

all areas of the world threatened by Soviet expansion. Otherwise, if temporarily halted by our action in Greece and Turkey, the Soviets may decide to accelerate expansion in the Far East, in order to gain control of those areas which outflank us in the Near and Middle East."

The JCS memorandum noted the fact that "The principal difference between the situation in China and that in the Near and Middle East is that in China there does not exist a united national government on which effective resistance to Soviet expansionist policy may be based." While they accepted Marshall's goal of establishing a government that the public would support and that could operate effectively, the Joint Chiefs argued that greater U.S. military assistance could contribute to this end, and could deter the Communists while political reforms were being made.¹³¹

In the spring of 1947, Marshall agreed to lift the embargo on military supplies to China, and by the following November he seems to have reluctantly come to the conclusion that, as he stated in another meeting with Pentagon officials, "... we have the problem of prolonging the agonies of a corrupt government, and that we probably have reached the point where we will have to accept the fact that this government will have to be retained in spite of our desire to change its character."¹³² Based on this conclusion, Marshall agreed to support economic aid to China, recognizing also that this could strengthen the administration's request for economic aid to Europe. Thus, in December 1947, when it requested congressional authorization of the Marshall plan, the administration told Congress that it was preparing a request also for China. No military assistance was to be requested, however, because of Marshall's concern, which was shared by Truman, about possible U.S. military involvement in China.

The request for economic aid to China was approved by Congress in the spring of 1948, but both the House and the Senate also voted in favor of providing limited military assistance, and the final act¹³³ authorized \$125 million for "special grants" to the Nationalists, presumably to be used primarily for military items.

To repeat, the analysis of these various actions helps to explain the way in which Congress and the executive branch reacted to a situation in which an existing, anti-Communist government was seeking U.S. support in its fight against Communist insurgents, and the effects of this position on, as well as in comparison with, the subsequent treatment of Vietnam. In the case of Vietnam, Congress approved the decisions of every administration, beginning with Truman, to support the anti-Communist government and to prevent the Communists from gaining power. In the case of China, however, the executive branch had concluded by 1947-48 that the Communists probably would defeat the Nationalists, and that there was little the U.S. could do about the situation except to delay the takeover. This, too, was accepted by Congress, although some Members dissented vigorously.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 838-848. For the reply of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs of the State Department see p. 849.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 911.

¹³³Public Law 80-472.

On February 20, 1948, Secretary of State Marshall, testifying in an executive session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said, "Present developments make it unlikely . . . that any amount of U.S. military or economic aid could make the present Chinese Government capable of reestablishing and then maintaining its control throughout all of China—that is, unless they reach some political agreement." "In these circumstances," he added, "any large-scale United States effort to assist the Chinese Government to oppose the Communists would most probably degenerate into a direct U.S. undertaking and responsibility, involving the commitment of sizeable forces and resources over an indefinite period . . . the costs of an all-out effort to see Communist forces resisted and destroyed in China would . . . be impossible to estimate, but the magnitude of the task and the probable costs thereof would clearly be out of all proportion to the results to be obtained." "The United States would have to be prepared to take over the Chinese Government, practically, and administer its economic, military, and government affairs. Strong Chinese sensibilities regarding infringement of China's sovereignty, the intense feeling of nationalism among all Chinese, and the unavailability of qualified American personnel in the large numbers required argue strongly against attempting any such solution."

It was clear, however, that the executive branch also felt compelled at this point to provide limited assistance to China if only to avoid the precipitous withdrawal of U.S. support from a traditional ally, and to obtain whatever benefits might result from conducting a holding operation against the Communists. Thus, Marshall concluded his testimony by asserting that the executive branch had "an intense desire to help China," and that "It would be against U.S. interests to demonstrate a complete lack of confidence in the Chinese Government and to add to its difficulties by abruptly rejecting its request for assistance."¹³⁴ The Army, Navy and Air Force disagreed with Marshall and the State Department, and favored military as well as economic assistance to China.¹³⁵

In the House of Representatives, which acted first on the Marshall plan bill, Representative Judd questioned Secretary Marshall extensively during an executive session of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and concluded by telling Marshall: "Bad as it is, I admit everything you said and more, but the alternative is worse: The loss of what we fought for. If China is not going to be free, and is to come under Soviet domination, the last war was not only futile, it was a great mistake because we wind up with less security than when we began."¹³⁶

Judd argued during the hearings that economic aid for China would be "Operation Rathole" unless there was also military aid "to protect the investment."¹³⁷ He and others also pointed out that, unlike the Greek-Turkish aid program, U.S. military advisers

¹³⁴HFAC *His. Ser.*, vol. VII, pp. 166-168. For an analysis of this point, and of the executive branch view of the relationship of China aid to other foreign policy interests, see John H. Feaver, "The China Aid Bill of 1948: Limited Assistance as a Cold War Strategy," *Diplomatic History*, 5 (Spring 1981), pp. 107-120.

¹³⁵See *FRUS*, 1948, vol. VIII, pp. 44-50.

¹³⁶HFAC *His. Ser.*, vol. VII, pp. 185.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 136.

were forbidden from giving operational (combat) advice to Chinese troops, and recommended that this restriction be removed. (Although the hearings and debates do not so indicate, the proposal for administering China military aid in like manner to that for Greece and Turkey was also motivated by the desire to have U.S. military advisers supervise the procurement and use of military items by the Chinese in order to insure proper purchasing of necessary items, and to avoid fraud and diversion.)¹³⁸

The arguments of Judd and other Republicans on the committee prevailed, and the bill as reported from committee approved the request for economic aid to China, and added \$150 million in military aid to be administered under the same terms as the military assistance program for Greece and Turkey. The committee also voted, after House Republican leaders decided that a consolidated bill would have stronger support, to add China to the bill authorizing the Marshall plan.

In its report the Foreign Affairs Committee declared, "... the United States can no more afford to see China become a coordinated part of another system than it can afford to see Greece and Turkey become part of another system." Furthermore, the report stated, "The committee is convinced that in cases where civil war and Communist aggression are present, as in China and Greece, and external threats are dangerous, as in Greece and Turkey, military-type aid is required to insure the effectiveness of economic aid."¹³⁹

In the House, debate on the China section of the Marshall plan bill was limited almost entirely to two motions by Democrats on the Foreign Affairs Committee to strike that section from the bill. An amendment by Mansfield to strike both China and Greek-Turkish aid, on the grounds that they should be considered in separate legislation, was defeated 18-152. An amendment by James P. Richards (D/S.C.) to strike the China section on the same grounds was defeated 31-113.¹⁴⁰ There was virtually no discussion of the proposal for military assistance to China or the proposal to administer this assistance in a manner like that for Greece and Turkey. Whereas only a year before there had been considerable debate on the use of military advisers in Greece and Turkey, in this debate the subject was not even raised. Whether from the deteriorating situation in China, or the recent Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, or increasing public support for a military response to Communist threat, or a combination of these, it was clear that the mood of Congress had changed substantially since the debate on Greek-Turkish aid.

A similar mood prevailed in the Senate, but, unlike the House, there was very little enthusiasm for aid to China. Except for Chairman Vandenberg, the Foreign Relations Committee was generally opposed to any further economic assistance to China, and the committee unanimously opposed military assistance, especially the House proposal for a military program like the Greek-Turkish aid program. Typical were the comments in executive session by Sena-

¹³⁸See the memorandum of conversation with Judd, *FRUS*, 1948, vol. VIII, p. 109.

¹³⁹H. Rept. 80-1585, reprinted in *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. III, pp. 176-219.

¹⁴⁰*CR*, vol. 94, pp. 3867, 3872. These votes were by division.

tor George and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R/Mass.). George said, "... I think that anything we give to China is probably just a complete waste; just a venture into outer darkness. We don't know what we are doing, and we can't do any good by it. ..." Lodge said, "If I didn't think that the Communists in China were going to be dominated by the Russians, I would not vote for a nickel, because I think Chiang is utterly incapable of governing mainland China. I would just let them have their revolution."

"There is one way to save China from Russian communism," George added, "and that is to send an army up on the Manchurian border big enough to stop it. Otherwise you are not ever going to stop communism in China." He was opposed to any military intervention, as was Lodge, who asserted, "... the day we send troops to China or to Russia, this country is through. There just isn't enough manpower in this country to protect China by manpower." "Better not to have the ERP [European Recovery Program]," he added. "If we have to swap ERP with sending an army to China, then we are lost."¹⁴¹

Most members of the Foreign Relations Committee objected strongly to the action of the House providing for military aid to China to be administered in a manner like that for Greece and Turkey. They continued to be concerned about the role of U.S. military advisers in Greece, and were adamantly opposed to a similar authorization for China.

During the hearings, the committee questioned administration witnesses on the status of U.S. advisers in Greece, and learned that since passage of the Greek-Turkish aid bill the executive branch, apparently without consulting Congress, had broadened the authority of U.S. advisers, permitting them to give military advice rather than just to advise on procurement. Asked whether U.S. advisers were involved in advising Greek forces in operational or combat conditions, the State Department witness said that they were, and that although officially this extended to the divisional level, "they may in individual cases advise at lower echelons."¹⁴²

Despite this testimony, the committee glossed over the use of advisers in operational roles, and made no apparent effort to legislate restrictions on their playing such roles. In its report on the bill, the committee made no mention of the change in roles, and stated only that U.S. advisers were giving military advice "down to the divisional level."¹⁴³

At the same time, the committee was sympathetic to the argument that the U.S. should not withdraw precipitously from China. In an executive session, Chairman Vandenberg characterized the China aid bill as "essentially three cheers for the Nationalist Government in the hope that it can get somewhere in the face of Communist opposition." Vandenberg said that, like many other Americans, he favored some kind of aid to China, and he declared, "I don't think this country would stand for our turning our backs on China. ... And I am sure Congress wouldn't let you turn your

¹⁴¹These excerpts are from a remarkably frank executive session of the Committee on Foreign Relations on March 20, 1948, beginning at p. 433 of *SFRC Hie. Ser.*, "Foreign Relief Assistance Act of 1948."

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 391, 406.

¹⁴³S. Rept. 80-1017, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 761.

back on China. So you can't turn your back. You have to do something. And your problem is, What can we do?"¹⁴⁴ The committee, he added, faced "a condition and not a theory."

Moreover, the Foreign Relations Committee was confronted with the dilemma posed by House approval of military aid for China, and this, too, exemplifies the tension between the Senate and the House that figured prominently in later congressional action on Vietnam. "The House," Vandenberg said, "is hell bent on writing military aid for China in this bill, and they are sure going to write it in. The form in which they have written it in, in my opinion as in yours, is completely impossible, because they have attached it to the Greek-Turkish bill, which carries all of the implications that are involved in the Greek-Turkish situation, which are entirely unsatisfactory to any of us." The problem, he added, was how to accommodate the House and thus prevent the China question from blocking action on the Marshall plan: "This in my mind is the purely practical parliamentary question of how we could write a gesture of military sympathy into this text to accommodate the viewpoint which we face under an almost unliveable condition that the House has created in a parliamentary sense in connection with the whole legislation. We cannot allow this problem, if we can help it, to indefinitely postpone ERP and Greek-Turkish aid and everything else, and yet it could very easily do that."

In the end, the Foreign Relations Committee agreed 13-0 to approve the request for economic aid, and to put \$100 million into the bill for military aid, but among the members there was also general agreement with the statement of Senator Carl A. Hatch (D/N.M.), who said in an executive session, alluding to the military aid provision, "Everybody is being blackmailed into this."¹⁴⁵

The action of the committee was, of course, coordinated with the executive branch, which also was strongly opposed to the House military aid amendment. Vandenberg reported to the committee prior to the vote on the bill that Secretary Marshall approved of the committee's decision to add the \$100 million. Marshall's "entire predilection," said Vandenberg, "is to make sure that we make no military commitments to China, and that nothing that we do can be read as an obligation on our part to follow through with military aid. . . ." ¹⁴⁶

In its report on the China aid bill, which it acted on separately in an effort to sever it from the Marshall plan legislation, the Foreign Relations Committee pointed out that U.S. military advisers in China did not participate in combat activities, and stressed that the language of the bill should not be construed to permit combat activity. "China is a maze of imponderables," the report concluded. "It is impossible to know the quantity and type of aid necessary for the restoration of a stable and independent China. The committee is convinced, however, that the assistance contemplated in this bill should appreciably strengthen the position of the National Govern-

¹⁴⁴*SFRC Hrs. Ser.*, "Foreign Relief Assistance Act of 1948," p. 456.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 459.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 463.

ment without, at the same time, involving the United States in any additional commitments of a military nature."¹⁴⁷

The committee also added this language (which was accepted by the House and became law) to the policy statement at the beginning of the bill:¹⁴⁸

... assistance furnished under this title shall not be construed as an express or implied assumption by the United States of any responsibility for policies, acts, or undertakings of the Republic of China or for conditions which may prevail in China.

In the Senate itself there was perfunctory debate on the China aid bill, but liberal internationalists, in this instance Wayne Morse (R/Ore.) and Claude Pepper, continued to argue that the U.S. should insist on democratic reforms in China as a condition of aid.¹⁴⁹

In the House-Senate conference committee, the Senate's (and administration's) position generally prevailed. Military assistance for China was raised to \$125 million (half of the difference between the two bills), but the provision for administration of the program according to the Greek-Turkish aid model was deleted. The Senate agreed to put China (and Greek-Turkish) aid into an omnibus bill, as provided by the House, and title IV of Public Law 80-472 became the China Aid Act of 1948.

During the summer and fall of 1948, as the Communists continued to gain in China, the executive branch debated possible changes in U.S. policy. By June, most ranking Army officials expressed agreement with Marshall that U.S. advisers should not be allowed to give operational military advice.¹⁵⁰ In July, the Army suggested the possibility of providing assistance to separatist regional regimes if the Nationalist government collapsed. The State Department continued to argue against further intervention, however, based not only on the "deficiencies" of the Chinese Government, but on the inability of the U.S. to intervene successfully. Further intervention, State contended, would require that the U.S., rather than the Nationalists, play the major role. This would not only be unacceptable to Congress and the public; it would be impossible, given available U.S. military resources. State agreed that the fall of China would be detrimental to the U.S., but concluded that "Although the detriment to United States national interest involved in present developments in China . . . would probably be sufficient to warrant intervention on the part of this country, we do not today have the means to intervene successfully in this situation."¹⁵¹

This last comment reflected the fact that the United States, which had demobilized after World War II, did not have the forces required for conducting military operations on the ground in China while also maintaining the necessary strength in other parts of the

¹⁴⁷S. Rept. 80-1026, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 726. This is the "Amended Report" of the committee. The first version of the report, which is also reprinted in *ibid.*, beginning at p. 699, contained comments about the situation that were quite critical of the Nationalists. Vandenberg, claiming that it was an oversight, ordered a revised report issued the same day.

¹⁴⁸Public Law 80-472, title IV, sec. 402.

¹⁴⁹See *CR*, vol. 94, pp. 3669-3672.

