. Even as the Administration could not do more than agree to "respect" and "take note" of the Geneva accords, it had to concede that they represented a reasonable outcome given the chaotic state of Allied relations before the conference, the rejection by France of a possible military alternative, and the undeniable military superiority of the Viet Minh beyond as well as within Vietnam. On the other hand, the settlement, viewed through the special lenses of the Eisenhower-Dulles Administration, also contained the elements of defeat. Part of the Free World's "assets" in the Far East had been "lost" to the Sino-Soviet bloc (much as China had been "lost" to Mao Tse-tung's forces); our allies had begged off when offered a chance to deal with the Communists by force of arms and, later, by an Asian-Western anti-Communist alliance ready for action; and the United States had been compelled to attend an international conference which not only confirmed to the Communists by diplomacy what they had gained by force, but also enhanced their image elsewhere in Asia and worldwide as standard-bearers of peace.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-268-

(U) The view that Geneva had come out better than could have been expected was the one offered publicly. The President, at a July 21 news conference, declined to criticize the accords. He said they contained "features which we do not like, but a great deal depends on how they work in practice." He announced the Government's intention to establish permanent missions in Laos and Cambodia, and said the United States was actively "pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area."²⁸

(U) Under Secretary Smith likewise was very guarded in remarks two days later. Denying that Geneva was another "Munich," Smith said: "I am...convinced that the results are the best that we could possibly have obtained in the circumstances," adding that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield."²⁹ When Dulles spoke (also on July 23), he was much less interested in the past than in the future. Referring to "the loss in Northern Vietnam," the Secretary expressed the hope that much would be learned from the experience toward preventing further Communist inroads in Asia. Two lessons could be culled, he observed. First, popular support was essential against Communist subversion; "the people should

(U) ²⁸White House press release of July 21, 1954.

(U) ²⁹Quoted in Richard P. Stebbins, et al., The United States in World Affairs, 1954 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 255.

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) feel that they are defending their own national institutions." Second, collective defense should precede rather than come during the aggression -- a pointed criticism of British policy during the crisis. A collective security system now in Southeast Asia, he concluded, would check both outright aggression and subversion.³⁰

(U) A point-by-point comparison of the Seven Points with the provisions of the accords indicates that quite apart from what had happened to American interests in Southeast Asia as a consequence of the conference, American diplomacy had, on balance, succeeded:

(U) (1) The integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia were preserved, and Viet Minh forces were to be withdrawn or disarmed and disbanded.

(U) (2) Southern Vietnam was retained, although without an enclave in the North and with the partition line somewhat south of Dong Hoi.

(U) (3) Laos, Cambodia, and "retained" Vietnam were not prevented from forming "non-Communist regimes" (in the case of Vietnam, within the two-year pre-election period); nor were they expressly forbidden "to maintain adequate forces for internal security." Vietnam's right to import arms and other war materiel was, however, restricted to piece-by-piece replacement, and its employment of foreign advisers to the number in the country at the war's close.

~~(U)~~ (4-5) Recalling Dulles' interpretation of July 7 that elections should "be only held as long after

(U) ³⁰ Department of State press release No. 400, July 23, 1954.

cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance," the accords did not "contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control"; nor did they "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means." Although Dulles and Mendès-France preferred that no date be set for the elections, the compromise two-year hiatus gave the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese a considerable breathing spell. The first priority, therefore, was to "give democratic elements best chance"; as was subsequently determined by Washington, this meant providing South Vietnam with economic assistance and political support. Elections, as Dulles indicated then, and as the OCB concurred in August,³¹ were agreeable to the United States; but they were two years away, and the immediate, primary task was "to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam...."³² Thus, the corollary objective (stated by the NSC in August and approved by the President) "to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections"³³ did not connote American intention to subvert

~~TOP SECRET~~ ³¹In its Progress Report of August 6 (see note 28), OCB said there was need for "political action" to build a strong foundation in free Asia to assure the continued orientation of the countries there toward the Free World. "A test of such political action and orientation will be the elections in Laos and Cambodia during 1955, and in north and south Vietnam during 1956." (Top Secret)

~~TOP SECRET~~ ³²This objective, stated in NSC 5429/1, was approved by the President. See NSC, Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East, August 12, 1954 (Top Secret).

(U) ³³Ibid.

~~(S)~~ the accords; read in context, the phrase meant that American influence would aim at assuring that the Communists not gain an electoral victory through deceitful, undemocratic methods in violation of the Final Declaration's stipulation that they be "free."

(U) (6) The accords expressly provided for the transfer of individuals desiring to move from one zone to another.

~~(S)~~ (7) The accords did seem, at the time, to have basically fulfilled the precondition of providing "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement." Although the machinery would be the ICC's rather than the UN's, Under Secretary Smith noted that the ICC would have a veto power on important questions (referring, evidently, to the unanimity rule); would be composed of one genuine neutral (India) and one pro-Western government (Canada); and would be permitted full freedom of movement into demilitarized zones and frontier and coastal areas. Smith gave this assessment:

Taking everything into consideration, I strongly feel this [the control and supervision arrangement] is satisfactory and much better than we were able to obtain in Korea. French feel, and Eden and I agree, that with such composition built-in veto will work to our advantage. This setup is best French or anybody else could get, and I feel it is within spirit of point 7.³⁴

~~(S)~~ Despite the overall concordance of major provisions of the accords with the Seven Points, the fact that another piece of territory had been formally ceded

(U) ³⁴Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 666, July 19, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

-272-

~~(S)~~ to the Communists obviously weighed heavily on the Administration. When, in August, papers were drawn up for the National Security Council, the Geneva Conference was evaluated as a major defeat for United States diplomacy and a potential disaster for United States security interests in the Far East. The Operations Control Board, in its progress report on the then-current NSC paper 5405, stated that the Final Declaration of the conference "completed a major forward stride of communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia. It therefore recorded a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC 5405 and a serious loss for the free world, the psychological and political effects of which will be felt throughout the Far East and around the globe."³⁵ In a separate report, the NSC was somewhat more specific concerning the extent of the damage, but no less restrained. The Communists had acquired "an advance salient" in Vietnam for use in military and non-military ways; the United States had lost prestige as a leader in Asia capable of stemming Communist expansion; the Communist peace line had gained at America's expense; and Communist military and political prestige had been enhanced as the result of their proven ability to exploit unstable situations in Southeast Asian countries without resort to armed attack.³⁶

~~(S)~~ ³⁵ OCB, Progress Report on United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 5405), August 6, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~(S)~~ ³⁶ NSC, Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East (NSC 5429), August 4, 1954 (Top Secret).

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~(S)~~ The conclusion that emerges from the obvious contrast between the public and private comments of Administration officials and organs is that where American diplomacy fell down was not at the conference but during the Indochina crisis as a whole. Nearly all the revised American negotiatory principles had emerged unscathed; but American objectives in Indochina -- the elimination of the Viet Minh threat, preservation of the strategically vital Tonkin Delta, and obstruction of Communist political and military expansionist policies in the region (all of which were enumerated in NSC 5405) -- had still been defeated. The United States had admirably maneuvered at Geneva in its self-limited role of interested party; but the Administration, convinced that any attrition of what had been regarded as "Free World" territory and resources was inimical to American global interests, could only view the settlement as the acceptance of terms from the Communist victors. The task in Vietnam in the two years ahead was therefore to work with what had been "retained" in the hope, by no means great, that the Diem government could pull the country up by its bootstraps in time to present a meaningful alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV.