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Policy Precedents: United States Involvement in Vietnam 1944-1961

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Final report 6 June 1975

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This thesis identifies a force, inherent in the national security decision-making process, which contributed to the American involvement in Vietnam. Termed "policy precedents," this force may be outside the control of the unwary decision maker and can result in irrational international behavior on the part of the nation. Once a policy or program becomes totally enmeshed within the governmental organization it becomes such a firm commitment that deviation from within becomes virtually impossible. At this point the means supplants the end and past policy drives present and future policies. Flexibility in decision making is lost and only a force from outside the government can effect a change.

This study shows that the increasing United States involvement in Vietnam from 1941 to 1961 can be explained, at least in part, by the impetus given the decision process by "policy precedents." It clearly shows that American policy evolved from relatively minor incremental but always escalating changes. With the exception of the initial post-World War II policy of containment, the broad global policies enunciated by American political leaders had little impact on the American course in Vietnam. Instead, this involvement was driven by commitments which were firmly established as early as 1950.

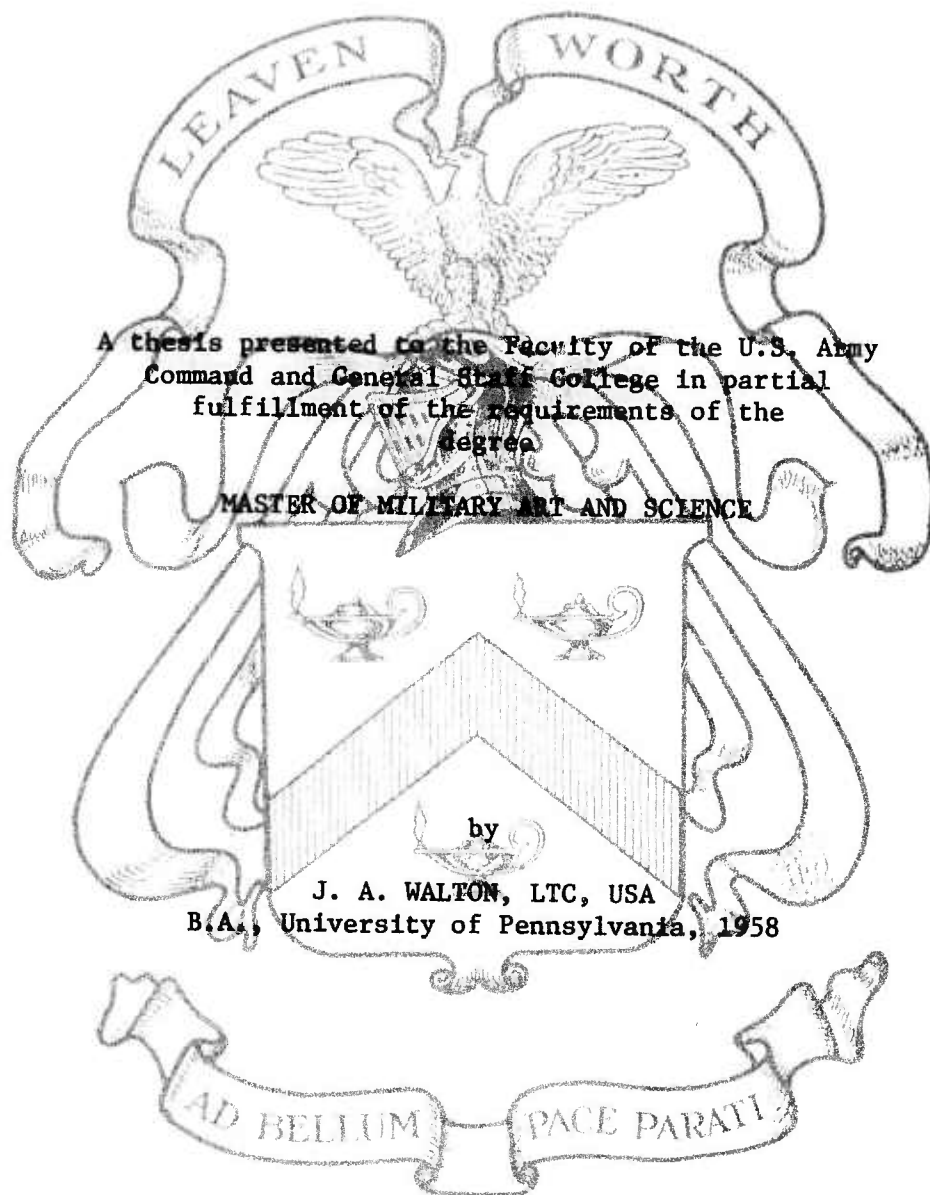
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POLICY PRECEDENTS

UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

1944 - 1961



A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

J. A. WALTON, LTC, USA
B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 1958

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1975

ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies a force, inherent in the national security decision-making process, which contributed to the American involvement in Viet Nam. Termed "policy precedents", this force may be outside the control of the unwary decision maker and can result in irrational international behavior on the part of the nation. Once a policy or program becomes totally enmeshed within the governmental organization it becomes such a firm commitment that deviation from within becomes virtually impossible. At this point the means supplants the end and past policy drives present and future policies. Flexibility in decision making is lost and only a force from outside the government can effect a change.

To develop this thesis the author employs the historical method and traces the development of American policy as directed toward Indo-China and Viet Nam during the period 1944 to 1961. Policies are analyzed to isolate American national interests and objectives, to determine the courses of action considered, and to identify the stated rationale for selection of the final policy. The "classical" or "pure-rationality" decision-making model is employed to assist in this analysis.

To accomplish this research a great deal of material was reviewed, analyzed and isolated. The available literature, both the limited primary and voluminous secondary sources were reviewed. Certainly, the most significant limitation was the scarcity of primary sources.

Accordingly, heavy reliance was placed on the two major editions of the Pentagon Papers, presidential papers, State Department publications, and the writings of the major participants and their advisors.

This study shows that the increasing United States involvement in Viet Nam from 1941 to 1961 can be explained, at least in part, by the impetus given the decision process by "policy precedents." It clearly shows that American policy evolved from relatively minor incremental but always escalating changes. With the exception of the initial post-World War II policy of containment, the broad global policies enunciated by American political leaders had little impact on the American course in Viet Nam. Instead, this involvement was driven by commitments which were firmly established as early as 1950.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

National security decision making seldom reaches the life-or-death immediacy of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Normally policy formulation evolves as a step-by-step process over a relatively long period of time based upon the interaction of many factors including the synthesis of ideas within the government, political pressures, vested interests, varying philosophies of the decision maker and the actual or contemplated reactions by our allies and enemies. Normally isolated reactions to situations are revocable. However, the sum of several independent actions may propel a nation along a course past a point where the leaders lose their freedom of action and instead react to situations based upon conditioned reflexes derived as a result of previous decisions and policies. Such may have been the case of the United States involvement in Viet Nam.

Widespread public dissatisfaction in the late 1960's, opposition statements by national political leaders from 1963 on, and dissent within academic circles are all indications that the United States involvement in Viet Nam may have been contrary to this nation's best interest. A study of the history of United States' actions suggests a degree of inevitability. However, a review of the available literature fails to explain this inevitability. Although the large scale commitment of U.S. forces occurred during the Johnson Administration there are indications that that administration may have been propelled along a

course of action which had its roots in the cold war policy of containment. This position was postulated by Hans Morgenthau as early as 1965 when he stated:

We are militarily engaged in Vietnam by virtue of a basic principle of our foreign policy that was implicit in the Truman doctrine of 1947 and was put into practice by John Foster Dulles from 1954 onward. This principle is the military containment of Communism. Containment had its origins in Europe; Dulles applied it to the Middle East and Asia through a series of bilateral and multilateral alliances. Yet what was an outstanding success in Europe turned out to be a dismal failure elsewhere.¹

The fact that President Johnson only deviated from the preestablished track by the imposition of a strong catalyst from outside the government is a historical fact. It appears that the public reaction to the war and the 1968 election were the two forces which ultimately changed the direction of American policy in Southeast Asia.

Theory

While the available literature on Viet Nam fails to explain the apparent inevitability of the United States involvement; the study of the decision making process has developed the analytical tools necessary to determine if this inevitability in fact occurred, and the apparent causes. Social scientists and philosophers since Plato have studied the governmental process and have formulated a multitude of normative models in an effort to explain the manner in which governmental decisions are formulated.

Charles E. Lindblom has developed such a decision-making model which explains the development of policy by conservative evolutionary changes.² In reaction to the widespread assumption by social scientists that pure rationality is the most effective method of decision making, Lindblom hypothesizes that pure rationality will result in an

unmanageable number of vague alternatives and, because the consequences of the alternatives cannot be precisely determined, may result in the adoption of radical policies which are destabilizing.³ Instead he advocates "muddling through" by the progressive evolution of policies by incremental change. "Incrementalism" is a narrowing of the decision makers focus. It is necessary because widely divergent policies are unlikely to gain support within the organization and, accordingly, are less likely to be adopted. Specifically Lindblom contends that usually:

...what is feasible politically is policy only incrementally, or marginally different from existing policies. Drastically different policies fall beyond the pale. That aside, a pre-occupation with no more than incremental or marginal changes in policy often serves for still other reasons to raise the level of competence of policy. Where applicable such a strategy:

- a. concentrates the policy-maker's analysis on familiar, better-known experience;
- b. sharply reduces the number of alternative policies to be explored and
- c. sharply reduces the number and complexity of factors he has to analyze.⁴

Thus the "incremental-change" model explains inertia and conservatism as it exists in policy formulation. Adherence to this model affords a high degree of stability and security to the decision-maker in most situations. The obvious fault lies in its failure to consider all alternatives and the decreased likelihood of optimizing results. There are two specific situations in which the "incremental-change" concept can be considered inappropriate; first, when past policies have not achieved satisfactory results; and, secondly, when the situation changes to such an extent that previous policies have no bearing on future decisions. In these two situations the decision-maker must have the flexibility to overcome the "incremental-change" predisposition and consider innovative changes which are more likely to reach the goals of the nation.

Although numerous "real world" models have been developed to

either explain the decision-making process or to be used as a guide for the formulation of policy, scholars generally agree as to the existence of an ideal model. Referred to as the "classical" or "pure-rationality" model this analytical decision-making concept would, if it were possible to follow, result in the formulation of purely rational decisions.⁵

Although it is generally accepted that this model is not possible to follow in a practical sense, it does provide an effective means to study the policy-formulation process and is readily adaptable to the analysis of strategic decisions by focusing directly on the decision-making process. The foundation, and initial step, in the classical model consists of a determination and precise definition of the desired ends (national goals, interests and objectives). If multiple ends exist, they must be ranked in the order of importance and priorities established. Secondly, the problem solver, through analysis, selects that means (course of action or policy) which will most effectively attain the ends selected. Inherent in this second process is an examination and weighing of the full range of interests and objectives which the nation has in a given situation, the full range of policies and programs which could be followed to reach these goals, the probable effectiveness of each of these policies and programs in achieving the desired goals in view of the existing situation, and, finally, the consistency between policies and programs in other areas with the contemplated policy in the area under consideration. Various courses of action can then be analyzed based on their cost and risk, in terms of the nation's capabilities and limitations, and then weighed in terms of the probability of success. Desirable courses of action can then be selected and, where consistent, integrated. Should this analysis indicate that the costs

and/or risks of the various available options exceed the benefits which can be logically expected, then the desired ends may have to be modified and a new analysis conducted. Essential to this form of analysis is the consideration of all available courses of action, a thorough understanding of the situation, and the ability to reasonably forecast the likely outcome of actions, all problems which Lindblom perceived in the development of his "incremental-change" model.

A multitude of conditions arise which limit the decisionmakers ability to consider alternative courses of action and conduct a rational analysis. Such failure, particularly when based on a faulty understanding of the situation, renders the "incremental-change" model inapplicable and may result in irrational international behavior which, if Lindblom is correct, may become self-perpetuating. The loss of freedom of action on the part of the decisionmaker can be attributed to an almost infinite number of causes arising from international, domestic, and governmental pressures. However, each of these pressures focus directly on the courses of action considered and limit the options considered in a manner quite different from that proposed by Lindblom. Accordingly, existing programs and policies develop their own momentum which is difficult to redirect due to organizational behavior; including individual and group identification, the development of a policy constituency, and organizational structuring. Certainly once an individual has committed himself publicly and privately to a course of action, he feels a strong emotional restraint against changing his views and admitting the error of his original judgment. When this decision is made within an organization, then the decision becomes the group's commitment and the individual's emotional restraint is reinforced by concepts of

organizational loyalty and conformity. Obviously, commitment is further intensified when the organizational well-being is tied to the program or policy. Public pronouncements explaining, justifying and forecasting actions all further solidify group and personal commitment.

The irrational force outside the control of the decision-maker which is based on previous policies is referred to in this study as "policy precedent." Major programs and policies, by their inherent complexity, involve a broad spectrum of agencies within the government. As a result a great deal of interagency cooperation is required for their effective implementation. Each agency will view the situation from a different perspective based, in part, on their own insured well being. As a result adjustments and accommodations ensue and the decisions become a commitment of the government as a whole rather than being tied exclusively to one individual or agency. Once a policy or program becomes totally enmeshed within the governmental organization, then flexibility in decisionmaking is lost and only a force from outside the government can effect a change. At this point the means may supplant the ends as the driving force and national interests and objectives may be based on the policies and programs rather than the converse.

Purpose

This paper analyzes the impact of "policy precedent" on the decision-making process in a specific instance: the United States' involvement in Viet Nam. This analysis is conducted in order to determine the rationality or irrationality of policy in this particular instance, and, if possible, determine the point at which the "incremental-change" concept should have been recognized as inappropriate and the

decision-maker should have opted for a radical departure from previously established policies.

Hypothesis

The increasing United States involvement in Viet Nam from 1944 to 1961 can be explained, at least in part, by the impetus given the decision process by "policy precedents."

Significance of Study

Hopefully, the result of this study will be a better understanding of the restraints which are imposed on the decision-making process. Since the military establishment is an important instrument in the execution of United States policy, it plays a significant role in the formulation of this policy. As a result, it is incumbent upon the military to have a better appreciation of the restraints placed upon the decision-making process which could impair future flexibility in a crisis situation with disastrous results for the nation.

Methodology

In order to understand fully the historical evolution of the American involvement in Viet Nam, it is necessary to understand the role which "policy precedent" played in shaping United States' policy and in restricting the freedom of action of the presidents during four successive administrations. The starting point for this inquiry is 1944, a time in history when, because of the impact of World War II in changing the world order, "incrementalism" and "policy precedent" as concepts were the most susceptible to change. It was at this point that the United States had the greatest freedom of action without external restraints. This study terminates in 1961, a point when President

Kennedy made the decision to fully commit the United States to the preservation of the South Vietnamese Government.

The specific methodology employed for conducting this research and for identifying the determinants of United States policy in Viet Nam consists in applying the analytical model as defined on page 4 to the decision making process during the progressive American involvement. Decisions are analyzed to isolate the national interests and objectives, determine the courses of action considered, and identify the stated rationale for selection of the final policy. Low level policy formulation and the mechanics of the decision-making process are outside the scope of this study and excluded from consideration.

Four research tasks have been identified which will indicate the role of "policy precedent" as a determinant in the national security decision-making process. Each of these tasks is extracted from one step of the analytical decision-making model. Specifically this research will determine:

- a. If the national goals and interests were clearly identified during the evolution of United States policy;
- b. If all viable courses of action were considered which would logically support the national goals and interests;
- c. If the policy selected was consistent with the decision maker's perception of the situation and with the national goals and interests; and
- d. If the national goals and interests were arbitrarily modified to conform to existing policy.

If it can be shown that tasks one, two and three were applied by the decision maker and task four was not a consideration throughout

the decision-making process, then the concept of "policy precedent" can be discarded as a factor in the decision making process. If, on the other hand, it can be shown that previous policies restricted the decision maker's freedom of action to consider tasks one, two or three or that task four was a factor, then the significance of "policy precedent" can be identified.

To accomplish this task a great deal of material was reviewed, analyzed and isolated by this researcher. The available literature, both the limited primary and voluminous secondary sources were reviewed. Certainly the most significant limitation imposed has been the scarcity of primary sources. Accordingly, heavy reliance has been placed on the two editions of the Pentagon papers, presidential papers, State Department publications and the writings of the major participants and their advisors.

NOTES

¹Hans J. Morgenthau, "We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam," The New York Times Magazine, (April 18, 1965), p. 28.

²For a detailed discussion of the incremental model see D. Braybrooke and C.E. Lindblom, A Strategy of Decision (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

³Dror Yehezkel, Public Policymaking Reexamined (Scranton, PA: Chandler Publishing Co., 1968), p. 144.

⁴Charles E. Lindblom, The Policy-Making Process (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), pp. 26-27.

⁵For an analysis of the "classical" model in detail, see Dror Yehezkel, op. cit., p. 132ff; C.E. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 13; and H.A. Simon and J.G. March, Organizations (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 136ff.

CHAPTER II

THE PERIOD OF VACILLATION

The Emergence of the Cold War and the Policy of Containment

American post World War II foreign policy developed as a reaction to the prominence of the Soviet Union as an emerging world power and the collapse of the pre-World War II balance of power system. Only two nations, the Soviet Union and the United States, emerged from the war with sufficient strength to function as super powers. Each viewed the other as a distinct threat to its existence and feared the other's supposed desire for world domination.

The war-time image of friendship and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the West quickly dissolved as a result of what the United States perceived as Soviet intransigencies and hostility. The initial result was frustration. It was quickly replaced, however, by a stubborn resistance against further Soviet expansion. The United States countered expansion of the Soviet sphere by moving into the many power vacuums created by the collapse of the prewar balance of power; and, by reacting to any attempted Soviet incursion into these areas. Relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were characterized by attempts on the part of the former to identify weaknesses within latter's spheres of influence and the expansion of that influence through the application of political, economic, psychological and/or military pressures to these areas. The United States countered by attempting to restrict Soviet expansion without a direct confrontation with the Soviet

Union.

Two opposing policy poles developed in the United States position toward the Soviet Union. At the one extreme were those advocates of broad concessions and, if necessary, the ultimate withdrawal to a fortress America. At the other extreme were those who advocated meeting every Soviet probe with maximum counterforce and, if necessary, war now rather than later. Fortunately, most individuals fell somewhere between these poles. An OSS report to the President on April 2, 1945 summed up this middle of the road approach. In its analysis of the future relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, the report recommended the creation of a US-Western European sphere to act as a counterweight to Russia. To this end the United States should

...do everything possible to encourage and support...the development of economically prosperous, popular democratic regimes which could, in cooperation with Britain and the United States, tend to balance the Russian position.¹

As regards to Asia "...we cannot afford to ignore the fact that with the defeat of Japan, Russia will emerge as a far more formidable power in Asia..." and "...the interest of the United States would appear to require a policy not unlike that recommended in Europe...."² The report further recommended that the United States strengthen such forces as may exist in Asia in order to balance China and Japan between the Soviet Union and America and pointed out the inherent danger of pushing too hard and placing the Soviet Union in the position of having to counter U.S. influence by anti-Chiang activities in China. Such pressures could result in Soviet attempts, and possibly success, in gaining control of all of China through the Sino-Communist movement.

Having effected a relatively balanced appraisal of the situation, the report went on to state that in regard to Indo-China

...it is not in our national interest to lead a crusade for colonial independence or to insist on some form of international trusteeship. None of the European powers has a strong position in the Far East. The least we can do is to avoid any action that may weaken it further; our interest in developing a balance to Russia should lead us in the opposite direction.³

Thus, the sentiment for supporting the European powers in Asia was projected, even though this sentiment might run counter to the nationalist aspirations of the people concerned.

Gradually, a world-wide policy was developed to control what was perceived as a Kremlin directed, Communist conspiracy for world domination. George F. Kennan, one of the primary defenders of this approach, stated the policy existent in 1947 when he wrote

...it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.... the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western World is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.⁴

Accordingly, Soviet and U.S. affairs were characterized by what was perceived by the U.S. as carefully planned Soviet actions followed by U.S. reaction. To assist in countering this perceived initiative, the United States ultimately developed an interwoven series of alliances whose primary purpose was to maintain the status quo among the non-Communist states. These alliances relied to a large extent upon America's nuclear shield for their ultimate security. The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in 1949 is an example of this concept. Without question the United States' commitment to the maintenance of the status quo had an adverse effect on her image. Throughout the period of containment the United States supported many governmental systems which were not popular with their subjects. While the Soviets

were relatively inflexible initially, by the time of Stalin's death they had developed a high degree of flexibility. As a result they were able to support movements, both Marxist and non-Marxist, designed to overthrow the pro-Western status quo in any area and to weaken Western unity. This greatly enhanced the Soviet's ability to contest for the allegiance of the many emerging and generally non-aligned neutralist nations of Asia and Africa. They were particularly effective in those areas, because of anti-colonialist influences, which desired to abrogate the spectre of colonialism.

The exclusive possession by the United States of nuclear weapons during the period 1945-1950 undoubtedly had a profound effect on Soviet policy. While the post World War II expansion of her borders and domination of Eastern Europe had provided her with a degree of protection, her leaders had to consider the possibility of nuclear annihilation.⁵ As a result Soviet policies were cautious and circumspect.

The Lenin doctrine of the inevitable war between Capitalism and Communism was a basic tenet of Communist ideology and the Soviet Union prepared for this eventuality. The development of a Soviet nuclear capability and the advancement of her industrial capacity resulted in an increased confidence by the Soviet rulers in their overall security. This shift is indicated by a 1954 Mikoyan speech in which he stated "...the danger of war has receded to a large extent in connection with the fact that we now have not only the atomic but also the hydrogen bomb."⁶

The United States was slow in reacting to this swing in policy. Both prior to and immediately following the development of the Soviet nuclear capability, U.S. policy was based on the use of nuclear weapons

to deter Soviet aggression. Eventually this reliance on nuclear weapons led to the concept of "massive retaliation." This policy was presented by John Foster Dulles during a speech in March 1954 to the effect that: "Recent statements have been designed to impress upon potential aggressors that aggression might lead to action at places and by means of Free World choosing, so that aggression would cost more than it could gain."⁷ He further amplified this threat by stating the U.S. would not tolerate continued aggression by Communist China in Indochina and would react to continued aggression by all means possible.⁸ The inappropriateness of this approach to the Indochina War is obvious.

Prior to this time the U.S. Government had followed a policy of containment as typified by the Korean conflict. In Korea, aggression had been pushed back at considerable expense by the pressure of conventional arms. The Korean War had three major impacts on United States' thinking. First, it solidified the view commonly held that all Communist actions were orchestrated directly by the Kremlin, or in the case of Asia, by the Kremlin through their agent, Communist China. Secondly, as a result of the political, military and economic drain created by the Korean War, there was a growing perception that the United States must not become involved in another major conflict on the Asian mainland. Finally, and probably most important, there was a recognition that the United States had been drawn into an involvement whereby she was unable to employ the total spectrum of her military power. Thus, the Eisenhower Administration was intent on formulating a policy in Indochina that would avoid a land war, strike at the source of aggression and utilize the total military power available. Chinese aggression in Indo-China was to be repulsed by the Allies issuing notice that it would

strike at the source of aggression. China was put on notice that should it continue its acts it faced possible obliteration.⁹ The primary problem of defeating the Viet Minh was not faced. This was left to the French. Instead U.S. policy in this area was concerned primarily with counterbalancing Chinese intervention.¹⁰

The Genesis of America's Viet Nam Involvement

America's current interest in Indo-China dates back to 1944. As the defeat of the Japanese became inevitable, the United States began developing policies for all areas under Japan's control. Policies toward Indo-China were loose and general since this area was not considered strategically significant and the United States was engrossed in measures designed to insure the rapid defeat of Japan.¹¹ The American Ambassador to China, Patrick Hurley, frequently complained about this lack of a definitive policy and urged the formulation of a firm program in the area.¹²

President Roosevelt considered Indo-China to be a post-war issue and any final decision regarding the status of the area was to be postponed until that time.¹³ He did initially agree to permit the Commanding General of U.S. Forces in China, General Albert Wedemeyer, to provide aid to the French and nationalists guerrillas provided this assistance neither implied support to the French nor detracted from more decisive combat operations against the Japanese in other theaters.¹⁴ While limited aid was provided to French units operating out of China in early 1945, this assistance was terminated by order of President Roosevelt on March 24, 1945.¹⁵ This termination, along with actual steps to block French operations from China further widened the breach in Franco-American relations, a split which had its roots in the personal antagonism

between President Roosevelt and General DeGaulle.

While a firm U.S. policy regarding the future of Indo-China had not been developed, President Roosevelt appears to have been firm by 1944 in his intent for the eventual sovereignty of the Indo-Chinese states. In a January 1944 memorandum to Secretary of State Hull, the President stated that for the past year he had been firm in his intent to establish an international trusteeship to administer the area. He stated his opposition to the return of the area to French control due to the total failure of that nation to effectively administer this area.¹⁶ In regard to this failure in Indo-China he stated: "France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better."¹⁷

In a November 17, 1944 message to Ambassador Hurley, the President reiterated this position stating that he "...is in favor of establishing a United Nations or International trusteeship under whose care and tutelage Indo-China can secure independence according to the principles of the Atlantic Charter."¹⁸ Roosevelt again presented this position in talks with Marshall Stalin at Yalta on February 8, 1945. At this time he secured Soviet concurrence to the trusteeship concept.¹⁹ In March 1945, during a private conference with General Wedemeyer, the President again stated his commitment to independence for Indo-China and his opposition to colonialism everywhere.²⁰

Up until his death on April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt resisted French, British and even State Department efforts to strengthen the French position in Indo-China. He failed to formulate U.S. policy to this end or to develop a workable alternative.²¹ Focusing on the unconditional Axis defeat, the President was apparently unwilling

to take any action which would weaken Allied effectiveness. Although unquestionably possessing a great deal of freedom of action to develop an effective Indo-China policy based on the elimination of the colonial influence, President Roosevelt chose not to do so. Thus, by failing to develop a policy and clearcut national objectives with regard to Indo-China the United States afforded the Colonial nations with the opportunity to plan for the reestablishment of the pre-World War II status quo.

Post Roosevelt Policy

The United States continued to press ineffectively for increased sovereignty for the Indo-Chinese states throughout the Truman administration. However, there was a definite shift away from the United Nations as the instrument for effecting this independence and toward increased sovereignty within the French Union. This shift may be attributed to two factors existing at the conclusion of the war. First, Indo-China was apparently not considered to be one of the critical strategic problems facing the United States. Such overriding considerations as the governing of large portions of Europe and Asia, coupled with problems in many other areas of the world, resulted in a continued delay in the formulation of a firm policy and the pressing for the American point. A second factor was the growing fear of Soviet expansion and the perceived need for a strong and united front among the Allies to protect Western Europe. As a result many officials opposed any action which might offend the European nations and run counter to French and British Colonial interests.²²

The dichotomy in approaches toward Indo-China in 1945 is indicated by a State Department attempt to clarify United States policy immediately following President Roosevelt's death. In response to a

request from the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) for the development of a firm Indo-China policy, the Division of European Affairs (EUR) developed a draft memorandum for the President regarding United States policy in that area.²³ Following EUR's finalisation, the memorandum was forwarded to the Division of Far East Affairs (FEA) for concurrence. EUR took the position that the French viewed with increasing suspicion the future intentions of the United States with regard to Indo-China, and that these suspicions were having a detrimental impact on the French government and people with a consequential adverse impact on Franco-American relations. Accordingly, EUR recommended that the United States should neither oppose the restoration of Indo-China to the French nor take any action with regard to French possessions that it was not willing to take with regard to the possessions of the other Allies (England and the Netherlands.)²⁴

In opposition, FEA's position recognized the increasing importance of Southeast Asia to the United States, the expanding movement toward self-determination within the area and the need for the United States to encourage and assist

...the people of Southeast Asia in developing autonomous, democratic self-rule...If this policy is not followed the millions who live in that area may well embrace ideologies contrary to our own...or ultimately develop a pan-Asiatic movement against the Western World.²⁵

It was further stated by FEA that if the French failed to adopt liberal policies toward Indo-China, policies which would lead to "true, autonomous self-government" then there "...will be substantial bloodshed for many years, threatening the economic and social progress and the peace and stability of Southeast Asia."²⁶ Under pressure, FEA compromised their position and recommended that the United States not oppose the restoration of Indo-China to French control provided the

French gave adequate assurances that they would develop "...a democratic national or federal government to be run for an increasingly by the Indochinese themselves..."; eliminate all special privileges for French citizens and interests in Indo-China; and establish a policy of "... complete economic and commercial equality."²⁷

The uncertainty existing within the State Department at this time is indicated by the fact that there was no resolution of these two opposing positions and a policy recommendation was not forwarded to the President. Possibly the upper echelons of the State Department were unwilling to present less than a unified position supporting the French. Support for this contention can be found in the position taken by the Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs, Mr. Charles C. Dunn. In a memorandum outlining his position, Dunn indicated that the FEA compromise was unacceptable and that he fully supported EUR's position of full backing for the French. It was further stated that the United States had no right to take any territory from the French nor interfere in her affairs. Mr. Dunn felt it would be better to adopt no policy than to formulate one based on the FEA position and the SWNCC policy review was dropped.²⁸

This typical conflict of bureaucratic interests resulted in a continuation and strengthening of the previous pro-French policy. Each of the divisions (FEA and EUR) had developed a clearcut policy constituency and a firm organizational commitment. In the absence of a well-defined, anti-colonial Indo-China policy, the domination of the status quo position was inevitable and could only lead to a continuation of support for the European colonial allies.

It is equally clear that not only was Europe dominating U.S.

policy, but, the Division of European Affairs was the dominant division within the Department of State as well. Clearly the overriding U.S. concern had focused on cooperation with the European allies to protect Western civilization from the Soviet Union. To this end, the State Department had developed an organizational commitment. As was the case in the closing days of World War II, when defeat of the Axis was the overriding consideration, U.S. Indo-China policy during the post-war period was driven by totally disassociated considerations reinforced by the organizational bias of the State Department.

As a result of this bias, dissent was stifled and the decision maker was not afforded the opportunity to consider alternative courses of action and render a well informed decision. Thus, the decision-making process was stifled by organizational bias. Although one can argue the relative merits of the outcome of this stifled process, it is clear that the process itself was less than totally rational.

British and French Policy

While United States policy vacillated, the French and British were firm in their plans for returning to the pre-war status quo in Asia. France, on its part, started preparing early for the reestablishment of French control over her former colony. Soon after the union of French forces with the Allies in 1942, France began planning for the reestablishment of control over Indo-China.²⁹ The initial French plans called for the rearming and deployment of two brigades with supporting naval and air units to Indo-China by the Fall of 1944.³⁰

Repeatedly the French applied to the United States and Great Britain for the necessary support and material to organize this force which eventually grew to two divisions. The British viewed the French

position with sympathy. British support for the plan was announced by the British Chiefs of Staff in May 1944.³¹ However, the United States, lacking a clear cut position and fearing such an operation would weaken the effort in other theaters, neither accepted nor rejected these plans.³²

Due to the apparent American opposition to their plan, the French changed their concept from that of an Indo-China liberation force to a force to assist the Americans in the eventual defeat of the Japanese. The two divisions were to be deployed as the United States saw fit. In July 1945 General DeGaulle's offer was accepted by President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill; with the earliest date of deployment set for the Spring of 1946.³³ The rapidly changing strategic situation created further delays, and, with the cessation of hostilities in Asia there was no further need for the forces. While pressing for major participation in the Pacific war, the French, supported by British bombers based in Ceylon, commenced guerrilla operations against the Japanese in Indo-China. Ambassador Hurley complained to President Truman in May 1945 that

...the French, British and Dutch are cooperating to prevent the establishment of a United Nations Trusteeship for Indochina. The imperialist leaders believe that such a trusteeship would be a bad precedent for the other imperialist areas in Southeast Asia. Accordingly they are attempting to reestablish French "imperialism" and defeat U.S. policy.³⁴

Upon the surrender of Japan on August 14, 1945, prearmistice agreements for the surrender of Japanese elements in Indo-China, which had been made at the Combined Chiefs of Staff Meeting in Potsdam on July 24, 1945, were implemented.³⁵ Operational responsibility for the area north of the 16th parallel was given to the Nationalist Chinese, while the area south of this parallel was assigned to the British

Southeast Asian Command.³⁶ The fact that Washington was not overly interested in this area is indicated by a combined Chiefs of Staff Memo of September 13, 1945 to the French informing them that military problems dealing with the area encompassed by the Southeast Asian Command were to be taken up directly with the British Chiefs of Staff in London.³⁷ In October the French and British governments signed an agreement recognizing the French Civil Administration as the sole legitimate authority for Indo-China south of the 16th Parallel.

Thus United States ambivalence toward Indo-China was faced by a divergent Anglo-French Front. The British carried out their aim of reestablishing French sovereignty from the time of their arrival in southern Viet Nam in mid September. On September 23d the British expelled the Viet Minh government from Saigon and armed conflict ensued.³⁸ By September 25th the British had rearmed over 1000 former French POW's and these troops, along with British and Japanese forces, were employed to maintain control.³⁹ The increasing influx of French units complemented the British Forces and together they were able to suppress the Vietnamese revolutionary government and to reestablish French authority. By November 1945 the French were firmly in control of the Saigon Government and the Colonial High Commissioner had returned to Viet Nam.⁴⁰

The situation north of the 16th parallel was considerably different, but the results were essentially the same. Initially the French tried unsuccessfully to obtain Nationalist Chinese recognition for the assertion of their sovereignty over North Viet Nam. At first, the Chinese supported and strengthened the Revolutionary Government, thence they gradually swung toward a pro-French program. In February 1946, the Chinese signed a series of agreements with the French calling for the withdrawal of the Chinese forces and the reassertion of French

sovereignty.⁴¹ The reason for this swing in China's policy is attributable to the increasing Chinese Communist threat and Chang Kai-shek's desire to divert his forces from occupation duty to more pressing needs.⁴²

The reestablishment of French sovereignty in Indo-China, coupled with the French bias in the State Department, totally restricted the President's freedom of action in developing a meaningful Indo-China policy. Although informed advisors within the government recognized the need for adjusting to the nationalist aspirations of the Indo-Chinese people, the United States was faced with a de facto reassertion of French domination in the area. Since a strong and sympathetic France was considered essential to the containment of Communist expansion in Western Europe, the formulation of an effective policy for Indo-China was further eclipsed by the importance placed on European defense. More and more the overriding consideration became not what is the best policy to adopt with regard to Indo-China, but, rather, how can the U.S. policy in Indo-China best support our policy in Europe. Thus international pressures greatly restricted U.S. actions with regard to Indo-China. Alternative courses of action were not permitted to surface.

Support of the French

As a result of the pressures noted above, American policy during 1946 and 1947 focused increasingly upon the containment of Communist expansion. It identified the only viable nationalistic force in Viet Nam as being Communist dominated. A cryptic State Department message to the U.S. representative in Hanoi on December 5, 1946 outlined this position:

Keep in mind Ho's record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view Dept....⁴³

This growing pro-French anti-Ho Chi Minh position was presented in a September 1948 State Department policy statement on Indo-China.

...we have an immediate interest in maintaining in power a friendly French Government, to assist in the furtherance of our aims in Europe. This immediate and vital interest has in consequence taken precedence over active steps looking toward the realization of our objectives in Indochina.⁴⁴

By 1949 American efforts towards Indo-Chinese independence were directed more toward diplomatic pressures against the French for the establishment of an alternative government in Viet Nam and with the granting of increased autonomy to this government. With the success realized by the Truman Doctrine and the use of military assistance in containing Communist expansion in Greece and Turkey, American policy turned toward increased use of this instrument as the means of providing pro-French support in Asia.

The French on their part were experiencing a great deal of trouble in reestablishing their control over Viet Nam. While attempting to stem Viet Minh influence they followed a policy of attempting to form an alternative government while controlling the Viet Minh militarily. The ineffective Bao Dai government was established in 1949 to govern the recently unified Viet Nam. While conflicts between the French and Viet Minh were frequent during the period 1946-1949, the Viet Minh were awaiting an opportune moment to expand their influence.⁴⁵ The final collapse of the Chiang Kai-Shek government and the Chinese assumption of control of China in December 1949 provided this opportunity. The loss of China had two primary effects upon U.S. policy toward Indo-China. On the

one hand it afforded the Viet Minh with its first worthwhile assistance from an outside power, initially a secure base area and subsequently military supplies. Secondly, the Communist victory created a sense of frustration among many Americans on our ability to contain Communist expansion. The U.S. government now perceived the Communists as being free to intervene directly into the peripheral areas of Asia (including Korea, Indochina, Thailand and Burma) and to expand their insidious influence. These factors solidified American reaction against the Viet Minh and deepened her concern over the region.⁴⁶

Independence Within the French Union

Relations between the nationalist forces in Viet Nam and the French during the period 1946-1949 were characterized by French concessions for short-term gains and Vietnamese concessions for long-term goals. Once the French achieved their desired short-term gains and a secure position, they abrogated their long-term responsibilities.

The first such agreement was the March 6, 1946 Accord signed by Ho Chi Minh for the Vietnamese Republic and Jean Sainteny for the French government. In accordance with the terms of this accord, the French government recognized the sovereignty of the Vietnamese Republic as an associated state within the French Union and agreed to the unification of Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin subject to a popular referendum. In return the Vietnamese Republic agreed to the return of French troops to Tonkin to replace the Chinese units. Both parties agreed to the cessation of hostilities and the immediate opening of negotiations to determine the future characteristic of the new nation's foreign affairs, the form of law for Viet Nam, and the economic and cultural interests that the French would ultimately retain.⁴⁷

This accord was followed by the non-effectual First and Second Dalat Conferences; the French establishment of the Provisional Government of Cochinchina, which effectively nullified the March 6, 1946 Accord; the Fontainebleau Conference; and the Ha Long Bay Agreements of 1947 and 1948. The results of these negotiations were the progressive estrangement of the Viet Minh and many other nationalists, and the replacement of Ho Chi Minh by Emperor Bao Dai as the legitimate representative of Vietnamese nationalism.

Negotiations between Bao Dai and the French continued and resulted in the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949. The French President, Vincent Auriol, and Emperor Bao Dai agreed to a unified Viet Nam within the French Union and established procedures for the formation of a Vietnamese administration. The French retained control of Vietnamese foreign and military affairs, and the Emperor, through inefficiency and political impotence, gradually became a virtual puppet of the French.⁴⁸ Treaties implementing the Elysee Agreement were signed on December 30, 1949, ratified by the French Assembly on January 29, 1950, by the French Senate on February 2, and signed by President Auriol on that same day.⁴⁹

The United States initially viewed the French-Bao Dai negotiations with caution. In a message from the Department of State dated January 17, 1949, the Ambassador to France was informed that the United States desired the French to come to an agreement with Bao Dai, or any other nationalist group capable of uniting the Vietnamese; however, he was also cautioned against making an irrevocable commitment of U.S. support for such agreements. Concern was expressed in this message that the United States might become tied to a government unable to obtain

the support of the Vietnamese people and held in power solely by the presence of the French military presence.⁵⁰ This position was expanded in a message to the Saigon Consul on May 2. This message questioned the viability of the Bao Dai solution and warned against any action implying U.S. endorsement or de facto recognition of the Bao Dai regime.⁵¹ On June 6, the United States, in a strongly worded memorandum to the French Government, expressed doubts as to the adequacy of the concessions made, pessimism of the future of the Bao Dai solution, and urged the French Government to grant sufficient concessions to insure success.⁵²

The fear of Communist success resulted in U.S. acceptance of the Bao Dai solution.⁵³ In spite of her reservations, the United States publicly indicated its support for the Elysee Agreement. On June 21 the State Department publicly stated that the formation of a unified Viet Nam and the efforts of Bao Dai to unite the "truly nationalist movements" within his country would serve to provide the basis "...for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people."⁵⁴ Encouraged by the British, who felt that failure of the Bao Dai solution would result in French withdrawal from Indo-China,⁵⁵ the Secretary of State forwarded a message to His Majesty Bao Dai, Chief of the Viet Nam State, on January 27, 1950. In this message the government expressed its "gratification" on the transfer of sovereignty over Viet Nam to the Bao Dai administration as of January 1 and expressed hope for the establishment of closer relations.⁵⁶ While essentially a pro forma declaration, this message nevertheless committed the United States to support the Bao Dai solution and further restricted the flexibility of the decisionmaker to consider viable alternative courses of action.

National Security Council Report 48/1

Due to the worsening situation among the Asian nations in late 1949, the United States government conducted a major reappraisal of United States policy as directed toward that area.⁵⁷ The result was the preparation by the National Security Council Staff of NSC report 48/1, "The Position of the United States With Respect to Asia". Published on December 23, 1949 this report reflected the combined positions of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Resource Board.⁵⁸

The NSC Report 48/1 was prepared for a special meeting of the National Security Council which met on December 29, 1949.⁵⁹ This report stated that the long-range objective of United States Asian policy was the prevention of regional domination by any one government or coalition, through the development of "...truly independent, friendly, stable and self-sustaining states in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter."⁶⁰ However, because of the defeat of the only effective balancer of power in the region, Japan, and the consequential emergence of the Soviet Union to a position of regional preeminence, there had been created a new threat to the security of the area. Thus the overall U.S. objective of limiting one nation domination focused on a more immediate objective of containing and, where possible, reducing

...the power and influence of the U.S.S.R. in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations.⁶¹

It was further stated that Soviet domination of this region would materially upset the relative balance of military power between the two superpowers. Strategically, the report stated that the value of Asia

to the United States was based on:

- a. The denial to the U.S.S.R. of a significant assistance to its war making power.
- b. The assistance of local forces to contain the spread of Communism thereby reducing the drain on the U.S. economy and, in the event of war, support our efforts.
- c. A valuable sources of strategic material (particularly rubber and tin).⁶²

The disintegration of European imperialism and a widening political consciousness among the former colonies was seen as having given birth to "...the rise of militant nationalism among the subject peoples."⁶³ The capture of these nationalist movements would afford the Kremlin with the opportunity to "...acquire Southeast Asia's resources and communications lines, and to deny them to us." They could also achieve significant political gains by dominating Asia. While the loss of China to Communism represented a "grievous political defeat" for the United States, in the event of a Communist domination of Southeast Asia, the U.S. would suffer "...a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia."⁶⁴ In protecting against this "rout" the U.S. must attempt to resolve the "colonial nationalist" conflict, satisfy the nationalist aspirations of the people, and establish stable anti-Communist regimes, while at the same time not "...weakening the colonial powers who are our western allies."⁶⁵

The report established a minimum military position to be maintained as a first line of defense for the strategic protection of the United States. Consisting of Japan, the Ryukyus Islands, and the Philippines, this belt would provide protection of the strategically essential lines of communication and establish a base for future offensive efforts to reduce the area of Communist control.⁶⁶ Recognizing the

overall strategic importance of Europe to the United States, the report proposed that, in the event of war with the U.S.S.R., the U.S. would conduct a strategic offensive in Europe and a strategic defense of Asia,⁶⁷ essentially the same strategy followed in World War II.

At the December 29th National Security Council meeting with the President presiding, the basic concepts of NSC 48/1 were approved and published as NSC 48/2.⁶⁸ This report concluded that our basic national security objectives in Asia were:

- a. Development of the nations and peoples of Asia on a stable and self-sustaining basis in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter;
- b. Development of sufficient military power in selected non-Communist nations of Asia to maintain internal security and to prevent further encroachment by communism;
- c. Gradual reduction and eventual elimination of the preponderant power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union will not be capable of threatening from that area the security of the United States or its friends and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence and stability of the Asiatic nations;
- d. Prevention of power relationships in Asia which would enable any other nation or alliance to threaten the security of the United States from that area, or the peace, national independence and stability of the Asiatic nations.⁶⁹

Specific actions to be taken to reach these objectives were:

- a. Support non-Communist forces in taking the initiative in Asia;
- b. Exert an influence to advance its own national interests; and
- c. Initiate action in such a manner as will appeal to the Asiatic nations as being compatible with their national interests and worthy of their support.⁷⁰

NSC 48/2 emphasized the importance of Indo-China and stated that

...action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial portion of the Vietnamese.⁷¹

It is apparent by this statement that there was a question at that time

as to the viability of the Bao Dai regime and the adequacy of the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949 to satisfy the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese people. However, the commitment by the United States to the Bao Dai solution was total by this time. From 1947 onward, no other course of action had been afforded meaningful consideration by the decision maker.

Recognition

The continued deterioration of the situation in Southeast Asia during the early months of 1950 resulted in increased governmental interest in Indo-China. On January 26 the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense a review of the current Mutual Defense Assistance Program which defined the long-range objectives of this program. Reiterating the wartime contingency of a strategic offensive in Western Eurasia and a strategic defensive in Asia, this memorandum placed primary emphasis on the expansion of Allied capabilities in Europe. However, apparently for the first time, it also stressed the need for developing "...sufficient military power in selected nations of the Far East and Western Pacific Ocean area; to prevent further encroachment by communism in those areas..."⁷² The report stressed the fact that the degree of success to be derived from military aid will depend on the "self-help efforts" and the will to resist on the part of the recipients.⁷³ Thus, in spite of the success of the aid program in Europe, there was a recognition that it was not a panacea for all security problems.

On January 18, 1950, Communist China became the first of the Communist states to recognize the Ho Chi Minh regime as the legitimate government of Viet Nam. The Soviet Union followed suit on January

30 resulting in a diplomatic protest to the Soviet Union on the part of the French government.⁷⁴ The United States cited this recognition as proof of the Communist control of the Viet Minh movement and a clear indication that Ho Chi Minh was an enemy of the nationalist movement, subordinate to Kremlin control.⁷⁵ The perception was growing that all Communist movements, regardless of their cover, were controlled and directed by the Soviet Union.

On February 2, 1950, Secretary Acheson officially informed the President that the French Assembly had ratified the series of treaties implementing the Elysees agreements and establishing Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia as autonomous states within the French Union.⁷⁶ The Secretary of State stressed to the President two recent developments of major significance: the arrival of Chinese Communist military forces on the China-Indochina border as a result of the Chinese Nationalist defeat and the previously noted diplomatic recognition of Ho Chi Minh by the Communist states. The Secretary recommended the United States recognition of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia upon final ratification of the treaties by the French Senate and the signature of the French President anticipated to occur on February 3d.⁷⁷ According to Secretary Acheson, this action was viewed as desirable and in consonance with U.S. foreign policy for four basic reasons:

- a. It would support the nationalistic aspirations of former colonial areas under non-Communist leadership;
- b. It would establish "...stable non-Communist governments in areas adjacent to Communist China";
- c. It would support an ally (France) who was a signatory of the North Atlantic Charter; and

d. It would be seen as a demonstration of United States resolve to resist the spread of Communism under the guise of nationalism throughout Asia.⁷⁸

There are no indications in this recommendation of the reservations which the State Department had previously held over the Bao Dai solution nor of the need for pressing the French for greater concessions. Thus the State Department had developed an organizational bias in support of Bao Dai and was filtering out opposing view points from Presidential consideration. President Truman approved this position on February 3, 1950 and diplomatic recognition was extended to the three states on February 7th.⁷⁹

The Department of State release announcing recognition failed to address the four basic reasons outlined above simply stating that the recognition was in consonance with:

...our fundamental policy of giving support to the peaceful and democratic evolution of dependent peoples toward self-government and independence.⁸⁰

Giving an indication of our future intentions, the release went on to state that the political stability and the development of democratic institutions in the three states were our major objectives and that the government was in the process of considering the means of attaining these objectives free from "internal dissension fostered from abroad."⁸¹

Economic Aid and Military Assistance

By 1949 President Truman was placing increasing emphasis on economic assistance as a basic tenet of United States foreign policy. In his January 5, 1949 "State of the Union Message", the President reiterated the Truman Doctrine by stating that the United States was following a foreign policy "...which is the outward expression of the

democratic faith we profess....to encourage free states and free people throughout the world, to aid the suffering and afflicted in foreign lands, and to strengthen democratic nations against aggression."⁸² To this end "...we have pledged our resources and our honor." This position was amplified on June 24, 1949 when he stated that "...assistance in the development of the economically underdeveloped areas has become one of the major elements of our foreign policy".⁸³ Failure on the part of the United States to "...aid the newly awakened spirit in these people to find the course of fruitful development...." may result in their falling "...under the control of those whose philosophy is hostile to human freedom...."⁸⁴ The President further stated that while economic recovery through foreign economic assistance was considered to be the most essential condition for the maintenance of freedom and stability, economic assistance alone would not be adequate to prevent aggression. Military assistance was also considered necessary to assist the threatened nations to resist Communist aggression.⁸⁵

The President's view of the value of foreign aid and military assistance was shared by the Department of State. In its first semi-annual report on the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, the overwhelming success of the program was demonstrated by using Greece as an example of the value of military assistance. Directly attributable to U.S. aid, was the reduction in the number of active guerrillas from 28,000 to less than a thousand. Further the program had helped keep Greece from falling to the Communists.⁸⁶ The report further stated that the program was considered to be essential to the defense of the free world and to the containment of Soviet power.⁸⁷

While United States aid to France under the Marshall Plan and

various other post World War II aid programs provided France with sufficient resources to continue the war in Indochina, it wasn't until 1950 that foreign aid was specifically designated to support operations in that area. Less than a month after U.S. recognition of Viet Nam the French requested \$30 million worth of military equipment to fight Communism in Indo-China.⁸⁸ The United States reacted by establishing an Economic Aid Mission under Robert A. Griffin to determine justifiable high impact programs to be funded from the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, to determine Point 4 Program requirements and to determine whether the aid should be provided directly to the Bao Dai government or to the French.⁸⁹ On March 16, 1950 Griffin submitted his preliminary recommendation for \$23.5 million, excluding military assistance, in order to fund urgent programs during the period ending January 30, 1951.⁹⁰ Citing numerous problems, particularly French-Vietnamese friction, he stated that it was feasible to strengthen Bao Dai through aid by winning over the non-communist supporters of Ho Chi Minh as well as a large portion of the uncommitted.⁹¹ He further emphasized that achievement of the desired goals could only be achieved by "prompt decisive action."⁹²

By May 1st the decisions regarding economic and military aid had been made. On that date the President approved a \$10 million dollar emergency shipment of military items to the French for equipping both French Union and Vietnamese State forces.⁹³ On May 8, 1950, Secretary Acheson announced the decision to provide economic aid and military equipment to France and the associated states of Indochina "...in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development."⁹⁴ In order to coordinate and develop this aid program, the United States announced on May 24th the establishment of a special economic aid mission under

Robert Blum to be located in Saigon.⁹⁵

Congressional approval was not required, for the necessary funds in support of Indochina to be expended prior to July 1, 1950. Section 303 of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 appropriated \$75 million as an emergency fund to counter aggression in the general area of China, and it was from these funds that the President authorized the above expenditures.⁹⁶ It is of note that Congress exempted the President from the normal requirement of accounting for expenditures from this emergency fund⁹⁷ and, further, that this appropriation was the only funds under the Act for which expenditure authorization was not delegated by the President to the Secretary of State.⁹⁸ With the exception of this accounting exemption, which was reduced to \$35 million, the same provision was included in the 1950 amendment to the Act authorizing expenditures through June 1951.⁹⁹

Upon the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, President Truman announced on June 27 that he had directed increased and accelerated military assistance to the forces of France and the associated states in Indochina.¹⁰⁰ As a result section 303 funds were increased by Congress to \$303 million by the Supplementary Appropriations Act approved by Congress on September 27, 1950.

The exact amount of aid provided to Indo-China by the United States is difficult to determine, particularly because of the multitude of programs and the provision of large sums to the French in support of the NATO agreements. It is clear that after May 1, 1950 the U.S. economic aid and military assistance programs to Indochina expanded rapidly so that by the time of the French defeat in 1954 the programs are estimated to have totaled well over \$2 billion.¹⁰¹ Paralleling this increase in assistance was a deepening of the United

States commitment to the defeat of the Viet Minh. As the program grew the handful of military advisors assigned to the embassy was expended to a full-scale military advisory mission by President Truman.¹⁰² Viable options open to the United States were becoming increasingly restricted.

Analysis

In analyzing the evolution of United States' policy toward Indo-China during the period 1944 through 1950 the effect of "policy precedents" is obvious. Initially the United States objectives of defeating Japan dictated that there be no clearcut national objective in Indo-China. In spite of pronouncements to the contrary U.S. policy focused exclusively on Allied victory. Policy directed toward the issue of nationalism was never meaningfully addressed.

Following the defeat of the Axis, events in Europe totally transcended the formulation of meaningful national objectives in Indo-China. However, contrary to the previous period, policy did evolve. This policy, based upon the U.S. objectives in Europe, was not designed to meet the United States strategic needs in Asia but, rather, to strengthen Franco-American relations. In spite of a well developed perception within the Government that the "Bao Dai solution" would not succeed, the United States government became totally committed to this course of action. In the absence of meaningful alternatives, which alternatives could not realistically surface under the circumstances, the United States objectives totally identified with support of the Bao Dai regime. Clearly at this point the means had supplanted any meaningful ends and national objectives were being driven by policy.

NOTES

¹U.S., Office of Strategic Services, "Memorandum For the President: Problems and Objectives of United States Policy," May 5, 1945, w/ incl. April 2, 1945, OSS Memorandums for the President (February-September 1945), Box 15, Truman Library. Subsequently referred to as OSS Memorandum of May 5, 1945.

²Ibid.

³U.S., Office of Strategic Services, "Memorandum For the President," September 25, 1945, OSS Memorandums for the President (February-September 1945), Box 15, Truman Library.

⁴George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs, XXV, No. 4 (July 1947), p. 577.

⁵H. S. Dinerstein, War and the Soviet Union (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), p. 4.

⁶Ibid., p. 71.

⁷John Foster Dulles, Speech to the Overseas Press Club, New York, March 29, 1954, in U.S., Department of State Bulletin, XXX (April 12, 1954), pp. 539-40.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City: Long Island, Doubleday and Co., 1963), p. 338.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 337-338.

¹¹Special Operations Research Office (SORO), Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941-1954 (Washington: American University, 1964), p. 107. Subsequently referred to as SORO.

¹²COMNAVGRP China Message, from Ambassador Hurley, for the President, 29 May 1945, White House Map Room File (1945), Truman Library. (Subsequently referred to as Hurley Message.)

¹³U.S., Department of Defense, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 7 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), Section V-B-1, p. 45.

¹⁴United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 1, op. cit., p. A-16.

¹⁵SORO, op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁶U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds, The Senator Gravel Edition. The Pentagon Papers. The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, I (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 10, (Subsequently referred to as Gravel Edition).

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Hurley message, op. cit.

¹⁹U.S., Department of State, Ambassador to France, Telegram to the Secretary of State, February 6, 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁰Albert C. Wedemeyer, Wedemeyer Reports (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1958), p. 340.

²¹U.K., British Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum on the "Participation of Two French Colonial Divisions in Far Eastern Operations," 19 July 1945; and U.S., Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum on the "Participation of Two French Colonial Divisions in Far Eastern Operations," 19 July 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 37, 45 and 68.

²²OS Memorandum of May 5, 1945, op. cit.

²³U.S., Department of State, Division of European Affairs, Memorandum for the President, "Suggested Reexamination of American Policy with Respect to Indo-China," April 20, 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

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²⁵U.S., Department of State, Division of Far East Affairs, "Memorandum for the President Regarding Indochina," April 21, 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 15.

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²⁷Ibid., p. 16.

²⁸U.S., Department of State, Under Secretary, "Memorandum on Indochina," April 23, 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁹Marcel Vignares, United States in World War II - Rearming the French (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1957), p. 391.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 393. See also: United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 37.

³²Ibid., p. 391. See also: United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 36.

³³Ibid., p. 399. See also: United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 43.

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³⁵"Report to the President and Prime Minister of the Agreed Summary of Conclusions Reached by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the 'Terminal' Conference," (Potsdam Conference), July 24, 1945, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., p. 42.

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⁴⁷Gravel Edition, I, op. cit., p. 19.

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⁸⁸New York Times, February 28, 1950, p. 20, col. 5.

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96 Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, Sect. 303, 63 Stat 714 (1949), 22 USC, Sect 1604 (1949).

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CHAPTER III

THE DEEPENING COMMITMENT

Indochina - the Key to Communist Containment in Southeast Asia

During the early 1950's, there was a shift in the United States attitude toward Indo-China and the French involvement there. Prior to this shift, the U.S. could best be classified as an interested observer. Tacit support of France was viewed as a logical means of gaining and maintaining French support for American interests in Europe. The United States desired to retain France as a strong and reliable ally capable of assisting in the defense of the continent. The outbreak of hostilities in Korea and the subsequent decision by the Truman Administration to stop Communist expansion in Asia focused U.S. attention on Indo-China. This focus, coupled with the Viet Minh successes in Northern Tonkin during the Fall of 1950, increased dissatisfaction with the French handling of the war, and the growing perception of Communist China as a threat to all of Asia led to an attempt by the United States to expand its influence in the area. Thus, the United States became less of an interested observer and increasingly attempted to manipulate events in Indo-China.

Along with this shift in attitude, a consistency in policy was developed which lasted throughout the 1950's. The foundation of this policy was enunciated in the first NSC position paper developed on Indo-China in March, 1950 (NSC 64/1).¹ Although rather brief, this paper stressed the strategic importance of Indo-China to U.S. security interests and alluded to the "domino principle" by stating:

...Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat. The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.²

This is essentially the concept which, four years later, would be utilized by President Eisenhower as the justification for an increasing American involvement in Indo-China.³

A split within the U.S. government can be detected in late 1950. The Department of Defense attributed the deteriorating situation to the ineptitude of the French, and, feeling that France lacked leadership and initiative, advocated that any support of the French must be predicated upon the development of a "strong, hard hitting" program to defeat the Viet Minh politically and militarily. The primary fear was viewed as being a progressive deterioration in French motivation and an ultimate withdrawal from Indo-China.⁴ The State Department, on the other hand, perhaps still oriented toward support of the French in Europe, placed the blame for the deteriorating situation on the weakness of the Bao Dai regime and the failure of the Emperor to demonstrate an "energetic opposition" to the Communist threat.⁵ While these two positions tended to counterbalance one another and restrict the development of an optimum program, there was agreement between the two agencies on the need for a continued and expanded American involvement.

Two other concepts were developing at this time. On the one hand the Communist attack in Korea had generated the fear of open Chinese Communist intervention into Southeast Asia, and, secondly, there was an intensification of the commitment on the part of the United States to contain the tide of Communist expansion. Offsetting these two concepts was a growing fear of the U.S. becoming involved in a land war on the Asiatic mainland with the Chinese hordes. This latter fear was

expressed by President Truman on April 11, 1951. In a major policy address he stressed the United States' aim in Korea was the limited goal of repulsing Communist aggression while avoiding the involvement of the United States in a larger war.⁶ These factors permeated national security planning and can be detected in the first detailed and comprehensive NSC position paper dealing with the Indo-China situation.

NSC 124/2: United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Regard to Southeast Asia

With President Truman presiding, the National Security Council approved on June 25, 1952 the first comprehensive position paper (NSC 124/2) addressing United States actions in regard to Southeast Asia and, specifically, the primary threat in that area—Indo-China. In response to the deteriorating French position the NSC staff prepared a detailed staff study on Southeast Asia which was published on February 13, 1952 and became the basis of NSC 124/2.⁸ This staff study was founded on the essential premise, first developed in 1950, that Indo-China represented for the Communists a key which would unlock the treasure chest of Southeast Asia. The staff study identified eight specific reasons for the criticality of Southeast Asia to U.S. security interests. Specifically the loss of Indo-China, and subsequently all of Southeast Asia would:

- a. Generate, within the free world, doubt as to the ability of the United States and the United Nations to stem the tide of communism.
- b. Be followed by a progressive Communist alignment on the part of India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. This alignment would ultimately endanger the stability and security of Europe and the United States.

c. Result in economic and political pressures on Japan. These pressures would ultimately push Japan toward accommodation with the Communist Bloc.

d. Deprive the Free World of needed resources; s.a.k., natural rubber, tin, petroleum and other strategically important commodities.

e. Afford the Soviet Union with control of Southeast Asian rice and, accordingly, a powerful weapon over the Asian nations.

f. Result in the loss of Malaya, thereby further weakening the British economy.

g. Seriously jeopardize the U.S. position on the first line of strategic defense in Asia; i.e., the offshore island chain of Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines.

h. Provide the Soviet Union with advanced bases (both air and naval) and control of the most direct line of communication in the area.

The staff study considered the entire area to be strategically interdependent requiring that the defense of one nation be predicated upon the effective defense of all nations in the area. The defense of Tonkin was considered to be the keystone of this interdependence. The loss of this area would open routes to Annam, Cochin China, Laos, Cambodia and ultimately Thailand, Burma, Malaya and Indonesia. Should Tonkin be lost, then the French forces in Indo-China would be forced into enclaves along the coast pending reinforcement or withdrawal. Increasing Communist successes would result in an ever increasing swing in native support toward the Viet Minh.

Once Indo-China had fallen, two forms of aggression against Thailand were viewed: overt Communist attack by the traditional

invasion route through Cambodia or through subversion by infiltration; and, the exertion of severe political pressures. In the former case it was considered possible to defend an area of southern Thailand centered on Bangkok, however, the bulk of the country would be indefensible. In the event of subversion it was considered possible that political pressure alone would drive Thailand toward accommodation with international Communism within a year. It was recognized that Thailand might resist subversion through substantial aid coupled with assurances of support from the U.N. and the U.S. The fall of Thailand to Communism would aggravate the serious security situation existing in Malaya. The Kra Isthmus was seen as affording the most defensible terrain in Southeast Asia and was considered to be the most effective second defensive line (after Indo-China). It was hoped, then, that Malaya and the East Indies could be defended against both subversion and direct attack.

The staff study recognized two distinct threats to the security of Indo-China. The first threat was seen as a progressive weakening of French will as a result of the Viet Minh war of attrition and ultimately a French capitulation and the surrender of the area to Communism. The second threat considered direct intervention by the Chinese Communists. The military forces of the French and of the Associated States were considered much too weak to withstand such forces as the Chinese could bring to bear. As a result the Allies would be forced back into an enclave around Haiphong, defensible for only a limited time without outside assistance.⁹

The development among the three Associated States of stable governments capable of gaining the support of the masses and of building effective armed forces was considered to be the key to meeting this threat. The study recommended that every effort must be made by the

United States to strengthen French resolve; to oppose a negotiated settlement; to build stable indigenous governments; and to increase U.S. influence within these governments. The United States' economic aid program was seen as the primary vehicle of U.S. policy for defending the area. The objectives of the aid program were to increase production within the three states; to increase popular support for the indigenous governments by improving governmental services; to support the military effort; and, finally, to increase awareness of America's interest in the peoples' welfare and independence.¹⁰

The anticipated means of countering direct Chinese intervention is not clearly presented in the study. Desirably, the U.S. forces would operate under the auspices of the United Nations, or as a minimum in conjunction with our allies: France, Britain and other Commonwealth countries. Recognizing the undesirability of committing major U.S. ground forces, the study stated that the scope of U.S. involvement could not be determined at that time; however, efforts should be directed toward bolstering French Union forces. Such measures as a naval blockade of Communist China; naval, air and logistical support of French Union forces; and attacks by air against military targets in China were mentioned. These actions were seen as increasing the risk of general hostilities; degrading U.S. capabilities in other areas; arousing public opinion; and implying U.S. willingness to resist Communist aggression in other critical areas. Failure to take action would result in a major Communist victory at little or no cost.¹¹

On February 29, 1952, the Central Intelligence Agency, in conjunction with the major intelligence agencies of the Defense and State Departments, completed a special intelligence estimate entitled

"Consequences of Certain Possible U.S. Courses of Action with Respect to Indochina, Burma or Thailand."¹² Dealing exclusively with the threat of Communist Chinese military intervention, this estimate recommended that the most effective means of deterring Chinese Communist intervention was through the prior issuance of a creditable warning against such action by the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand. The effectiveness of such a warning would depend upon the creditability and capabilities of the five powers as well as a firm intent not to localize the action but to direct any intended action against Communist China itself.

On March 3, 1952 the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted an analysis of the NSC staff study.¹³ This analysis stressed the need for a clear understanding of the costs involved in supporting the objectives embodied in the staff study. Specifically the United States would have to be willing to take actions which would result in a long and expensive defacto war with China. Such a decision would require a thorough evaluation of the costs in terms of men, money and materiel; the impact on other U.S. commitments, specifically NATO; and the expected support from our allies. Questioning the will of our allies and pointing out the need for decisive results, the JCS stressed that consideration must be given to appropriate action against Communist China itself, unilaterally if necessary. "Failing such freedom of action, the United States should accept the possibility of loss of at least Indo-China, Thailand and Burma."¹⁴ In any case the JCS reaffirmed their position that United States ground forces should not be committed in the defense of Indo-China, Thailand or Burma under any circumstances. Thus the JCS addressed only the threat of overt Chinese intervention and advocated an either/or approach: either be willing to carry the war to Communist

China with the associated risks and high costs or be willing to accept the loss of the area.

On June 25, 1952 the President and the National Security Council approved NSC 124/2.¹⁵ Essentially this position paper incorporated the analysis found in the NSC staff study with only limited revisions and deletions. While the deletions may have been driven by a desire to reduce the length of the document, they may indicate a shift in attitude during the four month period in which this position was being developed. Specifically the variations between the staff study and NSC 124/2 were as follows:

a. There was a shift in the emphasis placed on the strategic value of the area to the Soviet Union; and specifically the strategic value of bases in Southeast Asia and the enhanced economic position that would accrue to the USSR from the area. While it was emphasized that the loss of the area would seriously endanger U.S. security interests, a parallel gain to the Soviet Union was not noted. Paralleling this change, there was an increased perception of the Chinese Communists threat to the area. Apparently the world situation in general and the Korean War in particular were beginning to indicate the existence of a degree of polarity within the Communist bloc.

b. There was no mention in NSC 124/2 of the contention that the loss of Southeast Asia would generate doubt among the nations of the free world as to the ability of the U.S. and the U.N. to stem the tide of Communism. While this contention would be strongly presented in future years, it was apparently not considered significant at this point.

c. The importance of Malaya to the economic position of the United

Kingdom was also omitted. Perhaps the decreasing threat of the insurgency in Malaya and the British moves toward Malayan autonomy had lessened the importance of this consideration.

d. There was increased emphasis placed on the enhancement of U.S. influence among the governments of the Associated States with a parallel decrease in French influence. This modification reflected a growing concern regarding the will of the French government to continue its efforts in the defense of this area. In accordance with this shift there was increased emphasis on increasing the sense of responsibility and the capabilities of the three indigenous governments; strengthening the areas by developing indigenous forces capable of maintaining internal security; instituting land reforms; providing industrial and agrarian credit; formulating a sound rice marketing system; developing a labor movement; and by increasing foreign trade. Thus, for the first time social reforms were included in a national policy paper. The primary vehicle for achieving these social, political and military reforms would be U.S. economic and military assistance.

e. To provide for the maximum possible time to strengthen the Associated States, defeat the Viet Minh and influence the events in Indo-China, every effort was to be made to discourage a negotiated settlement on the part of the French and encourage the aggressive prosecution of the war by the French and indigenous forces. The target of mid-1955 was established for the defeat of the Viet Minh and the stabilization of the area.

f. While the NSC staff study viewed the two threats (CHICOM intervention and Viet Minh subversion) as balanced, NSC 124/2 considered the greatest threat as arising from Communist supported internal

subversion.¹⁶ This shift in emphasis can be attributed to the steady growth of the Viet Minh forces and the weakening resolve of the French government as perceived by the U.S. and indicated in this paper.

g. The impact of the JCS review can be seen in the actions contemplated in regard to Chinese Communist intervention. This intervention was defined as both direct attack and covert participation "...to such an extent as to jeopardize retention of the Tonkin Delta area by French Union forces..."¹⁷ Whereas the recommendations in the NSC staff study were vague, those in NSC 124/2 are clear. The U.S. should attempt to work through the U.N. or, if this is not feasible, then in conjunction with our allies. If concurrence is not obtained, however, the U.S. must consider taking unilateral action.¹⁸ The minimum actions to be taken would include a "resolute defense of Indochina" and the interdiction of Chinese Communist communication lines including those in China.¹⁹ Other actions to be taken as deemed appropriate, would include: increased covert operations; employment of anti-Communist Chinese forces for military operations in Southeast Asia, Korea or China proper; assistance to the British to evacuate Hong Kong; and, the evacuation of French Union forces from Tonkin if required.

h. An expansion of the war to China was contemplated even without overt Communist intervention. While the situation which would precipitate this eventuality was not defined, the possibility of a need for "air and naval action in conjunction with at least France and the U.K. against all suitable military targets in China..." was presented.²⁰

NSC 124/2 demonstrates a significant evolution which had been occurring in United States' policy. One old concept, containment, had been modified and the seeds were sprouting for two future concepts, the

"domino theory" and massive retaliation.

The modification of containment occurred as a result of the fall of China to Communism and her intervention during the Korean War. Originally designed to counter the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union, containment was expanded to oppose the same perceived tendencies by China. Thus the fear of Soviet influence in Asia had been supplanted by a fear of Red China.

The existence of the "domino theory", born in NSC 64/1 (see above p. 45), is indicated by the designation of Tonkin as the key to all of Southeast Asia (see above p. 48). This position is an expansion of the containment concept which views Communism as an ever expanding stain threatening the fiber of the free world. Containment was founded on a perception that if Communist border areas could be defended, Communism would not be able to envelop this safe zone and successfully attack nations away from the periphery. However, by this time, the "domino theory" was so well rooted that this perception had been expanded to the point where the fall of one nation on the periphery would inevitably result in the fall of her neighbors, and their neighbors, and on and on.

The military's frustration with the handling of the Korean War and, specifically, the American decision not to strike strategic targets in China, gave impetus to the development of the concept of "massive retaliation." That this concept was well developed in March 1952 is indicated by the JCS analysis of the NSC staff study (see above p. 51). This analysis advocated striking the source of aggression, i.e. China. The degree of acceptance that this concept had already developed within the bureaucracy is indicated by the fact that the JCS position was

included in the final policy paper.

In analyzing NSC 124/2 in relation to the research tasks outlined in Chapter I, there are definite indications that "policy precedents" may have begun to have an impact at this stage of the American involvement. The national goal in Indo-China was clearly identified as being the defense of Southeast Asia against Communism. However, there is nothing to indicate in the then current CIA estimates, the NSC staff study or NSC 124/2 that a thorough analysis of the susceptibilities of the Southeast Asian nations to Communist subversion had been performed. The U.S. containment policy as expanded explained the criticality of Indo-China to U.S. interests, and there was no need to thoroughly evaluate the situation. Rather than being based on the situation, policy was driving the government's perception of this situation.

As was the case throughout the American involvement in Viet Nam, there appears to have been only one course of action or, perhaps more accurately, one package of actions considered by the decision-maker. U.S. policy focused exclusively on support for the Bao Dai Government with supporting actions designed to strengthen that regime. While pressures were evident within the government for increased U.S. involvement and commitment in support of Bao Dai, similar pressures for a reduction in the American effort are not discernable. There are no indications that any other solutions were even considered by the President. Thus there appears to have been a limitation on the options presented to the decision-maker for his consideration and an inherent restriction in his freedom of action. In spite of this limitation, the policies appear to have been considered by the government as supportive of U.S. national goals as perceived by the decision-makers.

A New Positive Foreign Policy - The Eisenhower Administration

On January 20, 1953 former general Dwight David Eisenhower was sworn in as the 34th President of the United States of America. Thirteen days later the new President presented his first "State of the Union" message to Congress in which he outlined an offensive concept for the waging of the cold war.²¹ Reacting adversely to the initiative which he perceived the Communists as having had since 1945 he stated:

We have learned that the free world cannot indefinitely remain in a posture of paralyzed tension, leaving forever to the aggressor the choice of time and place and means to cause greatest hurt to us at least cost to himself.

This administration has, therefore, begun the definition of a new, positive foreign policy...governed by certain fixed ideas. They are these:

- (1) Our foreign policy must be clear, consistent, and confident...it must be the product of genuine, continuous cooperation between the executive and the legislative branches...
- (2) The policy...must be a coherent global policy. The freedom...in Europe and in the Americas is no different from the freedom... in Asia.
- (3) Our policy, dedicated to making the free world secure, will envision all peaceful methods and devices--except breaking faith with our friends. We shall never acquiesce in the enslavement of any people in order to purchase fancied gain for ourselves...
- (4) The policy we pursue will recognize the truth that no single country, even one so powerful as ours, can alone defend the liberty of all nations threatened by Communist aggression from without or subversion within. Mutual security means effective mutual cooperation...The heart of every free nation must be honestly dedicated to the preserving of its own independence and security.
- (5) Our policy will be designed to foster the advent of practical unity in Western Europe. The nations of that region have contributed notably to the effort of sustaining the security of the free world. From the jungles of Indochina and Malaya to the northern shores of Europe, they have vastly improved their defensive strength...²²

This concept was further expanded by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who, in a major foreign policy address, after an "agonizing reappraisal" of United States' foreign policy, made the following key points:

- a. Previous policy had been developed as a result of emergency action to situations imposed upon us by our enemies;

b. If we continued our previous policies we would exhaust ourselves economically and militarily;

c. We could not afford economically or politically to support other countries indefinitely;

d. We required allies and collective security and had to make these relations more effective and less costly;

e. We must place more reliance on deterrent power, and less emphasis on local defensive power to insure the success of collective security; and

f. "The way to deter aggression is for the free community to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and with means of its own free choosing."²³

In spite of the "new look" presented by Eisenhower and in the "agonizing reappraisal" conducted by Secretary Dulles, there were no inconsistencies between these statements and the policies outlined in NSC 124/2. Since a deadline (mid-1955) had been established for the defeat of the Viet Minh, there was no danger of indefinite support or of exhausting the United States economically. Since there was no intention of committing ground forces to Indo-China, there was no danger of military exhaustion. The intention of employing air and naval forces against China to counter CHICOM intervention was certainly a reliance on deterrent forces and not a local defensive action. Finally, the need for cooperation among our allies in the area had been stressed although efforts to develop a united U.S., French, Commonwealth position had been unsuccessful. This consistency between the policies of the old and new administrations tends to indicate, at least in the case of Indo-China, that the "new, positive foreign policy" was either rhetoric or the

concepts were already well entrenched in the staffs of the State Department and National Security Council.

During the first year of the Eisenhower Administration, both the military and political situation in Indo-China deteriorated. As a result of a Viet Minh offensive begun in October 1952, the Communist forces by mid-1953 had secured northwestern Tonkin, invaded and secured large portions of northern Laos, and had well over half of the French forces tied down in static defensive positions. At the same time the Viet Minh were free to roam the countryside, virtually at will. In the Red River Delta, where the main defensive effort had been centered, the Viet Minh exercised partial or total control in 5,000 out of the approximately 7,000 villages.²⁴ Similarly, in Annam the Viet Minh controlled the countryside while the French forces were tied up in enclaves. Only in Cochinchina did a degree of security exist, thanks in large measure to the efforts of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen sects.²⁵ Politically the coalition supporting Emperor Bao Dai was disintegrating into two poles: those desiring greater independence and the complete ouster of the French; and those with a vested interest in the continuation of Franco-Vietnamese cooperation (rich landowners, profiteers and the antidemocratic, monarchists who supported the Emperor).²⁶ Ultimately, this latter group predominated and the relatively progressive government of Premier Nguyen Van Lam was replaced by a cabinet formed by Prince Bui Loc in January 1954.²⁷

The existing situation in Indo-China was assessed adequately by the U.S. Government. In its national intelligence estimate (NIE-91) of 4 June 1953, the intelligence community recognized the deteriorating military situation and the increasing degree of military initiative possessed by the Viet Minh.²⁸ Increasing Viet Minh strength

was attributed to their enhanced prestige as a result of recent military successes and to their organizational and administrative efficiency, enemy strength coupled with a lack of aggressiveness on the part of the French, the distrust of the French by the people, and popular apathy were forecasted to result in a decline in the French Union military position during the coming year. Paralleling the French military decline would be the increasing strength of the Viet Minh political position, particularly in the areas under their control. While some optimism was expressed regarding Premier Tam's ability to strengthen his political position, it was considered doubtful that he would be able to provide the promised land reforms and other needed economic and social reforms. The removal of Tam in January 1954 by reactionary elements totally eliminated any possibility for reform.

Reacting to this deteriorating situation and the lack of French Union initiative the new French commander in Indo-China, General Henri Navarre, developed the "Navarre Plan." This plan was oriented strictly on military security without addressing the more important political and social considerations. Through the employment of a vigorous and continuous offensive, while slowly building up the indigenous forces, General Navarre estimated that he could defeat the Viet Minh main force by 1955.²⁹ Predicated on the formation of effective indigenous security forces, Navarre planned to free French units to form a large mobile strike-force equipped with modern American arms and equipment. This force would be employed to attack the "flanks and rear of the enemy".³⁰ Although some reservations were expressed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the intentions and capabilities of the French to vigorously and enthusiastically prosecute the "Navarre Plan", the United States agreed to provide the necessary funds (\$385 million) to implement the

program.³¹ While there was some consideration for the commitment of U.S. ground, air and naval forces in Vietnam,³² this plan never surfaced and the primary United States' weapon in Indo-China continued to be the American dollar.

NSC 5405--"United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia"³³

For the first year of his administration President Eisenhower continued to follow those policies developed in early 1952 by the Truman Administration. It wasn't until one year later, on January 16, 1954, that the National Security Council and the President approved the first Indo-China policy paper of the new administration. Although NSC 5405 superseded NSC 124/2, it embodied all the essential concepts of the former document. In most cases it was simply a verbatim restatement or rewording of the document approved by President Truman. There were, however, a few minor changes in emphasis. Overt CHICOM intervention in Indo-China, except as a result of direct U.S. intervention, was considered less likely than that previously indicated. In the event of such intervention, retaliation was expanded from that of cutting lines of communication to attacks "...against all suitable military targets in China which directly contribute to the war in Indochina..."³⁴ There was also a shift away from unilateral American action and toward a joint agreement between the United States, the United Kingdom and France prior to any contemplated action against China. As in NSC 124/2, this paper stressed the importance of U.S. opposition to a negotiated settlement, but expanded this concept to U.S. opposition to a cease-fire as well. The primary vulnerability of U.S. interests in the area was increasingly perceived as being a weakening in French will and a capitulation to the Viet Minh.

The Eisenhower Administration, although having perceived the need for a shift in U.S. foreign policy, was becoming more deeply committed to the war with little deviation from the previous administration. The intensity of the administration's concern was as evident in the public pronouncements as in the secret NSC documents.

In remarks at the Governors' Conference, Seattle, Washington on August 11, 1953 President Eisenhower stated:

If Indochina goes several things happen right away. The Malay-an peninsula ... would be scarcely defensible—and tin and tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming. But all India would be outflanked. Burma would be outflanked...how would the free world hold the rich empire of Indonesia? So you see somewhere along the line, this must be blocked...that is what the French are doing (in Indochina)... 35

On January 2, 1954 he further stated in his "Annual Budget Message to the Congress":

In Indochina...the French Union and Associated States are holding back the Communist efforts to expand into the free areas of Asia.... 36

In his speech to the Overseas Press Club in New York City on May 8, 1950 Secretary Dulles said:

...If the Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indochina or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against the other free peoples in the area. ...the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally...must be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility ... should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks....Sometimes it is necessary to take risks to win peace... 37

During his press conference on April 7, 1954 President Eisenhower stated:

"Finally, (in regard to Indochina) you have ... what you would call the 'falling domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty, that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences. 38

From these statements one can see the existence of a firm commitment to contain Communist expansion in Southeast Asia through the defense of Indo-China. Although Eisenhower's "falling domino principle" had its genesis in U.S. policy dating back to 1950, for the first time it was stated publicly. Further, while there had previously been a recognition of the possibility of stemming Communism, should Indo-China fall, there appears to be no such recognition at this time. The U.S. commitment to the defense of Indo-China was hardening.

As was the case when the "domino theory" was being developed there is no indication in any of the documents or references reviewed that the hardening of U.S. policy and the deepening commitment to hold Indo-China were predicated upon an analysis of the other Southeast Asian nations' vulnerability to Communist subversion. On the contrary, public statements at the time all indicated that Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia were becoming progressively stronger. If the "falling domino principle" and the deepening U.S. involvement were not based on a thorough analysis of the relative susceptibility of these nations to subversion, and it appears they weren't, then one has to look elsewhere for the driving force behind the deepening U.S. involvement. It appears evident that at this time policy was driving policy and the threat was being developed to justify the actions considered necessary to support this policy. Assumptions were becoming fact with little or no justification within the situation to warrant this shift.

Moving Toward the Brink of War

Following limited initial success, the French implementation of the "Navarre Plan" began to experience frustration. In a series of offensive actions during late 1953, Navarre's mobile reserves attempted

but failed to engage the enemy decisively. Relying on superior intelligence and effectively utilizing the severe terrain, Viet Minh forces dissolved when confronted by the French. General Giap was using his time wisely, upgrading the efficiency of his forces by improving his supply lines to China, by rearming his main force units, and by extensive training and political indoctrination.³⁹

In an effort to maintain the initiative, General Navarre decided in November to cut the Viet Minh lines of communication between Laos and Tonkin by establishing a strong garrison at Dien Bien Phu. Grossly underestimating Viet Minh combat capabilities, while overestimating the ability of the French Air Force to resupply isolated outpost, General Navarre airdropped three battalions into the area on November 20. He then became committed to a course of action which would ultimately result in the capture or death of 18,000 French Union soldiers.

As the French position deteriorated and as plans were being formulated for discussing the Indo-China question at the Geneva Conference, the U.S. government began a detailed analysis of the available courses of actions. While there was general agreement regarding the strategic importance of Indo-China to the security interests of the United States as embodied in NSC 5405, there appears to have been a considerable degree of disagreement over the specific actions which should be taken.

President Eisenhower established two primary restraints on any U.S. involvement in Indo-China. First, Congressional approval was essential prior to U.S. military action. This position was presented at the March 10, 1954 news conference when, in response to a question regarding Congressional concern that the U.S. Indo-China involvement

might lead to World War III, the President replied "...there is going to be no involvement of America in war unless it is a result of the constitutional process that is placed upon the Congress to declare it."⁴⁰ The existence of this condition is further supported by Sherman Adams when, in writing about the decisions at this time, he states that the President was "...determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress."⁴¹

The second condition which the President established was the requirement that any action have the backing and support of the Western Allies and particularly Britain. This was indicated in his April 7, 1954 press conference when, in regard to action in Viet Nam, he stated "...this is the kind of thing that must not be handled by one nation acting alone."⁴² This condition is also indicated by the previously noted shift in emphasis away from unilateral action embodied in NSC 5405 and the stated need for joint agreement on the part of the U.S., U.K. and France. Again Sherman Adams substantiates this condition when he states that the President "...having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea..., was in no mood to provoke another one in Indo-China by going it alone in a military action without the British and other Western Allies."⁴³

During the first week in April the NSC staff was busy preparing NSC Action No. 1074-A, an analysis of the "...extent, and the circumstances and conditions under which the United States would be willing to commit its resources in support of the effort to prevent the loss of Indochina to the Communists...."⁴⁴ This paper addressed four issues: first, the prospect of losing Indo-China to the Communists; secondly, the "risks, requirements and consequences of U.S. intervention"; thirdly, the "desirability and form of U.S. intervention"; and, finally, the "timing

and circumstances of decision to intervene with U.S. combat forces."

As regards the first issue the NSC staff concluded that, while possible, an adverse military decision in Indo-China did not appear to be imminent. Accordingly, "...the United States should undertake a maximum diplomatic effort to cause the French and Associated States to fight to a successful conclusion."⁴⁵

The commitment of U.S. combat forces was seen as causing a strain among the Western Allies, an increased risk of general war with China, as involving high costs in manpower and money, and finally, possible adverse domestic political repercussions.⁴⁶ The analysis of the degree of risk as regards to a general war with China resulted in disagreement among the members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee of the NSC. While all agreed that there would not be direct CHICOM intervention unless the Viet Minh were faced with probable defeat, three of the six members felt that given this imminent defeat the Chinese would probably intervene, while the remainder felt the chances for open intervention were still less than half.⁴⁷ Three minimum conditions were set for U.S. intervention: Congressional approval, an invitation from the Associated States to participate militarily, and cooperation on the part of the French to phase their withdrawal in consonance with simultaneous U.S. deployments.⁴⁸

The report weighed three alternative forms of commitment in view of their impact on free world opinion, their military requirements, Soviet Bloc reaction and foreign aid considerations. The three courses of action considered were: intervention in concert with the French; in concert with the French and others (U.N. or regional grouping); and in the event of a French withdrawal, in concert with others or alone. The use of tactical nuclear weapons was discussed under each of these

alternative and the force requirements were predicated upon their availability.⁴⁹

The report was extremely shallow, addressing U.S. intervention without any consideration for the likelihood of success. While each of the courses of action were weighed in terms of political and military costs, there was no indication made as to the relative degree of success which could be expected. The report was totally devoid of specifics with force structure being driven by availability rather than need. In addressing the use of air and naval forces, no consideration was given to the availability of suitable targets and the decisiveness of these targets in relation to Viet Minh strength. The same was true for ground forces with a total absence of any discussion regarding the method of employment. Finally, while it supposedly presented three courses of action, the report in fact presented only one course of action (intervention) under three different conditions (with the French, with other allies and without the French or other allies). There appears to be a narrow desperation behind the thinking that went into the preparation of this report. A desperation based the impending loss of Viet Nam unless drastic action was taken; actions that were totally unrealistic given the domestic and international political situations. Power would be required, power was available, but power was impractical.

NSC 1074-A was not unanimously accepted within the government. The leading dissenter was the Army Chief of Staff, General Matthew B. Ridgway. The "Army position on NSC 1074-A" pointed out the important military disadvantages to intervention, discounted the possibility of achieving decisive results without the use of ground forces, and stated that the use of atomic weapons would have no impact on the number of troops required to achieve victory.⁵⁰ It assumed the withdrawal of the

French and pointed to the need for seven U.S. divisions to defeat the Viet Minh with an additional five divisions required to counter CHICOM intervention. The Army position also pointed out that the ability of the United States to meet its NATO commitments would be degraded for a "considerable period."⁵¹

General Ridgway, reacting against what he perceived to be a dangerous trend in thinking, *i.e.*, achieving quick and easy victory through the use of nuclear weapons, sent an Army investigating team to Indo-China to evaluate the situation.⁵² The report found that "...the (Indochina) area... is practically devoid of those facilities which modern forces such as ours find essential to the waging of war.... to provide the facilities we would need would require a tremendous engineering and logistical effort."⁵³ The report went on to point out that we would have to go in with "...a very strong ground force - an Army that could not only stand the normal attrition of battle, but could absorb heavy casualties from the jungle heat, and the rots and fevers which afflict the white man in the tropics." Finally, the U.S. would have to be willing to pay a tremendous price in lives and dollars. This cost was viewed by General Ridgway as equal to, or greater than, the price the United States paid in Korea.⁵⁴

On April 6, 1954 the National Security Council reviewed NSC Action 1074-A. Recognizing the disadvantages of unilateral action and the undesirability of meaningful U.N. action, the Council recommended U.S. intervention only as a part of a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation.