¹⁵⁰*FRUS*, 1948, vol. VIII, pp. 90-99.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 208-211.

world. As General Marshall said, referring to calls to "give the Communists hell": "... I am a soldier and know something about the ability to give hell. At that time my facilities for giving them hell ... was [sic] 1½ divisions over the entire United States. That's quite a proposition when you deal with somebody [China] with over 260 and you have 1½."¹⁵²

On November 3, 1948, the National Security Council debated the U.S. position on China, but apparently could come to no conclusions.¹⁵³ The debate continued in the following weeks, with the military, led by Forrestal, arguing for a more definitive position, and State, in the words of Kennan, advising that "The disappearance of the Chinese Nationalist Government, as now constituted, is only a matter of time and nothing that we can realistically hope to do will save it."¹⁵⁴

From the Chinese Nationalists came the desperate plea, ignored by Washington, to put U.S. military officers in "actual command of Chinese army units under pretense of acting as advisers."¹⁵⁵

By January 1949, an NSC draft report omitted all reference to supporting regional groups or other dissidents, and instead took the position that the goal should be "to prevent China from becoming an adjunct of Soviet power." "The objective of the U.S.," it said, "with respect to China is the eventual development by the Chinese themselves of a unified, stable and independent China friendly to the U.S. in order to forestall threats to our national security which would arise from the domination of China by any foreign power."¹⁵⁶

It was early March 1949 before an agreement was finally reached in the NSC on a policy position toward China. NSC 34/2¹⁵⁷ approved a hands-off policy, but advocated taking advantage of opportunities to exploit rifts inside China and between China and the U.S.S.R. Drafted primarily by State's Policy Planning Staff, headed by Kennan, the NSC paper took refuge in the possibility of changing the behavior of China in the long-run:

We shall be seeking to discover, nourish and bring to power a new revolution, a revolution which may eventually have to come to a test of arms with the Chinese Communists if it cannot in the meantime so modify the composition and character of the Chinese Communists that they become a truly independent government, existing in amicable relations with the world community. This is obviously a long-term proposition. There is, however, no short cut. Consequently we have no sound alternative but to accommodate our native impatience to this fact. The Kremlin waited twenty-five years for the fulfillment of its revolution in China. We may have to persevere as long or longer.

¹⁵²Quoted by Seyom Brown, *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy From Truman to Johnson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 61.

¹⁵³FRUS, 1948, vol. VIII, pp. 118, 132, 146, 185.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 214. See also pp. 185-187, 224-225.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 193. In September 1944, President Roosevelt, on the advice of General Marshall, had proposed that Chiang Kai-shek appoint Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell as commander of all Chinese forces. Chiang reacted by demanding the recall of Stilwell.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1949, vol. IX, p. 474.

¹⁵⁷"U.S. Policy Toward China," approved by the President on March 3, 1949, in *ibid.*, pp. 492-495.

Toward the end of 1948, as the situation in China looked hopeless, the U.S. Government began to become more concerned about Vietnam. On September 27, 1948, the State Department prepared a "Policy Statement on Indochina," in which it took the position that the Communists were winning in Indochina, and that "Some solution must be found which will strike a balance between the aspirations of the peoples of Indochina and the interests of the French."¹⁵⁸ "Post-war French governments," the paper said, "have never understood, or have chosen to underestimate, the strength of the nationalist movement with which they must deal in Indochina. It remains possible that the nationalist movement can be subverted [sic] from Communist control but this will require granting to a non-Communist group of nationalists at least the same concessions demanded by Ho Chi Minh." There followed this statement summarizing the dilemma facing the U.S.:

Our greatest difficulty in talking with the French and in stressing what should and what should not be done has been our inability to suggest any practicable solution of the Indochina problem, as we are all too well aware of the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution which excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome. We are naturally hesitant to press the French too strongly or to become deeply involved as long as we are not in a position to suggest a solution or until we are prepared to accept the onus of intervention. The above considerations are further complicated by the fact that 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.

China Falls to the Communists and Debate Begins on Defending Vietnam

The 1948 election of Truman and of a Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate, together with the fall of China to the Communists in 1949, exacerbated the differences within Congress, and between certain Members of Congress and the administration, concerning U.S. policy in Asia. Despite these differences, which centered on China, there was a growing consensus in both Congress and the Executive, and among both Democrats and Republicans, that steps needed to be taken to protect the rest of Asia, especially Southeast Asia, from the Communists.

During the spring of 1949, supportive Members of Congress, with some help from the administration, sought to provide assistance to those areas of China that had not been conquered. The result was the extension of the China Aid Act, and authorization to spend the small remaining amount of unexpended funds from the previous year. This was followed by approval of a small program of aid for use in the "general area" of China, which was to include Indochina. By the end of the year, as Chiang Kai-shek moved his gov-

¹⁵⁸FRUS, 1948, vol. VI, pp 43-49

ernment to Formosa and Chinese Communist troops occupied the area next to the border with Indochina, the defense of Indochina had begun to receive increasing attention in Washington.

In dealing with Indochina, however, the United States was confronted with a number of problems, as was indicated earlier. On March 29, 1949, the Policy Planning Staff again analyzed the dilemma facing the U.S.¹⁵⁹ "We should accept the fact," the paper stated, "that the crucial immediate issue in Southeast Asia—that of militant nationalism in Indonesia and Indochina—cannot be resolved by any of the following policies on our part:

- "(1) full support of Dutch and French imperialism,
- "(2) unlimited support of militant nationalism, or
- "(3) evasion of the problem.

"Because the key to the solution of this issue lies primarily with the Netherlands and France, we should as a matter of urgent importance endeavor to induce the Dutch and the French to adapt their policies to the realities of the current situation in Southeast Asia. . . ." In addition, the paper called for developing, in collaboration with the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as India and Pakistan, a plan for wider cooperation in Southeast Asia, leading eventually to one or more regional associations of non-Communist nations.¹⁶⁰

The British agreed with this approach, and in a memorandum for Secretary of State Acheson on April 2, 1949, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stated, "If a common front can be built up from Afghanistan to Indo-China inclusive, then it should be possible to contain the Russian advance southwards, to rehabilitate and stabilize the area, and to preserve our communications across the middle of the world. A stable South East Asia may also eventually influence the situation in China and make it possible to redress the position there."¹⁶¹

Acheson himself was ". . . increasingly concerned about the . . . advance of communism in large areas of the world and particularly the success of communism in China," and advocated that the U.S. should seek to contain communism in Asia as well as in other parts of the world.¹⁶²

Concerning Indochina, Acheson confided to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in an executive session on February 15, 1949, that the U.S. was faced with "a race with time" in preparing the Vietnamese for self-government. Acheson, known as having strong attachments to Britain and to Europe, referred to the process of "disintegration" which he said had been occurring in China and was continuing in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Burma, and Indochina. "These people," he said, "are about 95 or 96 percent illiterate. They do not have the simplest ideas of social organization. They do not know about starting schools. They do not know about dealing with the most primitive ideas of public health.

¹⁵⁹This paper, PPS 51, was the basis for NSC 48/2, December 23, 1949, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," which is discussed below.

¹⁶⁰For the text of PPS 51, see *FRUS*, 1949, vol. VII, pt. I, pp. 1128-1133. For a discussion of the development of PPS 51, and subsequent debate of it in the State Department, see Robert M. Blum, *Drawing the Line: The Origin of the American Containment Policy in East Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), pp. 112-124.

¹⁶¹*FRUS*, vol. VII, pt. 1, p. 1137.

¹⁶²See *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 37.

They do not know how to organize to build roads. Government is something of a mystery." He added that what they needed was foreign advisers "... to show them the simple things about what is a school district, and what is the area that falls within a school district, how you go about collecting taxes, and how you get teachers; how to teach the children, whether you have desks or chairs and so forth."¹⁶³

On March 8, 1949, the French Government took a step designed to placate the Vietnamese while preserving French control. By the Elysée Agreement between President Vincent Auriol and Emperor Bao Dai, it was decided that Vietnam, along with Laos and Cambodia, was to become an Associated State in the French Union. Each associated state would have its own government, but its foreign and defense policy would be controlled by France, and the French would continue to maintain economic dominance.¹⁶⁴ Bao Dai, who had refused to break his exile in France until Vietnam was given its independence, accepted these terms and returned to Vietnam, where he formally established the State of Vietnam on July 1, 1949. The U.S. Government concluded that it had no alternative but to support the Elysée Agreement and the Bao Dai government. In a cable on May 10 to the U.S. Consulate in Saigon, the State Department declared: "Since appears be no other alternative to estab Commie pattern Vietnam, Dept considrs no effort should be spared by Fr, other Western powers, and non-Commie Asian nations to assure experiment best chance succeeding." The cable went on to say that the U.S. would, at an appropriate time, recognize the Bao Dai government, as well as consider requests from it for economic and military assistance. But it could only do so if the French made "the necessary concessions to make Baodai solution attractive to nationalists," and if the Bao Dai government could gain popular support. A government in Vietnam similar to the Chinese Nationalist Government, it said, would be a "foredoomed failure."¹⁶⁵

In a meeting of State Department experts on May 17, 1949, however, it was agreed that there "seemed little chance" that the Elysée Agreement would "appeal to Vietnamese nationalists or that the Baodai experiment would succeed." Representatives from the Office of European Affairs said, however, that "there was no chance whatsoever of the French making any concessions at the present time beyond those contained in the agreement, and that for us to press them to do so would only stiffen and antagonize them.

"It was the consensus of the meeting that the US should not put itself in a forward position in the Indochina problem since there appeared to be nothing we could do to alter the very discouraging prospects, and that we should endeavor to 'collectivize' [to work with other nations] our approach to the situation."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³HFAC His. Ser., vol. IV, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶⁴For details see Hammer, pp. 234-235.

¹⁶⁵FRUS, vol. VII, pt. I, pp. 23-24. This cable was drafted by Charlton Ogburn, Jr., a public affairs officer in FE, and was signed for Acheson. Ogburn later questioned U.S. involvement in Indochina.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.* p. 27.

Consonant with this, the State Department told the U.S. Consulate in Saigon on May 20, 1949, "... shld it appear as Dept fears that Fr are offering too little too late, Dept will not be inclined make up for Fr deficiencies by rushing into breach to support Baodai agreements at cost its own remaining prestige Asia. Dept considers US this stage shld avoid conspicuous position any kind and try reach common attitude with other interested govts, particularly UK, India and Philippines."¹⁶⁷

A proposed memorandum on June 6, 1949, for the French Government, in which the State Department urged the French to take additional steps toward accepting Vietnamese nationalism, was not presented after objections from the U.S. Ambassador to France, David K. E. Bruce, but Bruce met with Foreign Minister Robert Schuman to urge that such action be taken.¹⁶⁸ "Our recent experience in China," he told Schuman, "had given us abundant proof of fact no amount of moral and material aid can save government isolated from contact with its people and enjoying little popular support."¹⁶⁹

Although Congress continued to support the Executive during 1949, the bipartisan consensus developed in the 80th Congress began to weaken after the Democrats, who controlled the White House, regained control also of Congress. As partisan differences became more pronounced, and the cold war more intense, foreign policy became more political. Thus, the fall of China became a highly-charged political event, as well as being a major foreign policy problem. Ironically, the first U.S. aid program for Vietnam was authorized as a result of a compromise designed to accommodate demands for last-minute assistance to the Nationalist Chinese.

By early 1949, the Communists had taken Peking, and the U.S. Government began closing its assistance program to China. Acheson told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in an executive session on February 15, 1949, "The will to fight of the Chinese armies had disappeared because the will to fight for the country has disappeared. This is a situation where no amount of friendship, no amount of help or advice can deal with the problem." "To rush ourselves into China now," he added, "to get into the position of being one of the endless numbers of foreigners who have intervened in China; to get ourselves—if we were foolish enough to do so—bogged down with military forces in China, would be silly beyond human description." "We cannot furnish a government for China. You cannot bring competence where competence does not exist. You cannot bring honesty where honesty does not exist."¹⁷⁰

It will be recalled that the China Aid Act had been passed in 1948 by the Republican-controlled Congress as one title in a package aid bill consisting of four titles, the largest of which authorized funds for the Marshall plan. In 1949, the administration, hoping to avoid debate on China and to prevent extension of the China Aid Act, submitted the Marshall plan authorization bill without the provision for aid to China, and the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Re-

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 38, 45, 65

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁰*HFAC His. Ser.*, vol IV, pp. 43, 49. Similar testimony was given the Senate. See *SFRC His. Ser.*, "Economic Assistance to China and Korea: 1949-50," especially pp. 17 ff. and 56 ff.

lations Committees both refused to agree to Republican demands for adding China aid to the bill. In the House, the entire Republican membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee objected to this procedure in a statement of its position included in the committee report on the bill. Arguing that communism was a global threat, and that assistance for Asia should be coupled with assistance for Europe, the Republican members said that the authorization for aid to China should again have been reported with the Marshall plan authorization. They reiterated their support for a bipartisan foreign policy, but said, "The utter bankruptcy, economic, military, and moral, of our Government's policy in China is not part of the bipartisan foreign policy." They criticized the administration for not promptly implementing the China Aid Act, and for not permitting U.S. military advisers in China to give the same kind of training in combat situations that U.S. advisers gave in Greece "under precisely similar circumstances."¹⁷¹

Of interest in passing is the proposal by Representative Mansfield to provide for terminating assistance under the Marshall plan to any participating country "so long as it denies to its citizens or citizens in any dependent area under its jurisdiction, the principles of individual liberty, free institutions, and genuine independence." He offered the amendment on March 2, 1949, in an executive session of the Foreign Affairs Committee considering the extension of the Marshall plan. John Davis Lodge (R/Conn.) asked Mansfield whether, in view of the situation in Indochina, the amendment would deprive the French of any aid. Mansfield replied, "I would not think so at the present time. Unfortunately, I do not know too much about the Indochinese situation. I do not think anybody does . . . but I think there is a lot that the French must answer for in Indochina and the Dutch in Indonesia. . . ." Mansfield subsequently withdrew the amendment, however, and joined Representative Javits in sponsoring an amendment to terminate assistance to any participating nation "which fails to comply with the decisions or accept the recommendations of the Security Council of the United Nations on measures to maintain or restore international peace or security. . . ." This was directed primarily at the Netherlands, which was then defying efforts by the U.N. Security Council to prevent further use of force against Indonesia. The State Department opposed the Javits-Mansfield amendment, saying that such a political factor should not be used as a condition for aid to Europe. The amendment was defeated 3-17 in the committee and 5-136 when offered again in the House.

Meanwhile, the Senate had approved a similar amendment offered by Senator Owen Brewster (R/Maine) for himself and nine other Republicans. Senators Vandenberg and Connally had opposed the amendment, which the Foreign Relations Committee had then rejected, but a revised version was supported by Vandenberg and passed the Senate by a voice vote. It was accepted by the House, and the final version provided that Marshall plan assistance should be terminated to a participating country when "the provision of such assistance would be inconsistent with the obligations of the United States under the charter of the United Nations to refrain

¹⁷¹H Rept. 81-323, pt. 2, reprinted in *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. IV, pp. 586-591.

from giving assistance to any State against which the United Nations is taking preventative or enforcement action."¹⁷²

After considerable debate, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, having reported the Marshall plan bill without including China, acceded to the Republicans and held hearings on a separate bill to extend the China Aid Act. In modified form this was unanimously supported by the committee and passed by the House.

In the Senate, the China issue was also a very hot political subject, with support for the Nationalists being led by Senators William F. Knowland (R/Calif.) and Patrick A. "Pat" McCarran (D/Nev.). On February 25, 1949 McCarran introduced a bill to increase U.S. aid to China, and on March 9, 49 other senators joined McCarran in writing to Chairman Connally to urge public hearings on China. Among these were several Members who were known to be opposed to further aid to the Nationalists, (including J. William Fulbright [D/Ark.], a member of the Foreign Relations Committee), who thought the issue should be aired publicly.¹⁷³ On March 11 the Foreign Relations Committee met in executive session with Secretary Acheson to consider the situation. There was a brief discussion of the request for hearings, and general agreement among members of the committee that the issue of aid to China would come up in Senate debate on the extension of the Marshall plan. Acheson was asked about whether the State Department had reached any conclusions on further aid to China of the kind proposed in the McCarran bill, and he replied, "... we think it is quite hopeless to do anything of this sort."¹⁷⁴

During March 1949 the Foreign Relations Committee met in five additional executive sessions to hear testimony from the executive branch and to consider what to do about China aid. The dilemma, as Senator Walter George put it, was "... when we get this ECA [Economic Cooperation Administration, the U.S. agency administering the Marshall plan] up here next week we are going to be put to it to explain how we are one worlders looking east, and isolationists looking west to China. That is an embarrassing situation." Secretary Acheson responded: "I agree with you."¹⁷⁵

The Foreign Relations Committee was unable to reach agreement, and did not act on McCarran's bill. But the matter was taken care of on the Senate floor during debate on the extension of ECA when Connally, with the support of the members of the committee, offered an amendment to extend the China Aid Act, and to allow the President to use the remaining \$54 million at his discretion. As drafted by the administration, this amendment would have permitted aid to "such other recipients," in addition to the Nationalist government, "as the President may authorize," as well as allowing aid to be given "upon such terms and conditions as the President may authorize." This language, apparently the first of its

¹⁷²Public Law 81-47, sec. 11. A similar provision in the subsequent Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 was proposed by the executive branch and accepted by Congress. See Public Law 81-329, sec. 405(c), on p. 578 of *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. V, pt. 1. The discussion and action in the Foreign Affairs Committee on Mansfield's amendment and the Javits-Mansfield amendment are in *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. IV, pt. 2, pp. 98-102, 178, 428-434.

¹⁷³For the letter and the text of the bill see *SFRC His. Ser.*, "Economic Assistance to China and Korea: 1949-50." For further details see Blum, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 41 ff.

¹⁷⁴*SFRC His. Ser.*, "Economic Assistance to China and Korea: 1949-50," p. 4.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 51.

kind, would have permitted aid to guerrilla or other dissident groups. In the amendment as introduced by Connally, however, the words "such other recipients" were deleted.

Senator William F. Knowland offered his own version of the Connally amendment, adding a proviso that aid should not be given to any part of China under Communist control. The Knowland amendment had been worked out with and approved by Connally and the executive branch, and was accepted by voice vote in the Senate and by the House and became law.

Approval of Funds for the "General Area of China"

The extension by Congress of the China Aid Act set the stage for congressional action during the summer of 1949 to authorize funds for military assistance to the "general area" of China, which was then used in 1950 as the statutory authorization for the first U.S. aid program to Indochina. The vehicle for this action was the military assistance bill (Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949), submitted to Congress in July 1949 immediately after Senate approval of the NATO Treaty. Although the purpose of the bill was to establish the basis for military assistance to any country, the bill was directed primarily at Europe, and in the Far East only Korea and the Philippines were to be included.

The omission of China from the bill, and the general lack of emphasis on Asia, provoked a sharp reaction among Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and in executive session on August 10-11, 1949, Secretary Acheson was questioned at length on the subject.¹⁷⁶

When the committee voted on the mutual defense assistance bill, Representative Lodge offered an amendment to provide \$200 million for military aid to be used in supporting guerrilla forces in China and for 500 U.S. officers and "a proper equivalent of enlisted men" to advise such forces. Lodge said that it was a bipartisan amendment offered also on behalf of Representative Francis E. Walter (D/Pa.). In arguing for the amendment, which he said would not only benefit China, but also would use the million Nationalist troops in southern China to help prevent the Communists from taking Indochina, Lodge admitted that such a program "presents a certain difficulty under our system. If it could be done under the CIA, without talking about it, it might be better, except that this thing has one advantage and that is that it encourages those who are still resisting."

The vote on the Lodge-Walter amendment was straight party-line in committee: 7 yeas (all Republicans) and 11 nays (all Democrats).¹⁷⁷

During the hearings on the bill there was some discussion of a related proposal which had been included in the first version of the bill sent to Congress, but was omitted from a revised version submitted several days later after the first version was strongly criticized, especially in the Senate. This was a provision which would

¹⁷⁶For the hearings see *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. V. It should be noted that on August 6, 1949, the State Department had released its white paper on China, "United States Relations with China," Department of State Publication No. 3573, Far East Series 30, explaining and defending U.S. policy. For congressional reaction to the white paper see Blum, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 92-95.

¹⁷⁷For the discussion and the vote see *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. V, pp. 352-359.

have given the President the authority to provide military assistance to groups, such as guerrilla organizations, within a country under the bill's definition of "nation" as "any foreign government or country, or group thereof; or any representatives or group of the people of any country, however constituted, designated as a 'nation' by the President for the purposes of this Act."

In an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Vandenberg said that the bill "extends to the President of the United States the greatest peacetime power that was ever concentrated in an Executive. He is entitled to sell, lend, give away, anything he wishes to any nation on earth on any terms that he defines at any time he feels like it." Vandenberg inserted in the record of the hearing Walter Lippmann's column from that morning's newspaper (August 2, 1949), in which Lippmann, a very influential journalist, said that the bill submitted to Congress was "a general license to intervene and to commit the United States all over the globe, as, when, and how the President and his appointees decide secretly that they deem it desirable to intervene." If these "extraordinary powers" were approved, Lippmann continued, "Congress would invest the President with unlimited power to make new commitments which Congress would have to support but could not control."¹⁷⁸

Secretary Acheson replied that the provision allowing aid to groups within a country was for the purpose of giving the executive branch the flexibility it needed, and that the use of this broad authority would be confined by other limits in the bill. He went off the record to explain why the authority was needed, but when asked by Chairman Connally whether the provision was put in "largely on account of one country," he replied that it was. The country was not named. He added that "There was a desire also to have a certain amount of flexibility with Southeast Asia. There will be problems with regard to the Philippines and Siam and places of that sort that would make some flexibility necessary."¹⁷⁹

Several days after submitting the original version of the mutual defense assistance bill, the executive branch submitted a revised bill to Congress in which the definition of "nation" was changed to provide that "'nation' shall mean a foreign government eligible to receive assistance under this Act."

In the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings on the revised bill, Representative Judd, among others, attacked the provision in the original bill as being too broad, ". . . because it included the world and it allowed the President to consider any little group of people as a nation. I think that was too sweeping a grant of power."¹⁸⁰

Representative Abraham A. Ribicoff (D/Conn.) thought that the provision represented "tough, realistic thinking," and chided Judd for his opposition.¹⁸¹ Secretary Acheson said that although the provision had been omitted from the revised version of the bill, and that he was not asking for it to be reinstated, that if Congress de-

¹⁷⁸SFRC *Hrs. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program: 1949," pp. 22, 35-36. For the text of the original bill see pp. 632-647. For further details see Blum, *Drawing the Lines*, pp. 129-131.

¹⁷⁹SFRC *Hrs. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program: 1949," pp. 28, 48.

¹⁸⁰HFAC *Hrs. Ser.*, vol. V, p. 357.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 243.

cided to provide "some money—not very much—which could be used in Asia, on a confidential basis, much might be done with it . . . there are many ways in which that could be used in China and elsewhere."¹⁸²

No further action was taken by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on reinstating this or a similar provision, but the provision finally approved by Congress for aid under the mutual defense assistance bill to the "general area" of China was the same idea in another form.

The Foreign Affairs Committee approved 14-6 (in opposition were four Democrats and two Republicans) a proposal of Republicans James G. Fulton (Pa.) and Javits, and Democrats Ribicoff and George A. Smathers (Fla.), to add the following language to the bill:¹⁸³

The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by free countries and free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence and as favoring the participation by the United States therein.

The amendment, which was strongly supported by Judd, would indicate to the people of the Far East, according to Javits, that in addition to efforts to provide "rather minor military aid . . . we are at the same time saying what we expect to see our main dependence placed on, to wit, the economic improvement of that whole area." The result, he said, could be the creation of an agency comparable to the regional economic organization (Organization for European Economic Cooperation [OEEC]) established in Europe for implementing the Marshall plan.¹⁸⁴

The Fulton-Javits-Ribicoff-Smathers proposal was approved by the House and the Senate and became law, thus serving as an expression of support from Congress for the subsequent development of the regional pact in Southeast Asia (SEATO) in 1955.

In its final form the provision made no mention of U.S. participation. During the House-Senate conference Senator Connally had asked about the meaning of the House language: "Well, this pledges us, doesn't it, favoring participation by the United States? That means we are going to cough up the money for them." Representative Ribicoff replied that "It was not just a question of appropriations. . . . It was a question of encouraging them to get together in an organization that would help combat communism and that they would know that the Congress of the United States looked favorably toward that policy." Connally said that the leadership in organizing such a pact should come from Asia. "I do not think we can do anything for them unless they initiate it and do something for themselves first. . . ." Senator Lyndon B. Johnson (D/Tex.), another conferee, who was serving his first year in the Senate, suggested removing the entire provision. "All you are doing is sending

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁸³From H. Rept. 81-1265, pt. 1, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 506.

¹⁸⁴For the discussion and vote see *ibid.*, pp. 347-351.

an engraved invitation for them to work up an organization, then committing us to participate in it before we know anything about it. Why don't we take that whole paragraph out, and if we can work up a pact or charter or an agreement or something, then come up and have it, like we handled the Atlantic Pact. Why go through a lot of conversation there that does not mean anything so far as this bill is concerned?" He did not think it was "necessary to express a lot of pious hopes" in the bill. Representative Vorys disagreed: "... there are some of us who think it is not sufficient to merely do nothing and say nothing with reference to the Far East, that if all we are ready to do is to express a pious hope, we can at least express a pious hope."

The conferees agreed to the amendment, but deleted the language referring to U.S. participation. In the conference committee report it was explained that this action did not "prejudice the question of such participation."¹⁸⁵

To Representatives Judd, Vorys, and John Lodge, however, the adoption of the amendment advocating establishment of a Far East pact, although desirable, was not sufficient. "... it does not seem to us," they said in their minority views on the bill, "to fill the urgent need for a plan of action in the Far East and particularly in China. For it is in China that the cold war has become a hot war. It is in China that the sincerity and effectiveness of our declared policy of containing communism is being put to an acid and tragic test. While in Europe, American national security is threatened, in China American national security is actually under ruthless and efficient attack." In a statement that anticipated the Kennedy administration's arguments about responding to "wars of national liberation," Judd and Vorys added, "... we should not assume that if all of China is conquered, 'Soviet Russian imperialism' will be implemented outside the borders of China by the Chinese Communists. We believe that just as it is implemented by Chinese Communist units so it could be implemented in Indochina by Indochinese Communists, in Burma by Burmese Communists, in Indonesia by Indonesian Communists and so on. We believe that we are giving official recognition, sanction, and assistance to the subterfuge of internal force employed by the Soviet Union when we regard the China war as an internal question for the Chinese to handle without outside assistance."

"... we cannot protect American national security," the Republican minority report on the bill declared, "by hunting with the hounds in Greece and running with the hare in China." Guerrilla activities in China could harass the Communists and "augment the troubles of the Communists." Proposing that there be money appropriated for such activities, with a "broad grant of powers" to the President to use such funds covertly, the minority report concluded that "... events not only in China but in Europe, have shown that we too must learn to operate in the twilight zone of action in which communism makes its greatest gains."¹⁸⁶ Here,

¹⁸⁵For the discussion in the conference committee see *ibid.*, pt. 1, pp. 432-435, and for the report see H. Rept. 81-1346, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 568.

¹⁸⁶See H. Rept. 1265, pt. 2, "Additional Supplemental Minority Views," pp. 565-566 of *ibid.*

too, it should be noted, this proposal anticipated the extensive covert activities carried out by the U.S. elsewhere, including Vietnam, in later years.

In House debate on the mutual defense assistance bill, August 17-18, 1949, Vorys, Judd and John Lodge argued their position, and on their behalf Lodge offered the same amendment that had been defeated in committee. It would provide \$100 million of assistance (trimmed from the \$200 million offered in committee), \$75 million for China and \$25 million for Southeast Asia, "in order to battle communism on a global basis." The amendment was generally opposed by the Democrats. Mansfield declared that if the amendment were adopted it would "amount to a virtual declaration of war." "... if this House votes for this amendment," he added, "it will only be a short time before you will be sending American boys to China. . . ." Representative Smathers disagreed. "How, in heaven's name, could it be a declaration of war to say that we are going to assist the Chinese fight communism in China and have it not constitute a declaration of war to say that we are going to assist the Greeks and Turks . . . and do the same thing in Iran and Korea and various other places throughout the world where we have embarked upon a program of containment of communism."

Lodge's amendment was defeated by teller vote, 94-164.¹⁸⁷ The Senate, however, subsequently approved an amendment to the bill similar to the Lodge amendment, which provided \$75 million for use in China and the "general area." Throughout the joint hearings of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees on the mutual defense assistance bill during August 1949, Senator Knowland, a member of the Armed Services Committee, had hammered away at the lack of emphasis on Asia in the bill. He and others offered an amendment to provide \$175 million for military assistance to China. He also proposed asking Gen. Douglas MacArthur II to return to the U.S. to testify on the Asian situation, and this was agreed to in an executive session of the two committees, 13-12, on a party-line vote with only Senators Richard B. Russell (D/Ga.) and Byrd, who voted with the Republicans, breaking party ranks.¹⁸⁸ MacArthur declined to testify, so it was agreed to hear Vice Adm. Oscar C. Badger, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in the Western Pacific, in his absence. Admiral Badger testified in executive session on September 8, 1949, that there was still resistance to the Communists in China, and that a fund of \$75 million could be used to support anti-Communist activities in China, especially a holding operation in the area adjacent to Indochina. If the Chinese Communists were not stopped in South China, he said, Indochina, Burma, and perhaps Malaya would then fall, either from internal subversion or external attack.¹⁸⁹

The State Department saw Knowland's amendment as an opportunity to restore the authority for conducting unconventional and covert warfare in Southeast Asia while at the same time accommodating the demands of those who favored further aid to the Nation-

¹⁸⁷For debate on the amendment see *CR*, vol. 95, pp. 11782-11791. For Lodge's attempt to get administration backing of the amendment see Blum, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁸⁸*SFRC Hs. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program: 1949," p. 186.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 527-528.

alists. A new amendment was drafted by the Department for Connally, authorizing the President to use whatever funds the committee might approve for activities in the Far East to carry out the purposes of the act. It was also provided that this would be a confidential fund requiring only Presidential certification rather than the usual vouchers.

In a meeting on August 30 of a four-member subcommittee drawn from the two committees for the purpose of working out compromises on several parts of the bill, and with a State Department representative present, Connally reported that "The idea of the State Department, Acheson among them, is they are willing to agree to some substantial sum strictly to be within the control of the President and without mentioning China, leaving it up to the whole area of Asia, so that he can help here or help there." All four of the members present, however, agreed that Knowland would object to the lack of specific reference to China, but they supported the proposal even though they had difficulty conceiving how it could be implemented. They agreed with Vandenberg's statement that "we are the victims of our own form of government at this point. I have no doubt in the world that the President of the United States, handed \$100 million, without the necessity for even accounting for half of it, could by intrigue and manipulation raise unshirted hell in the Far East and do \$5 billion worth of damage to the cause of communism, and that is what I would like to do, but I do not know how you would do it under our form of government."

Senator Millard E. Tydings (D/Md.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, as well as a member of Foreign Relations and of the subcommittee considering the bill, told Connally that the problem was whether to "fight the Chinese combination" or to "give them this money under these conditions where it may never be spent at all," and thereby get the support of Knowland and others for the bill as reported by the two committees to the Senate. Connally said he wanted to get support for the bill, and would like to get agreement on a compromise.¹⁹⁰

When the two full committees met again in executive session on September 9, Connally offered the State Department amendment, having changed the language from the "Far East" to "China and the Far East." Knowland objected, saying that under the amendment the President would not have to spend any money in China, and Congress might never know, because of the confidential accounting system, whether any had been spent in China. Connally's substitute amendment passed, however, 12-9.

At about this same time the remaining Nationalist forces in China were capitulating, and the administration, which had been giving some thought during August to the possibility of supporting these forces, concluded that such aid was not feasible.¹⁹¹ (By December 1949, the Communists were in control of China, and large-scale fighting had ceased.)

In final committee action on the military assistance bill on September 12, 1949, the China amendment question was raised again by the Republicans. Knowland expressed the hope of reaching a

¹⁹⁰For the subcommittee discussion see *ibid.*, pp. 473-477.

