slowly and grudgingly to the Vietnamese to generate any enthusiasm among Vietnamese nationalists. I didn't see how Navarre was going to win, unless he made radical changes to get the Vietnamese nationalists much more deeply involved."[65]

It is not known what specific recommendations were made by Lansdale after the conclusion of the trip, but it is probably not mere coincidence that, shortly thereafter, Ngo Dinh Nhu, brother of Ngo Dinh Diem, organized the Movement of National Union for Independence and Peace, which led to an unofficial Congress of National Union and Peace on September 6, 1953, in Saigon (Cholon). This group demanded unconditional independence for Vietnam, freedom of the press and of association, an end to corruption, reforms of the army and the Bao Dai regime and establishment of a national assembly.[66]

Bao Dai's official National Congress met from October 15–17, and despite efforts to keep it under control, including hand-picking the delegates (Ngo Dinh Nhu refused to participate), it got out of hand, and began taking positions similar to those of the unofficial congress in September.

In a cable to Paris, the State Department indicated its strong disapproval of the tone of the speeches at the National Congress—the "constitutional verbiage and empty demagoguery" of "political dreamers and doctrinaires."[67]

To make matters worse, the Congress adopted a resolution that stood officials in Paris and Washington on their ears:[68]

> The National Congress, considering that:
>
> In this historic circumstance, all free and independent countries have the tendency to cooperate closely with each other, in order to maintain their independence and liberty mutually and to promote world peace;
>
> Considering that alliance between people can be durable and useful only if the two countries can cooperate on an entirely free and equal basis and respect rights of each other;
>
> Considering that French Union, built on French Constitution of 1946, was quite contrary to sovereignty of an independent nation;
>
> Considering the first right of a people is its own interest;
>
> Decides:
>
> 1. Not to join French Union;
>
> 2. After having recovered all rights still held by France and after clarification of matters concerning old institute of emission, which is Bank of Indochina, Vietnam will sign with France treaties of alliance on an equal basis, according to demands of France and Vietnam during any given

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[65] Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 111.

[66] Out of that September meeting, Ngo Dinh Nhu and five others formed a political party, according to Lansdale, ". . . to organize urban laborers and rural farmers in a joint nationalist effort with the *intelligentsia* throughout the country, forming neighborhood, village, and hamlet chapters." *Ibid.*, p. 340. That was the genesis of what became known as the Can Lao, led by Ngo Dinh Nhu, which became a very potent force during Diem's Presidency.

[67] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 839. During the time of the unofficial congress in September 1953 there is an intriguingly conspicuous gap in the communications between Saigon and Washington contained in *FRUS*. One cannot help but wonder what the archives of the CIA might contain.

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 826–827.

period and under circumstances which will be clearly determined;

3. All negotiations, all recommendations, all decisions of any international assemblies regarding Vietnam must be decided by Vietnamese people;

4. All treaties above-mentioned must be ratified by General Assembly of Vietnam, constituted by universal suffrage, in order for them to go into force.

In a cable to Washington, which was probably discounted to some extent by the State Department as reflecting the "localitis" of the Ambassador (i.e., lack of detachment from the local situation), Ambassador Heath said, "it seems probable that Congress was cleverly sabotaged by pro-Viet Minh stooges in its midst."[69] (A few days later Heath amended his statement, saying that "motion appears rather the product of emotional, irresponsible nationalism.")[70] He reported that the resolution had been toned down (the only change was to add the words "in its present form" to the first of the four points) after pressure from Bao Dai's representatives, who had been pressured by the French and Americans, but that it was still an irresponsible and harmful action:

> It is a matter of extraordinary difficulty to convey degree of naiveté and childlike belief that no matter what defamatory language they use, the Vietnamese will still be safeguarded from lethal Communist enemy by France and U.S.
>
> Objectives of our diplomacy at this critical juncture should, in our belief, be directed in Vietnam to bringing these people to sober realization of where they stand, dancing on brink of destruction; and in France to enlist those capacities of clear-sightedness and of true French greatness as world power to overlook this present irritant and to keep the national sights on the main issues at stake.

In Paris, the news of the passage of the resolution denouncing the French Union was received incredulously, but this reaction was tempered by the modification that was subsequently adopted, as well as friendly remarks in another resolution authorizing Bao Dai to select the representative to negotiate with the French.[71]

During this period, Senate Majority Leader Knowland, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Mike Mansfield, also a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, played a direct role in helping to convey to Indochinese leaders, especially in Cambodia, the opposition of the U.S. Government to any move toward neutralism or negotiations with the Communists.

While Knowland was in Indochina for four days in the middle of September 1953, the Royal Government of Cambodia issued a statement demanding that Viet Minh forces either submit to the new national government or leave the country.[72] It also declared, "We have no reason to take sides against communism as long as it does not come to impose itself by force upon our people." In response, Heath talked to the French, and then cabled Washington suggest-

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 829.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 836.
[71] See *ibid.*, pp. 828 ff., *passim* for French and American actions and reactions, as well as additional details on the National Congress. See also Hammer, pp. 304–307.
[72] FRUS, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 798.

ing that he and Senator Knowland, who were scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Penn Nouth, tell the Prime Minister that ". . . his government cannot look to US to replace French in realm of military and economic aid if he persists in policy outlined in public statement. . . ."[73] Washington agreed, and at the meeting both Heath and Knowland stressed the need for Cambodia to cooperate with the other Associated States in combatting the Communists. Knowland lectured the Prime Minister on the need for the three States to act together, and threatened action by the U.S. Congress to cut off aid to any State that did not cooperate.

In reporting on the meeting, Heath told Washington, (with a copy of the cable to Knowland), that Knowland's comments "were impressively delivered and very useful. . . ."[74] In truth, the effect of Knowland's heavy-handed role, as the U.S. Chargé in Cambodia cabled a few days later, was to "irritate further" both the Prime Minister and the King, who issued a joint statement taking issue with the threatened cut-off of U.S. aid in which they asked ". . . whether there is justice on earth and whether it is normal that small countries be condemned to die because they refuse to buy their lives at a shameful price of abdication as a free people."[75]

Later in September, Senator Mansfield visited Indochina for eight days, during which he also met with the Cambodian Prime Minister and, among other things, stressed the need for Cambodia to join "with all free nations in common struggle against international communism." He was reportedly less abrasive than Knowland had been, but the Cambodians reiterated their position.[76]

While in Paris en route to the U.S., Mansfield met with several French leaders, and took the position that the French would be justified in a "get tough" policy toward Cambodia.[77]

Several other congressional delegations visited Indochina during the fall of 1953, an indication of the growing attention the area was receiving in Congress.[78] There were printed reports from three of these congressional delegations, those of Senators Mansfield and Smith, and a group from the Foreign Affairs Committee. All three reports strongly supported the position of the executive branch. Mansfield said, ". . . the issue for us is not Indochina alone. Nor is it just Asia. The issue in this war so many people would like to forget is the continued freedom of the non-Communist world, the containment of Communist aggression, and the welfare and security of our country." "Just as the conflict in Korea is being fought in part to avoid war on our own frontier in the future, so too is the war in Indochina."

Mansfield was optimistic. He said that while it was "too early to evaluate the effectiveness" of the Navarre plan, "the general consensus is that it has already provided a lift to morale and may pro-

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[73] *Ibid.*, pp. 799–800.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 806.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 808.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 810.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 825.
[78] In addition to Knowland and Mansfield there were visits by Senator H. Alexander Smith (R/N.J.), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, accompanied by Francis O. Wilcox, chief of staff of the committee; Senator Edward J. Thye (R/Minn.), a member of the Appropriations Committee; and four members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Representatives Judd, Marguerite Stitt Church (R/Ill.), Zablocki and E. Ross Adair (R/Ind.). For relevant State Department cables see *ibid.*, pp. 876–878, 892–893, 898–900.

vide in time the striking edge necessary to end the long stalemate." If progress continues to be made, he added, in two or three years the "Communist threat in southeast Asia can be dissolved." Only an invasion by China could prevent this from happening, he said. A negotiated settlement would be possible, but "A truce in Indochina, however, as anywhere else in dealing with the Communists, depends on strength, not weakness."