General Ridgway's actions were unique among the Presidential advisors involved in the development of U.S. policy within the framework of this study. He was personally able, to retard and possibly reverse

the tide of ever increasing American involvement. At this time the Administration's commitment was not General Ridgway's or the Army's. President Eisenhower's reliance on massive retaliation and the imposition of force reductions had alienated the Army to a large extent. Thus, Ridgway's opposition to an action which represented a practical application of a policy which he opposed is understandable. This instance does indicate, however, that the forces of "policy precedent" can be retarded by an individual or agency operating within the bureaucracy.

Operation Vulture

While the Administration's "Indians" were analyzing U.S. actions, as well as enemy and ally reactions, two "chiefs" had apparently made up their mind as to the course U.S. policy should follow. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, and the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were totally committed to the defense of Indo-China at all costs and were taking actions which moved the United States toward the brink of war.

In the course of discussions on Indo-China with the French Chief of Staff, General Paul Ely on March 25, 1954, Admiral Radford proposed a major escalation of American involvement through the employment of U.S. air power to save the garrison at Dien Bien Phu.⁵⁵ Two U.S. Carriers (the Boxer and the Essex) were positioned off the coast of Indo-China, and together with Air Force aircraft based in the Philippines, would have represented a formidable air capability in excess of 200 aircraft. Although ostensibly on training exercises in the South China Sea, these carriers in fact, had been moved to stations off the coast of Viet Nam to prepare for the contingency of United States involvement.⁵⁶

Having planted the seed and apparently anticipating a formal

request from the French for U.S. support, Admiral Radford and Secretary Dulles briefed key Congressional leaders on April 3, 1954 regarding the situation in Indo-China.⁵⁷ One of the purposes of this briefing was to obtain Congressional approval for one or more massive airstrikes against the Viet Minh forces who were besieging the French forces at Dien Bien Phu (Operation Vulture).⁵⁸ Congressional backing for this military operation did not materialize. Congressional reluctance can be traced to the lack of consensus within the Joint Chiefs of Staff, primarily that of General Ridgway; a lack of contingency planning for possible Chinese actions; and the Congressional desire to have a unified Anglo-American policy.⁵⁹ The Congressmen established three conditions which had to be met prior to intervention: the formation of an allied coalition force; an accelerated program of independence for the Associated States; and the continued prosecution of the war by the French Expeditionary Corps.⁶⁰ Thus a force from outside the organization was required to restrict the inevitable movement toward an ever increasing involvement.

In an effort to obtain united action on the part of the U.S., U.K. and France, President Eisenhower wrote Prime Minister Churchill on April 4 attempting to impress upon him the importance of Indochina and the need for decisive action.⁶¹ Churchill's reply indicated to the President that the "...British had little enthusiasm for joining in taking a firm position...."⁶² In spite of repeated attempts by Secretary Dulles during visits to Paris and London, British enthusiasm could not be generated and they deferred all U.S. efforts to develop a collective security arrangement for Southeast Asia until after the Geneva Conference.⁶³

At 0150 hrs on May 8 the last radio message was received from an outpost of the Dien Bien Phu garrison. The main position had been overrun the previous evening and the battle lost. All resistance had ended and only seventy-three members of the garrison were able to evade death or capture. What General Navarre hoped would be a decisive defeat of the Viet Minh became instead a decisive loss for the French forces. This defeat marked the end of French military influence in Asia. Responsibility passed to the politicians at Geneva to minimize the political consequences for the West.

NOTES

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³The President's News Conference of April 7, 1954, U.S., Public Papers of the President-Dwight D. Eisenhower-1954 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 382.

⁴K. T. Young, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Memorandum to General Malony, SEAC, 13 October 1950; U.S. Naval Intelligence Memorandum, "The Current Situation in French Indochina," 17 October 1950; Office of the Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for Secretary Finletter, 19 October 1950, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 369-370, 382-387, 391-392.

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⁷U.S., "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25, 1952, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 520-534.

⁸U.S., "NSC Staff Study on United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia," February 13, 1952, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 468-476.

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¹²U.S., Central Intelligence Agency, Special Estimate 22, "Consequences of Certain Possible U.S. Courses of Action with Respect to Indo-China, Burma, or Thailand," 29 February 1952, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 477-484.

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¹⁵U.S., Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council, on "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25, 1957, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 8, op. cit., pp. 520-534.

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¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 534.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 532.

²⁰Ibid., p. 534.

²¹"State of the Union Message to Congress," February 2, 1953, U.S., Public Papers of the President - Dwight D. Eisenhower - 1953 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 12-16.

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²³"The Evolution of Foreign Policy" Address by Secretary of State Dulles to the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, N.Y., January 12, 1954, U.S., Department of State Bulletin, XXX (January 25, 1954), pp. 107-110.

²⁴Edgar O'Ballance, The Indo-China War, 1945-1954 (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1964), p. 194.

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²⁶Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Political History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), p. 347.

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- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 301.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 318-319.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 300, 304.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 308, 316, 324, 331.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 332.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Matthew B. Ridgway, Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 276.

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⁵⁴Ibid., p. 277.

⁵⁵U.S., Joint Chiefs of State, Memorandum for the President "Discussions with General Ely relative to the Situation in Indo-China," 24 March 1954, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 9, op. cit., p. 285.

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⁵⁸Television interview of Representative McCormick as reported in New York Times, January 23, 1956, p. 3, col. 2.

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CHAPTER IV

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND SUPPORT FOR DIEM

The Geneva Conference

The events leading up to, and the negotiations during the Geneva Conference represented a defeat for American diplomacy, and placed a serious strain on the Western Alliance. If one accepts the declarations found in the various NSC policy papers as expressing the goals of United States' policy, then these policies had failed miserably. Such a failure was inevitable given the basic contradictions between the U.S. goals and those of her allies. These contradictions, when coupled with the realities of the situation could not have achieved success.

American policy was focused almost exclusively on the containment of Communism. Virtually anything that contributed to this goal was acceptable; anything seen as hampering the achievement of this goal was unacceptable. In the contest with the Soviets, the spread of Communism represented a threat to all spheres of the United States' power position: economic growth and stability; domestic unity; national security; political influence; national self-esteem; and in general all those benefits accruing to a world power in a bi-polar world. The British and French, on the other hand, while also in opposition to the spread of Communism, could not afford the luxury of focusing exclusively on this goal. Both nations were experiencing domestic political and economic difficulties, which frequently transcended the containment of Communism when the costs were considered excessive. For the British the costs of risking a

general war with the Communist Bloc or even a localized war against China represented such an excessive cost.¹ The loss of Hong Kong, which would have undoubtedly resulted from a naval blockade of China, rendered this relatively low level act of belligerency unacceptable. In addition, Britain, was trying to hold the Commonwealth together. As a result its leaders were extremely sensitive to Indian pressures. India was incensed by the belligerent public pronouncements from Washington and exerted such a pressure on the British Government.² For the United States to expect Britain to join in a united military front with even greater risks could best be classified as grossly over-optimistic. Particularly since air and naval actions alone were considered by the British to be insufficient in themselves to force the Chinese to desist from active support of the Indochinese guerrillas.³

The heavy economic drain in Indo-China only compounded the domestic difficulties which the French were experiencing. France was in Indo-China because of past as well as anticipated future political and economic benefits which could be derived from this involvement. For the pragmatic Frenchman, continued involvement could only be justified as long as France could maintain its influence in the area and derive appropriate benefits from this influence.

The American obsession with the avoidance of a land war with the Chinese dictated against the commitment of ground forces. This necessitated the continued presence of the French Expeditionary Corps. The French presence could only be expected to continue as long as they maintained their influence and controlled the situation. Accordingly, the French would not grant sufficient authority and responsibility to the governments of the Associated States. Without an adequate weakening

of French influence, the nationalistic aspirations of the people could not be met, and effective indigenous governments would not develop. The withdrawal of French forces, which would have paralleled any decrease in French influence, would have necessitated the presence of U.S. ground forces to maintain the stability of the situation. Although contemplated, this course of action was not possible given the United States' fear of a major land war. Increased U.S. influence in the area was continually resisted by the French who saw little value in fighting a war for the purpose of expanding American power at their expense. As a result it was impossible to even develop a united front with the French let alone with the British.

For the British a negotiated settlement at Geneva represented the best means of attaining her primary goal, the avoidance of a general war with the Communists, while requiring some concessions to the containment of Communism. For the French, Geneva represented a means of partially retaining some influence in Indo-China, while at the same time ending a war which had been so disruptive domestically. For the United States the Geneva Conference, which of necessity would result in concessions to the Communists, threatened the "sanctified" containment principle.

Although opposed to negotiations with the Communists from a position of weakness in concept, the American government was resigned to their inevitability; and an agreement to conduct negotiations directed toward an Indochinese solution was reached by the Big Four in February 1954. Rather than attempting to optimize the results of these negotiations, the United States delayed the development of a firm position to be followed at Geneva; and, instead, continually attempted to create

conditions which would lead to an improved military situation. Throughout the negotiations the United States pushed the French for American intervention as part of an international force; however, the two allies, because of their divergent goals, were unable to arrive at a suitable agreement.⁴ By continuing to push the French for internationalization of the war, the United States hoped to provide the British and the French with an alternative to total capitulation once, as it was anticipated, the negotiations broke down.⁵ Apparently Secretary Dulles came to the conclusion by June 14 that the possibility for internationalization of the war was remote at best; and decided that the French were only using this threat as a bargaining chip with the Communists.

On May 12, five days after the start of the Indo-China phase of the Geneva Conference, Washington forwarded its guidance to the American delegation at Geneva.⁶ It is clear that Washington was unwilling to agree to any likely outcome which could be expected from the conference.

The United States is not prepared to give its express or implied approval to any cease fire, armistice, or other settlement which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states (Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia) or of permanently impairing their territorial integrity, or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union in Indochina, or ... sanctioning any action which would result in the amalgamation of the people of this area ... into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship.⁸

Should continued participation by the U.S. delegation result in their likely involvement in a settlement contrary to these principles, then the delegation was to withdraw totally, or limit its involvement to that of an observer.⁹

Paralleling the strain in Franco-American relations was a deterioration in Anglo-American relations as well. Dulles regarded the British attitude in Asia as weak and a betrayal of U.S.-U.K. agreements.¹⁰

British weakness was based on a fear of the H-bomb, and the unacceptable risk of global war which would result from a confrontation between the Chinese Communists and the nations of the Western Alliance.¹¹

While pushing the French militarily and politically, the United States recognized the possibility of a negotiated settlement based on a partition of Indo-China from the start of the negotiations.¹² Accordingly, efforts to "steel" the French were synonymous with efforts to develop a joint Anglo-American position on any possible outcome. By the end of June, Washington was willing to concede the unlikelihood of "united action," willing to accept partition and, apparently, recognized the fact that only the introduction of ground forces could restore the situation in Indochina.¹³ As a result of this reluctant movement on the part of the United States toward the British position, it was possible for the two nations to develop the minimum acceptable terms which both powers could accept at Geneva. Accordingly, the two countries transmitted to the French government the seven conditions for any settlement agreed upon that would be respected by the United States and the United Kingdom.¹⁴ Such a settlement must:

- a. Preserve the independence and integrity of Laos and Cambodia and provide for the withdrawal of all Viet Minh forces from these nations;
- b. Preserve the southern half of Indo-China from Communism (at least that portion south of Dong Hoi);
- c. Contain no restrictions on Laos, Cambodia or free Viet Nam which would impair their ability to maintain stable governments capable of resisting Communism;

- d. Contain no political provisions which would result in the loss of free Viet Nam to Communism;
- e. Not preclude the reunification of Viet Nam peacefully;
- f. Provide for the safe transfer of all persons desiring to relocate from one zone to another; and
- g. Contain effective means for international supervision.¹⁵

In spite of fears that the British would force France into a settlement far short of the seven points, an agreement for the cessation of hostilities was signed on July 21, 1954.¹⁶ This agreement was considered by Washington to be, if not fully in accord with, at least within the spirit of the seven points. The final settlement provided for a military truce between the French Union forces and the Viet Minh; the temporary partition of Viet Nam at the 17th parallel; the withdrawal of French Union forces from the north and Viet Minh forces from the south; and within two years the conduct of national elections to unify the country.

It is of note that only France and the Viet Minh signed the agreements. The Vietnamese representative, Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, expressed his opposition to the settlement, particularly that portion pertaining to partition, but agreed not to oppose the impending armistice.¹⁷ The United States neither formally supported nor expressed opposition to the agreements, simply stating

...it will refrain from the threat of the use of force to disturb them (the agreements) ... and would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the ... Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.¹⁸

This statement was a significant concession on the part of Secretary Dulles, who had been reluctant to join in the Geneva Conference, and only agreed to participate as an "interested nation" when it appeared

there was going to be a conference irrespective of United States' actions. Once a settlement was reached the Republican Administration was not going to take any action which would commit the United States to guaranteeing Communist domination of any people or area.

The Geneva accords were viewed by the United States as a setback for the Western powers and a victory for the Communists.¹⁹ There are some indications that the belligerent policies advocated by Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford were largely responsible for a settlement partially acceptable to the West. Throughout the Conference, France used the threat of U.S. intervention as a lever to maintain a negotiating base in the face of continued military reversals. Certainly the threat of American intervention, and the subsequent possibility of general war greatly affected the British and possibly the Kremlin. In an August 1954 national intelligence estimate the CIA attributed the Communist acquiescence to the agreements to two factors in the Communist's estimate of the situation:

- a. an effort to win a total military victory in Indochina might precipitate U.S. military intervention.
- b. the objective of gaining political control over all Indo-China could be achieved as a result of the armistice agreement.²⁰

The United States Government has frequently been accused of attempting to sabotage the Geneva Conference and, subsequently, of rendering the agreements reached inoperative. Such an accusation is both true and false. If one accepts the conference as being universally desirable and in the best interest of mankind generally, then the United States was bound morally to work within its context and support the result. If one views the conference as being a means to attaining the national interests of the French, British and Communist nations to

the detriment of the American goals, then clearly there was no obligation on the part of the United States to assist in the formulation of a settlement or to support the settlement once developed. This is apparently the position that was adopted by the American Government. As a result the U.S. attempted to discourage a settlement, attempted to "steel" French resolve and attempted to create an internationalization of the war. Whether these actions constituted sabotage, or can be considered as normal diplomatic efforts of a power politics form of diplomacy, is a matter for individual judgement. It is true, however, that Washington in general, and Dulles in particular, was extremely intolerant of the positions being taken by Britain and France.²¹ Rather than optimizing the results of the Conference by working toward a suitable position, which at least partially satisfied the goals of all the allies, the United States instead worked toward goals that were contrary to both the goals of her allies and of the Communist Bloc, and actually in opposition to American best interests. Indo-China was a source of frustration based on the impotence of power. His perception of this impotence is best summed up in a report by Secretary Dulles to the NSC on May 6, 1954:

Is the United States prepared to acquiesce in the clearly engineered Communist aggression in and taking over of Indo-China - with Red Chinese support - even though we have the military means to redeem the situation? - The A-bomb.²²

The fact that the A-bomb was not an appropriate weapon in this situation was not addressed.

American policy at the time of the Geneva Conference was inflexible and fraught with contradictions. The inflexibility was centered on a total commitment by Washington to a containment of any and all expansion on the part of Communism. The contradictions arose from the

inconsistency of American policy with the policies of her allies; the inconsistency of American policy with the nationalist aspirations of the Indochinese people; and internal contradictions among the various American policies. These latter contradictions included an inappropriate application of massive retaliation to deter Communist subversion; the refusal to commit ground forces to a war in which only ground forces could achieve military success; and the reliance on allied unity when allied unity was unobtainable. The United States was unable to achieve success because her policies were not in consonance with the realities of the situation, and the government was forced to accept the enslavement of the people of North Viet Nam.

The American position at Geneva represented a significant expansion of the containment policy. Originally oriented on a restriction of Soviet expansionist tendencies, containment had been raised to a moral commitment to protect the people of the Free World. It became a moral crusade against "unholy" communism centered on the righteousness of the American cause. Throughout its evolution, the concept of containment was progressively elevated from the policy level to that of a national goal. At the time of the Geneva Conference the United States was so firmly committed to containment that the government was willing to jeopardize American-European unity and risk a military involvement which could have led to global war. The American commitment to the defense of Indo-China in direct opposition to other equally or more significant interests is attributed to the impact of "policy precedent"; an impact which drove the policy of containment to a disproportionate level of significance.

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)

It is clear that immediately prior to and during the Geneva Conference, the United States government was unable to develop a clear and workable plan for solving the Indo-China Crisis. Instead they were "... searching about for some expedient which would serve to restore, or at least to hold the situation."²³ As a result, several plans and variations of these plans were considered ranging from the use of nuclear weapons against China to total disengagement.

As previously noted, one such expedient course of action was the "united action" concept. A variation of this concept was developed to include representative Asian nations in order to counter claims that the U.S. was either imperialistic herself or supportive of colonialism.²⁴ Since this plan was predicated upon the granting of absolute independence to the Associated States besides the gradual replacement of French influence by the United States, French support could not be obtained. In addition, since the deployment of U.S. ground forces would have been necessary, it is doubtful if sufficient support could have been developed within the United States government; particularly since the British were opposed to all forms of collective or unilateral intervention.

A second, broader grouping with a different role was also considered. This grouping, which included the ANZUS nations, Thailand, the Philippines, Britain, and possibly Korea, Nationalist China and the Colombo countries, would act as a second line of defense against further Communist advances after Indo-China.²⁵

As with other U.S. policies, the immediate formation of a regional defense organization ran counter to British policy. Concerned that such actions would be viewed by the Communists as provocative, the British were firm in their intentions to defer all Allied actions to

form such an arrangement until the outcomes of the Geneva Conference were determined. The British were willing to begin secret talks regarding a collective defense agreement to counter further Communist aggression after the Geneva settlement.²⁶ Accordingly, Anglo-American study group was formed in June, 1954. This effort was followed by an ANZUS Council meeting and intense diplomatic consultations by the United States and Britain to expand the base of support for such a treaty. These combined efforts paved the way for the Manila Conference and the formation of SEATO.

On August 20, 1954 a NSC review of American Far East policy (NSC 5429/2) was conducted. This review concluded that the Geneva Settlement had jeopardized the U.S. security interests and increased Communist strength.²⁷ This increased strength was attributed to:

- a. The possession of an advanced salient to mount military and non-military pressures against remote non-Communist areas;
- b. A loss of prestige in Asia regarding the United States' ability to check Communist expansion and a consequential expansion of Communist political and military prestige; and
- c. Because of their moderate image at Geneva the Communists had been portrayed to the Asian people as a peaceful movement, countering the United States motives of "...extremism, belligerency, and opposition to co-existence."²⁸

Reiterating that the loss of Southeast Asia would seriously threaten U.S. security interests and specifically imperil the retention of Japan within the off-shore island defense chain, the review recommended intensified political and covert actions. The key to the stabilization of the area was seen as the formation of a collective security treaty with the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France,

the Philippines, Thailand and other free South and Southeast Asian countries. Such a treaty was viewed as eliminating many of the obstacles which had restricted U.S. actions in the crisis which preceded the Geneva Conference. Specifically such a treaty would:

a. Commit each member to treat an armed attack on the agreed area (including Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam) as dangerous to its peace, safety and vital interests, and to act promptly to meet the common danger in accordance with its own constitutional processes.

b. Provide so far as possible a legal basis to the President to order attack on Communist China in the event it commits such armed aggression which endangers the peace, safety and vital interests of the United States.

c. Ensure that, in such event, other nations would be obligated in accordance with the treaty to support such U.S. action.

d. Not limit U.S. freedom to use nuclear weapons, or involve a U.S. commitment for local defense or for stationing U.S. forces in Southeast Asia.²⁹

Conditions were propitious for the formation of such an organization. Australia and New Zealand, each interested in expanding their international influence, were concerned with the increasing Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. To provide for their security they were interested in maintaining British and American presence in the Pacific area. SEATO was seen as a means to this end.³⁰ Thailand, under the rule of a strong anti-Communist military government closely tied to the United States, was particularly concerned with the danger of subversion.³¹ The Philippines were also concerned with subversion, however, their participation was a function of close security ties with the United States as manifested by the U.S.-Philippines bilateral security pact. Pakistan joined in an attempt to outmaneuver India and enhance Pakistani prestige by bringing other Colombo Pact states into SEATO, and to obtain allies to enhance her security against India.³² Britain was interested in increasing her influence among the Southeast Asian Commonwealth states, desirous of healing the Anglo-American wounds,

and gaining support for the fight against Communism in Malaya. American participation was insured by its anger and frustration over Geneva, by its position regarding the strategic importance of Southeast Asia and the perceived need to stem the spread of Communism. France, whose interest in SEATO quickly waned, was carried along by the diplomatic tide in an apparent effort to maintain her presence in the region and to influence future developments in Indo-China.

During the period September 6-9, 1954, only forty-nine days after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, the representatives of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Republic of the Philippines, the Kingdom of Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America met in Manila and signed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. The effectiveness of the previous diplomatic efforts and perhaps the overwhelming dominance of the United States is indicated by the fact that the nine nations were able to reach accord in only two days of negotiations.

The treaty represented a compromise of contrasting goals among the parties. The Asian states, desiring to obtain a firm military commitment on the part of the United States, wanted to commit all parties to military action in the event of any aggression within the treaty area, a provision similar to the NATO agreement. The United States feared that such a strongly worded agreement would limit her freedom of action and would experience difficulties in Congressional ratification. She preferred a weaker statement of intent focusing exclusively on Communist aggression.³³ Such a position ultimately resulted in a weakening of the mutual bond within the treaty severely restricting its future value. Clearly SEATO was no NATO, and U.S. interests in Southeast Asia did not

parallel similar interests in Europe. When one faults United States' actions in Southeast Asia for being an attempt to apply an inappropriate European solution, one must also realize that the United States was unwilling to effect the same commitment to support these policies. Perhaps this weak commitment had as serious an impact on American allies as the inappropriateness of the actions.