¹⁹¹See Blum, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 98-102.

new compromise on which there could be greater agreement, thus strengthening the bill in floor debate in the Senate. He objected to the State Department-Connally amendment, saying that the entire \$75 million could be spent outside of China, and that he preferred a new amendment that had been developed by Senator H. Alexander Smith (R/N.J.). Smith's version would specify that the funds be used in "China and the Far East . . . the Far East area," and would require the President, before spending any of the money, to consult U.S. military commanders in the Far East, and to report any expenditures to a joint House-Senate committee composed of the ranking majority and minority members of the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs and the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees of the two Houses. In addition, unvouchered expenditures would be "available" to that committee and to other Members of Congress at the committee's discretion. Finally, the Smith amendment provided for assigning U.S. civilian and military advisers "to advise such nation (or the reputable leaders of any group or groups within such nation as determined by the President) on the use of U.S. military assistance."

The Democrats objected to the Smith proposal. Tydings said, referring to the provision for advisers, "Now, what I am afraid of there is you put them in charge of the conduct of the war . . . [and] We have got a commitment there where they can say that they blame it on our advice, that we directed it be done this way, and we may be hooked for a darn big project." Chairman Connally: "Wouldn't it make us a party to the war out there?" Senator Tydings: "That is right."

After further debate, Senator Vandenberg suggested changing the language of Connally's amendment to provide for aid to the "general area" of China. This was approved 17-6, and the revised Connally amendment was then approved 16-5 by the two committees. Opposed were five Democrats, George, Elbert D. Thomas (Utah), Theodore Francis Green (R.I.), Russell and Byrd.¹⁹²

Senators George, Russell and Byrd, all conservative Southern Democrats, were concerned about the potential cost of the military assistance, as well as the possible involvement and commitments which could result. Byrd, particularly, was concerned that it represented a world-wide aid program similar to that for Greece and Turkey.¹⁹³

The revised Connally amendment was approved by the Senate, and in the House-Senate conference the Senate prevailed. Representative Vorys was opposed to adding the language about the "general area" of China, preferring that only China itself be specified. He also objected to the provision for unvouchered funds. But the other House conferees disagreed with him on both points and the two provisions were approved.

In the conference committee, a State Department official was asked to explain what the fund for the "general area" of China

¹⁹²For discussion and action on the Connally and H. Alexander Smith amendments, see *SFRC His. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program 1949," pp. 611-628. For comments in the report from the two committees see S Rept 81-1068, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 699-736. For further details on the origin and development of the Connally amendment see Blum, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 133-142.

¹⁹³*SFRC His. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program: 1949," p. 43.

might be used for. He replied, "It might be used in other areas of the Far East which are affected by the developments in China. That would include such areas of Burma, the northern part of Indochina, if it became desirable to suppress communism in that country."¹⁹⁴

There was another provision in the 1949 mutual defense assistance bill with considerable import for Indochina. Approved with almost no debate, it authorized the President to send U.S. Armed Forces personnel to any "agency or nation" as noncombatant military advisers.¹⁹⁵ This became the statutory basis for the U.S. military advisory mission sent to Vietnam in 1950 by President Truman, as well as the authority for all of the other U.S. military missions established in following years in scores of non-Communist countries. In addition, of course, it was the authority by which President Kennedy increased the number of U.S. Armed Forces personnel in Vietnam to about 20,000 by 1963.

Although an earlier request in 1946-47 for blanket approval of U.S. military missions had not been acted upon by Congress, as was noted above, when Congress was asked in 1949 to approve the use of military advisers it did so with few reservations. The provision was approved by the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees and by the Senate without recorded discussion. Only a brief discussion occurred during debate in the House. Representative John Bell Williams (D/Miss.) moved to strike the language authorizing military advisers, arguing that the program should be voluntary, and that U.S. advisers should not be assigned overseas against their will. Both Democrats and Republicans on the Foreign Affairs Committee opposed the amendment. Vorys said it would "nullify" the entire military assistance program. Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas (D/Calif.), also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, declared that if the amendment were adopted "it will make our unified defense program perfectly ridiculous," and Representative Smathers agreed. The Williams amendment was rejected by a voice vote.¹⁹⁶

The mutual defense assistance bill was given overwhelming approval by Congress by a vote of 224-109 in the House and by a voice vote in the Senate. This occurred on October 6, 1949, only a few days after it was announced that the Russians had exploded their first atomic bomb, thus breaking the U.S. monopoly on the weapon.

By this time, the executive branch was convinced that the U.S. had to defend Indochina against the Communists. "Thus, in the closing months of 1949," the Pentagon Papers concluded, "the course of U.S. policy was set to block Communist expansion in Asia; by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming, by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible, but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean war of 1950-53, the forming of the Southeast Treaty

¹⁹⁴For the conference committee discussion see *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. V, pt. 1, pp. 452-460. For comments in the conference report see p. 571. For the provision as enacted, see Public Law 81-329, printed in *ibid.*, p. 577.

¹⁹⁵Public Law 81-329, sec. 406(b).

¹⁹⁶CR, vol. 93, pp. 11802-11803.

Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam."¹⁹⁷

This position on Indochina and on Southeast Asia was formally agreed upon at a meeting of the National Security Council on December 30, 1949, at which the council approved NSC 48/2, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia."¹⁹⁸ This NSC paper, the first U.S. Government document setting forth an official, presidentially-approved policy for blocking communism in Asia as well as promoting non-Communist development, provided for U.S. assistance to individual countries and steps to encourage regional pacts and a collective security arrangement for Asia generally. It took this position with respect to Indochina:¹⁹⁹

The United States should continue to use its influence in Asia toward resolving the colonial-nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movement while at the same time minimizing the strain on the colonial powers who are our Western allies. Particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese.

Secretary Acheson and his colleagues had concluded, however, that there was no alternative to Bao Dai, and that the U.S. should recognize the new government as soon as the French had completed their ratification of the Elysée Agreement.²⁰⁰ From Paris, U.S. Ambassador David Bruce said that the U.S. should consider the Indochina problem "... in a completely cold-blooded fashion, ...". If, as he felt, the U.S. needed to prevent the Communists from taking the country, while avoiding steps which would be unduly damaging to our relations with France, there were certain "practical measures" that should be taken. "... no French Cabinet would survive the running of the Parliamentary gauntlet if it suggested the withdrawal at present or in the near future of French troops from Indochina." Moreover, "At present no French Government could remain in power that advocated complete independence either now or in the future for Indochina, if by complete independence we mean that the country would not form a portion of the French Union."

Bruce outlined the steps he thought the U.S. should urge the French to take, and suggested that for its part the United States, along with the British and as many other countries as possible, especially in Asia, should recognize the Bao Dai government. This, he said, should "precede or to be simultaneous with recognition of Mao Tse-tung," and recognition should be accompanied by a statement to Mao from the U.S., the British, and any other countries that would join, warning that these countries "would take grave view of any attempt by China of any pretext to extend her authority south of Tonkinese frontier." He also recommended direct fi-

¹⁹⁷PP. Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 40.

¹⁹⁸For the text, see *FRUS*, 1949, vol. VII, pt. 2, pp. 1215-1220. For more details on the origin and evolution of NSC 48/2, see Blum, *Drawing the Line*, ch. 10.

¹⁹⁹*FRUS*, 1949, vol. VII, pt. 2, p. 1220.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, pt. I, p. 113.

nancing of Indochina development by the Marshall plan and consideration of using in Vietnam some of the \$75 million approved by Congress for China and the "general area."²⁰¹

²⁰¹David K. E. Bruce cable to Dean Acheson, Dec. 11, 1949, in *ibid.*, pp. 105-110

CHAPTER 2

THE U.S. JOINS THE WAR

On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson announced that the U.S. would begin providing assistance directly to the Associated States of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), as well as continuing its aid to France, "to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." "The United States," he said, "recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives."¹ There was apparently no comment from Congress, but the *New York Times* greeted the announcement with an editorial endorsing the move, and echoing the government's contention that the fall of Indochina would have a domino effect in Southeast Asia.²

By this decision, which was the culmination of months of planning, the United States made a profoundly important policy choice: it accepted responsibility, in the final analysis, for preventing the Communists from taking control of Indochina. This was not, of course, what government spokesmen said. Moreover, the limited intent of the announced action so carefully masked the ultimate intention of the assumed policy that the real point of origin of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war has remained unclear. Democrats frequently say it began in 1954, when President Eisenhower sent President Ngo Dinh Diem a letter offering U.S. aid. Republicans just as frequently say it began in 1962, when President Kennedy sent large numbers of military advisers, and in 1965 when President Johnson decided to use large-scale U.S. forces. The fact is that it began in 1950, when the U.S. Government decided that the loss of Indochina would be unacceptable, and that only with U.S. assistance could that loss be prevented. This was the basic position taken at the time by the Truman administration, and it was the position adhered to and strengthened by every succeeding administration.³

It is also important to note that this decision was made prior to rather than as a result of the Korean war, although the Korean invasion had the effect of increasing to some extent the scope and amount of assistance being given to Indochina. Here, too, it is sometimes taken for granted that the decision to intervene in Indochina was a result of overt aggression by the Communists in

¹FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, p. 812.

²*New York Times*, May 9, 1950.

³See Leslie H. Gelb, "Indochina and Containment, The Early 1950s," in John C. Donovan (ed.), *The Cold Warriors* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1974), pp. 107-129.

Korea.⁴ Quite the contrary is true. Indeed, it was assumed in the spring of 1950 that Indochina was the key area of Asia threatened by the Communists, and the one in which U.S. interests were paramount. The Korean war did not change that calculation; if anything, Indochina became relatively more important. This is the underlying reason for the effort made by the Eisenhower administration to avoid a settlement of the Indochina war in conjunction with the settlement of the Korean war. In Korea, a compromise ending of the war was in the U.S. national interest. In Indochina, a compromise was viewed with great apprehension by those in power in the executive branch, as well as most leaders of Congress, who continued to assume that the Communists must be stopped in Indochina, and had concluded that such a compromise would not be in the U.S. interest.

Although speculative, it is likely that the United States would have sent its armed forces into combat in Indochina in 1954,⁵ if not before, if the Korean war had not occurred (although President Eisenhower might still have insisted on using U.S. forces only in united action with other countries). Indeed, it was the domestic after-effect of that war which was the principal deterrent to the use of force by the United States in Indochina in 1954.

The Decision to Become Involved in the War in Indochina

In early 1950, the U.S. was prepared for action in Indochina, waiting only for France to complete ratification of the Elysée Agreement, thus completing its recognition of the Bao Dai government, before recognizing that government. The French did so on February 2, 1950, and on February 4 the U.S. recognized the new government of Bao Dai (as well as the Governments of Cambodia and Laos) as the first official indigenous government of the country since the beginning of French rule. On February 16, the French asked the U.S. to provide economic and military assistance for their use in Indochina.⁶

There appears to have been general acceptance by Congress of the decision to recognize the new governments of the Associated States, and there was little if any public comment on the matter by Members of Congress. During the month prior to the announcement, Secretary of State Acheson had testified in executive sessions of the Foreign Relations Committee that there was progress in Vietnam, and that the U.S. anticipated extending recognition after the French had acted.⁷ The committee seemed interested, but China, and U.S. policy options resulting from the victory of the

⁴See, for example, Lawrence C. Kaplan, "The Korean War and U.S. Foreign Relations," in Francis Heller (ed.), *The Korean War: A 25-Year Perspective* (Lawrence, Kansas: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), p. 77, edited for the Truman Library.

⁵Geoffrey Warner, for one, came to a similar conclusion. See Warner, "The United States and Vietnam 1945-65, Part I, 1945-54," *International Affairs*, 48 (July 1972), p. 385. Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24 (December 1980), pp. 563-592, shows convincingly how the Korean war intensified U.S. involvement in the cold war, but Jervis understates the possible effects of the Indochina situation, or of some other area of vital concern, on that process.

⁶For the background and significance of this action see Gary R. Hess, "The First American Commitment in Indochina: The Acceptance of the 'Bao Dai Solution,' 1950," *Diplomatic History*, 2 (Fall 1978), pp. 331-350.

⁷*SFRC Hrs. Ser.*, "Economic Assistance to China and Korea: 1949-50," p. 216, and "Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950," pp. 159, 181

Communists and the removal of the Nationalist government to Formosa (Taiwan), remained its primary concern. (This concern about China was also prompted by the fact that legislation authorizing the China Aid program, which still had about \$100 million in unexpended funds, was due to expire on February 15, 1950. After considering the alternatives, it was decided to extend the program until June 30, 1950, thus continuing the availability of funds for use in the "general area" of China. As will be recalled from the previous chapter, it had been agreed that these could be used in both Korea and Indochina as well as in Formosa.)

Anticipating U.S. recognition of the Bao Dai government and the initiation of a U.S. assistance program, a "working group" in the State Department had issued a report on February 1, 1950, proposing military aid for Indochina financed by the 1949 appropriation for aid to the "general area" of China. The group concluded that "The whole of Southeast Asia is in danger of falling under communist domination," and the French needed help in their efforts to assist the Governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in combating the Communists. "Unavoidably," the report stated, "the United States is, together with France, committed in Indochina. . . . The choice confronting the United States is to support the French in Indochina or face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and, possibly, further westward. We then would be obliged to make staggering investments in those areas and in that part of Southeast Asia remaining outside Communist domination or withdraw to a much-contracted Pacific line. It would seem a case of 'Penny wise, Pound foolish' to deny support to the French in Indochina." In recommending such aid, however, the group specifically excluded "United States Troops."⁸

On March 7, Dean Rusk (who had been made Deputy Under Secretary of State in the spring of 1949), sent a memorandum to the Defense Department, stating:⁹

The Department of State believes that within the limitations imposed by existing commitments and strategic priorities, the resources of the United States should be deployed to reserve [sic] Indochina and Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. The Department of State has accordingly already engaged all its political resources to the end that this object be secured. The Department is now engaged in the process of urgently examining what additional economic resources can effectively be engaged in the same operation.

It is now, in the opinion of the Department, a matter of the greatest urgency that the Department of Defense assess the strategic aspects of the situation and consider, from the military point of view, how the United States can best contribute to the prevention of further Communist encroachment in that area.

The U.S. decision to become involved in the war in Indochina was made on April 24, 1950, when, on the recommendation of the NSC, the President approved NSC 64, "The Position of the United

⁸FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 711-715.

⁹PP. Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 194-195.

States With Respect to Indochina."¹⁰ There is no indication that Truman or any of his associates consulted any Member of Congress in making this first and fundamental commitment, although it is possible that there were individual discussions with or "briefings" of a handful of elected floor leaders and committee chairmen and ranking minority members. It would not be surprising, however, if there was no contact on the matter between the executive branch and Congress, given Secretary of State Acheson's penchant for unilateral exercise of Presidential power, and Truman's agreement with and acceptance of that posture.

NSC 64 was a very brief memorandum containing only cursory analysis of the subject, but its conclusions were profound and far-reaching. Based on NSC 48 (see the previous chapter), the memorandum took the position that "It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia." U.S. assistance was essential, it said, because the Chinese had moved up to the Indochina border, and "In the present state of affairs, it is doubtful that the combined native Indochinese and French troops can successfully contain Ho's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese Communist troops crossing the border, or Communist-supplied arms and material in quantity from outside Indochina strengthening Ho's forces."

NSC 64 was based on the "domino theory," which has been frequently and erroneously attributed to the Eisenhower administration:

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.

The Department of Defense, the JCS, and the Department of State agreed that, strategically, Indochina was the key area of Southeast Asia, and that military aid and a military aid mission should be sent immediately.¹¹

From Saigon, the new U.S. Chargé, Edmund A. Gullion, cabled on May 6, 1950, his views on the situation. Indochina, he said, was comparable to Greece; it, too, was a "neuralgic focus" for the Communists, and if it fell "most of colored races of world would in time fall to Communists' sickle. . . ." The U.S., therefore, should resist Communist penetration by "all means short of use of armed force," and in the event the Chinese or Russians invaded or used force in Indochina the U.S. should assist the French and the Indochinese with the necessary American forces. "This flexible concept," he

¹⁰For the text see *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 745-747.

