

CABLEGRAM

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To Casey from Spender.

Geneva Conference - Indo-China.

I saw Murphy for over half an hour on 24th March and gave him aide-memoire based on your 197 which he was glad to receive. In answer to specific questions concerning United States thinking on Indo-China discussions and their estimate of French intentions, he gave substantially the same replies as we have in recent weeks been reporting from working level in the State Department - 'leave running to French', 'no firm State Department views' etc.

2. I found him evasive and obscure in his replies. He talked generalities, would not speak to the point and express mainly 'personal' views. The only substantial answer he gave was that since there had already been negotiations with North Korea 'there could be no objection in principle to negotiating with Vietnam.'

3. The following, however, gives the general picture of the situation which emerged from what he said. The State Department thinking on any solution in Indo-China does not appear to have made much, if any, progress. The impression I gathered was they were more concerned about how Indo-China was to be held than how it was to be settled. They are extremely concerned about the political situation in Paris and Indo-China. There are so many conflicting points of view in the French Government that it has probably been impossible for the French to formulate even tentative official views on approach to Indo-China discussions at Geneva, although there was no chance that the French would seek cease-fire before 26th April 'anything might happen' through force of French public opinion after Geneva gets under way and if no solution seems to be emerging after weeks of discussions. Meantime, lack of social and political cohesion in Indo-China has been contributed to by the French themselves (e.g. French are presumably still afraid to allow Vietnam military forces sufficient indigenous leadership. Murphy, however, thought the French had some justification for this fear. The absence of any political leader comparable with Syngman Rhee (who, despite all his faults was a centre of great strength in South Korea) together with the lack of social and political cohesion, made it impossible in foreseeable future to deny Indo-China to the Communists without continuing French military occupation.

4. In these circumstances, United States is approaching Geneva with the hope of 'concentrating discussions in the beginning and for as long as possible on Korea before beginning Indo-China discussions which they will work hard to delay as much as possible

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Their hope is, I think, that Korea discussions will prove even to the French satisfaction, that the only kind of Indo-China settlement which the Communists would accept at the present stage would be equivalent to Communist domination. United States is not, therefore, at least for the time being, pressing the French for their views, since this might make earlier Indo-China discussions likely. Murphy suggested that decision (even among the Big Three) on 'interested States' might well await Geneva. This might give them opportunity of pressing on with Korea first. By his general evasiveness to direct questions put to him, I sense that the United States wishes to remain uncommitted to any position in advance and to play 'bad ear' as the situation develops. I think the United States is most anxious to keep the Korean discussions separate from those on Indo-China but are not too certain at this stage how they can accomplish this.

5. When I enquired whether insufficient consultation before Geneva might result in cracks in Western unity, Murphy appeared to think that dangers inherent in early discussion of Indo-China were even greater. He made no attempt to balance these dangers against the contingency that too long deferment of Indo-China discussions after 26th April might result in even greater pressure on the French Government to accept a cease-fire.

6. I think it a fair judgment to say that the State Department is not at all happy at the position which is emerging as a result of Berlin Agreement and have no clear views at the moment as to how they are going to handle it.

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