SEATO represented a further strengthening of the American involvement in Southeast Asian affairs. The moral obligation to stem Communist expansion had become a treaty obligation. An obligation that was unable to generate significant support from the majority of the non-Communist Asian states, but which further intensified the American commitment to containment.

United States Support of the Diem Regime

While the United States and Britain were able to reconcile their differences over Southeast Asia after Geneva through the medium of SEATO, the same cannot be said of Franco-American relations. Carrying through their Geneva policies France hoped to retain a degree of economic and cultural influence over the Ho Chi Minh government and were willing to effect an accommodation.³⁴ As a result, the active anti-French government of Ngo Dinh Diem represented a threat to French interests. With the increasing American support of Diem, the French were forced to choose between a continued Franco-American Alliance in Europe or an open break between the Allies over Viet Nam. The French opted for the maintenance of the European Alliance and began its withdrawal from Indo-China, a withdrawal that was completed three months before the deadline set for the nation-wide general elections in July 1956.

As a result of previous French colonial policies, which had

restricted meaningful Vietnamese participation in the colonial government, both North and South Viet Nam fell under a period of political chaos. In the South, bandit gangs ruled in the absence of a police, religious minorities with French support claimed areas and exerted an influence disproportionate to their size, refugees were moving south by the hundreds of thousands, the economy was wrecked and there was little administrative expertise upon which to fall back upon. Aggravating the situation the South Vietnamese politicians, because of mutual jealousies and vested interests, were unable to develop a common policy for stabilizing the new nation.

With the French granting of full independence to South Viet Nam on July 7, 1954, Emperor Bao Dai appointed Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister. In spite of the political difficulties facing him, Diem attempted to salvage the country.³⁵ The National Intelligence Estimate of September 15, 1954 concluded that Diem lacked the ability to effectively deal with the politics and administration of South Viet Nam.³⁶ However, he was seen as the "...only figure now on the political scene behind whom genuine nationalist support can be mobilized."³⁷ His ability to succeed was seen to be largely a matter of the degree of wholehearted French support. The United States pressed for this French support which, while often agreed to by the French, was never forthcoming.

Fortunately for the stability of the South, Ho Chi Minh was experiencing similar difficulties in North Viet Nam; and Diem was afforded the opportunity to consolidate his government's position.³⁸ He established five major goals: the organization of a viable government; the easing of the economic pains of the country; elimination of French influence; domination of the French supported quasi-religious sects and

elimination of their disproportionate influence; and, finally, the strengthening of his personal influence.³⁹

In spite of the problems facing him, Diem's first year in office proved to be relatively effective. He avoided a civil war with the armed sects and was able to achieve a degree of reconciliation. He purged his government of French supporters. He strengthened his control over the Army and eliminated the politically minded Chief of Staff, General Hinh. He weakened the position of Emperor Bao Dai by defying his authority and refusing to accept the Emperor's appointments into his government. When he effectively integrated and resettled nearly a million refugees from the North, he solved one of the world's largest refugee problems.

The first year of his administration was crucial for Diem in his relations with the United States. Even though his strongest U.S. backers, including Secretary Dulles, frequently wavered in their support, he gradually picked up support inside and outside Washington. Congressmen on both sides of the aisle were extolling his virtues and the national intelligence estimates began to indicate an appreciation for his growing strength. By May 1955 he was conceded the ability to stabilize the situation in Saigon but was considered unable, as was any other nationalist leader, "...to build sufficient strength to meet the long range challenge of the Communists."⁴⁰ The reversal was complete by October 1955 when Diem was recognized as having made "...considerable progress toward establishing the first Vietnamese government...." and would continue to do so as long as the Communists "...do not exercise their capabilities to attack across the 17th Parallel or to initiate large-scale guerrilla warfare in South Viet Nam."⁴¹

By focusing exclusively on internal security the United States'

representatives were lulled into a sense of security by Diem's success. Diem, aware of the threat posed by the Communists, instituted a three-step conceptual program to counter Viet Minh influence.⁴² Step one envisaged the Army wresting control away from the Viet Minh and providing the required degree of security for the people. This security phase would be followed by an intense period of political indoctrination extolling the anti-colonialist social virtues of the Diem regime. Finally, the peoples support would be won through the employment of a vigorous civic action and social reform program.⁴³

While conceptually strong the Diem program contained the seeds of its own destruction, primarily because it offered too little as compared to the Viet Minh. In an overcrowded rural society, where 90% of the population is involved in agricultural production, land is obviously the single most significant concern of the people. That such was the case in Viet Nam is attested to by the fact that from Geneva onward land reform was the single most dominant policy of the Communists.⁴⁴ Association with the land was further intensified by the country's religious values. The ownership of land satisfied all the peasant's needs. It insured that one's ancestors were properly respected. It provided daily sustenance for the farmer and his family. Finally, and probably more important, it was an insurance policy for security after death as it afforded the means to ones descendants to appropriately venerate the farmer's spirit.⁴⁵ Diem's program threatened this three-stage security for those peasants who had been granted title to the land by the Viet Minh. By 1956 the land reform program had stagnated. It failed to adequately redistribute the available land to a significant portion of the people due to graft, landlord opposition, and administrative incompetence.⁴⁶

As the ARVN forces secured the countryside, they provided the cover for the return of the landlords who not only began collecting rent, but back rent as well. Although the Diem government placed restrictions on the amount of rent that could be collected (25% of the annual crop), any payment represented a burden to those who had received title to the land under Viet Minh rule, or as a minimum, had been living rent free during the preceding eight or so years. This situation was compounded by excesses on the part of the ARVN and local officials whose government affiliation was associated with the landlord.⁴⁷ Government land redistribution efforts were ineffective, futile and often graft-ridden. Even as late as 1968, Race has estimated that 70% of the land in Long An Province was tenant farmed, 9% was communal (village and church owned) and the remainder owned by the tiller but largely worked by hired labor.⁴⁸ Of more significance, however, is the fact that 90% of the families were tenants.⁴⁹ The appeal of the Communists' land reform program on the mass of the rural populace is obvious.

A similar situation occurred with the overzealous efforts of the Diem regime to identify and eliminate former Viet Minh. The secret police sought out former Viet Minh and Viet Minh supporters with a vengeance. Success was often judged on the number of enemy identifications, rather than the accuracy of these identifications. As a result, the opportunities for unscrupulous and corrupt enforcement were magnified. This intimidation created an extremely adverse reaction on the peasants, as well as many former Viet Minh willing to seek an accommodation with the government. The latter individuals were frequently driven underground and back into the arms of the Communists.⁵⁰

A survey of rallied and captured Viet Cong conducted for the United States government indicates the ineffectiveness of the Diem

programs. While older Viet Minh had joined the movement primarily for nationalistic reasons, those joining after Geneva did so for one or more of a mix of motives including:

a. As a protest against social conditions at the village level (i.e., arrogant and corrupt officials, government incompetency, and tenant farming);

b. The lack of educational and career opportunities provided the average peasant by the GVN and, conversely, the opportunities (for upward mobility) afforded within the Communist movement;

c. An antipathy to being drafted by the ARVN for service away from home and under circumstances making such service dangerous and a politically dubious commitment;

d. The spirit of adventurism as provided by Communist military forces;

e. The desire to escape from unpleasant personal or family situations;

f. The admiration of an older Viet Minh member of the family;

g. An entwining with Viet Minh family members and consequential pressures from the Diem secret police; and

h. Dislike for the GVN and a nationalistic desire to protect Viet Nam from the American imperialists and their lackeys (the GVN). The Diem regime was viewed as representing the rich, the landowner and the city people.⁵¹

The goals which these individuals reportedly sought are equally illuminating:

a. To expel American imperialism, which had replaced French Colonialism, from Viet Nam.⁵²

b. Social justice for the people and specifically the elimination of poverty, the redistribution of land, an end to unemployment, educational and economic opportunity, and, finally, equality and justice for all.⁵³

c. Peace and security.⁵⁴

President Diem was doomed to failure because of his orientation and philosophy. Born of a mandarin family he was a firm adherent to elitist rule. Extremely introverted and pious he isolated himself from his people. Endowed with a strong sense of loyalty to his family, he relied heavily on them for support and rewarded this support with high positions of authority and responsibility to the virtual exclusion of other nationalist leaders. Since he focused exclusively on the retention of power, and developing loyalty among the power elite, President Diem consolidated power at the top and built down from this level. As a result loyalty flowed toward the top and focused on the premier. Any diversion of this flow away from Diem resulted in, as a minimum, the loss of political power and more probably imprisonment. This relationship could tolerate corruption and dishonesty within the bureaucracy but never disloyalty. President Diem became totally isolated from his people. An isolation that was further intensified by his religious, social and philosophical views.⁵⁵

By contrast the Communists, intent on gaining power, built from the bottom up. They made every effort to identify the national government with all the evils of society, big and little, and at the same time did everything possible to reduce the government's administrative efficiency. The Communist's policies were extremely general and non-specific. Local cadres were granted a great deal of freedom to adjust

local policy to meet local conditions and the aspirations of the people. As a result Communist policies varied widely from province to province and often between adjoining districts.

Focusing almost exclusively on the upper level of Diem's political stability, a split developed within the U.S. government regarding future United States's support to Viet Nam. On September 22, 1954 the JCS (and apparently DOD) stated their opposition to U.S. participation in the training of Vietnamese forces and instead advocated a "low priority" U.S. effort in Viet Nam. This position was based on the instability of the Diem government, stringent restrictions on the introduction of adequate personnel and equipment embodied in the Geneva agreements, the extended period of time (several years) that would be required to develop an effective military force, and the need for developing effective and reliable allied forces elsewhere. Eventually they conceded on October 14 that if "...political considerations are overriding..." that they would agree to the assignment of a training mission to the Saigon Military Advisory and Assistance Group.⁵⁶

On the other hand the State Department, and specifically Secretary Dulles, adopted the position that an effective government in Free Viet Nam could only be developed as a result of United States efforts to "...strengthen the (Diem) government by means of a political and economic nature and by strengthening the Army which supports it."⁵⁷ Secretary Dulles viewed the development of a stable, anti-Communist government as being dependent on the degree of internal security which could be afforded by the military.⁵⁸ By training the Vietnamese Army the United States could "...substantially influence the development of political, as well as military stability in free Viet Nam."⁵⁹

This disagreement resulted in a State Department victory. The

State Department took the position that political factors were in fact overriding and that the Diem government could be effectively strengthened only through the training of the Vietnamese armed forces by a U.S. training mission.⁶⁰ Instructions to support this policy were transmitted to Saigon on October 21, 1954.⁶¹ The goals of this policy were:

- a. to promote internal security and political stability in Free Vietnam;
- b. to establish and maintain control by that government throughout the territory of Free Vietnam; and
- c. to effectively counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the 17th Parallel.⁶²

These instructions were followed on October 23 by a letter from President Eisenhower to Premier Diem reaffirming United States' intentions to provide aid to the Government of Viet Nam. The purpose of this aid was stated to be the development and maintenance of "...a strong, viable state capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."⁶³ This letter, signed by the President, was an unusually clear indication of support for the Diem government and materially enhanced the American commitment to South Viet Nam. This letter apparently antagonized the French who felt that unqualified U.S. aid had given Diem too much freedom of action without sufficient restraints. This situation, a disagreement between Paris and Washington over reimbursement for the French Expeditionary Corps and continued efforts by the United States to undercut the French position in Saigon, resulted in a further deterioration of Franco-American relations.⁶⁴

Indicative of the importance placed on internal security as the solution to the problem in Free Viet Nam, is the fact that Ambassador Heath was replaced by a former military officer with extremely limited diplomatic experience but considerable experience dealing with the French, particularly the military.

On November 3 former Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins was appointed as a special Ambassador with the specific mission of assisting the Vietnamese government in promoting internal security and political and economic stability, establishing control within South Viet Nam and counteracting Viet Minh infiltration.⁶⁵

While there was a recognition of the need for economic and agrarian reforms within Viet Nam in 1954 and 1955, neither the NSC papers nor the national intelligence estimates accorded these issues the significance they warranted. Concerned with the possibility of overt attack or accelerated guerrilla warfare by the DRV, U.S. actions focused almost exclusively on strengthening Diem's political and military stability. This emphasis is seen in the aid programs proposed for FY 1954 and FY 1955. Over 90% was earmarked for military assistance while less than 2% of the funds were designated for economic aid, technical assistance, education and information programs.⁶⁶

United States support of President Diem followed a familiar precedent. As was the case in Nationalist China and Korea, American policy was directed toward the Chief-of-State rather than the national government. American policy focused increasingly on a strengthening of President Diem's position, rather than the development of political institutions which could result in a change of government through constitutional processes. These institutions, as well as all peaceful political opposition, were stifled with the obvious association of American policy with the political repression carried out by the American protege. As a result the United States was itself largely responsible for the disproportionate emphasis placed on rural security and the inevitable deemphasis of needed social and political reforms. Increasingly the fall of Diem was identified as representing a failure of

American policy. Only after the total disintegration of Diem's political position was America willing to seek a new protege and acquiesce to the violent overthrow of the Diem regime.

A Stable and Democratic Viet Nam - 1956

Apparently Washington viewed the Vietnamese situation with favor in 1956. Communism had been contained in Indo-China. Publicly President Eisenhower praised President Diem's splendid leadership, which was viewed as exceeding anyone's most optimistic expectations.⁶⁷ Viet Nam was considered to be truly free, "...free not only from foreign rule, but also from any mark of foreign domination."⁶⁸ Assistant Secretary of State Robertson made one of the few detailed public statements on the Vietnamese situation in 1956. Projecting an image of stability and freedom, due largely to the "dedication, courage, and resourcefulness of President Diem", he stated that Viet Nam was progressing:

...rapidly to the establishment of democratic institutions by elective processes, its people resuming peaceful pursuits, its army growing in effectiveness, sense of mission, and morale, the puppet Vietnamese politicians discredited, the refugees well on the way to permanent resettlement, the countryside generally orderly and calm, the predatory sects eliminated and the venal leaders exiled or destroyed."

"Perhaps no more eloquent testimony to the new state of affairs in Viet Nam could be cited than the voice of the people themselves as expressed in their free election of last March. At that time the last possible question as to the feeling of the people was erased by an overwhelming majority for President Diem's leadership."⁶⁹

The situation was, in fact, relatively stable in the South, due in a large part to the problems being experienced by Ho Chi Minh and the Communists in the North. A reign of terror had been initiated in an attempt to achieve a meaningful agrarian reform program.⁷⁰ The peasants were experiencing hardships, with per capita food consumption falling to as low as 500 calories per day in some regions.⁷¹ Diem's propaganda

machine exploited the numerous reports of brutality and the abortive peasant revolt in Nghe An; thereby generating a degree of revulsion to Communism among the peasants.⁷² But Diem's government was new and still offered promise to the people. They as yet had not begun to experience the oppression of the secret police, bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption by local officials and the social upheaval of the agrovillage, and strategic hamlet programs. These destabilizing influences were soon to follow.

A similarly optimistic view of the situation was perceived by the U.S. intelligence community. A July 1956 national intelligence estimate recognized a greatly strengthened political position and popular support for Diem⁷³ and forecasted a continued improvement during the coming year.⁷⁴ Diem's personal prestige was viewed as expanding as a result of the improvements in internal security and a frustration of the Communist objectives.⁷⁵ While recognizing a stagnation in the land reform program, this estimate placed little stress on this point, a major issue of continuing importance to Communist policy within South Viet Nam. Rather than a microanalysis of the Vietnamese economy, an approach of more significance in an underdeveloped nation, the estimate approached the economy from the macro-level stating:

Progress toward resolving basic economic problems will continue slow, but conditions in South Viet Nam are not likely to have serious adverse political effects during the coming year, as rice production, rubber exports, and large scale U.S. aid provide reasonable living standards.⁷⁶

This estimate, like its predecessors, failed to address the basic aspirations of the Vietnamese people. Unmentioned were the nationalistic desire for independence (many viewed the American imperialists as having replaced the French Colonialists); the desire for peace; the desire for reunification; the desire for social equality,

freedom and democracy; the desire for the opportunity for upward mobility; and the desire for an improved living standard or popular livelihood. Instead of focusing on these aspirations as the key to success in Viet Nam, the estimate considered three threats to continued stability and popular confidence in the government: a DRV invasion across the 17th parallel; large scale guerrilla warfare; or, the death of President Diem.⁷⁷

On September 5, 1956 the President approved NSC 5612/1, "U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia", and directed its implementation by all pertinent U.S. agencies and executive departments.⁷⁸ This was the first comprehensive NSC policy paper dealing with Southeast Asia since NSC 5405 had been approved six months before the Geneva Settlement on January 16, 1954. While generally similar to previous NSC statements of policy, there were several significant shifts in attitude:

a. There was a slight decrease in the significance of Southeast Asia to U.S. security interests. While previously this loss was perceived as seriously endangering U.S. security, "seriously" was dropped from this paper which stated simply that U.S. national security would be endangered. This threat was further weakened as regard to the previously stated "falling domino principle." Instead of the inevitable fall of the entire region occurring by the fall of one nation, there was a perception that the loss of one country would "...encourage tendencies toward accommodation by the next." This shift may be attributed to the improving situation in South Viet Nam and the perception that the wave of Communism could in fact be stopped. If so, then the strategic value of the area was based, at least in part, on the threat from Communism.

b. While the danger of CHICOM and DRV overt aggression and militant subversion in Southeast Asia were recognized to exist, they

were ascribed less likelihood than a Communist political and economic offensive. Such an offensive would include exploitation through trade, economic assistance, political and diplomatic activity and extensive infiltration. Whereas aggression and subversion could be countered by the U.S. deterrent policy and SEATO, this latter threat was considered more difficult to cope with.

c. Because the Communist political and economic offensive was now perceived as the most significant threat there was a consequential shift away from a purely military approach and toward political and economic solutions. The need for more effective political organizations, stronger internal administration and greater allegiance by the people was recognized. There was a perceived need for training competent local managers and technicians as well as the development of new local government programs. These programs were not to be concentrated exclusively at the national level but should "...include activities designed to strengthen and vitalize indigenous traditions and institutions and to have an impact on village life, rural society, and educational systems."⁷⁹ To this end there was to be "...increased emphasis on community development projects, educational programs and other activities aimed to influence the welfare and attitudes of the people at the village level."⁸⁰ Economic programs were necessary which would assist the local governments to "...manage the political demand for rapid betterment in the conditions of life and provide for sound economic development."⁸¹

d. U.S. policy toward North Viet Nam was enunciated for the first time.⁸² The actions to be taken were to isolate and exploit the weaknesses of the DRV to the maximum extent. The DRV was not to be recognized and every effort was to be made to discourage non-Communist

governments from developing relations or trade with North Viet Nam. The U.S. should strive to prevent any spread of DRV political influence in Southeast Asia and to deter the DRV from attacks or subversion in South Viet Nam or Laos. The United States should determine DRV weaknesses and exploit these weaknesses internally and internationally. To weaken Sino-Soviet influence, the nationalist sentiments within North Viet Nam were to be exploited and the Government of South Viet Nam was to be encouraged to undertake political, economic and psychological warfare against the north.⁸³

By the end of 1956 the United States had recognized the need for meeting the social and political aspirations of the Vietnamese people and was beginning to identify those aspirations. Unfortunately, the U.S. was unable to implement an effective program to satisfy this need. NSC 5612/1 is devoid of any specific means to achieve a meaningful reform program. Satisfied with the "courageous leadership" of President Diem, the Eisenhower Administration concentrated on the means to attain a strong and stable Vietnamese Government capable, through its military forces, of maintaining the internal security and of developing the capability of resisting external aggression. Focusing exclusively on the macro-economic level, the policy paper stressed the importance of the economic integration of the Southeast Asian states among themselves and with the Western World; it emphasized national growth without any means of satisfying the aspirations of the people; and, it offered Western technical and economic assistance to the peasant who was primarily interested in owning a hectare or two of land.

With the attainment of a relatively peaceful countryside, the opportunity had been provided to fully develop a meaningful and free

South Vietnamese society. Unfortunately, the Diem regime represented the most significant obstacle to reform, and the United States was firmly committed to the support of President Diem. At a period when a relative degree of success had been realized, there was no recognition of the decisiveness of this point in history and the opportunity faded. Stability gradually gave way to political chaos.

NOTES

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CHAPTER V

THE IRREVOCABLE AMERICAN COMMITMENT

Gradual Deterioration in Viet Nam (1957-1960)

The situation in Viet Nam continued to be viewed favorably throughout 1957. Attributing the success in U.S. policy objectives to an effective military and economic assistance program and to the deterrent effect of SEATO, the President stated on May 21:

Two years ago it appeared that all Southeast Asia might be overrun by the forces of International Communism. The freedom and security of nations for which we had fought throughout World War II and the Korean War again stood in danger. The people of Viet Nam responded bravely--under steadfast leadership.