¹¹See the various memos in *ibid.*, *passim*. For the position of the Joint Chiefs see the memorandum from the Chairman, Gen. Omar N. Bradley, to the Secretary of Defense, April 10, 1950, in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 363-366.

During the development of NSC 64, the Army's Plans and Operations Division (OPS), had taken the position, however, that although the U.S. had a strategic interest in Southeast Asia, this was primarily limited to the assurance of food supplies for Japan. It was not clear, OPS said, that the U.S. had a "vital security interest" in Indochina. U.S. recognition of Bao Dai, however, had "cast the die," and the U.S. was thereby involved in supporting Bao Dai. OPS recommended that limited aid should be given "provided that France agrees to a more complete transfer of sovereignty to Bao Dai, a relinquishment of its colonial tenets and an acknowledgment that the Military pacification of Indo-China is not possible." OPS memorandum of Feb. 24, 1950, quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 102.

added, "envisages possibility limited use of US force, takes account possibility checking threat by display determination and reckons with twilight zone in our constitutional system between war making power of executive and legislative branches. It envisages our going as far as we did in Greece and farther than was ever announced we would go. It is derivative of Truman doctrine. Its execution at any given time depends on relative military posture of ourselves and potential enemy, particularly in atomic weapons."¹² Similar conclusions were reached in August 1950 by a joint State-Defense military assistance survey mission to Southeast Asia.¹³

In the spring of 1950, in preparation for the implementation of NSC 64, the State Department had sent a study mission to Southeast Asia, the Griffin mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, former deputy chief of the U.S. economic aid mission in China. Ostensibly the group was surveying the economic situation, but in reality it was assessing political and, to some extent, military factors as well. The mission, which paid particular attention to the situation in Indochina, had as its goal, according to Griffin, preventing "a repetition of the circumstances leading to the fall of China."¹⁴

On May 2, 1950, there was a high-level meeting in the State Department to discuss Griffin's findings. Bao Dai, said Griffin, could not maintain the status quo, and "must either quickly win additional support and begin showing gains in prestige or there will be a falling away of his present following." "Time is of the essence in the Vietnam situation," he said. "Bao Dai must be given face. . . . If Bao Dai once starts slipping, it will be impossible to restore him."

The principal problem was political, as the French themselves had decided when they recognized the native governments of the Associated States. But because the French "cannot afford a continued military cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year in a campaign that has failed and that has no prospect of bringing about a military conclusion," it was necessary, Griffin said, for the French to accept and attempt to make a success of the Bao Dai government. "This may be contrary to human nature," he added, "but it is doubtful if that Government can succeed without the most generous, if not passionate, French assistance."¹⁵

In a similar meeting a few days later, Griffin "described a welcoming arch leading to one of the villages in Indochina—'Communism, no; Colonialism, never.' He said that this sentiment was characteristic of all of Southeast Asia but that it undoubtedly represented the spirit of at least 90% of the Indochinese."¹⁶

Congress Passes Legislation to Provide New Aid for Indochina

Although it does not appear to have been consulted in the making of this new commitment, Congress responded to the Presi-

¹²FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 803-804. Some officials in the State Department were skeptical of Gullion's analysis. See, for example, the memorandum by one of the most perceptive and frank of these skeptics, Charlton Ogburn, pp. 766-767.

¹³Ibid., p. 842. This report is discussed below.

¹⁴Wolf, *Foreign Aid: Theory and Practice in Southern Asia*, p. 82.

¹⁵FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, p. 796. See also pp. 762-763.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 88. For the Griffin mission generally see Samuel P. Hayes (ed.), *The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1971).

dent's initiative by enacting legislation to provide additional authorization and funds for these U.S. efforts in Indochina. Besides extending existing authority and funds for the "general area" of China until June 1951, the Foreign Economic Assistance Act, approved in June 1950, also provided authority for an entirely new foreign aid program, the "point 4 program," which was the beginning of U.S. economic aid to non-European countries.¹⁷ Although it was billed as a new technical assistance program of "shirt-sleeves diplomacy" to help the less-developed nations improve their living standards, the real motivation for the program, especially in Southeast Asia, was the need to provide assistance to less-developed countries threatened by the Communists, which, by improving economic conditions, could presumably provide greater political strength and stability.¹⁸ Indochina was to be its first and primary target, a fact that was not made known publicly, and may not even have been properly understood by Congress. Together with the new U.S. military aid mission to each of the Associated States, the economic aid mission established under the authority of this legislation provided the entering wedge for the United States to intervene in the Indochina war. This, too, may not have been clear to Congress at the time, although it could certainly have been deduced from the testimony and other public and private statements of administration spokesmen.

During the hearings and debate on the aid bill, which began in February 1950 and ended in May, there were a number of comments by Senators and Representatives about the need to continue assisting the Nationalist Chinese in Formosa, as well as taking additional steps to stop the Communists in Asia. The debate was not clearly focused, however. It was obvious that Members of Congress generally and the Republicans in particular were troubled and perplexed by the "loss" of China to the Communists. They wanted to prevent a repetition of that experience; yet they, no less than those in the executive branch, were not sure how to go about such a task.

Many Members seemed unclear about the relevance of economic assistance to revolutionary situations involving the use of force, and tended to doubt the validity of the argument advanced by the executive branch that economic progress would produce political progress and greater security. There was a particularly strong reaction against the point 4 program on the part of Republicans and conservative Democrats. They were concerned that it would be the beginning of a large and permanent foreign aid program, as indeed it was, and they questioned the premise that it would promote stability and security.

In the House, the authorization for point 4 was cut from the \$45 million requested by the administration and approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee to \$25 million on a motion by the highly-respected Christian A. Herter (R/Mass.), a leader in the passage of

¹⁷Public Law 81-535, the Foreign Economic Assistance Act, of which point 4 was title IV, the "Act for International Development." The Foreign Economic Assistance Act, which extended the Marshall plan, was the new name for what had been called the Economic Cooperation Act, by which the Marshall plan had been established.

¹⁸As Wolf noted in *Foreign Aid: Theory and Practice in Southern Asia*, p. 60, "... economic and humanitarian objectives ... played a relatively minor role in the case of aid to Southern Asia."

the Marshall plan.¹⁹ Herter, who strongly supported point 4, said he thought the requested amount was too high. A Republican motion to strike point 4 from the bill failed, 150-220.²⁰ Most of the votes in favor of the motion were from conservatives, both Republicans and Democrats. Representative Judd, along with other critics of U.S. policy in Asia, urged approval of point 4, however, saying, "This is almost the first move . . . in the direction of trying to develop a program that makes sense out in that part of the earth where half of its people live."²¹

In the Senate, criticism and skepticism were even stronger, and point 4 was passed by only one vote, 37-36.²²

During these debates the subject of Indochina came up from time to time, but the paucity of comment indicated not so much an absence of information as general acquiescence in executive branch policy and an absence of new ideas. Senators harped on the established arguments. In an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on March 29, 1950, for example, Senator Theodore Francis Green (D/R.I.) asked Secretary of State Acheson, "Are we not getting into a position where we are rather defending in part what is left of French colonial policy there, and also supporting against the revolutionaries an unpopular king whom they are trying to put out, and a corrupt government there?" Acheson agreed, but said that although the U.S. was "pressing the French to go forward as far and as fast as they can . . . we have to be careful . . . that we do not press the French to the point where they say, 'All right, take over the damned country. We don't want it,' and put their soldiers on ships and send them back to France." Green persisted. "We have jockeyed ourselves into a position," he said, "where we had to take the position of one or the other parties in the country against the rising masses. Everywhere the masses in these countries . . . are rising, and they are conducting what will ultimately be—it is a question of time—successful revolutions, but we are identified to those masses as being the defenders of the status quo. . . ." ²³

In House debate on the 1950 foreign aid bill, Representative H. R. Gross (R/Iowa) offered an amendment to provide that "the principles of the Bill of Rights and the Atlantic Charter should govern in dependent areas" and that no U.S. funds should be spent to aid "colonial exploitation or absentee ownership." But, judging by the debate, it was a "nuisance" amendment that even Gross may not have taken seriously, and it was defeated on division 22-72.²⁴

In a similar vein, Representative Compton I. White (D/Idaho) read the text of that portion of the bill which reiterated the 1949 language favoring a Pacific pact, based on developing the "economic and social well-being" of peoples of the area, the safeguarding of their "basic rights and liberties," and the protection of their "security and independence." "Does the gentleman," he asked the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, "think that policy of Con-

¹⁹CR, vol. 96, p. 4540. The final bill provided for \$35 million.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4552.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 4545.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 6481.

²³SFRC Hrs. Ser., "Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950," pp. 267, 269.

²⁴CR, vol. 96, p. 4536.

gress is being carried out at the present time in Indochina, where the people are struggling for their freedom and the French are sending expeditions in there, airplanes and everything else, to destroy those people and to destroy their liberty. Does the gentleman think we are carrying out that policy?" It was something of a rhetorical question and it received a rhetorical response by the chairman: "That is an expression of a pious hope on the part of the committee. It is a hope, however, that the passage of this legislation may speed to fulfillment."²⁵

As approved by Congress in May 1950, the Foreign Economic Assistance Act provided \$40 million for use in the "general area of China."²⁶ The provision reaffirming Congress' support for a Pacific pact, which was not in the Senate bill, was dropped in conference based on the fact that it was already provided for by the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 and did not need to be reenacted.²⁷

The Anti-Communist Offensive and NSC 68

The lack of reference to Indochina during these debates in the spring of 1950 also reflected the preoccupation of Congress with the domestic political turmoil produced by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R/Wis.) and others in the Republican as well as the Democratic Party who were concerned about Communist influence in the United States and in the U.S. Government. One of the consequences of this development, probably unintended, was to divert the attention of Congress and the public from foreign policy questions, including the situation in Indochina.

The Truman administration was responsible for stimulating some of this anti-Communist sentiment, however, and, in fact, had deliberately set about during 1950 to generate a stronger public awareness of the Communist threat and the need for the United States to rearm. In January 1950, President Truman announced that the U.S. would build a hydrogen bomb, a response to the Russian's successful testing of an atomic bomb the previous September. At the same time, he ordered a study of U.S. foreign policy goals and strategic situation. This resulted in a policy paper of the National Security Council, NSC 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," completed in early April, which was based on the premise that the Russians were intent on "world domination," as demonstrated by the events that had led to the cold war.

One of the objectives of NSC 68 was to rouse the public to support a stronger defense effort. Acheson led the way, and, as he said in his memoirs, "Throughout 1950 . . . I went about the country preaching this premise of NSC 68."²⁸

NSC 68, probably the longest, most detailed and perhaps the most important policy paper ever produced by the National Security Council, concluded that "the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake," and that "The frustration of the Kremlin design requires the free world to devel-

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 4056.

²⁶Public Law 81-535, title II, the "China Area Aid Act of 1950."

²⁷H. Rept. 81-2117, p. 28

²⁸Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 375

op a successfully functioning political and economic system and a vigorous political offensive against the Soviet Union. These, in turn, require an adequate military shield under which they can develop. It is necessary to have the military power to deter, if possible, Soviet expansion, and to defeat, if necessary, aggressive Soviet or Soviet-directed actions of a limited or total character." "... it is clear that a substantial and rapid building up of strength in the free world is necessary to support a firm policy intended to check and to roll back the Kremlin's drive for world domination."²⁹

The State Department's leading Russian experts, George F. Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen, disagreed strongly with the paper's assumptions about the "Kremlin's drive for world domination," among other things, but Acheson and Paul H. Nitze, then the head of State's Policy Planning Staff, were in agreement on the final product and the objections were turned aside.³⁰

The importance of NSC 68 for the present study is, first, the position it took with respect to preventing Communist expansion, a position that strongly supported U.S. policy in Indochina under NSC 64. Although Acheson, in a speech on January 12, 1950, before the National Press Club, had expressed the government's position that the perimeter of U.S. defenses in the Pacific did not include either Korea or Indochina, he had left open the possible response of the United States to Communist aggression in either area.

NSC 68 is also of interest in relation to U.S. involvement in Indochina because of its assumption that the Russian "threat" was primarily a military threat and, accordingly, that the first concern of the U.S. must be to strengthen its military capabilities. This assumption, of course, was dramatically reinforced by the Korean war, and by January 1951 State Department policy planners were speculating that the U.S. military buildup would be considered by the Russians as an important reason for a decision in 1951 "to fulminate the world crisis." As viewed from Moscow, they said, "The massive fact which confronts the Soviet Union is the mobilization of strength at the center in the U.S. The budget just presented to the Congress calls for a defense effort equal to the total annual product of the U.S.S.R."³¹

There were a few, but very few, who questioned the assumptions on which this buildup was based, or its possible consequences. Secretary Acheson, in the same January 1950 Press Club speech, stressed the need to recognize the strength of nationalism in Asian countries, and the importance of assisting only those governments which had popular support. But, as David S. McLellan has observed, "Acheson's admonition that the United States must not become involved in support of governments which lacked a popular following must be viewed more as a cautionary ideal than as a

²⁹The text of NSC 68, which was dated April 7, 1950, and finally approved (after further study, including the development of cost estimates) by the President on September 30, is in *FRUS*, 1950, vol. I, pp. 235-292. For a good discussion of the development of NSC 68 see Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat," *International Security*, 4 (Fall 1979), pp. 116-158. See also John Lewis Gaddis and Paul H. Nitze, "NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat Reconsidered," *International Security*, 4 (Spring 1980), pp. 164-176.

³⁰For their objections, which are over-simplified here, see Kennan's *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, pp. 470-475; for Bohlen see *FRUS*, 1950, vol. I, p. 221, and 1951, vol. I, pp. 106, 163, 170, 177, 180. For Nitze's position see 1951, vol. I, p. 172, and his section (entitled "The Development of NSC 68") of the Gaddis and Nitze article cited above.

³¹*FRUS*, 1951, vol. I, p. 37.

practical guide. The fact of the matter was that the search for a policy toward Southeast Asia had become more acute with the fall of China. Already Acheson was giving consideration to French requests for military assistance to their puppet regime in Indochina against the Vietminh."³²

The Effects of the Korean War

On June 25, 1950, the Korean war began, and on June 27 President Truman announced that, as a part of its response to the invasion, the U.S. would increase military assistance to France and to Indochina, including the establishment of a U.S. military mission in each of the Associated States.³³ Some have incorrectly assumed that the decision to send the missions was prompted by the Korean invasion, whereas, in fact, the missions were to be sent as part of the plan to implement NSC 64, which, it will be recalled, was approved on April 24, 1950.³⁴

Truman's decision to increase U.S. aid for Indochina after the Korean invasion was hailed by most liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, in Congress. On June 27, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D/Minn.), for example, called it "most encouraging."³⁵ One exception was Senator Robert Taft (R/Ohio), who said that "The furnishing of military assistance to Indochina contradicts Secretary Acheson's statement that all the United States could do in Southeast Asia was to provide advice and assistance when asked, and that the responsibility was not ours."³⁶

The effects of the Korean war on the U.S. role in Indochina were several-fold. It had the primary effect of galvanizing U.S. determination to resist communism and to increase defense spending and military assistance, thus providing precisely the event needed to implement NSC 68, including the expansion of the U.S. role in Indochina. As Secretary of State Acheson said in an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on July 24, 1950, "... what they have done by this is to arouse the United States in a way that only Pearl Harbor did, and if they had not done it we would have had a terrible time getting people in this country to see the real danger in which the country is."³⁷

³²David S. McLellan, *Dean Acheson, The State Department Years* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976), p. 214. For the text of Acheson's speech see *Department of State Bulletin*, Jan. 23, 1950. For one very perceptive analysis of NSC 68 and of the danger of a "predominant reliance on military force" in dealing with emerging "social and economic pressures" in many parts of the world, see *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 1, pp. 302-304.