While strongly supporting U.S. assistance, however, Mansfield said that this ". . . should not involve the commitment of combat forces. Sacrifices for the defense of freedom must be equitably shared and we have borne our full burden in blood in Korea."[79]

On January 19, 1954, Mansfield gave an oral report on his trip in an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee, in which he took an even stronger position on the importance of defending Indochina than he took in the published report.[80] "The importance of Indochina, as I see it," he said, "cannot be overstressed. It is perhaps the most important area in the world today . . . if Indochina itself falls, that means all of Southeast Asia, and perhaps all of Asia will follow suit, and then the cost will be tremendous. The loss of China will be as nothing compared to the loss of the rest of Asia, and if Indochina falls, that is what will happen." Mansfield added, however, that although maximum aid should be given to the French, the U.S. should not "go to the extreme of sending in American combat forces." If the war was going to be won, he said, it was going to be won by the Indochinese themselves.

Senator H. Alexander Smith, then chairman of the Subcommittee on the Far East of the Foreign Relations Committee, was also optimistic about the situation in Indochina, an area which he, too, considered vital.[81] He believed the Communists could be checked, but he stressed the need "for building a greater will to fight among the people of Vietnam." In order for this to take place, ". . . the people of Vietnam (1) must understand more clearly than they do the nature of the Communist threat that surrounds them; and (2) they must be assured of their independence. The problem at this stage is more a psychological one than a material one."

Smith strongly supported the continuation of U.S. aid programs, but added, "We must not seek to dominate or dictate. We must not try to rebuild these countries in the image of America." He said he favored a regional security pact under the leadership of nations of the area. He also approved of the administration's efforts to warn the Chinese against intervention in Indochina, and said, ". . . the time has come when our Government should declare that we will react to aggression wherever it occurs in the world, taking whatever action our national interests require."

The House Foreign Affairs Committee delegation also supported the administration's position that, as the group's report stated, ". . . a free Asia is vital to the security of the free world, and,

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[79] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Indochina*, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield on a Study Mission to the Associated States of Indochina, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Committee Print, October 27, 1953, 83d Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1953).

[80] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 47 ff.

[81] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Far East and South Asia*, Report of Senator H. Alexander Smith on a Study Mission to the Far East, Committee Print, January 25, 1954, 83d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954).

therefore, to the security of the United States." Moreover, in Indochina, although "at best a touch-and-go proposition," it was essential to continue the struggle against the Communists. "For the free world to seek a truce with the Communists in Indochina is to engage in appeasement equivalent to an Indochinese 'Munich.'"

The House study mission agreed, however, that "nationalism" was the only cause that could rally the people of the area against the Communists, and that independence, therefore, was essential: "The apathy of the local population to the menace of Vietminh communism disguised as nationalism is the most discouraging aspect of the situation. That can only be overcome through the grant of complete independence to each of the Associated States. Only for such a cause as their own freedom will people make the heroic effort necessary to win this kind of struggle."[82]

Another Reevaluation of U.S. Policy in Indochina

Toward the end of 1953, as it became apparent, despite an optimistic report by General O'Daniel when he returned to Indochina for a review of the Navarre plan, that there was little progress in the war, the U.S. began reevaluating the situation in Indochina.[83]

The beginning step in this review was NSC 162/2, "Basic National Security Policy," approved by the President on October 30, 1953.[84] NSC 162/2 was the Eisenhower administration's charter for what was called the "New Look" in national security policy. Lampooned at the time as a "bigger bang for the buck," this policy called for meeting the "Soviet threat" without "seriously weakening the U.S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions." One basic aspect of the "New Look" was increased reliance on nuclear weapons, which, the document stated, would be considered "as available as other munitions" in the event of hostilities.[85]

In the case of Indochina, NSC 162/2 said that it was "of such strategic importance" that an attack on it "probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressors."

The Army, in particular, continued to be concerned, however, about the gap between policy rhetoric and actual plans and capabilities for possible U.S. military action in Indochina. If the area was as important to defend as had been asserted by NSC 162/2, it

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[82]H. Rept. 83-2025, July 2, 1954. An earlier "committee print" of the same report was issued in February.

[83]For O'Daniel's report see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 879-881. See also pp. 903-913 for a long report on the trip by Philip Bonsal, Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs in FE, who accompanied O'Daniel. Bonsal found less political support for the war than "desirable," but generally approved of Navarre's progress, and, in view of the difficulties involved in direct U.S. intervention, favored increased U.S. aid to French Union forces.

O'Daniel's optimism was not shared by other top U.S. military officials, as Spector explains in *Advice and Support*, pp. 180-181, and according to Spector's report on an interview he had in 1975 with O'Daniel, "Only later would O'Daniel conclude that his assessment was overoptimistic and that he had been misled by an impressive show of energy and activity probably staged for his benefit."

[84]*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 412-429.

[85]In NSC 162/2 the Eisenhower administration also affirmed its commitment to the "containment" policy of the Truman administration, although it debated substituting the word "resistance" in an effort "to cloak the fact that the administration had decided against changing policy." See Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "The Origins of Massive Retaliation," *Political Science Quarterly*, 96 (Spring 1981), p. 44.

was essential, the Army maintained, to consider whether it could be defended without ground forces. If ground forces were required, the question of their availability had to be faced. Thus, on December 8, 1953, the Army pointed out to the Planning Board of the NSC that the U.S. did not have enough troops in being to commit divisional forces to Indochina and still meet its responsibilities in Europe and the Far East. It suggested, therefore, that there should be a reevaluation of the position on Indochina taken in NSC 162/2 which would focus on "the importance of Indochina and Southeast Asia in relation to the possible cost of saving it."[86]

Toward the end of 1953, the Army's Plans Division, G-3, did two studies of the question of using U.S. forces to replace the French, in which it came to these conclusions:[87]

> . . . should the French decide to withdraw their forces from Indochina, it would take seven U.S. Army divisions plus a Marine division [a total of approximately 375,000 men, including support personnel] to replace them. . . . [and] would entail an extension within the U.S. Army of all terms of service by at least one year, a recall of individual reserve officers and technicians, an increase in the size of monthly draft calls, and a net increase of 500,000 in the size of the Army.
>
> The planners estimated that U.S. forces could establish a secure base in the Red River Delta region in a few months, but cautioned that successful military operations alone would not destroy the Viet Minh political organization. To accomplish this goal five to eight years of effective political and psychological measures like those being carried out by the British in Malaya would be required.

Meanwhile, the intelligence community was studying the Indochina situation, including the consequences of committing U.S. forces to the defense of the area. In a "Special Estimate" on November 16, 1953 (beginning in 1953 these were called Special National Intelligence Estimates—SNIEs) on "Probable Consequences in Non-Communist Asia of Certain Possible Developments in Indochina Before Mid-1954," the conclusion was:[88]

> Over the long run, reactions in non-Communist Asia to US intervention in force in Indochina would be largely determined by the success of the intervention. If the Viet Minh were quickly eliminated or decisively defeated without leading to a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina, and if military victory were followed by the emergence of truly independent and effective governments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, non-Communist Asian leaders would accept the new situation and would welcome the setback of Communist expansion in Asia. On the other hand, a protracted stalemate in Indochina would almost certainly reduce support for the US throughout Asia.

This intelligence estimate did not specifically comment on the possible effects of U.S. intervention in preventing Communist control of Southeast Asia, although the representative of the Joint

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[86]Memorandum from Col George W. Coolidge, Acting Chief, Plans Division, to Defense Member, NSC Planning Board, Dec 8, 1953, quoted in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol I, p 89

[87]Spector, *Advice and Support*, p 195

[88]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p 874

Chiefs had suggested adding this statement: "U.S. intervention in force in Indochina would effectively stop further Communist advance in Southeast Asia, reduce their capabilities in Indonesia, and provide a bulwark to the Philippines and Australia; this would assure the availability of rice to the non-Communist rice-deficient nations and guarantee to the West the continuing availability of the vital strategic raw materials of Southeast Asia and its contiguous areas."[89]

A National Intelligence Estimate on December 1, 1953, concluded, ". . . the implementation of the Laniel-Navarre Plan will probably be the last major French offensive effort in Indochina. We believe that even if the Laniel-Navarre Plan is successful, the French do not expect to achieve a complete military victory in Indochina. They probably aim at improving their position sufficiently to negotiate a settlement which would eliminate the drain of the Indochina War on France, while maintaining non-Communist governments in the Associated States and preserving a position for France in the Far East." The estimate also concluded that France favored an international conference on Indochina, and that if necessary to negotiate an end to the war, ". . . France would press the US to consent to French acceptance of terms which the US would regard as weakening the Western position in Indochina and thus in Southeast Asia as a whole."

On December 18, 1953, there was another special estimate, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US Courses of Action in Indochina Through 1954," which discussed the probable reactions of the Communists to the commitment of U.S. military forces to Indochina during 1954, either on a scale necessary to defeat the Viet Minh, or on a scale necessary to check the Viet Minh until they could be defeated by "US-developed Vietnamese forces." This estimate concluded that if U.S. forces were committed to Indochina the Chinese Communists probably would not immediately intervene with their own forces:[90]

> In the initial stages of an actual US military commitment, the Communists might not feel compelled to intervene openly in force immediately. They would recognize the difficulties which the US forces would face in operating in the Indochina climate and terrain. They would also realize that the xenophobia of the indigenous population of Indochina might be effectively exploited to the disadvantage of US forces by Communist propaganda; the Chinese Communists would therefore prefer that the US rather than themselves be confronted with this antiforeign attitude. They might estimate that, with increased aid from Communist China, the Viet Minh forces, by employing harrassing and infiltrating tactics and avoiding major engagements, could make any US advance at the least slow and difficult. It is probable, therefore, that the Chinese Communists would initially follow a cautious military policy while they assessed the scale, nature, and probable success of the US action. . . . Even at this early stage, however, the Chinese Communists would probably take strong action short of

[89] *Ibid*. p 872 fn
[90] *Ibid*. p 926

open intervention in an effort to prevent the US from destroying the Viet Minh armed forces.

On December 23, 1953, the NSC heard a report from Vice President Nixon, who had just returned from a trip to Indochina. Although he began by saying, "About Indochina we must talk optimistically; we have put good money in, and we must stick by it," Nixon added that he would be emphasizing the pessimistic aspects, and he did. The Navarre plan, he said, was a "tremendous improvement," but the training of Indochinese soldiers was "not going well," there were "no real leaders in Vietnam," and there was continuing nationalist resistance to the role of the French. He concluded his presentation by stating that while supporting the French, the U.S. should oppose negotiations. ". . . I am convinced," he said, "that negotiation at the present time would be disastrous."[91]

As 1953 ended, French forces were in position at a northern base soon to achieve international prominence—Dien Bien Phu, where they hoped to force a showdown with the Viet Minh that would result in a costly defeat for the Communists and turn the tide of the war.[92]

NSC 5405 and the Continuing Debate Over the U.S. Commitment to Defend Indochina

During early January 1954, the NSC endeavored to agree on an interpretation of the U.S. commitment to Indochina that would respond to the questions raised by the Army and establish new guidelines for U.S. policy. The result was NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," which was approved by the President on January 16, 1954.[93]

The NSC Planning Board's draft of NSC 5405 (then numbered NSC 177), was first circulated to members of the Council on December 31, 1953, together with the draft of a "Special Annex" based on a report prepared on January 5, 1953, by the JCS' Joint Strategic and Logistics Plans Committees on the question of U.S. action in the event of a French withdrawal.[94] Two contingencies were considered in the Special Annex: (1) French agreement to settle the war on terms unacceptable to the U.S. in the absence of an offer of U.S. military participation, and (2) refusal by the French to continue the war even with U.S. participation. The paper posed two alternatives for the U.S. in both of these cases—either not to commit U.S. forces and to suffer the consequences, or to commit such forces to supplement or replace the French.

In their report to the JCS, the Joint Strategic and Logistics Plans Committee recommended that, if necessary, the U.S. should send its own forces to Indochina, as well as providing assistance to those of the Associated States.

Vice Adm. Arthur C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in the Defense Department's International Security Affairs Division, took the opposite position. In a memorandum

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[91] *Ibid*., pp. 930-931
[92] See *ibid*., pp. 914, 917, 937
[93] For the text see *ibid*., pp. 971-976
[94] For the text of the Special Annex see *ibid*., pp. 1183-1186

on January 5, 1954 to Gen. Charles H. "Tick" Bonesteel III, the military liaison officer on the NSC staff, he said:[95]

> Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement—such as "Naval and Air units only." One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly. . . . If it is determined *desirable* to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed.

At its meeting on January 6, the JCS approved the recommendations of its committees, including the proposed use of U.S. forces. On January 7, however, at a meeting of the Armed Forces Policy Council, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger Kyes "vigorously attacked the idea of participation in the Indochina War. Although Kyes ostensibly objected to inaccuracies in the logistical considerations in the annex, his real concern was with the effect of intervention on the defense budget. The year 1954 was to inaugurate the Eisenhower administration's New Look in defense policy, and a major military commitment in Vietnam would almost certainly necessitate a sizeable increase in the armed forces and in defense production and send the defense budget skyrocketing."[96]

Kyes asked the White House to have the Special Annex withdrawn, and it was announced at the NSC meeting on January 8 that this was to be done. From the memorandum of the discussion at that meeting it was obvious that, in addition to budgetary concerns, the substance of the Special Annex was so controversial, and the questions it discussed so sensitive, that it was prudent not to have it in circulation. As the memorandum noted, "The contingencies referred to in the Special Annex would henceforth be discussed only orally, and all copies of the Annex would be recalled for destruction."[97]

The reaction of the State Department to the Special Annex is not entirely clear, but it is known that FE, while expressing reservations about committing U.S. troops, was also concerned about the "loss" of Southeast Asia resulting from the combination of French withdrawal and U.S. refusal to commit troops. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson, sent Dulles a memo on January 7, 1954, in which he suggested points that could be made when the NSC met the next day.[98] Point (a) recommended

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[95] *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 89 (emphasis in original) Bonesteel's position was Assistant for National Security Council Affairs in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

[96] Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 197

[97] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 948

[98] *Ibid*., pp. 944–945

making "every effort" to support the Navarre plan. These additional points were made:

> (b) Any commitment of US forces in Indochina may lead to the eventual necessity for making progressively larger commitments.
>
> (c) Such commitment would require drastic revisions upward in US budgetary, mobilization and manpower plans and appropriations, since existing plans and appropriations probably preclude the engagement of US forces in operations of the Indochina type.
>
> (d) Public opinion in the US is not now ready for a decision to send US troops to Indochina and in all probability will not support such a decision unless convinced that such action is necessary to save Southeast Asia from Communist domination.
>
> (e) Withdrawal of the French forces plus refusal to commit US forces would weaken the free-world position throughout Asia and probably influence the neutralist nations toward the Communist bloc.