The armed forces, having improved significantly, was considered capable of maintaining the internal security of the nation and the economic aid program was seen as making slow progress.² Progress had also been made in forming a representative government and executive leadership were viewed as being strong.³ President Diem feared two threats to South Viet Nam: aggression by invasion; and Communist directed subversion. During a visit to the United States in 1957 he requested an increase in his armed forces to counter these threats.⁴ Apparently satisfied with the situation, Washington disapproved this request.⁵

In April, 1958 NSC 5812/1 was reviewed, revised and issued as NSC 5809.⁶ Changes in U.S. Southeast Asian policy were directed primarily toward the deteriorating situation in Laos and the increasing accommodation of Cambodia with Communism. Although there was a perception of an increased threat of Communist subversion; increased popular

dissidence, particularly in the extreme south; and, the need to employ the Vietnamese military forces in a manner to "...win the favor of the local populace....", United States policy was essentially unchanged.⁷

In a semi-annual report on Southeast Asia issued on May 28, 1958 the Operations Coordinating Board recognized problems in Viet Nam for the first time in two years.⁸ President Diem's stern police measures, an over emphasis on internal security, and strict highly-centralized political and economic controls were all cited as creating an increase in internal dissatisfaction with the Saigon government.⁹ In spite of these difficulties, this report considered that the United States was achieving its objectives in Viet Nam and concluded that no review of policy was necessary at that time.¹⁰

Expressing the sentiments of the middle-of-the-road elite, the newspaper Tu Do wrote on March 4, 1958 "we must have done with arbitrary arrests and imprisonments. The citizens of a free and independent country have the right to be protected in accordance with the Constitution".¹¹ Two weeks later the National Democratic Movement of South Viet Nam stated, "we enjoy neither justice nor freedom of the press nor free speech nor freedom to travel and meet together: A revolt is simmering."¹²

By January 7, 1959, and the publication of the next semi-annual report on Southeast Asia, the situation was perceived as seriously deteriorating.¹³ Doubt was expressed at this time as to whether U.S. policy objectives could be achieved to the desired degree.¹⁴

The "authoritarian and pervasive political controls" of the Ngo family were viewed as responsible for increasing political weakness.¹⁵ This weakness was indicated by a lack of support from the middle class, intellectuals and former government officials; by some discontent within

the Army; along with a carefully planned Communist campaign of violence aimed at weakening the stability of the Diem government, and, specifically, to interfere with Viet Nam's economic programs. President Diem was reported to be anticipating a sharp increase in Communist guerrilla activity and terrorism. While the American Ambassador was attempting to convey the need for liberalizing political and administrative controls, his actions were reported as being restricted due to the "extreme sensitivity" of the Vietnamese government. In spite of this deterioration in Viet Nam and a recognition of the inherent weaknesses of the Diem regime the Operations Coordinating Board did not feel that a review of Washington's Vietnamese policy was necessary.¹⁶

A May 1959 national intelligence estimate (NIE 63-59)¹⁷ identified President Diem together with his effective control of the army and police as the essential elements of continued political stability in Viet Nam. Diem was considered to be an austere courageous, dedicated, and moralistic individual remote from the populace. His base of power was the Can Lao party, a semicovert organization which controlled the business and political life of the Vietnamese society. The Can Lao exercised such tight control within the society that professional advancement was increasingly dependent upon membership in the organization. While popular enthusiasm for the government was lacking and there was some disillusionment among the educated elite, the estimate stated that although "...there appears to be little identifiable public unrest" the policy of oppression together with the unscrupulousness of the Can Lao will result in decreased governmental prestige and increased public dissatisfaction.¹⁸

The May NIE was far less pessimistic about the Communist threat than the January Operations Coordinating Board quarterly report. The

only opposition to the government, the Communists were considered to be an operating arm of the North Vietnamese Communists.¹⁹ Although the Communists had recently accelerated their "...intimidation campaign, assassinating local officials in remote areas, terrorizing local populations and disrupting government operations..." the army was viewed as capable of maintaining effective internal security.²⁰

The disparity between the January OCB report and the May national intelligence estimate shows the impact which organizational commitment can have on perceptions of the situation. From the time of Diem's assumption of power, the intelligence community had been his strongest supporter in Washington. This support can be attributed to the fact that the CIA had been given the mission of assisting and advising President Diem during the period when he was forming his government in 1954.²¹ As a result, the chief of intelligence in Saigon, Major General Edward G. Lansdale, as well as other CIA officials, became his strongest supporter. The State Department, because its Ambassadors experienced continual difficulties and frustrations in dealing with the President, never developed the same commitment.

The OCB, chaired by a State Department representative and composed of a majority of members outside the intelligence community, was far more accurate in its assessment of the situation. The CIA, with its apparent bias, strongly supported President Diem and grossly underestimated the seriousness of the situation. The degree of support for Diem is indicated by the analysis that the Communists represented the only opposition to the Diem government. Non-Communist opposition was prevalent and was frequently expressed publicly.

It is highly unlikely that the CIA was unaware of this opposition. Apparently, the CIA had so totally identified with the government

that it, like President Diem, viewed all opposition as Communist dominated and directed. By its commitment to Diem the CIA's primary interest had diverged from the American number one goal, the containment of Communism. The CIA was primarily interested in keeping Diem in power.

While not directly addressing the deteriorating political situation in Viet Nam in 1959, one public statement by the President indicates an increased awareness of the situation. Whereas the President's speeches in 1957 and 1958 are noticeably void of references to Viet Nam, on April 4, 1959 he made a major speech at Gettysburg College devoted solely to the importance of Viet Nam to the security interests of the United States:

Strategically, South Viet Nam's capture by the Communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries in Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement...The loss of South Viet-Nam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom...by strengthening Viet-Nam and helping insure the safety of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, we gradually develop the great trade potential between this region, rich in natural resources, and highly industrialized Japan to the benefit of both.

...our own national interests demand some help from us in sustaining in Viet-Nam the morale, the economic progress and the military strength necessary to its continued existence in freedom.²²

This strong statement indicates that the President's perception of the strategic significance of Viet Nam grew as the stability of the area decreased.

Presidential references to Viet Nam were extremely limited in 1960. Except for occasional references to the strategic importance of the area and the success which the Republican government had achieved in maintaining the country's independence, President Eisenhower did not discuss this issue. Undoubtedly in an election year, the President was apparently not desirous of calling public attention to such a critical area of growing concern to the administration.

From mid-1959 onward, there was a definite increase in Viet Cong activity marked not only by an upsurge in terrorism (2% of the village chiefs were assassinated each month in 1959) but also by the fielding of Viet Cong military units which sought engagement with units of the regular army. On September 26, 1959 the 2d Liberation Battalion ambushed two companies of the 23d ARVN Div resulting in 26 ARVN casualties and the loss of large numbers of weapons. On January 25, 1960 the same battalion penetrated the defenses of the 32d Regiment, 21st ARVN Division at Tay Ninh killing 23 soldiers and again capturing large numbers of weapons. By early 1960 the Viet Cong were conducting company and larger operations in the Ca Man Peninsula area, the Mekong Delta region and Kien Hoa Province. The Viet Cong were reportedly moving into position to exercise one or more of three strategic military options:

- a. Incite an ARVN revolt;
- b. Establish a popular front movement in the lower delta; and
- c. Force the GVN into such repressive countermeasures as to incite a popular uprising.²³

It is clear, then, that Viet Cong units could move through the countryside with a relatively high degree of freedom; secure in the knowledge that the people would not betray them.

On March 7, 1960 the American Embassy in Saigon reported the existence of a "grave situation" which was growing more disturbing.²⁴ This deterioration was viewed as having resulted from an "...intensification of Viet Cong guerrilla and terrorist activities, weaknesses apparent in the GVN security forces and the growth of apathy and considerable dissatisfaction among the rural populace."²⁵ The seriousness of the security situation was indicated by an increased guerrilla

potential as manifested by a significant increase in the number and size of Viet Cong incidences. The increase in guerrilla potential showed the apparent weaknesses of the GVN security forces. This weakness was seen as resulting from a lack of ARVN counter-guerrilla training, a lack of unity-of-command at the operational level, and the peace-meal commitment of army units without centralized military planning. Diem's policy of dividing power between the Province Chiefs and military commanders, while preventing the military from developing too much power, nevertheless seriously restricted the military efficiency of his forces.

The Embassy saw the key to the situation as being the government's inability to gain the support and cooperation of the rural population. The people were viewed as being generally apathetic toward the GVN with signs of "...considerable dissatisfaction and silent opposition."²⁶ This condition had occurred because "...the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment."²⁷ This report went on to point out that incompetent officials, the use of forced labor for community development projects, corruption, the turbulence generated by resettlement, and the government's inability to protect the people from Communist terrorism all weakened the government's influence.

On July 25, 1960 the President approved changes in NSC 5809 and directed the implementation of NSC 6012, "U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia."²⁸ While revising policies toward several of the Southeast Asian nations, notably Laos, Cambodia and Singapore, the policies toward Viet Nam were essentially unchanged from NSC 5809. The only apparent shift in attitude was an increased awareness of the need for accelerated

propaganda efforts directed both internally against the Viet Cong and externally against North Viet Nam.

The August 23, 1960 national intelligence estimate reported a disturbing deterioration in the stability of South Viet Nam.²⁹ Due to the lack of GVN support from the peasants, the possibility of a loss in control over the countryside and a political crisis were recognized. Although Diem's position was not in immediate danger, should these adverse trends remain uncontrolled the collapse of the Diem regime was seen as likely.³⁰

By September 1960 the U.S. Ambassador was reporting from Saigon that the Diem government was in serious danger from two threats: a coup from non-Communist opponents; and, the gradual extension of Viet Cong control over the countryside.³¹ The latter threat was considered to be by far the most serious of the two. To counter these threats the Ambassador, acting under instructions from Washington, recommended on October 14 to President Diem a series of actions designed to broaden and increase the government's popular support.³²

a. Cabinet changes to include the appointment of a Minister of National Defense, and the inclusion of one or two non-Communist opposition members in the Cabinet.³³

b. The delegation by the President of increased authority and responsibility to cabinet members and a newly formed national Internal Security Council. This recommendation was viewed as an effort to free the President from relatively minor decisions and focus on basic policy matters.³⁴

c. Either an alteration of the Can Lao Party to eliminate its atmosphere of secrecy, suspicion and fear; or the total disbandment of the party.³⁵

d. Greater responsibility and power for the National Assembly, particularly in its legislative and investigative roles.

e. Public disclosure by government officials of their property holdings and sources of income.³⁶

f. Relaxation of restrictions on the press and increased contacts by the press with public officials.³⁷

g. The relaxation of restrictions limiting the opportunities for Vietnamese to travel and study abroad.³⁸

h. Procedures for the local election of village officials.³⁹

i. Several measures to win the support of the rural population. Specifically these measures would include a subsidization of the price of rice, liberalized credit for the small farmer, intensified agricultural development and diversification, payment of peasant labor in support of community development projects, subsidies for agrovillage residents during the period of their readjustment, and, finally, the payment of adequate compensation to rural health workers and members of the Self Guard Youth Corps.⁴⁰

j. The final recommendation was extremely sensitive and distasteful to President Diem. There were widespread rumors of corruption and the abuse of power by his brother and sister-in-law, Ngo dinh Nhu and Madame Nhu, and the Nhu's henchman, the head of the Secret Intelligence Service Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen. Accordingly Ambassador Dubrow recommended that these individuals be removed from the government and assigned as ambassadors abroad.⁴¹

The U.S. government was becoming increasingly aware of the need for reforms at all levels of the Vietnamese government; from the village to the national level. Although the recommended reforms addressed many of the problems causing dissatisfaction among the peasants, they failed

to address the two most critical aspirations: the desire for land ownership; and, the elimination of the Diem government. Diem, because of his authoritarian approach, distrust of others and unwillingness to delegate any authority past his most trusted subordinates, could not and would not take the actions necessary to win the loyalties of the people. His regime remained unchanged, officials at all levels continued to abuse the people, and dissatisfaction grew.

Five days after the election of John F. Kennedy to the Presidency, the dissatisfaction which had been growing in Viet Nam boiled over. On November 11, 1960, under the leadership of a small group of civilians and military officers, five paratroop battalions and several marine units seized control of all the key points in Saigon, surrounded the Presidential Palace and called for political reforms.⁴² The negotiations which followed permitted loyal forces (the 5th and 7th ARVN Divisions) to move from the provinces and, in spite of radio reports to the contrary, they quickly restored order.⁴³ The short lived revolutionary council had called for the end to the "totalitarian, authoritarian and nepotistic" form of government, coalition rule, increased reliance by the government on the military, the end to the practice of placing political favorites in key military positions and an effective campaign against Communist subversion.⁴⁴

Washington reacted favorably to Diem's success expressing satisfaction with the swift end to the revolt which could have resulted in a long and bloody civil war.⁴⁵ Although promising reforms the coup afforded Diem with the excuse and the motivation to further suppress his political opposition and consolidate power.

Although Ambassador Dubrow continued to press President Diem for

a more liberalizing policy, he was met with an extremely negative attitude. Diem specifically reacted adversely to the Ambassador's suggestions for increased power to the National Assembly, payment for peasant labor, and devaluation of the piaster. The other liberal proposals presented on October 14 and reiterated more forcefully on December 24, while not specifically rejected, were never implemented by President Diem. Instead, he stressed the need for improved internal security and an increase in his authorized military force structure.⁴⁶ The American government, with its ever increasing commitment to President Diem, relented in its pressures for reform and acquiesced to his requests.

Formation of the National Liberation Front

While banditry and, in some limited instances, Communist guerrilla actions were conducted in South Viet Nam prior to 1958, there is no evidence that these actions were in anyway connected with a coordinated plan. Due to the government "Denunciation of Communist Campaign", impatience on the part of the Communist cadres remaining in the South and the excessively repressive measures of the Diem regime the Communists in South Viet Nam began intensifying their military actions in 1958. Contrary to U.S. policy assertions that the insurgency in the South began as a result of North Viet Nam's direction, it appears to have begun initially in spite of North Viet Nam instructions to the contrary.⁴⁷ Once begun, however, the DRV quickly asserted itself and by 1959 was involved in the direction of the effort in the South.⁴⁸ Also by 1959 the infiltration south of some of the 90,000 regroupes, who had gone north during 1954 and 1955, was intensified by the DRV.⁴⁹ For these individuals, who had anticipated an earlier return following:

the elections promised by the Geneva accords, the opportunity to return to their families and homes was most welcome.⁵⁰ While many would have been willing to blend into the countryside and renounce their Communist affiliation, the repressive measures of the Diem government insured their loyalty to the movement. Their influx, coupled with the existing cadres and the dissatisfaction of the peasants, insured an ever-expanding base of support for the insurgency.⁵¹

While there is some doubt of the exact date that the National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed, December 20, 1960 is generally accepted as the latest possible date for its formation.⁵² It is clear that on, or before, this date a group of Communist and non-Communist Southern dissidents held a meeting somewhere in South Viet Nam and established the N.L.F.

Soon after its formation, the front announced an all-encompassing and noncontroversial program designed to gain the support of a large following. As announced over the Liberation Radio of South Viet Nam on February 13, 1961, this ten-point program has undergone little change during the past 14 years.⁵³ Basically, the program called for the establishment of a democratic coalition government by the overthrow of the American "puppet" regime, the development of an independent and modern national economy, the formulation of a peaceful and neutral foreign policy; and, the movement toward the reunification of North and South Viet Nam by negotiation. The program also called for several areas of social reform including the protection of minority rights, equality of the sexes, the redistribution of land by government purchase, jobs for the jobless, food for the hungry, health care for the ill, job security for the worker, and the elimination of illiteracy through educational reform. In short, the NLF program provided a

panacea for every ill within the society. All Vietnamese so desiring could easily identify with the program without personal conflicts. The Front's arms were even opened wide, through the act of repentance, for the Diemist "bullies" who had perpetrated crimes against the people.

The NLF program was basically an expansion of three principal contradictions between the Vietnamese people and the Diem regime. As outlined in a Communist document ("The Path of the Revolution in the South") these contradictions were:

- a. The desire for peace, independence and national reunification;
- b. The desire for freedom and democracy; and
- c. The desire for an adequate living standard or popular livelihood.⁵⁴

The approach was to identify the local needs of the people and to gain their support and sympathy by identifying the government as the reason these needs were not being met. Three distinct but interwoven activities were initiated: "the political struggle movement", "the armed struggle", and "the military proselyting movement."⁵⁵

The "political struggle movement" operated on two parallel axes. The first axis addressed the local situation and was designed to "... lessen enemy pressure; oppose military operations and terrorism; oppose the strategic hamlet and extortion; and halt the seizure of land the corvée labor system and the army draft".⁵⁶ The second approach was pointed toward the individual, in an effort to involve and immerse the people in the revolutionary movement.⁵⁷ The two axes were interdependent, for as individual involvement was expanded resistance to the government could become more effective. Similarly, as government control was weakened a greater number of individuals could be involved in

the movement. The "political struggle movement" began with an initial consolidation of power in areas remote from Saigon's control and then a gradual expansion throughout the South. Eventually, the NLF assumed that the weak and tottering government could be overthrown politically.⁵⁸ While it did make tremendous advances, the political movement by itself was never able to supplant the government of South Viet Nam.

The violence program was initially subordinate to political considerations.⁵⁹ As it became more and more apparent that the "political struggle movement" was not going to gain success by itself, while government forces intensified their operations, the violence program became an increasingly essential component to the revolutionary movement. Although the early infiltrators were predominantly political cadre, as the tempo of the military operations intensified the infiltration became more and more oriented on military operations, often to the detriment of Communist political considerations.⁶⁰ In the end, it was the armed struggle which achieved the total victory which the political struggle had been unable to achieve over a 30-year period. However, this victory could not have been possible without the inherent weaknesses created by the "political struggle movement."

The "military proselyting movement", or Binh Yan, was focused against the government's armed forces in an effort to weaken their combat efficiency. This effort attempted to "win over the enemy soldier by propaganda". The soldier was propagandized directly and, often more importantly, indirectly through his family. Although considered by many as a part of the "political struggle movement,"⁶¹ this program was so important and effective that many cadre considered it a separate essential point in itself.⁶² Accounting for large number of desertions and decreased morale, "military proselyting" was seen as a

method of achieving victory without the spilling of blood.⁶³

Throughout the revolution the economic issue of paramount importance was land reform. Point IV of the 1961 ten-point NLF program was devoted to agrarian reform and included the reduction of land rent, the redistribution of communal lands; guaranteed property rights for those farmers who had already received land; and, the purchase and redistribution of surplus lands owned by the big land owners.⁶⁴ Under this program each farmer was entitled to sufficient land for his needs at no cost to him and guaranteed a market for the fruits of his labor.⁶⁵ So that everyone would be satisfied, the land owner, although compelled to relinquish his land, was guaranteed a fair price. In practice, however, it appears that the landlords were treated less than fairly. Large land owners were forced to flee to secure areas and many were assassinated. Smaller landlords who remained in contested areas were forced to lower their rents to 10% or less of the annual crop.

One study clearly shows that as the influence of the Viet Cong increased in an area the rents paid by the tenants decreased.⁶⁶ This rent incentive together with Viet Cong land titles, which would be lost in the event of GVN control of the area, created among most peasants in a Viet Cong controlled area a vested interest in the success of the revolution. Particularly in those areas like Long An Province where, as late as 1968, 90% of the farmers in the government controlled areas were tenants.⁶⁷

While the GVN from 1955 onward also had a land reform program, many of its policies simply strengthened the N.L.F. program. Certainly the GVN's confiscation and return of land to former landlords following the Geneva agreements alienated all those who had received land--under the Viet Minh land program. The purchase by the GVN of large scale

French land holdings and the confiscation of 490,000 acres lacking clear title created further alienation as none of this land was redistributed to the peasants. A portion of this acreage was rented to the peasants directly by the government, while a larger portion was placed under village control and rented on a year-to-year basis. This latter situation created extreme pressures on the farmer, as he had little security and was forced to bid annually at ever increasing rents for the continued use of the land.⁶⁸ Of course the Viet Cong exploited this enmity by guaranteeing these lands to the tiller.

Second only to its ten-point program, the success of the National Liberation Front can be attributed to its excellent organization which was tightly controlled, responsive to the people and highly disciplined.⁶⁹ The Communists erected an infrastructure incorporating a hard-core elite and a multitude of popular associations which obtained the involvement of the entire populace. Under the complete control of the political elite, the popular associations provided the means for mobilizing a generally indifferent populace.⁷⁰ By gradually drawing a greater proportion of the population into these organizations, the leaders were able to neutralize support for the GVN pacification effort. Beginning gradually, the Communists were able to progressively involve the individual in political, extra-legal and finally illegal activities to weave them individually in the revolution. As a result, all individuals living in Communist controlled areas naturally identified their security with the security needs of the movement.

Washington's perception of the situation in Viet Nam in 1959 and 1960 was totally inconsistent with reality. The Communist organization was not an operating arm of the North Viet Nam regime - it was controlled and directed by Soviet hangers-on. The increased Communist campaign

in 1959 was not directed by the North - it was a spontaneous reaction to the Diem regime. The peasants were not apathetic to Diem - they were repressed and hostile. The Communists were not achieving success because the GVN could not protect the people from Communist intimidation - the Communists were achieving success because their "political struggle movement" addressed the grievances and aspirations of the people. The United States was not viewed as a staunch supporter of freedom - the United States was viewed as being against freedom and democracy; against peace, independence and national reunification; and against the peoples desire for a popular livelihood. The people did not want reductions in rent - the people wanted land. The people did not want the security of "agrovilles" - the people wanted the freedom to live on their land. President Diem was not a courageous, effective, and democratic leader - he was autocratic, paranoid, repressive, nepotistic and arbitrary and he was incapable of leading his people. The answer to the problem was not increased security in the countryside - the answer was reform. The answer to the problem was not reform from within the Diem government - the answer was the establishment of a liberal government which could institute the necessary reforms and lead the people.

The American commitment to the containment of Communism and support of the Diem regime had impaired its vision. The full range of viable courses of action was not considered. Instead, only two courses of action were presented to the decision maker: a continuation of the status quo and an increase in the American commitment. As the situation deteriorated it was obvious that the status quo was not adequate. The only solution was an increase in commitment. The degree to which this inevitable escalation of commitment and effort can be attributed to

"policy precedent" is open to question. However, its presence as a factor is obvious.

President Kennedy and Counterinsurgency

John F. Kennedy won the 1960 Presidential election by a narrow margin. Arriving in office at a period of heightened Cold War tensions, his administration faced Communist confrontations in Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Viet Nam. Promising a new direction to American foreign policy, the Administration attempted to formulate a viable concept to meet the Communist threat. Even prior to ascending to the Presidency, then Senator Kennedy summarized his views regarding the type of military force required to deal with the entire spectrum of Communist aggression ranging from a nuclear exchange at one extreme to guerrilla warfare at the other. In a statement made on February 29, 1960, the Senator stated:

...events have demonstrated that our nuclear retaliatory power is not enough. It cannot deter Communist aggression that is too limited to justify atomic war...In short, we need forces of an entirely different kind to keep the peace against limited aggression and to fight it, if deterrence fails, without raising the conflict to a disastrous pitch.