³³*Public Papers of the Presidents*, Harry S. Truman, 1950, p. 492.

³⁴In his useful study, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 196, William W. Stueck, Jr. says that increased U.S. assistance to Indochina as a result of the Korean war implicated the U.S. further in a "cause that was bound to fail." This overlooks the involvement that was already well underway, and doubtless would have increased, perhaps even faster, in the absence of the Korean war.

³⁵*CR*, vol. 96, p. 9233.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9322.

³⁷*SFRCS Hist. Ser.*, "Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950," p. 323.

"NSC-68 became the conceptual framework on which the rapid expansion of United States armed forces was hung during the first months of the Korean war. Before the war was over military spending had reached a peak of \$50 billion a year (compared to \$15 billion in the previous year). The 1,461,000 men in the United States armed forces in June 1950 were more than doubled in two years, with the Army accounting for the largest increase. As compared with 48 Air Force wings in 1950, the Korean Armistice in 1953 left the United States with nearly 100 wings, with another 50 expected to come into the inventory over the coming four-year period. The Navy was floating 671 ships on the eve of hostilities in 1950, and over 1,100 by the summer of 1952." Brown, *The Faces of Power*, p. 52.

As Seyom Brown has pointed out:³⁸

... the fact that we were willing to fight a high-cost war to keep South Korea out of Communist hands also gave impetus to the emerging realization that the power contest could be won or lost in the secondary theatres when there was a stalemate in the primary theatres. The Korea War thus marked a globalization of containment in terms of operational commitments as well as rhetoric.

The secondary effect of the war in Korea, however, was to limit the manpower and resources available for a major U.S. commitment to Indochina, and subsequently to cause such resistance to another limited war on the mainland of Asia as to block armed U.S. intervention in Indochina for many years.

The Korean invasion also had the effect of emphasizing the danger of overt, external Communist aggression, which in turn led to increased U.S. concern with the possibility of such an attack in Indochina. As a consequence, throughout the 1950s the South Vietnamese were being prepared primarily for conventional warfare against an invasion, and were not in a position to respond adequately to the guerrilla tactics employed by the Communists when they renewed the armed struggle in the late 1950s.

The Korean war also had a serious effect on the U.S. policymaking system, and this in turn affected the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam war. The decision to enter the Korean war was made by the President on his own claim of authority to take such action. After the decision had been made, the United Nations requested American leadership of a U.N. peacekeeping force. While this may have internationalized the action and provided a frame of national and international legality, it was not the causative factor in the decision, nor did the administration rely on it as legal justification for the use of U.S. forces.

The President, it was argued, has the authority and the power to deploy and to employ the armed forces of the United States in the defense of U.S. national interests, and to engage in hostilities short of a declaration of war, without the approval of Congress. Thus, a "limited war," (or "police action," which was the term applied to Korea), could be fully and constitutionally authorized by action of the President, with Congress relegated to the role of providing or withholding funds to maintain the war effort. This argument was not made publicly at the time of the invasion, however. It became explicit only after questions were raised subsequently about the decision to go to war, and about the respective roles of the President and Congress. This was due primarily to the exigencies of the situation, which, because of the suddenness of the invasion, tended to choke off consideration of constitutional questions and institutional roles.

The issue was also less clear-cut in the beginning because in the initial stages of decisionmaking there was at least some semblance of consultation with Congress, and agreement by the President to consider making a request to Congress for authorization of the war.

Truman's first contact with Congress after the invasion was on Monday, June 26, when Chairman Connally saw him at the White

³⁸Brown, p. 59

House. (It is not clear how Connally came to be at the White House, but presumably it was at the request of Truman.) Connally reported that Truman asked him whether he had the authority to commit U.S. forces without the approval of Congress. Connally replied, "If a burglar breaks into your house you can shoot him without going down to the police station and getting permission. You might run into a long debate in Congress which would tie your hands completely. You have the right to do it as Commander-in-Chief and under the UN Charter."³⁹

Truman then met on June 27 and 30 with selected Members of Congress. Both meetings were very brief. The first lasted about 30 minutes, and the second about 35. At the first meeting, to which he invited the elected Democratic leaders from the House and Senate as well as the top Democrats and Republicans on the foreign policy and the armed services committees of the two Houses, Truman gave this explanation of his decision to defend Korea:⁴⁰

The communist invasion of South Korea could not be let pass unnoticed, he said, this act was very obviously inspired by the Soviet Union. If we let Korea down, the Soviet [sic] will keep right on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another. We had to make a stand some time, or else let all of Asia go by the board. If we were to let Asia go, the Near East would collapse and no telling what would happen in Europe. Therefore, the President concluded, he had ordered our forces to support Korea as long as we could—or as long as the Koreans put up a fight and gave us something we *could* support—and it was equally necessary for us to draw the line at Indo-China, the Philippines, and Formosa.

Truman did not invite elected Republican leaders to the first meeting. These were included, however, in the second meeting on June 30, at which Senate Minority Leader Kenneth S. Wherry (R/Neb.) objected to Truman's decision not to seek the approval of Congress, or even to inform Congress, before sending U.S. forces into combat.

Senator Wherry arose, addressed the President as though he were on the Senate floor, and wanted to know if the President was going to advise the Congress before he sent ground troops into Korea.

The President said that some ground troops had already been ordered into Korea. If there were a real emergency, he would advise the Congress.

Senator Wherry said he thought the Congress ought to be consulted before the President made moves like this.

The President said this had been an emergency. There was no time for lots of talk. There had been a weekend crisis and he had to act. . . .

Senator Wherry said "I understand the action all right. But I do feel the Congress ought to be consulted before any large scale actions are taken again."

³⁹Senator Tom [Thomas T.] Connally, as told to Alfred Steinberg. *My Name is Tom Connally* (New York: Crowell, 1954), p. 346.

⁴⁰Truman Library, Elsey notes of the meeting of June 27, 1950, Papers of George Elsey, Subject File, Korea (emphasis in original) There is a second set of notes of the meeting in *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VII, pp 200-202

The President replied that if any large scale actions were to take place, he would tell the Congress about it. . . .

Moments later Wherry again said he thought the President should consult Congress "... before taking drastic steps."

... the President responded that "... "If there is any necessity for Congressional action, ... I will come to you. But I hope we can get those bandits in Korea suppressed without that."⁴¹

Although a decision had already been made to send large-scale U.S. forces into combat, Truman did not reveal this to the second meeting which was, according to one author, "a lie designed to avoid leaks that would reveal to the enemy American troop movements."⁴² Another author takes the position, however, that "Comments of legislators as reported in [George M.] Elsey's notes make it clear that some of them at least understood that Americans soon would be fighting in the front lines and that casualty lists would be appearing ... no complaints about deceit were voiced by those who had attended the conference."⁴³

Dean Rusk, who participated in the meeting of June 30 (he was then Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East), says that there was a consensus among congressional leaders attending the meeting that the President "should proceed on the basis of his own presidential powers, reinforced by the U.N. Security Council resolutions calling on Members to come to the assistance of Korea."⁴⁴

At the June 30 meeting, Senator H. Alexander Smith suggested the possibility of a congressional resolution approving the President's action. Truman asked Acheson to consider the suggestion.⁴⁵

On July 3, there was a meeting of a number of top government officials with the President, which was also attended by one Member of Congress, Senate Majority Leader Scott Lucas, at which Acheson presented the draft of a resolution calling for Congress' commendation of the President's action. According to his memoirs he did not recommend a resolution of approval because the action should "rest on his constitutional authority as Commander in Chief of the armed forces."⁴⁶ Acheson also suggested to Truman that the

⁴¹Truman Library, Elsey notes on the meeting of June 30, 1950, Papers of George Elsey, Subject File, Korea.

⁴²Stueck, pp. 179-185. For other accounts see also *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VII, p. 200, and Glen D. Paige, *The Korean Decision* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 148, 187, 262. The account by Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: Times Books, 1982), does not add significantly to the existing literature on the Washington policymaking process.

On Monday, June 26, the day after the attack, Senate Republicans caucused and agreed that the U.S. should assist the Koreans, but should not become directly involved in the war. They took the position that while the U.S. had a "moral obligation" to help the Koreans, there was "no obligation" to go to war. This could help to explain why no Republican Senate or House floor leaders were included in the President's first meeting with Members of Congress.

⁴³Robert J. Donovan, *Tumultuous Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 217. Donovan's interpretation is confirmed by the full text of the Elsey notes to which he referred, which are cited above.

⁴⁴Letter to CRS from Dean Rusk, Apr. 1, 1983.

⁴⁵On July 3, Acheson phoned Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson to seek his concurrence with a resolution he had prepared, along with a draft of a speech for Truman to make personally to Congress. He told Secretary Johnson that the resolution would pass if it did not mention Formosa or Indochina, and that "it would be helpful in the time ahead." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VII, p. 283.

⁴⁶*Present at the Creation*, p. 414.

The following draft of the resolution, located in the Truman Library, Papers of George Elsey, Subject File, Korea, is probably the one which was presented by Acheson:

Continued

initiative for the resolution should come from Congress to avoid the impression that the President was asking Congress for approval. Truman asked Lucas' opinion. Lucas replied that he questioned whether the President should appear before Congress with a special message. The resolution would be approved, he said, but might take a week to debate. Many Members "had suggested to him that the President should keep away from Congress and avoid debate." The President, he said, "had very properly done what he had to do without consulting the Congress." Lucas suggested that before having the resolution introduced the President should call congressional leaders together again and get their approval. Truman replied that "it was up to Congress whether such a resolution should be introduced, that he would not suggest it." Lucas also suggested that Truman deliver the message to the country as a "fireside chat," rather than before Congress. He said that Truman "would be practically asking for a declaration of war if he came up to the Congress like this." The President said that "it was necessary to be very careful that he did not appear to be getting around Congress and use extra-Constitutional powers."

Averell Harriman, one of those present, "stressed the need for close relations between the President and Congress under Presidential leadership. While things are going well now there may be trouble ahead."

As the meeting ended, Truman said he would consider the matter further, and talk again with Democratic congressional leaders at their regular meeting with him the following week. The result of this was that the message was delayed until July 19, when it was submitted in writing to Congress, and the idea of a resolution was abandoned. Lucas' advice, which was probably supported by other Democratic leaders, appears to have been a crucial factor in this decision.⁴⁷

At the time, there was almost no congressional objection to the decision to go to war without Congress' approval. Questions were raised by only a few Republicans, primarily Wherry and Taft, but they also supported the President's decision, and as U.S. troops went forth to meet the enemy, questions about the war's constitutionality may have seemed moot if not irrelevant.⁴⁸ By the end of 1950, however, after Chinese forces had entered the Korean war and forced the Americans to retreat, both Republicans and Democrats in Congress began again to question the decision to enter the Korean war without the approval of Congress. The issue was joined late in 1950 when President Truman announced that he was send-

"Resolved . . . That the Congress of the United States hereby expresses its commendation of the forthright actions taken by the United States and other Members of the United Nations, both in condemning the acts of aggression of the invading forces from north Vietnam, and in employing armed forces to assist the Republic of Korea.

"It is the sense of the Congress that the United States continue to take all appropriate action with reference to the Korean situation to restore and maintain international peace and security in support of the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations."

⁴⁷For a summary of the July 3 meeting, from which these quotes are taken, see *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VII, pp. 286-291. In his memoirs, pp. 414-415, Acheson said he agreed with Lucas, and he defended the decision not to ask for congressional approval. Truman's memoirs do not mention the discussion of the congressional resolution.

⁴⁸Among other things, Robert Taft said that ". . . if the President can intervene in Korea without congressional approval, he can go to war in Malaya or Indonesia or Iran or South America." *CR*, vol. 96, p. 9320.

ing additional U.S. ground troops to Europe for assignment to NATO. This produced a very sharp reaction in Congress, resulting in the "Great Debate" during the first three months of 1951 on the specific power of the President to assign ground forces to an "international army" without congressional approval, and, more generally, the power of the President to deploy U.S. forces abroad without such approval, especially in cases involving possible hostilities. In the end, the Senate passed a resolution supporting the President, but stating also that Congress should be asked to approve any future U.S. troop assignments to NATO.⁴⁹ That action ended the Great Debate, but the "Taft problem," as it became known, remained, and in 1964 it appears to have been very much on the minds of policymakers as they approached the point of deciding to use large-scale U.S. forces in the Vietnam war. President Lyndon Johnson, who knew about the "Taft problem" from his own experience in the Senate in 1950, sought to avoid what might be called "Truman's mistake." The irony, of course, is that in avoiding Truman's mistake, Johnson ended up making a "mistake" with more serious consequence, and which, together with subsequent actions of President Nixon, led to an effort by Congress to clarify and define the war power provisions of the Constitution through passage of the War Powers Resolution.

The Question of Using American Forces in Indochina

As far as Indochina was concerned, during the period August-November 1950 there was a surge of support for a stronger U.S. role. In part, this resulted from an increased concern about defending Southeast Asia against the Communists, but it was also stimulated by a growing awareness of the weakness of the French and of the Bao Dai government. It was during this period that proposals were first made for the use of U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina.

In August 1950 a joint State-Defense MDAP (mutual defense assistance program) survey mission completed an extensive trip to the Far East, including three weeks in Vietnam. On August 7, its Chairman, John F. Melby, then Special Assistant to Dean Rusk, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, cabled Rusk his conclusions, which also represented the group's consensus. "Indochina," he said, "is keystone of SEA [Southeast Asia] defense arch. Failure here will inevitably precipitate balance of SEA main-

⁴⁹Unfortunately there is no one good source on the Great Debate. There is a summary in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, but for an adequate understanding it is necessary to read the hearings and debates, including the executive sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees meeting jointly, which appear in *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. III, pt. I.

During the Great Debate, there were numerous supporting statements by academicians asserting the power of the President to employ U.S. forces overseas in the absence of war without approval by Congress. Among these, interestingly enough, were two—Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Henry Steele Commager, who during the Vietnam war became ardent advocates of congressional action to control the President. For their statements in 1951 see Schlesinger's letter to the *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1951, and Commager's article, "Presidential Power: The Issue Analyzed," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 14, 1951. Two other academicians, Edward S. Corwin and Clinton Rossiter, both noted commentators on the Constitution and the Presidency, took issue with Schlesinger and Commager and with the administration's position. See Corwin's article "The President's Power," *New Republic*, Jan. 29, 1951, and Rossiter's "The Constitution and Troops to Europe," *New Leader*, Mar. 26, 1951. See also Corwin's memorandum reprinted in *CR*, vol. 97, p. 2993. For the administration's legal justification see *Powers of the President to Send the Armed Forces Outside the United States*, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Committee Print, 82d Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951).

land into Communist orbit with excellent prospect of similar eventuality in Indonesia and Philippines, barring American occupation of latter. Within Indochina complex, Vietnam is the crisis point whose resolution will largely determine outcome in Laos and Cambodia." "Primary Vietnam concern," he added, "is eventual independence. Vietnam will have it regardless of anything else and will seek allies wherever it may be necessary." He continued:

If Vietnam is determined on complete independence as all evidence suggests, it probably cannot get it for a long time in face of French opposition, but it can create the kind of uproar which will constitute a continuing drain on French strength and in end benefit only Communists. Co-incidentally, American identification with French in such eventuality will further weaken American influence in Asia. Historically no ruling group has ever remained more or less indefinitely in power in face of active or even passive resistance from the governed, or without ruining itself in the process. There is no convincing evidence Nationalism in Indochina proposes to be an exception.