Dulles, meanwhile, had received potentially important advice on the Indochina situation from another source, Senator Walter George, the powerful ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, who told Dulles on January 4 that "He was greatly worried about that situation. He hopes that no effort will be made to get Congress' consent to sending in U.S. troops." Dulles' memorandum of the conversation then adds this comment: "We talked about possible sea and air activity, to which he did not seem seriously to object."[99] Dulles probably talked privately with other Members of Congress about the situation, but, like Acheson, he declined to discuss with the Foreign Relations Committee the alternatives being considered by the executive branch, even when asked in an executive session what the U.S. planned to do if the French withdrew. This question was raised by Senator H. Alexander Smith during a meeting of the committee with Dulles on January 7, 1954, for a review of the world situation, and Dulles replied that the NSC was discussing that matter the following day, but that he was "not in a position to give you an answer on it here."[100]

In an executive session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on January 19, 1954, the question of sending U.S. troops to Indochina was also raised:[101]

> Mr. [Henderson] Lanham [D/Ga.]. I am wondering just how firm our policy in Asia is. Supposing Indochina should be invaded by the Chinese Communists. Are we ready to go to war with China, or are we simply going to slap them on the wrist with a blockade or something of that sort? Have we really made up our minds that we are going to use all the force that is necessary to save Asia? As I understand it, Indochina is certainly the key to Southeast Asia. Have we made up our minds to fight, or are we just going to run a colossal bluff, or do we really mean to back it up?

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[99] *Ibid.*, pp. 939-940.
[100] *SFRC His. Ser.* vol. VI, p 21.
[101] *HFAC His. Ser.* vol. XV, pp. 423-426.

Secretary Dulles. Well, the Executive has a very clear view on this thing. There are some things which will require the cooperation of you ladies and gentlemen down here. You ask whether we are going to go to war. We have in mind the Constitution, which says only the Congress can declare war.

Mr. Lanham. That hasn't always been observed; witness Korea and other places. There might be an emergency when you would have to act.

Secretary Dulles. I think I can assure you that there is a will to act, there are plans of action, but I would not want to say to you it is the intention of the President to put the country into war without regard to the views of the Congress.

Mr. Lanham. Even if it meant the loss of Indochina in the meantime?

Secretary Dulles. I would doubt very much whether it would be in the province of the President to put the country into war to prevent the loss of Indochina, though there are a great many steps which can be taken and which would be taken by the Executive in the exercise of the full powers that he felt he possessed, short of concurrence by the Congress, which I hope would be quickly available.

The NSC meeting on January 8, 1954,[102] began with a briefing by Allen W. Dulles, Director of the CIA, on the military situation in Indochina. He reported that the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu was surrounded by the Viet Minh, and that while the position was a strong one, the French were "locked in it." Admiral Radford commented that although General Navarre had told him the Viet Minh could take Dien Bien Phu if they were willing to suffer the losses this would require, he doubted whether the Communists would attempt to do so in view of their apparent interest in moving into Laos. Allen Dulles responded that the only reason for the Viet Minh to try to take Dien Bien Phu was the "psychological damage which they could do the French will to continue the war in Indochina." But he added, "This political and psychological advantage might seem to the Vietminh to be worth the military loss that they would suffer."

After Dulles' briefing, the Council took up NSC 177 (which became NSC 5405). The President began by asking several basic questions. "First, why did the French persist in their unwillingness to allow the Associated States to put the case of Communist aggression against any of them before the UN?" He said he understood why the French had originally opposed such a move, but he could not understand, now that the Associated States had been declared independent, why they continued to do so. Secretary of State Dulles replied that this was due to ". . . French sensitivity with regard to the French position in North Africa. If the Associated States were to go to the UN, the Moroccan issue would almost certainly be raised." To this, Eisenhower replied, in a statement that summarized his position on the war and on the question of U.S. involvement; a position that he maintained throughout the debates on U.S. policy during the period prior to the Geneva Conference:

[102] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, pp 947–953

> . . . this seemed to be yet another case where the French don't know what to do—whether to go it alone or to get assistance from other nations clandestinely. They want to involve us secretly and yet are unwilling to go out openly to get allies in their struggle. For himself, said the President with great force, he simply could not imagine the United States putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia, except possibly in Malaya, which one would have to defend as a bulwark to our off-shore island chain. But to do this anywhere else was simply beyond his contemplation. Indeed, the key to winning this war was to get the Vietnamese to fight. There was just no sense in even talking about United States forces replacing the French in Indochina. If we did so, the Vietnamese could be expected to transfer their hatred of the French to us. I can not tell you, said the President with vehemence, how bitterly opposed I am to such a course of action. This war in Indochina would absorb our troops by divisions!

Vice President Nixon commented that while the French said they favored the development of national armies, they were also ". . . aware that if the Vietnamese become strong enough to hold their country alone, they would proceed to remove themselves from the French Union." Eisenhower's response was, ". . . if the French had been smart they would long since have offered the Associated States independence on the latter's own terms." But he favored efforts to get the French to let the U.S. take over a "good part" of the training of national armies in order to strengthen the ability of the Indochinese to defend themselves, as well as to relieve French military personnel from training duties and thus free them for combat.

The discussion turned to ways of helping the French while avoiding the use of U.S. forces. Secretary Dulles said that the French had not requested U.S. combat forces. Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, asked whether the French request for U.S. planes and pilots would not constitute "the camel getting his head through the door." Admiral Radford argued that the U.S. should do "everything possible to forestall a French defeat at Dien Bien Phu," and, if necessary, send an aircraft carrier to help the French defend that garrison. Secretary of the Treasury George M. Humphrey countered that "he simply did not see how we could talk of sending people, as opposed to money, to bail the French out. When we start putting our men into Indochina, how long will it be before we get into the war? And can we afford to get into such a war?" Radford replied that "we already had a lot of men in Indochina now, though none of them in combat operations. Nevertheless, he insisted, we are really in this war today in a big way." Humphrey added that although he understood how serious the fall of Dien Bien Phu might be, "it could not be, he thought, bad enough to involve the United States in combat in Indochina."

At this point Eisenhower took the position that even if the U.S. did not send American pilots, "we could certainly send planes and men to take over the maintenance of the planes." But Secretary Humphrey and Robert Cutler again expressed concern that such a move would be a step toward involving the U.S. in the war. Cutler

asked Secretary of State Dulles whether the use of U.S. planes might invite the French to "unload their military responsibility on the United States." Dulles said he did not think so, and Eisenhower said that ". . . while no one was more anxious than himself to keep our men out of these jungles, we could nevertheless not forget our vital interests in Indochina."

Humphrey then asked whether the U.S. would intervene if the French were to withdraw and "turn the whole country over to the Communists." "The President replied no, we would not intervene, but that we had better go to full mobilization . . . what you've got here is a leaky dike, and with leaky dikes it's sometimes better to put a finger in than to let the whole structure be washed away."

Admiral Radford again referred to Dien Bien Phu, saying, ". . . if we could put one squadron of U.S. planes over Dien Bien Phu for as little as one afternoon, it might save the situation. Weren't the stakes worth it? We were already in this thing in such a big way that it seemed foolish not to make the one small extra move which might be essential to success." Eisenhower suggested, referring to the CIA, that the U.S. could provide "a little group of fine and adventurous pilots . . . U.S. planes without insignia and let them go." This could be done, he added, "without involving us directly in the war, which he admitted would be a dangerous thing." Radford agreed. As the meeting ended, it was decided that the Defense Department and the CIA would make a report to the NSC on measures the U.S. could take to assist the French.[103]

But this account of the January 8 NSC meeting, prepared by the NSC staff, may not tell the entire story. It would appear that the two alternatives posed in the Special Annex (whether or not to commit U.S. forces) were also discussed at the meeting. It would also appear that the withdrawal of the Special Annex may have been interpreted by the NSC staff to include omission in the notes of all discussion of the Special Annex that occurred during the meeting. According to Pentagon notes of the meeting cited in the *Pentagon Papers,*[104] "State and Defense were at considerable variance" concerning the two contingencies discussed in the Special Annex. "The State view considered the French position so critical already as . . . 'to force the U.S. to decide now to utilize U.S. forces in the fighting in Southeast Asia.' The Defense representative refused to underwrite U.S. involvement. He reportedly stated that the French could win by the spring of 1955 given U.S. aid and given 'improved French political relations with the Vietnamese . . . the commitment of U.S. forces in a "civil war" in Indochina will be an admission of the bankruptcy of our political policies re Southeast Asia and France and should be resorted to only in extremity.' He argued that every step be taken to avoid a direct American commitment."