...And our capability for conventional war is insufficient to avoid the hopeless dilemma of choosing between launching a nuclear attack and watching aggressors make piecemeal conquests.⁷¹

The Kennedy Administration suffered from what has been referred to as the "legacy of the 1950's".⁷² Both the State and Defense Departments were staffed with individuals who, frustrated by the loss of China, were firmly committed to the policy of containing and isolating mainland China. Secondly, as noted above, there was a repudiation by President Kennedy and his key advisors of the concept of massive retaliation and the realization of the need for the development of an alternative concept to meet varying threat levels. Finally, the problems of employing major forces in a Korean-style, limited-war were

viewed as being too expensive militarily, politically inadvisable and would tie-up the limited forces available in one area (Vietnam) that might be required elsewhere (Cuba or Berlin). The President's advisors, working on the above foundation, analyzed the Free World's successes against Communist subversion since World War II (Malaya, Greece, Philippines, etc.) and developed the concepts of counterinsurgency.

In spite of the stated need for a new approach to Asian policy, the Kennedy Administration followed the programs of its predecessor. The Counterinsurgency Plan for Viet Nam, which was approved by the President on January 28, 1961, had been developed totally by officials of the Eisenhower Administration. This fact would indicate that Kennedy and his advisors were only vocalizing what had been a concept growing within the bureaucracy of the previous administration in reaction to the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. If this was the case, and it appears to have been, one can question what impact a new leader with new ideas has on the decision making bureaucracy.

Actually the Counterinsurgency Plan (CIP) was far less than a revolutionary departure from previous policies. Its approach to the entire problem in Viet Nam was one of security, and it failed to address the aspirations of the peasants; which aspirations the Viet Cong had been so adroitly exploiting.⁷³ It did recognize the problem which the American officials had been experiencing in obtaining Diem's agreement and compliance with certain U.S. desired reforms. As a result, it used the 20,000-man approved increase in the Vietnamese armed forces and support for the expansion of the Civil Guard as a lever designed to pry these needed civil and military reforms from the Diem regime. The civil reforms included increased authority to the National Assembly; the

inclusion of opposition leaders within the cabinet; and improved civic action programs to win the support of the people. The military reforms focused on an improvement in the confused military chain-of-command, and the development of a mobile operational concept designed to regain the initiative in the war against the guerrillas.⁷⁴ Eventually the quid pro quo aspect of the CIP was dropped and President Diem again achieved his force increase as well as over \$42 million additional aid without any modification to his method of rule.⁷⁵

As the situation deteriorated in Viet Nam and the loss of Laos to the Communists became increasingly likely, President Kennedy directed the formation of an ad hoc group for the development of a program designed to prevent a Communist take-over of South Viet Nam.⁷⁶ This task was given to the Deputy Secretary of State Roswell Gilpatric, who formed an interagency task force and in less than six days prepared "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Viet Nam."⁷⁷ While recognizing that the program had not been developed in complete detail, due to the limited time available, Mr. Gilpatric reported to the President that the task force had been able to prepare "...a plan for mutually supporting actions of a political, military, economic, psychological and covert character which can be refined periodically on the basis of further recommendations from the field."⁷⁸ Since it represented the best thinking of the Departments of State and Defense, CIA, ICA, USIA and the Office of the President, this report, and a final revision, dated May 6, 1961, are worth considering in some detail.

The task force report viewed the deteriorating situation as attributable to the implementation by the North Vietnamese of a Communist master plan for the takeover of all Southeast Asia.⁷⁹ As a result of the implementation of this plan:

...the internal situation in South Vietnam has become critical. What amounts to a state of active guerrilla warfare now exists throughout the country. The number of Viet Cong hard-core Communists has increased from 4400 in early 1960 to an estimated 12,000 today. The number of violent incidents per month now averages 650. Casualties on both sides totaled more than 4500 during the first three months of this year. 58% of the country is under some degree of Communist control, ranging from harassment and night raids to almost complete administrative jurisdiction in the Communist "secure areas"....

In short, the situation in South Vietnam has reached the point where, at least for the time being, a solution to the internal security problem must take priority over other programs directed towards the political or economic fields.⁸⁰

Internal security was becoming even more important than previously.

Reform would have to wait until the countryside was secure.

To counter this threat the task force recommended the following major actions:⁸¹

a. An increase in the size of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) from the then current complement of 685 to approximately 785. This action was the first clear cut violation of the Geneva Accords by the United States;

b. Expand the MAAG's area of responsibility to include support and advice to the 40,000 man Self Defense Corps;

c. Provide Military Assistance Program (MAP) support for the entire 68,000 man Civil Guard and the Vietnamese "Junk Force". This latter group would have the mission of interdicting Viet Cong infiltration and supply into South Viet Nam by water;

d. Deployment of a 400-man Special Forces Group to Nha Trang in order to accelerate GVN Special Forces training;

e. Assessment of the military utility of increasing the GVN forces from 170,000 to 200,000 personnel;

f. Consider the deployment of two U.S. battle groups and an engineer construction battalion to the high plateau region to establish

two divisional training areas to train the additional forces in "c" above;

g. Consider assigning limited coastal patrol missions to the Pacific Command naval units;

h. Consider assigning limited aerial surveillance and close air support missions to the Pacific Command air units;

i. Politically the report recommended a personal letter of support to President Diem from President Kennedy; a state visit by Vice President Johnson to obtain joint agreement on the means required to preserve the integrity and freedom of Viet Nam; implementation of the CIP reforms; and a program to improve Viet Nam's relations with other countries and enhance its status in world opinion;

j. Economically the report recommended increased emphasis on, and funding of rural development - civic action programs; the development of a combined U.S. - Viet Nam plan for the use of U.S. financial resources; and the undertaking of a long-range economic development program;

k. An expanded psychological warfare program designed to inform the world of the Communist infiltration and terrorist campaign, to expand the knowledge of the Vietnamese people regarding unfavorable conditions in North Viet Nam and to encourage defections from the Viet Cong ranks was recommended; and

l. Expanded covert operations were recommended including intelligence flights over North Viet Nam, infiltration of observers and combat teams into Viet Cong controlled areas (including cross-border operations), expansion of intelligence and resistance efforts in North Viet Nam, penetration of Viet Cong organizations, and increased

communications intelligence actions by ASA and CIA.

While the plan encompassed the full spectrum of political, military, economic, psychological, and covert operations its focus was unquestionably directed toward the development of effective internal security. The chief threat to President Diem's administration was viewed as being "...The government's inability to protect its own people".⁸² In addition, the report focused exclusively on maintaining the political status quo. While the need for social, economic, and political reforms were recognized as necessary, these reforms were designed to shore up the existing administration. The task force considered Diem to be the only possible solution with other possible alternatives entailing an unacceptable degree of risk. However, the report was optimistic and considered it possible

...to effect a major alteration in the present governmental structure or in its objectives. To accomplish this will require very astute dealing between U.S. government personnel and the Vietnamese. However, we believe that we have the combination of positive inducements plus points at which discreet pressure can be exercised which will permit accomplishment of this objective.⁸³

While deferring a decision on the issue of deploying the U.S. battle groups and assigning combat missions to the Pacific Command air and naval forces, the President, on April 29, 1961, approved the remaining major recommendations of the Vietnam Task Force report.⁸⁴ Many of these recommendations were incorporated in a rather detailed letter informing President Diem of the upcoming visit of Vice President Johnson, as the President's representative, to discuss measures for an "...intensified effort to win the struggle against Communism and to further the social and economic advancement of Vietnam".⁸⁵

It is clear that the United States Government was prepared to deploy combat forces to South Viet Nam should they be considered

necessary for the defense of that nation against Communism. This option was repeatedly explored by the Defense and State Departments throughout 1961. On one occasion (May 1, 1961) as the increasing likelihood of the fall of Laos was perceived, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific was alerted to the possibility of deploying two 5,000-man brigades, one to Thailand and one to Viet Nam.⁸⁶ This issue was discussed by President Diem and Vice President Johnson on May 12 during the latter's visit to Viet Nam and President Diem was firm in his position that he "...did not want U.S. combat forces for the purpose of fighting Communists in South Viet Nam..." and that such forces would be welcome only in the event of overt aggression.⁸⁷ From these discussions it appears likely that had President Diem so requested, United States combat forces could have been committed to South Viet Nam by President Kennedy nearly four years prior to the landing of the Marines at Da Nang in March, 1965. The Viet Nam albatross, which President Johnson carried to his grave and into history, could have been carried by his predecessor. Certainly, both share a large degree of responsibility for the events that transpired during the ensuing 14 years.

In any case, President Kennedy in early 1961, more than his predecessors, formalized and expanded the United States' commitment to South Viet Nam. He, like Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, was firmly committed to the United States' objective of preventing the Communist domination of South Viet Nam.

In 1961 policy was clearly driving policy. The United States commitment to Viet Nam transcended almost all other considerations. This commitment was increasing incrementally and outside the control of the decision maker. Whereas the defense of Viet Nam had originally been one action within the larger policy of containment, by 1961 it had been

elevated to a national goal. The reputation and determination of the United States would be judged based on its success in Viet Nam. John F. Kennedy would be similarly judged. He lacked the capability to reverse the tide and the American commitment deepened.

Prologue

Throughout 1961 the security situation rapidly deteriorated and ultimate Viet Cong victory appeared certain. The Viet Cong leaders were riding a crest of successes and rapidly approaching the final phase of insurgency. The Saigon and Washington Governments recognized the challenge and were attempting to arrive at a solution. American aid was increased, the ARVN forces were reoriented toward counterinsurgency operations, and there was an increased realization of the scope of the problem. As a result, 1962 saw a reversal. Increased effectiveness of the ARVN and the initial success of the "Strategic Hamlet" concept swayed the tide from a Viet Cong advantage to one of parity.⁸⁸

While the military situation in early 1963 was improving, the political stability of the nation was crumbling. The cleavage between the Buddhist and the Diem regime widened. Increased governmental oppression resulted in increased strife.⁸⁹ The American commitment to Diem waned and his strongest opponent, the military, was afforded the opportunity to seize control.⁹⁰ A general's junta was established in November, 1963.

With increased instability in the South Vietnamese government during 1963, the Communist worked at expanding their control over the countryside and made tremendous strides. The Strategic Hamlet Program failed and collapsed. It had grown beyond the security capabilities of the government and had been left uncovered in many areas by troop

deployments to Saigon for the coup.

The junta never became organized and a bloodless coup brought General Nguyen Khanh to power in August 1964 and military efforts were redirected against the Viet Cong once more. Khanh was replaced by a civilian oriented government that October and Tran Van Huong assumed the duties of Prime Minister. He was replaced in January 1965 by Phan Huy Quat. Quat was subsequently replaced in June by a second military Junta. Emerging from this Junta was Air Force Brigadier General Nguyen Cao Ky. Ky was able to quell the Buddhist and afford the nation a degree of stability not realized since the middle years of the Diem regime.

While the political situation in South Viet Nam was deteriorating an unusual situation occurred off North Viet Nam. North Vietnamese motor torpedo boats on two occasions attacked United States naval vessels in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin.⁹¹ President Johnson asked for and received Senate approval for the use of American might in Southeast Asia. The stage was set for major United States escalation of the war effort. Increased enemy infiltration of North Vietnamese units and supplies resulted in increased bombing in the north. This same factor coupled with a deteriorating military situation resulted in the deployment of American ground forces in the south. In March 1965 the first of these units was deployed, two Marine battalions. The 173d Airborne Brigade followed from Okinawa in May, the 1st Infantry Division, a brigade from the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the Korean Capital Division soon followed. By October the equivalent of three U.S. and one Korean divisions were on the ground and in combat.

Prior to 1965 the war had been purely a Vietnamese war supported by the United States. Contrary to General Ridgway's earlier advice at the time of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, by 1965 the United States was entering the war in force. Now it was an American war and by April 1969 the commitment of United States troops would swell to a high of 543,400 personnel and the equivalent of nine maneuver divisions.⁹² America's allies would contribute an additional 60,000 men. In spite of increased North Vietnamese infiltration the war stalemated. The immediate threat of a North Vietnamese victory was blocked and, while periodic reversals occurred such as the 1968 Tet Offensive, as long as American troops were present the overall progress of the war was toward increased security in the South. Security only repressed the revolutionary movement. With the removal of American power the government's weakness became evident. The "political struggle" and "military proselyting" campaigns created the environment for Communist military success and South Viet Nam fell in April, 1975.

What were the reasons that the Johnson Administration committed the United States to the war? President Johnson summarized these reasons in a speech at Johns Hopkins University on April 7, 1965. He stated:

Our objective is the independence of South Viet Nam, and its freedom from attack... We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny... We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam... We are there to strengthen world order... To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next.⁹³

The President went on to say that over this war, and all Asia, is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. "It is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every

continent. The contest in Viet Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purpose."⁹⁴

Since 1954 every American President had offered support to the people of South Viet Nam. Since 1945 the American commitment had expanded and deepened. Since 1945 the United States' involvement had followed an inevitable course of ever increasing commitment and involvement, due, at least in part, to the impact of "policy precedents" on the decision making process.

NOTES

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CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Findings

Decision making has been defined as a social process which identifies a problem, produces a number of alternatives, and selects one alternative for implementation.¹ By this definition the decision-making process which led to the American involvement in Viet Nam can best be classified as a non-decision-making process. The flaw in the process was the failure on the part of three succeeding presidential administrations to consider viable alternatives. Rarely was the President accurately informed of the facts and afforded the opportunity to select from opposing courses of action. Instead he was presented with a policy statement which had been developed and agreed to by the various agencies within the bureaucracy. The only freedom of action which he possessed was to either approve or disapprove all or a portion of the stated policy. Apparently approval was expected and the disapproval option was rarely exercised.

Since all of the options presented were of a nature that would result in American escalation, the President's choice was simply between acceptance of the status quo by rejecting the new policy or the acceptance of escalation. Throughout the period of this study policies proved to be far more durable than the individual who developed them. They were cumulative with subsequent decisions building on the base of previous decisions. Thus the presence of previous decisions can be

discerned in all subsequent decisions and the United States was driven toward an ever deepening involvement in the conflict.

The bureaucracy lacked a means for reversing this involvement. While two instances of significant dissent were noted (the EUR-FEA conflict² and the Army's opposition to Operation Vulture³); these instances led to a continuation of the status quo. Once dissent became obsolete due to a changing situation, escalation continued.

Since alternative courses of action were not considered, the personality of the President had little direct impact on decision content. What impact the President did have was indirect, through his manipulation of the organization. The degree of escalation was tied to such factors as organizational rules; the degree of centralized (or decentralized) control; reporting and communications channels; and the allocation of influence and responsibility to the various agencies. Changes in structure generally permitted the more radical policies to come forward. Thus when President Kennedy assumed office, his attempt to increase flexibility resulted, instead, in a more rapid escalation of the American involvement.

The assignment of responsibilities and the allocation of influence was generally unclear throughout the period of study. As a result, agency actions were often duplicative and generally reinforcing. Their actions tended to focus on political considerations rather than the development of an effective estimate of the situation. A logical assignment of responsibilities to the various agencies would have assigned specific and separate roles for the State Department, CIA, and Defense Department. Such an assignment would insure the development of all critical information required by the decision-maker. Thus the CIA could be expected to assess the threat and determine the risk involved

in the implementation of specific courses of action. The Defense Department would be expected to analyze the threat and, in light of military capabilities, identify the forces and resources required to counter the threat. The State Department would be expected to analyze the various courses of action and identify the political impact on allies and the interrelationship of existing policies. Thus, the decision maker would be afforded with an analysis of the problem as well as the relative costs, risks and benefits of the various alternatives. He could then make a rational decision. Such, however, was not the case.

Once a decision is rendered, one agency should coordinate and direct the implementation of policy. Again this was not the case. The CIA, Department of Defense and Department of State all had operational responsibilities which were often in conflict. Each developed organizational biases which, while not a part of, certainly imparted on the decision-making process. As a result all three agencies became clearly identified with existing policy and no one agency was able to develop the adversary relationship to present viable alternatives.

The exception which proves the rule occurred in 1954 when the Army, alienated and excluded by the concept of massive retaliation and the imposition of force reductions, exerted a significant impact on the restriction of the American involvement. The Army's position is attributable to its alienation and inability to identify with the government's program. Had this identity existed, it is doubtful if General Ridgway would have conducted such a detailed opposition to the course of action then under consideration.

With the exception of the EUR-EEA controversy and the Army's 1954 position, all restraints on the increasing American involvement

were imposed by restraints from outside the bureaucracy. These restraints originated from two sources; Congress and the American allies. These outside influences are particularly noticeable in the repudiation of the Atlantic Charter as applied to Indo-China, which repudiation was based on the requirements of Western unity; in the decision not to commit U.S. military forces in support of the French position at Dien Bien Phu; in the impotence of American policy during the Geneva Conference; and, the refusal by President Diem of the offer of U.S. military force immediately following President Kennedy's election.

An excellent example of organizational bias was uncovered during the course of the study. The failure of the CIA to accurately analyze the situation existing in South Viet Nam is attributable, at least in part, to that agency's support of Diem. As a result objectivity was severely restricted and the CIA was unable to accurately assess the nature of the real threat to South Viet Nam. This identification certainly contributed to the following failures:

- a. The disproportionate emphasis placed on the contention that the insurgency was part of a Communist master plan originating in the Kremlin;
- b. The failure to recognize that the insurgency had its roots in the South, as well as the disproportionate emphasis placed on North Vietnamese support and direction;
- c. Failure to identify the aspirations of the people as the driving force behind the insurgency;
- d. The disproportionate emphasis on rural security as the means of achieving victories;
- e. The failure to effectively identify the weaknesses of the

Diem regime;

f. The identification of Diem's retention in power as being synonymous with American interests;

g. The disproportionate emphasis that was placed on the possibility of Chinese Communist overt intervention in the war; and

h. The failure to assess the relative vulnerabilities of the other South East Asian nations to Communist subversion.

Perhaps the major finding of this study is the continuity and gradual evolution of American policy during the period 1944 to 1961. Such supposed major shifts in policy and strategies as containment, massive retaliation and flexible response were simply political rhetoric to explain shifts in policy which had occurred incrementally within the government prior to their pronouncement. Containment was simply an expansion of the concepts embodied within the Atlantic Charter regarding self-determination, and an attempt to apply this concept to counter what was perceived as Soviet attempts to enslave the people of Europe. What was an idealistic approach to Europe became a pragmatic approach in Asia and resulted in support of the French colonial interests.

Massive retaliation was not a new concept when enunciated by Secretary Dulles in 1954, at least insofar as its application to Indo-China. The J.C.S. and CIA were espousing this concept as early as 1952, most probably as a result of the frustration inherent in the Korean War. Similarly, Kennedy's counterinsurgency concepts were well developed within the government by the time of his assumption of office and may have had their roots in the Army's opposition to the concepts of massive retaliation. While the President's direct impact on these concepts were minimal, the changes in administration provided the catalyst for their more rapid implementation.

Analysis

The complexity of the decision-making process and the interrelationship of non-quantifiable factors renders an analysis of U.S. policy an extremely difficult and subjective exercise. To reduce this complex task to a manageable level the research tasks, which were derived from the rational model and identified in Chapter I, have been applied to the findings.

Were the national goals and interests clearly identified during the evolution of United States policy? The application of this criteria varied during the period studied. Initially U.S. policy focused on the defeat of Japan and was clearly identified. During the immediate post-World War II period the overriding consideration was Soviet containment and the need for continued Western unity. Support for the French pulled the United States into the Indo-China involvement. Gradually this involvement solidified into a firm commitment to defend the area from Communism. This commitment eventually became the driving force, transcending all other goals.

By 1954 the United States was willing to weaken Western unity in support of the defense of Indo-China. It is during the 1950's that the American focus became blurred. The strategic significance of South East Asia became directly tied to the stability of Viet Nam. Defense of Viet Nam, rather than the containment of Communism became the overriding consideration. Thus by 1961 U.S. national goals were not clearly identified.

Were all viable courses of action considered which would logically support the national goals and interests? Throughout the decision-making

process there was a total absence of alternatives considered. As noted, the only freedom-of-action afforded to the decision maker was his veto authority which would result in a continuation of the status quo. Policy approved invariably resulted in some form of escalation.

Was the policy selected consistent with the decision maker's perception of the situation and with the national goals and interests? Generally they were. However, this perception was clouded by the commitment that developed, particularly during the period 1954 to 1961. The decision maker's attention was frequently directed away from reality and toward an unreal perception of the situation. Thus the commitment of the United States to the defense of Viet Nam determined the situation and the decision maker was not provided with the information required to make a rational decision.

Were the national goals and interests modified to conform to existing policy? Clearly they were. As noted above the overriding consideration became not the containment of Communism, not the defense of South East Asia; but rather the American commitment to defend Viet Nam. Eventually even the defense of Viet Nam became less important than the maintenance of the Diem regime in power. Policy drove policy and once the United States became committed to a course of action it became a basis for all subsequent actions. There was no mechanism within the process which could reverse this trend. The United States became more and more involved, not because of a rational evaluation of facts, but rather because of the irrational forces within the national security decision-making process.

Conclusion

The American involvement in Viet Nam from 1944 to 1961 can be explained, at least in part, by the impetus given to the decision process by the concept referred to as "policy precedents." This involvement evolved by relatively minor incremental, but always escalating changes. The United States was propelled along the course of increasing involvement by forces outside the control of the decision makers and became inevitably committed to the defense of Viet Nam.

NOTES

¹Richard C. Snyder, et. al. (ed). Foreign Policy Decision-making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 92.

²See above pp. 20-21.

³See above pp. 67-68.

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