Melby recommended that the French work out a specific arrangement with the Vietnamese for granting independence in 5-30 years, with the Vietnamese gradually assuming greater responsibility for government and defense. Such an arrangement, he added, could be under U.N. auspices, with the U.S. providing necessary financial support.⁵⁰

Based on this and other reports, State's Policy Planning Staff prepared a memorandum on August 16, "United States Policy Toward Indochina in the Light of Recent Developments," in which it concluded, "... the situation in Indochina is more serious than we have reckoned." "... it has been revealed that the French have no confidence in their ability to maintain a position should the Chinese Communists seriously go to the aid of the Viet Minh, either directly or indirectly." "The question inevitably arises: 'Can we then supply supplementary ground forces?' The answer, subject to check with the Defense Department, would seem to be in the negative." This being the case, "... the only hope for a solution lies in the adoption of certain drastic political measures by the French themselves." After suggesting how this might be done, the memorandum concluded: "If Paris does not feel that it can adopt a bolder political approach with respect to Indochina, we must recognize that the French and we may well be heading into a debacle which neither of us can afford. For our part, it will become necessary promptly to reexamine our policy toward Indochina."⁵¹

At the same time, Charlton Ogburn, Jr., Policy Information Officer in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, sent Rusk another of his expressive but thoughtful memos in which he lamented the behavior of the French. "... it seems to me maddening that the French should remain so uninformed and irresponsible with regard to realities in the Far East." French "folly" he said, had left the U.S. with "two ghastly courses of action in Indochina . . . 1. To wash

⁵⁰FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 845-848. For the survey group's official statement of its findings see pp. 840-844. See also John F. Melby, "Memoir, Vietnam-1950," *Diplomatic History*, 6 (Winter 1982), pp. 97-109. For military aspects, see Spector, pp. 111-115.

⁵¹FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 857-858.

our hands of the country and allow the Communists to overrun it, or, 2. To continue to pour treasure (and perhaps eventually lives) into a hopeless cause. . . ."

Ogburn recommended that in addition to efforts to influence the French, the State Department should "begin to give the hostile Senators here in Washington an appreciation of the dilemma we have been thrust into. . . ." Noting that the Department had been telling the Foreign Relations Committee that the situation in Indochina was a "clear case" of Communist aggression which was being met in a "hard-hitting, two fisted manner," Ogburn said, "This is all right in the short run, but is it not sowing the whirlwind?—unless of course we intend when the time comes to commit American ground forces in Indochina and thus throw all Asia to the wolves along with the best chances the free world has?"⁵²

On September 11, 1950, Assistant Secretary Rusk prepared a memorandum for Secretary Acheson on "Possible Invasion of Indochina," in which he reported, "All indications point to a probable communist offensive against Indochina in late September or early October." The only defense against such an attack, and against future Communist gains in Indochina, Rusk said, was the French Army. For this reason, it would not be desirable to ask the French to withdraw or even to establish a definite date of withdrawal from Indochina. Thus, he concluded, the U.S. had no choice but to continue helping the French, even though, as he noted, this would continue to provoke charges of U.S. imperialism.⁵³

The prediction proved to be quite accurate. During late September and October 1950 the Viet Minh conducted a broad offensive in the northern part of the country, and by October 19 had taken control of most of the area between Hanoi and the Chinese border. This was, according to the histories of the period, and in the words of one, the "greatest military defeat in France's colonial history."⁵⁴

While these reverses were taking place, U.S. policymakers were formulating a new position on Indochina, and on October 11 the interdepartmental Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee (a group from State, Defense, and the ECA, established in May 1950) circulated a proposed State-Defense memorandum to the NSC. This memorandum, "Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy on Indo-China for NSC Consideration," made an even stronger case for U.S. interests in Indochina than had been made in NSC 48 or NSC 64. "Firm non-Communist control of Indochina," it said, "is of critical, strategic importance to U.S. national interests. The loss of Indochina to Communist forces would undoubtedly lead to the loss of Southeast Asia as stated in NSC 64."

The paper recommended against the use of U.S. forces in Indochina in the case of "overt, foreign aggression"—meaning, of course, from China—"in the present circumstances."⁵⁵ To provide

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 862-864.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 878-880. A similar prediction, based on the military findings of the joint State-Defense survey mission, was made at the end of August 1950 by the military's Joint Intelligence Committee. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 125.

⁵⁴Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 325.

⁵⁵This, it should be noted, was consistent with NSC 73/4, Aug. 25, 1950, "The Position and Actions of the United States with Respect to Possible Further Soviet Moves in the Light of the Korean Situation," *FRUS*, 1950, vol. I, p. 389.

for such a contingency, however, as well as to make plans for united action in the event of increased internal Communist military activity, the Joint Staff should be authorized, the paper stated, to make plans with the French and British to defend Indochina from internal or external attack. In addition, the U.S. should take steps to promote the development of national armies in each of the Associated States in order that they could become capable of self-defense, thus allowing the French to withdraw and to strengthen NATO. Finally, the paper emphasized the need to continue pressing the French to give greater independence to Indochina.⁵⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, were in favor of a stronger position. In a preliminary response to the memorandum of the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee they advised "that the situation in Indochina is to be viewed with alarm and that urgent and drastic action is required by the French if they are to avoid military defeat."⁵⁷

The Chiefs were even considering the possible use of U.S. ground forces in Indochina, based on a memorandum on October 18 from Gen. J. Lawton Collins, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, who proposed that, as a last resort, and under certain conditions, the U.S. should consider using such forces in Indochina to prevent the Communists from taking the area.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, in addition to the fact that the Collins memo has never been published, the record provides no indication of reaction to proposals for the possible use of U.S. forces in Indochina with the exception of a memorandum on October 13, 1950, from Kenneth T. Young, Far Eastern Adviser in the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in the Department of Defense (and in later years U.S. Ambassador to Thailand) to Maj. Gen. Harry J. Maloney, the Department's representative on the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee.⁵⁹ According to Young, "... the French are trying too little, too late, and not very hard. They have shown no vigorous leadership nor enlightened capacity." "The French Government in Paris has not yet been stunned into forthright and vigorous action," he added. "It is my impression that the U.S. Government has not yet spoken freely and bluntly to the French regarding Indochina."

Commenting on the proposed NSC paper on Indochina policy, Young said that it was "weak from the political side." "In the drafting stage," he said, "the Defense representatives argued for a strong, hard-hitting policy on political and economic concessions. The State Department representatives flatly refused and continued

⁵⁶FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 888-890.

⁵⁷During consideration in July and August 1950 of NSC 73/4 the Chiefs had taken the position that if the Chinese provided overt military assistance to the Viet Minh, the U.S. should, among other things, consider providing air and naval assistance to the French. See the JCS memo in PP, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 373-374. They also recommended that if the Chinese overtly attacked Indochina, the U.S. should formally mobilize to the extent necessary. This proposal had not been accepted by other departments, however, and had not been included in the NSC policy paper. Moreover, NSC 73/4 had avoided any reference to U.S. policy in the event of covert Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, concentrating entirely on the question of external aggression.

⁵⁸The conditions were that such action should not endanger the U.S. strategic position in the event of a world war, that it offer a chance of reasonable success, and that it be done with other members of the U.N. See Stephen Jurika, Jr. (ed.), *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam. The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford* (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1980), p. 341. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 129.

⁵⁹See PP, DOD ed., book 8, pp. 369-370.

to refuse to consider Indochina in that manner." Young argued that rather than accepting State's position, Defense should argue for making U.S. military aid conditional on French moves toward political concessions in Indochina.

The lack of French leadership, Young said, "leads to a number of implacable principles regarding U.S. policy on Indochina." He described these as follows:

We must avoid, at all costs, the commitment of U.S. armed forces, even in a token or small scale fashion, for combat operations. Such a commitment would lead the French to shake off responsibilities and show even less initiative in Indochina. There are too many undone things to even consider such a commitment at this stage. And, even as a last resort, there would be serious objections to such a commitment from the U.S. point of view. U.S. officials must be on guard against French attempts to pressure or panic us into some sort of a commitment. Failing to get a satisfactory statement from the U.S., the French, over the next few months, may try a little psychological warfare on us. They may speak hopelessly of a coming Dunkirk. They may intimate the necessity to come to an understanding with the Chinese Communists. They may threaten to throw the problem into the United Nations, either in a political or a military way. The best defense against such tactics will be to make the French pull themselves up by their own efforts.

Before giving their final response to the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee's memorandum the Joint Chiefs waited for a report from Brig. Gen. Francis G. Brink, Commander of the U.S. military assistance mission in Vietnam, and by the time this had been received the Chinese had entered the Korean war. As a consequence, the JCS position, as stated in its memorandum of November 28, 1950, on "Possible Future Action in Indochina," did not recommend the use of U.S. forces.⁶⁰ In fact, it recommended that the U.S. take every possible action short of using U.S. forces, even to the point of seeking to prevent a situation in which the U.S. could be compelled to join a U.N.-sponsored military action in Indochina similar to that in Korea. In the case of overt Chinese aggression against Indochina, the JCS recommended that in order to avoid a general war with China the U.S. should not commit its armed forces, but should, along with the British, support the French and the Associated States "by all means short of the actual deployment of United States military forces."

The JCS memo did not specifically discuss the question of using U.S. forces to help the French contain the Viet Minh in the absence of a Chinese attack, but this subject was addressed directly by the Pentagon's Joint Strategic Survey Committee in a memorandum on November 17, 1950 for the JCS, that was attached to the Chief's November 28 memorandum, and on which the JCS memo was based.⁶¹ The answer, according to that group, was that the U.S. should not "commit its military forces to Indochina in

⁶⁰For the text of the memo see *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 945-948

⁶¹For the text see *Ibid.*, pp. 949-953.

order to assist the French in restoring internal security," for the following reasons:

- a. Involvement of United States forces against Viet Minh forces would be likely to lead to war with Communist China;
- b. A general war with Communist China would, in all probability, have to be taken as a prelude to global war;
- c. Our major enemy in a global war would be the USSR;
- d. Our primary theater in the event of a global war would, in all probability, be Western Europe; and
- e. The forces of the Western Powers are insufficient to wage war on the mainland of Asia and at the same time accomplish the predetermined Allied objectives in Europe.

"While minor commitments of United States military forces might be sufficient to defeat the Viet Minh in Indochina," the Strategic Survey Committee added, in a farsighted comment, "it is more probable that such commitments would lead to a major involvement of the United States in that area similar to that in Korea or even to global war. Accordingly, there would be great potential danger to the security interests of the United States in the commitment of any 'token' or 'minor' United States forces in Indochina."

This was the conclusion of the Strategic Survey Committee's memorandum:

It appears that, in view of the unrest in Southeast Asia generally and in Indochina specifically, any military victory in Indochina over the communists would be temporary in nature. The long-term solution to the unrest in Indochina lies in sweeping political and economic concessions by France and in the ultimate self-government of the three Associated States within the French Union or their complete independence of France. From the viewpoint of the United States, pressure on France to provide the much needed leadership to initiate these reforms and to grant self-government will prove less expensive in United States lives and national treasure than military commitments by us.⁶²

Based on this advice, the JCS recommended primarily a political solution to the problem. "... the fundamental causes of the deterioration in the Indochinese security situation," the November 28 JCS memo said, "lie in the lack of will and determination on the part of the indigenous people of Indochina to join wholeheartedly with the French in resisting communism. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that, without popular support of the Indochinese people, the French will never achieve a favorable long-range military settlement of the security problem of Indochina." For this reason, it was essential, the JCS said, for U.S. military assistance to be based on "assurances" by the French that they would develop an adequate program of self-government for Indochina, that they would organize national armies "as a matter of urgency," and that meanwhile they would send more forces to Indochina to prevent further

⁶²For the record, it should be noted that the members of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee at the time this thoughtful report was prepared were, from the Army, Maj. Gen. Ray T. Maddocks; from the Navy, Rear Adm. T. H. Robbins, Jr.; and from the Air Force, Maj. Gen. Thomas D. White.

Communist military gains. Finally, the memo stated, France must assure the U.S. that it would "change its political and military concepts in Indochina to:

"i. Eliminate its policy of 'colonialism.'

"ii. Provide proper tutelage to the Associated States.

"iii. Insure that a suitable military command structure, unhampered by political interference, is established to conduct effective and appropriate military operations."

The entry in force of the Chinese into the Korean war during the last part of November, together with continuing advances by Communist forces in Vietnam, created such doubts about U.S. Indochina policy that one leading State Department official suggested that the U.S. Government might be "wrong" in the approach it was taking. John Ohly, Deputy Director of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program, expressed his concern on November 20, 1950, in a long memorandum, "Reappraisal of U.S. Policy with Respect to Indochina."⁶³ Ohly said that the military assistance program planned for Indochina would "seriously affect" such programs in other countries, and that "We have reached a point where the United States because of limitations in resources, can no longer simultaneously pursue all of its objectives in all parts of the world and must realistically face the fact that certain objectives, even though they may be extremely valuable and important ones, may have to be abandoned if others of even greater value and importance are to be attained."

This was Ohly's conclusion:

... the demands on the U.S. for Indochina are increasing almost daily and . . . , sometimes imperceptibly, by one step after another, we are gradually increasing our stake in the outcome of the struggle there. We are, moreover, slowly (and not too slowly) getting ourselves into a position where our responsibilities tend to supplant rather than complement those of the French, and where failures are attributed to us as though we were the primary party at fault and in interest. We may be on the road to being a scapegoat, and we are certainly dangerously close to the point of being so deeply committed that we may find ourselves committed even to direct intervention. These situations, unfortunately, have a way of snowballing.

According to Secretary of State Acheson, the recipient of the memo, Ohly's prediction was a "perceptive warning." "The dangers to which he pointed," Acheson said in his memoirs, "took more than a decade to materialize, but materialize they did."⁶⁴

⁶³The memorandum, edited to a shorter length, is in *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 925-930.

⁶⁴*Present at the Creation*, p. 674.

Ohly's advice was rejected by Livingston T. Merchant, Deputy Assistant Secretary (FE), in a memorandum to Dean Rusk, (Assistant Secretary FE), on January 17, 1951, in which Merchant said, among other things, "... the Joint Chiefs of Staff are the proper arbiters of the military aspects of the program and have in fact resolved it by approving an expanded aid program for Indochina. . . . I see no point in reopening the debate or even in troubling the Secretary about it." Quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 131, who adds: "Merchant's note, in effect, left to the military the essentially political question of whether there should be aid for Indochina and how much it should be."

- There is no available information on Rusk's position, but he probably took Merchant's advice, and may not even have sent Ohly's memo to Acheson. For Rusk's position that military assistance for Indochina was essential, see his memorandum of January 31, 1951, discussed below.

Acheson, however, on the assumption that the "immediate situation appeared to take a turn for the better," said he decided that "having put our hand to the plow, we would not look back." Thus, by the end of the year the U.S. made additional commitments to assist the French and the Associated States. In a token gesture, probably as a matter of political "exchange," the French agreed on December 8, 1950, to establish a Vietnamese national army. This was followed on December 18 by a French request to the U.S. for equipment for the army, which was followed on December 23 by a U.S. bilateral mutual defense assistance agreement with the French and each of the Associated States.

These political developments were viewed in the State Department as representing the "near satisfaction of our political efforts" with the French.⁶⁵ But at that point the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Indochina appeared imminent, and there was considerable doubt that Indochina could be "saved." A CIA intelligence estimate on December 29, 1950, called the French position in Indochina "precarious," and said that unless this position improved substantially, the Viet Minh, even in the absence of a Chinese invasion, could drive the French out of the northern part of Vietnam (Tonkin) in 6 to 9 months.⁶⁶

Congress Provides Additional Aid for Indochina

There was additional congressional action on legislation for Indochina during the period after the Korean invasion. It will be recalled that in May 1950 Congress approved the Foreign Economic Assistance Act authorizing the continuation of economic assistance to the "general area of China," as well as establishing the point 4 program under which the U.S. could provide assistance to Indochina aimed at promoting political stability. Passage of the 1950 amendments to the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, which provided military assistance for Indochina, followed in July, after the Korean invasion.