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[103]This report, submitted on January 15, 1954, generally called for increasing support for the Navarre plan, including the assignment of more U.S. military specialists to the Saigon MAAG. See *ibid.*, pp. 968–971. It also suggested that the U.S. propose to the French the creation of a "volunteer air group" of nationals from non-Communist countries to serve with French Union forces. In addition, it called for increasing guerrilla warfare activities, on which the CIA submitted a report that was attached as an appendix. Neither this nor any other appendix has been printed in *FRUS* or has been otherwise made public, however.

[104]*PP,* Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 89–90.

The two persons referred to as spokesmen for State and Defense in this instance were Secretary Dulles, for the State Department, and Secretary of Defense Wilson.

If this report of the meeting is correct, the Secretary of State was in favor, at least as of January 8, 1954, of using U.S. forces in Indochina, whereas the Secretary of Defense thought that "every step" should be taken to avoid such a direct commitment. What remains unclear is whether, if he took this position, Dulles was recommending the kind of involvement suggested by Radford and supported by Eisenhower, or a more direct involvement. It is doubtful whether Dulles, who maintained a close relationship and consistency of viewpoint with Eisenhower, would have taken a position at variance with that of the President.

The NSC met again on January 14, 1954, to discuss NSC 177.[105] Secretary Dulles said that if the French were forced to withdraw from Indochina, and the Viet Minh took control of the country, the U.S. should then seek to "carry on effective guerrilla operations" against the Communists. "We can raise hell and the Communists will find it just as expensive to resist as we are now finding it." The President remarked that ". . . he wished we could have done something like this after the victory of the Communists in China. Secretary Dulles answered that of course it was a grave mistake to have allowed the Communists the opportunity to consolidate their position in China. If we had made our plans in advance we might well have succeeded in keeping Communist China in a turmoil."

Vice President Nixon said that while Dulles' idea "had merit," he doubted whether the Vietnamese could be recruited as guerrillas. If the French left Indochina, however, he thought this might give the Indochinese "the will to fight," thus allowing the U.S. to become involved in training their soldiers.

It was agreed that the CIA, working with other agencies and departments, should develop plans for "certain contingencies in Indochina" along the lines proposed by Secretary Dulles.

NSC 177 was then approved by the Council and renumbered NSC 5405. In its final form[106] NSC 5405 was basically a rewrite of the Truman administration's NSC 124/2, of June 1952, with much of the same language and provisions and no significant changes. As it had in 1952, the NSC, Admiral Radford said, "sidestepped the question, raised by the JCS, of what the United States would do if France gave up the struggle."[107]

The Decision to Send U.S. Aircraft Technicians to Vietnam

On January 16, 1954, Eisenhower set up a small group, which became known as the Special Committee on Indochina, to expedite U.S. aid to French forces and to analyze the situation and make additional recommendations for U.S. action. The group was headed by Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief

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[105] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 961-964.

[106] For the text see vol. XII of *ibid.*; for excerpts of the major provisions see *ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 971-976. On August 6, 1954, there was a report on NSC 5405, "Progress Report on United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," from the NSC's Operations Coordinating Board, now declassified in part. Subsequent OCB reports on NSC 5405 on December 24, 1955, and July 11, 1955, are declassified in part. A report on March 24, 1955 is fully declassified. All are available at the Eisenhower Library.

[107] *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 383.

of Staff during World War II, who had a close personal bond with the President. Other members were Allen Dulles (Director of the CIA), Roger Kyes (Deputy Secretary of Defense), Admiral Radford, (Chairman of the JCS), and C. D. Jackson, (a Special Assistant to the President). The President said that the group was to be "self-contained," and should operate outside the customary bureaucratic framework. (Specifically, "neither NSC nor OCB [Operations Coordinating Board of the NSC] need be cut in on its deliberations.")[108]

At the meeting of this special committee with the President on January 16, it was agreed that ". . . a defeat in Indo-China could very easily be the prelude to real disaster for our side in the whole Southeast Asia area. Yet all are agreed that neither American dollars, nor French gallantry, nor American hardware, can achieve victory. The key to victory is dedicated participation on the part of native . . . troops in the struggle." Despite this fact, the training of national armies was "precisely where things are going wrong in a big way."

Eisenhower concluded the meeting by asking the group to develop not only a specific plan of action for Indochina, but an "area plan" for the general area of Southeast Asia in the event of losses in Indochina. As it turned out, this seemingly minor and almost routine proposal for developing an "area plan" was, in fact, of the highest importance in the evolution of the administration's position on Indochina. What it signified was the beginning of a shift from an emphasis on the critical importance of Indochina to emphasis on a wider framework within which the "loss" of Indochina or a part of Indochina could be justified and made politically acceptable. Although the President and his advisers obviously had not, at that stage, fully decided on the course of U.S. action, it appears that they were beginning to prepare for possible French withdrawal and a compromise settlement under which at least part of Indochina would become officially recognized as Communist-controlled. The other side of the coin would be that, in anticipation of this, the U.S. would seek to build a new collective defense system under which the remainder of Southeast Asia could be more readily and effectively defended after French withdrawal and a division of Indochina.[109]

One very important clue to the shift taking place in the administration with respect to Indochina was contained in the testimony of Under Secretary Smith in an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on February 16, 1954. Although the members of

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[108] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 981–982, 986–990. The Special Committee on Indochina was the forerunner of the NSC Special Group (or 5412 Committee) established in March 1954 by NSC 5412, which provided general authorization for the conduct of covert activities. See ch. 6, p. 309 below.

[109] Philip W. Bonsal, director of the State Department office responsible for Indochina, said in a personal letter to Ambassador Heath on January 22, 1954, that the "area plan" was a "line of thought influenced to a large extent by Ambassador [William J.] Donovan's ideas. . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 994. Bonsal, as might be expected, may have seen only part of the picture; either that, or he was not being and could not be completely frank with Heath. "Wild Bill" Donovan, former head of the OSS, who had been appointed U.S. Ambassador to Thailand in 1954, argued that the "loss" of Indochina would not necessarily result in the "loss" of Southeast Asia, but his appointment itself may have been one aspect of the effort to establish an area plan in the event of the fall of part or all of Indochina. Donovan, in fact, saw his appointment in these terms. See Anthony Cave Brown, *The Last Hero. Wild Bill Donovan* (New York: Times Books, 1982), p. 822.

the committee were probably not aware of the significance of what he was saying—nor could they be, not being privy to the extremely sensitive, high-level executive branch deliberations on this subject[110]—Smith signaled this shift of emphasis when he told the committee:[111]

> Of course, the loss of Indochina to the Communists would set off political repercussions throughout Southeast Asia and elsewhere in Asia which, in my opinion, would be extremely dangerous to our national security interests.
>
> I have said to this committee, and I want now to retract the statement, that I thought of Southeast Asia as like one of those houses of cards that children build, and if you knock one of them out, the whole structure collapses. Well, I do not believe that now, that is, I am not prepared to and I would not say that now.
>
> I think that, even at the worst, part of Indochina might be lost without losing the rest of Southeast Asia. . . .
>
> One can think of the possiblity of an area defense pact which might include Thailand as the bastion, Burma and, possibly Cambodia. . . .

Later in the hearing Smith even tipped the hand of the administration on the action at the Geneva Conference later that year in dividing Vietnam at the 17th parallel, although again the committee probably did not understand the import of his comment. Speaking of the work of the Special Committee on Indochina he said that the group had begun to consider "the first possible alternative line of action" if the French were forced to withdraw, which would be "a kind of walling off of an area, and supporting native elements who are willing to be supported in the other part of the area."[112]

On January 29, 1954, the Special Committee met to consider French requests for assistance, primarily planes and aircraft technicians.[113] (Meanwhile, a working group of representatives from State, Defense, the JCS and the CIA under the chairmanship of Gen. G. B. Erskine [Director of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense] had been established by the Special Committee to consider recommendations for further action.) There was a consensus in favor of providing the planes, but not on the request for 400 U.S. technicians. Admiral Radford thought that the French had not made a sufficient effort to find French technicians. Under Secretary of State Smith, however, favored sending at least 200 of those requested. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes was doubtful. "Mr. Kyes questioned if sending 200 military technicans would not so commit the U.S. to support the French that we must be prepared eventually for complete intervention, including use of U.S. combat forces. General [Under Secretary] Smith said he did not think this would result—we were sending maintenance forces not ground forces. He felt, however, that the importance of winning in Indochina was so great that if worst came to the worst he personal-

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[110] It is doubtful whether the circle of those in the executive branch who were fully aware of this shift extended beyond Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Cutler and the members of the Special Committee on Indochina

[111] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, p. 113.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[113] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1002-1006.

ly would favor intervention with U.S. air and naval forces—not ground forces. Admiral Radford agreed." It was concluded that this was a matter that only the President could and should decide, but the Special Committee agreed that 200 uniformed U.S. Air Force technicians should be sent "only on the understanding that they would be used at bases where they would be secure from capture and would not be exposed to combat."

The group also agreed to send U.S. civilian pilots hired by the CIA, using planes from the CIA's proprietary airline, the Civil Air Transport (CAT), to assist French forces with air transport.[114]

At the recommendation of Allen Dulles, it was also agreed that Colonel Lansdale, who at that stage was one of the representatives of the CIA on the Special Committee, would be assigned to Saigon as one of five U.S. military liaison officers approved by General Navarre to work with the French.

The group also discussed the preliminary draft of a paper from the Erskine working group on future courses of action. Admiral Radford said he thought the paper was ". . . too restrictive in that it was premised on U.S. action short of the contribution of U.S. combat forces. He said that the U.S. could not afford to let the Viet Minh take the Tonkin Delta. If this was lost, Indochina would be lost and the rest of Southeast Asia would fall. The psychological impact of such a loss would be unacceptable to the U.S. Indochina must have the highest possible priority in U.S. attention." He suggested that when the paper was redrafted there should be two alternatives, one on using U.S. combat forces, and the other on not using such forces. Under Secretary Smith agreed.

Later that same day (January 29), the President approved this recommendation of the Special Committee, and the technicians were dispatched immediately to Indochina.[115] The news that this was being done had already leaked to the press, however, and there was a strong reaction in Congress. Senator John C. Stennis (D/Miss.), a respected conservative on the Armed Services Committee, wrote to Secretary of Defense Wilson on January 29 stating that he had ". . . been impressed for some time that we have been steadily moving closer and closer to participation in the war in Indo-China. I am not objecting to any announced policy thus far, but a decision must soon be made as to how far we shall go. . . . It seems to me that we should certainly stop short of sending our troops or airmen to this area, either for participation in the conflict or as instructors. As always, when we send one group, we shall have to send another to protect the first and we shall thus be fully involved in a short time.

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[114] A few weeks later a squadron of U.S. Air Force C-119 transports, painted gray, and manned by two dozen CAT pilots, began flying supplies into Dien Bien Phu On May 6, the day before the fortress fell, two of these Americans, James B. McGovern, known as "Earthquake McGoon," and Wallace Buford, were killed when their plane was hit by Communist gunfire and crashed nearby.

For general reference see Christopher Robbins, *Air America. The Story of the CIA's Secret Airline* (New York: Putnam, 1979).

[115] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1007. According to Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 161, this was not the first time that U.S. Air Force personnel had been used for this purpose. In January 1953, 28 Air Force mechanics had been loaned to France to help with aircraft maintenance and the training of French ground crews in Vietnam. Congress does not seem to have been consulted on or informed about that decision.

"With consideration of our confirmed promises and assured obligations in Europe, in the Pacific area, in Korea and elsewhere, and with consideration of our home defenses, I do not think we can at all afford to take chances on becoming participants in Indo-China."

Judging from remarks by Stennis in the Senate a few days later, to which further reference will be made, it would appear that the decision to send the technicians was made without any consultation with Congress, and that Congress was informed of the decision only after the news stories appeared. Stennis said that no one on the Senate Armed Services Committee knew about the decision, and that "when it was learned that men from the Regular Air Force were not merely being considered for duty in Indochina, but had already been sent there, and that the original proposal was to send 400 men, instead of 200—there was grave concern."[116]

On February 3, Eisenhower told Under Secretary Smith that congressional leaders should be consulted before the technicians were sent to Indochina.[117] Accordingly, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes and Admiral Radford met with the Senate Armed Services Committee, and probably also the House. (The transcripts of these meetings, which were held early in February 1954, have not been printed.) The proposal was not well-received. Senator Saltonstall, chairman of the committee, and the Republican whip in the Senate, reported in a meeting of Senate Republican leaders with Eisenhower on February 8 that "the Committee had been very loathe to agree to this involvement of US personnel."[118] The committee objected, Saltonstall said, to sending uniformed Americans, and would not have the same objections to sending civilians. Eisenhower replied that he could understand the desire to avoid committing U.S. forces to Indochina, but that "he did see the need for carrying on a US program in regard to Asia, and he saw some merit in using this small project to serve a very large purpose—that is, to prevent all of Southeast Asia from falling to the Communists." He cited the fall of the Chinese Nationalists and the problem the U.S. had experienced in not being able to send more equipment to the Nationalists because of their inability to maintain it.

The President also commented that it would take time to recruit civilian mechanics, but that the French had been put on notice that they would have to increase their own efforts, and that the 200 U.S. mechanics would be withdrawn by June 15. Saltonstall repeated that the assignment of the uniformed technicians to Indochina "could bring trouble with the Appropriations Committee as well as the Armed Services Committee. . . ."

What is the alternative? the President asked, if the U.S. was going to "prevent our position in Asia from deteriorating further." He spoke of his "continuing belief in the use of indigenous troops

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[116] *CR*, vol. 100, p. 1552. For Stennis' letter to Wilson, see *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, p. 239. Subsequently Stennis said that at a meeting of the Armed Services Committee in early February at which the administration testified about the decision to send the technicians, " . . every Senator present except one expressed grave concern and what was in effect strong disapproval." *CR*, vol. 100, p. 2903.

[117] According to the official Air Force history of the war, the technicians began to be flown into Indochina on February 5, 1954. See Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1981), p. 17.

[118] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1023

in any Asian battles, with the United States providing a mobile reserve for the overall security of the free world."[119] "Yet he believed that exceptions had to be made until the time when indigenous forces could be built up to an adequate point and they could be secure in the knowledge that the U.S. air and naval forces stood ready to support them."

Agreement was reached that Republican congressional leaders would explain the need for the decision to send the 200 men, and the President, for his part, said he would use civilian mechanics after June 15 if U.S. assistance was still required.