In the new mutual defense law, most of the provisions of the old law remained in effect, including the section advocating the development of a Pacific pact. The new law authorized \$75 million in military assistance for the "general area of China," but rather than permitting the entire amount to be used by the President at his discretion without vouchers, the new law permitted him to spend up to \$35 million in that fashion. It was also provided, that except for \$7.5 million that would be allocated for additional CIA activity, these expenditures were to be reported to the foreign policy committees and the armed services committees. This change was made at the insistence of various members, led by Senator Knowland, who argued that it was "good public policy" for Congress to know where and for what purpose the money was being spent.⁶⁷

Because of Korea, there was exceptionally strong support for the bill. It passed the Senate unanimously and with only one negative

⁶⁵FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, p. 957.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 959.

⁶⁷See the discussion in an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee, *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. II, pp. 507 ff.

vote in the House. There was perfunctory debate and there were few amendments. The only note of dissatisfaction was sounded in the House, where the sponsors of the Pacific Pact, including Fulton, Javits, and Judd, were critical of the failure of the administration to implement that provision of the 1949 law.⁶⁸

Representative Judd, in particular, was encouraged by the U.S. response to the Korean invasion. In a long and very thoughtful analysis of the situation in Asia, he said that in Asia the doctrine of containing communism finally was being given "a chance to succeed because, for the first time, we are to try it." He and others who had been advocating the use in Asia of techniques employed in Greece were also encouraged that the administration had "at last" decided to employ these techniques in Asian countries faced with Communist insurgencies.

In August 1950, the administration sent to Congress a supplemental request for military assistance, of which \$303 million was to be used for the Philippines and other countries, including Indochina, in the area of Southeast Asia. This, too, was passed almost unanimously and without significant changes or debate, as were all of the appropriations bills providing funds for U.S. operations in Southeast Asia.

Developments in Indochina During 1951 as the U.S. Becomes More Involved

By late 1950, the United States was faced with a growing number of foreign policy problems in addition to the setbacks suffered in the Korean war. Communist insurgencies were threatening established governments in the Philippines, Burma, Malaya and Indonesia, and Iran was on the verge of political changes that it was feared could be successfully exploited by the Communists. While attempting to rearm as quickly as possible in order to prevent or block expansionist moves by the Russians or the Chinese, U.S. policymakers were increasingly concerned about changes in the balance of power which might result from Communist gains in some of these colonial or former colonial territories, especially in Southeast Asia. There continued to be particular concern about Indochina, where there was a brief improvement in the French position in Indochina during the first half of 1951 when French Union forces, under the leadership of General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny (who had been appointed in December 1950 as both military commander and political high commissioner), succeeded in preventing further advances by the Communists.⁶⁹ But this was only temporary, and French forces were soon on the defensive again. (De Lattre, who died of cancer in January 1952, was replaced late in 1951 by Gen. Raoul Salan, who was replaced in May 1953 by Gen. Henri-Eugène Navarre.)

During 1951 the French also sought to improve their position in Washington, culminating in General de Lattre's personal visit in

⁶⁸See U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *To Amend the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949*, Public Hearings, 81st Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950), pp. 17-20, and CR, vol. 96, p. 10545.

⁶⁹According to Admiral Radford, U.S. Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) at the time, these successes "were made possible by American military assistance." *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 342.

September to appeal for greater assistance. The reaction of the U.S. was to agree to increased military and economic aid, but to resist French and British suggestions for a joint command in the area, as well as French requests for direct budgetary support to help pay for the cost of the war.

As Adm. Arthur W. Radford observed, the French, as well as the British, "wanted the United States to be more deeply committed to the defense of the area than our policies would allow."⁷⁰ U.S. policymakers were greatly concerned about the possibility that the Communists were preparing to strike in other parts of the world, especially in Europe, and of the need to maintain the military strength necessary to meet such an attack. In addition, of course, the military situation in Korea, although somewhat more favorable by the end of January 1951, required such a major commitment by the United States that a stronger U.S. military role in Indochina of the kind that had been considered in September-October 1950 was now precluded. "... Chinese intervention in Korea," as Radford said, "had placed such heavy demands on American fighting strength that the JCS could visualize no practical means of assisting Indochina other than increasing the flow of supplies in the event of emergency."

The French and British also wanted to hold a tripartite military staff conference in the spring of 1951, pursuant to Secretary Acheson's suggestion at the September 1950 Foreign Ministers meeting, but the U.S. balked. "Both the British and the French," Radford commented, "had reason to think that we were trying to avoid really serious discussion, which was true."⁷¹

In a memorandum on January 10, 1951, the JCS recommended against holding the talks, but said they recognized that political considerations might be overriding.⁷² They made this recommendation based on the following conclusions:

a. The United States should not permit its military forces to become engaged in French Indochina at this time, and

b. In the event of a communist invasion of Indochina, the United States should under current circumstances limit its support of the French there to an acceleration and expansion of the present military assistance program, together with taking other appropriate action to deny Indochina to communism, short of the actual employment of military forces.

The three-power military staff conference was held in Singapore in May 1951, but the United States participated reluctantly.

Although the U.S. was not in a position to play a more active military role in Indochina, American political and security interests remained constant. U.S. officials still considered Indochina vital to the security of Southeast Asia, and continued to take the position that the fall of Indochina would result in Communist control of all of Southeast Asia, which in turn would have very serious consequences for the United States and its allies. A memorandum

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

⁷²*FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, p. 347. According to Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 142, "Their [JCS] unhappy experience with the Southeast Asia Command in World War II and their desire to preserve their freedom of action in any future large-scale conflict were probably responsible for the Chief's lack of enthusiasm for . . . formal tripartite defense arrangements for Asia."

on January 31, 1951, from Assistant Secretary of State Rusk, for example, declared that military assistance for Indochina was essential because "It is generally acknowledged that if Indochina were to fall under control of the Communists, Burma and Thailand would follow suit almost immediately. Thereafter, it would be difficult, if not impossible for Indonesia, India and the others to remain outside the Soviet-dominated Asian bloc. Therefore, the State Department's policy in Indochina takes on particular importance for, in a sense, it is the keystone of our policy in the rest of Southeast Asia. . . . In sum, to neglect to pursue our present course to the utmost of our ability would be disastrous to our interests in Indochina, and, consequently, in the rest of Southeast Asia."⁷³

It is interesting to note a portion of General Eisenhower's entry in his private diary for March 17, 1951 (Eisenhower was then NATO Supreme Commander), in which he expressed support for the "domino theory" and for defending Indochina, but questioned whether there could be a military "victory" in that area:⁷⁴

General de Lattre is to be here in a few minutes (at 8:45 A.M.) to see me reference his request for reinforcement for Indochina: the French have a knotty problem on that one—the campaign out there is a draining sore in their side. Yet if they quit and Indochina falls to Commies, it is easily possible that the entire Southeast Asia and Indonesia will go, soon to be followed by India. That prospect makes the whole problem one of interest to us all. I'd favor reinforcement to get the thing over at once; but I'm convinced that no military victory is possible in that kind of theater. Even if Indochina were completely cleared of Communists, right across the border is China with inexhaustible manpower.

The approval on May 17, 1951, of NSC 48/5, an updated version of the original 48/2,⁷⁵ reflected the consensus among policymakers in Washington that the U.S., while continuing to maintain vital political interests in Indochina, and while committed to preventing the Communists from controlling Southeast Asia, was not in a position militarily to prevent this from happening if the Chinese were to invade the area. As the accompanying NSC staff study stated, ". . . in the event of overt Chinese aggression, it is not now in the over-all security interests of the United States to commit any United States armed forces to the defense of the mainland states of Southeast Asia. Therefore, the United States cannot guarantee the denial of Southeast Asia to communism."⁷⁶

Barred from playing a more active military role, the United States continued playing its political role. The "political picture" in Vietnam, however, was "quite gloomy" according to the ranking U.S. representative in Indochina, Minister Donald R. Heath. In a meeting in Washington of the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee on February 7, 1951, Heath said that although the general outlook in Indochina was "much brighter, . . . the situation needed a Churchill at this juncture and that Bao Dai, while far from being

⁷³FRUS, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 20–22.

⁷⁴Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 190.

⁷⁵See the previous chapter for 48/2, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," approved December 30, 1949.

⁷⁶FRUS, 1951, vol. VI, p. 59. For the text of 48/5 see pp. 34–39.

idle, was certainly no Churchill."⁷⁷ In a cable on February 24, Heath declared: "Fact is that Ho Chi Minh is the only Viet who enjoys any measure of national prestige." He added: "Far after him would come Ngo Dinh Diem, the Catholic leader now in US. In talk in Paris [Léon] Pignon told me that he had come to conclusion only solution would be for Bao Dai to entrust formation of government to Diem. . . ."⁷⁸

Ngo Dinh Diem was an obscure figure to the Americans, except for the few who knew Vietnam, but under U. S. sponsorship he was to play the leading political role in South Vietnam from 1954 until his assassination in 1963. He became the U.S. Government's choice for President of South Vietnam in 1954, and was put in office by the U.S. over the opposition of the French. He was deposed and killed in 1963 by Vietnamese military officers, after the United States decided he had to be replaced. Many leading U.S. Government officials of the 1960s still believe that, at best, the deposing of Diem was the most grievous political mistake of the entire war, and that, at worst, it foredoomed subsequent U.S. efforts to defend that country.

Diem had first appeared on the American scene in the summer of 1950 when he and his brother, Monsignor Ngo Dinh Thuc, Catholic Bishop of Vinh Long, arrived in the United States for a visit. They were preceded by a cable to Washington on June 23, 1950 from Edmund A. Gullion, U.S. Consul General in Saigon, reporting that they were both nationalists and notorious political "fence sitters." Gullion summarized a discussion he had with the Bishop about the situation in Vietnam:⁷⁹

The Bishop said he felt pessimistic. He believes things can go on indefinitely as at present, with each side shooting at the other with no solution.

"What support does Prime Minister [Tran Van] Huu's government have?" queried the Bishop. "Huu relies on His Majesty," said Monsignor in reply to his own question. "And what support does His Majesty have? Bao Dai relies on French bayonets." The Bishop declared there was no public opinion behind this government. He said the French should, in his opinion, give Viet-Nam its independence. The country has very little independence now. Bao Dai needs to have an ideal for which to fight.

The Bishop added that "he deplored that American aid would be regarded by his people merely as help to the French Colonialists. Mr. Gullion emphasized in reply that the aid would really reach and benefit the people. The Bishop countered that it would still be regarded as Colonialist. In his opinion, the United States should have applied pressure to alter French political aims."

Gullion also noted that the Bishop said he wanted to acquaint himself with America, and that he had met Cardinal Spellman (Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York) when the

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 385. Léon Pignon was French High Commissioner in Indochina prior to de Lattre's appointment in late 1950.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 830-831.

Cardinal was passing through Saigon. This connection was to become a key to Diem's future U.S. support.

In addition to his brother's having met Cardinal Spellman, Diem, while visiting Japan, had met a young American college faculty member, Wesley R. Fishel, (at the time of their meeting Fishel worked for or with the CIA), and it was Fishel who is said to have persuaded him to come to the United States. Moreover, the trip apparently was sponsored by Fishel's university, Michigan State, a connection that also became significant.

After arriving in the United States, Diem and his brother met at the State Department on September 21, 1950, with William S. B. Lacy, Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs. Lacy then cabled a report to the U.S. legation in Saigon in which he said that the two men had continued to decry French domination of their country.⁸⁰ "Bishop," Lacy said, "made clear that he felt more strongly about presence Fr than he did Viet Commies," and that under the existing circumstances his brother would be destroyed in a few months if he agreed to become Premier under Bao Dai. (Bao Dai had been attempting to get Diem to take this or some other post in the government.) This was Lacy's conclusion about Ngo Dinh Diem:

Ngo fitted more into mould of present-day Vietnamese politician, steeped in oriental intrigue and concerned equally if not more, we suspect, with furthering his own personal ambitions than solving complex problems facing his country today. Like other prominent Vietnamese . . . Diem is ever prepared to deliver endless dissertations on the errors of the past and the hopelessness of the present but is either incapable or unwilling offer any constructive solution to current dilemma other than vague and defamatory refs to Fr and implications that only US can solve problem, thru him to be sure. Dept officers reiterated view that Vietnam's problems wld be solved only by Vietnamese, that West cld help, but that burden of solution rests with Viets.

Early in 1951, Diem, who had taken up residence at a Catholic Maryknoll seminary in New Jersey, met again with State Department officials. Washington cabled Saigon a brief report on the meeting, saying that Diem had sent word to Bao Dai that "in the face of the crisis facing his country at present he wld be willing to become PriMin [Prime Minister] and form a new govt providing that Bao Dai gave more auth to the Fed Govt and ceased bypassing it in favor of 'governing thru the three provincial govs.'" Diem "spoke with much more balance than heretofore," the cable added. He was more aware of the Chinese threat, and less hostile to the French.⁸¹

Gullion cabled back from Saigon that "Ngo Dinh Diem's willingness to serve is interesting and encouraging sign of evolution of attitude of sectarian fence sitters." Catholic participation in the government would be helpful, he said, but "they should not lead it at this stage." If, he added, in a comment suggestive of future problems, Bao Dai "were to be dumped or shunted out of the way with

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 884-886

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 348

French cooperation and a show of American involvement, the result might be a boomerang and we would look like the puppeteers we are alleged to be."⁸²

Despite his apparent awareness, in this instance, of the problems that could result from U.S. political intervention in Indochina, and despite his initial opposition to "rocking the boat" when he was assigned to Vietnam in the summer of 1950, Gullion was becoming an exponent of greater intervention. Together with his principal ally, Robert Blum, a CIA agent who was head of the U.S. foreign aid mission in Indochina, he decided that in order to satisfy indigenous demands for political independence, and thus undercut support for the Communists, the U.S. should apply greater pressure on the French while also supporting the Indochinese directly. (Gullion also soon gained an ally in the U.S. Senate in the person of John F. Kennedy.) It was this emphasis on direct U.S. assistance that earned Blum the title of the "most dangerous man in Indochina," conferred by de Lattre, but the honor should have been shared by Gullion, and reportedly by many others in the U.S. legation in Saigon.⁸³

U.S. Minister Heath was known to be less of an interventionist than Gullion or Blum, which is certainly attributable in part to the fact that he was the person primarily responsible for dealing with the French and the Vietnamese officials. But Heath himself also felt that the U.S. should play a more active political role in Indochina. Although he had few good things to say about Vietnamese Government officials, ("The Chief of State has yet to exhibit sustained energy or the know-how of leadership, its cabinet lacks stature, color, and broad representativeness; its administrators are generally inexperienced and frequently venal"), he recommended that the U.S. "sell" Bao Dai to the public of Vietnam. "Viets must be coached by American technicians," he said, "in giving Viet government 'new look'; uniforms, stamps, seals, government forms, street signs, money, etc. As long as Bao Dai is our candidate he must be ingeniously 'sold'—an American advisor should be stationed with him."⁸⁴

In his memoirs Admiral Radford described this period as one in which "our responsibilities tended to supplant rather than complement those of the French. We could become a scapegoat for the French and be seduced into direct intervention."⁸⁵

Thus, during 1951 the United States became increasingly involved in the internal affairs of Indochina, especially Vietnam. This was done with the best of intentions. The reasoning was that if the U.S. became too closely associated with the French it would be rejected by the Vietnamese as being colonialist. This was ex-

⁸²*Ibid.*, pp. 359-361.

⁸³These observations are based on Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 65 ff. Of interest is Shaplen's novel, *A Forest of Tigers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), on the people and events of the period. The principal French official in the novel, M. Remy, like the real French officials of the time, thought the Americans were capable of considerable mischief: "The Americans, wide-eyed, harping on the shibboleths of their own distant revolution, were at least as difficult if not as implacable an enemy as the Communists themselves. In fact, Remy had concluded, since one had to deal on a daily bureaucratic level with the Americans, they presented a far more serious problem. It became exacerbated when their peculiar romantic mixture of blandishment and infantile enthusiasm was regarded as a kind of clarion call." *A Forest of Tigers*, p. 336.

⁸⁴*FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 332-338.

⁸⁵*From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 342.