After the meeting, Eisenhower called Secretary of Defense Wilson to tell him about Saltonstall's concern. He reported Saltonstall's opinion that there would be much less opposition in the Senate if the administration stated unequivocably that U.S. Air Force technicians would be removed by June 15, and he told Wilson "to devise the necessary plan, even if it meant the hiring of technicians under the aid program to replace the air force technicians in Indochina."[120]

On February 8, Senator Mansfield, saying that it was a matter requiring the "urgent attention of the Senate," warned in a Senate speech that there was a "swiftly developing crisis" in Indochina which could lead to a Communist victory or to U.S. military involvement in another Korea.[121] He said that in his opinion "the French will not lose the war in Indochina," but if the French were forced to withdraw "the gateway of South Asia is open to the onward march of Communist imperialism." At the same time, he hoped there would not be a negotiated peace "such as the French hope for," and he was concerned about the possible division of Vietnam similar to the division that had occurred in Korea. "I should like to see a clear-cut victory, and then the States given complete independence, so that they would not lose their independence as soon as they had achieved it, under such circumstances as the Koreans did."

Mansfield approved the sending of the 200 technicians, calling this "a logical extension of a practice already underway," but said that he was concerned about possible U.S. military involvement in Indochina. "The only way to insure success in the struggles against communism in Indochina," he said, "is for the people of the Associated States to put their shoulders to the wheel."

Senate Majority Leader Knowland and Armed Services Chairman Saltonstall agreed with Mansfield on the acceptability of the decision to send the technicians, and Knowland asserted that there was no intention of sending U.S. ground forces to Indochina.

The next day, February 9, Senator Stennis told the Senate of his concern that "step by step, we are moving into this war in Indochina. . . ."[122] ". . . I am afraid," he said, "we will move to a point from which there will be no return." "I know the general argument is that we must stop communism in Asia," he added. "I

[119] Note the parallel between this position and that of the "Nixon Doctrine" in 1969.
[120] *The Eisenhower Diaries*, p 275
[121] *CR*, vol 100, pp 1503-1506
[122] *Ibid.*, pp 1550-1552

wish that were as simple and as easy of accomplishment as it sounds.

". . . should we get into war in Indochina," Stennis said, "it could result in involving us further on an enormous and, I believe, an endless scale." Those who favored such U.S. intervention, he said, "should consider the possibilities involved. They should advocate a larger Army, the increased taxes which will be necessary to maintain it, and a call for more men each month under the Selective Service Act."

Although administration leaders, including the President himself, asserted that there was no intention of using U.S. ground forces in Indochina, Stennis continued to feel that the presence of U.S. Air Force personnel in a combat zone could lead to further U.S. involvement.

In early March there were attacks on or near air bases where U.S. technicians were working, and Stennis again told the Senate that "step by step and day by day, we are coming nearer and nearer to a fighting part in the war in Indochina." He added that Congress should participate in decisions such as that to send the technicians. "The members of Congress are the ones who will be asked to vote the money and draft the men if we become further involved in war."

Stennis called for the removal of the technicians as soon as possible, or at least for their relocation to safer locations. He was challenged by Senator John F. Kennedy, who agreed that the technicians should not have been sent to Vietnam, but argued that to remove them at that point would further weaken the resolve of the French and would undercut the U.S. position at the forthcoming Geneva Conference. (He agreed with Stennis that they could be moved to safer locations.)

It is of interest to note Kennedy's comment about the Geneva Conference, which appears to have been identical to the position taken by the Eisenhower administration as well as by Mansfield.

> In April there is to be a conference at Geneva, in which the Communists undoubtedly will present to the French an attractive plan for the total withdrawal of French forces from Indochina, and a partition which I believe, would be the first step toward the seizure of complete control in that area by Communist forces.
>
> The position of the United States at Geneva should be that such an agreement should not be made, but that the war should be continued and brought to a successful conclusion.[123]

Asked at a press conference the next day about the possible military involvement of the U.S. in Indochina, Eisenhower replied: ". . . there is going to be no involvement of America in war unless it is a result of the constitutional process that is placed upon Congress to declare it."[124]

In passing, it is of interest to note that the *Washington Post,* in an editorial following Eisenhower's statement, disagreed with the President's position that he needed to have Congress' approval before using the U.S. armed forces in Indochina.[125]

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[123] For the remarks of Stennis and Kennedy see *ibid*. pp 2902–2904

[124] *Public Papers of the Presidents.* Dwight D Eisenhower. 1954. p 306

[125] *Washington Post.* Mar 12. 1954

The decision to send the 200 mechanics was raised again at an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on February 16, 1954, at which Under Secretary of State Smith and Admiral Radford testified on the situation in Indochina.[126] Smith said that the French had asked for 400 mechanics, but that "we would not give them 400, that is a little too much. You would not want to create in this country or in the minds of the Congress the impression that we were backing into the war in Indochina."[127] But Senator Mansfield said that he had "every confidence in men like Navarre and Bao Dai and Cogny," and that he was "very glad that this Government is spending $1,200 million this year in Indochina . . . I will vote for another billion or more next year." He again said that he had "no concern" about the sending of the planes or the technicians. "When you send in B-26s you are just continuing a program long under way, and when you send in technicians, you are sending in a group in addition to a group already there, because part of the MAAG group has been working on this maintenance program, so what has been done in effect is nothing new, but a continuation of old policy."

Mansfield added, referring to criticism of the French, ". . . I hope that we will forget some of our ideas for the time being and recognize that the French have serious problems in places like Morocco, and Tunis as well as internally in the Saar and in relation to Germany."[128]

In a similar vein, Senator Fulbright said he thought that ". . . we, as a country, have often gone overboard in talking about democracy in countries such as this; what we need here is . . . a strong native leader who can rally the people. . . ." In the absence of such leadership, he said, "what we are going to be faced with is this interminable guerrilla warfare which never does stop." The war could not be won "by B-26s or any other kind of thing that we can put in. . . ." If Bao Dai was "not any good, we ought to get another one . . . I am very strongly in favor of your taking a strong lead," Fulbright told Smith, "in trying to develop a really effective man. . . ."[129]

Concerning the military situation in Indochina, Admiral Radford spoke assuredly to the committee about the French position, and said that although the Viet Minh hoped to "scare" the French into making accommodations at Geneva, the likelihood of serious military defeats had been "played up in the press far beyond the actual situation." This led Senator H. Alexander Smith to comment: "That gives me personally a great relief because I have been thinking since my trip there that . . . these stories were grossly exaggerated. The thing is working out . . . according to plan, and if Navarre can hang on and get support from Paris for the next 2 years, . . . with our help, his plan may succeed, and they may clean this thing up."[130]

Two days later, February 18, 1954, Under Secretary Smith and Admiral Radford held a similar executive session briefing for the

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[126] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 107-146.
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[128] *Ibid.*, p. 142.
[129] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

House.[131] Smith repeated his comments about planning for a possible loss of part of Indochina, but there is no indication that the members of the House committee were any more aware of the significance of his statements than the members of the Senate committee had been.

Admiral Radford also assured the committee that the military situation was "satisfactory." He also said that there was "no danger" of the French being driven out of Dien Bien Phu, adding, "The Vietminh . . . are not anxious to engage in a showdown fight, because their ammunition supplies are not large, and a great deal of it is homemade."[132]

On May 11, 1954, four days after Dien Bien Phu fell to the Communists, the Foreign Affairs Committee met in executive session with Secretary Dulles to consider the situation in Indochina. At the end of the meeting, which had involved considerable soul-searching, Representative Burr P. Harrison (D/Va.), said he would like to close the meeting with a quotation, and proceeded to read back Radford's reassuring words of February 18.

The U.S. Prepares for Negotiations, and for War?

From January 25 to February 18, 1954, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union met in Berlin, and agreed on a five-power (their countries plus China) international conference in Geneva beginning on April 26, to deal first with Korea and then with Indochina. The U.S., as was indicated earlier, had been strongly opposed to broadening the Geneva Conference to include Indochina, but the French were adamant, and they were supported by Britain. In his report to the NSC on February 26, 1954, Dulles said, ". . . if we had vetoed the resolution regarding Indochina, it would have probably cost us French membership in the EDC [European Defense Community] as well as Indochina itself."[133]

From his position on State's Policy Planning Staff, Edmund A. Gullion, formerly in Saigon, prepared a long memorandum on February 24 on the prospects for Indochina negotiations in which he concluded, "We and M. Bidault are both embarked upon a slippery slope."[134] The French, "beguiled by the prospects of a compromise peace," would not be inclined to continue waging the war; Congress and the public would question the provision of aid; the Vietnamese would be fearful of partition or a coalition government. Examining several possible outcomes, Gullion said, "While it is true that the partition formula would offer the vague hope of later improvements in the Asia or world situation, it would be considered as the ultimate sell-out by most Vietnamese. After a period in which all of Vietnam on both sides were broken down into many warring groups with divergent interests, the whole population on both sides would settle down for a century of effort, if need be, to throw out whoever was trying to hold them apart."

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[131] *HFAC Hts. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 95-160.
[132] *Ibid.*, p. 106.
[133] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1079-1081.
[134] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, pp. 417-424.

Gullion added, "We, not the French, would probably be the principal sufferers if we are held responsible for a multilateral partition of Indochina, completely losing what credit we have remaining in Asia. It might be better, if such a catastrophic settlement must be made, that the responsiblity be borne by the French alone and be undertaken in direct negotiations with Ho Chi Minh."

Gullion's conclusion was that the "loss of Indochina would be much more menacing to the free world than the loss of Korea," and that "we should try to persuade the French that the war should go on, using whatever inducements we can." If the French decided to withdraw, which he did not think they could or would do, ". . . I should recommend not a compromise peace . . . but an internationalization of the war under the UN, with the participation of US forces, if necessary, recognizing that the Chinese might retaliate massively."

Philip W. Bonsal, State's Office Director for Southeast Asia, who had been named head of the Working Group on Indochina preparing for the Geneva Conference, recommended on March 8, 1954, that unless the President's statement on February 10 opposing U.S. military involvement in Indochina was going to be taken as the final word on that subject, the U.S. should be ready to consider such action:[135] "If, at any time in Geneva, there is any prospect that an offer of U.S. support, air, naval or even ground forces to supplement the Franco-Vietnamese military effort will cause the French to refuse to capitulate, we must be in a position to make or not to make such an offer as a result of a firm U.S. policy decision at the highest level."

Gullion generally agreed with Bonsal's recommendations, but in a memorandum on March 10 he questioned the proposal that the U.S. should be ready, if necessary, to offer U.S. forces to assist the French in Indochina.[136] ". . . I fear that we simply cannot make that promise. We have been progressively moving away from it during the period of the 'linking' of Korea and Indochina as 'two fronts on the same war'; the enunciation of the 'New Look' with reliance on atomic weapons; the formulation of the 'disengagement' policy, and the declaration of a resolve not to become involved in the war, forced upon us by Congressional clamor over the deployment of a few technicians to Indochina." "If US forces *were* to be engaged," he said, "I believe that the prospects of success would be greater, and the chances of Congressional support greater if it were put on the basis of a new deal; i.e., a collective operation."

Meanwhile, policymakers in Washington continued their efforts to support the French while also keeping the U.S. role under constant review. On February 10, President Eisenhower, obviously responding in part to congressional comments, stated publicly his opposition to becoming militarily involved in Indochina: ". . . no one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region than I am . . . I cannot conceive of a greater tragedy for America than to get heavily involved now in an all-out war . . . particularly with large units."[137]

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[135] *Ibid.*, p. 441.
[136] *Ibid.*, p. 447.
[137] *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Dwight D Eisenhower, 1954, pp. 250, 253

On February 11, the NSC met again. Allen Dulles reported that Viet Minh forces were moving south from Dien Bien Phu into Laos, and that a "frontal attack" on Dien Bien Phu "appeared unlikely." He said that General Navarre "remains convinced of the soundness of his plan, and saw no reason why he should not achieve a victory in 1955." There was some discussion of the increasing discouragement of the French, which prompted the President to remark that ". . . the mood of discouragement came from the evident lack of a spiritual force among the French and the Vietnamese. This was a commodity which it was excessively difficult for one nation to supply to another."[138]

In another personal letter to Ambassador Heath on February 12, Philip Bonsal tried to interpret for Heath the mood in Washington. He reported on the work of the Special Committee and the Erskine subcommittee, of which he was a member, in their search for ways to bolster French Union forces and to stiffen the French will to continue fighting. "All this soul-searching," he told Heath, "has been conducted in an atmosphere of intense public and Congressional interest. There have been leaks galore: leaks about planes; leaks about mechanics; leaks about O'Daniel [who was being considered as the new MAAG Commander in Saigon] and about the Special Committee. Most important, there has been a leaking of pessimism and a lack of confidence in French generalship and in French intentions." ". . . there is extreme skepticism in the Pentagon," he added, "with regard to French intentions and capabilities . . . it is believed by many that the war will not be won unless somehow American brains and will power can be injected in decisive fashion in view of French inadequacies in strategic planning and offensive spirit."[139]

But as Washington pushed for a more active military role in assisting the French, the French pushed back. General Navarre firmly rejected any advisory role for General O'Daniel or the U.S. MAAG, as well as the suggestion that U.S. personnel assist in training Indochina troops, thus freeing French training officers for combat.[140]

Navarre also continued to insist that French forces were not threatened at Dien Bien Phu. On February 21 he told Heath that "Dien Bien Phu is a veritable jungle Verdun which he hopes will be attacked as it will result in terrific casualities to the Viet Minh and will not fall."[141]

Some Members of Congress, however, continued to worry about the situation. On February 24, Secretary Dulles gave the Foreign Relations Committee a report in executive session on the Berlin Conference.[142] He said that the U.S. could not have prevented the inclusion of Indochina in the peace talks without causing the fall of the Laniel-Bidault government, which he said was "the best government that I can see that we could have in France, when you combine both the importance of EDC and the importance of Indo-

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[138] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, pp. 1036, 1038
[139] *Ibid*., p. 1042
[140] *Ibid*., pp. 1062, 1120, 1145
[141] *Ibid*., pp 1065-1066
[142] *SFRC His Ser*., vol VI, pp 153-184. For Dulles' report on February 23 to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, see *HFAC His Ser*., vol XV, pp 429-479

china." But he added, "We, the United States, I can guarantee to you, will not go into that conference with any obligation to stay there and it will not be bound by anybody's vote than its own, and we will be in a position to exert a considerable degree of power because of the extent to which the French are dependent, certainly to carry on the struggle, upon our military aid. . . ."

Despite earlier testimony by Under Secretary Smith that a division of Vietnam was one possibility, Dulles rejected the idea: ". . . a territorial division would cut the area in two, something comparable to Korea, [and] would be a disaster for the free peoples there because it would throw the bulk of the population and the bulk of the economic strength under Communist control." He said that there was no ". . . acceptable result there short of a military defeat of the organized forces and forcing them into a position of having a guerrilla operation comparable to what has been going on in Malaya for a number of years now, which could be dealt with by the native forces. . . ."

Moreover, he told the committee, "there will probably not be any major or anything like decisive engagements during the remaining 2 months of March and April of the fighting season," and all the French had to do, therefore, was to "hold on, hold on for 2 months," and by the next fighting season (beginning in the fall of 1954, after the end of the rainy season), French forces, augmented by national armies, could go on the offensive. He admitted that this was a "very rosy prospect," and that there was room for doubt, but that it was a result worth pursuing. But he seemed to have difficulty with the obvious ambivalence that such a picture represented: "I think there is a chance—I certainly would not want—there is a probability, but a fair, perhaps, an even, chance that during this 6-month lull there will be a sufficient development and a sufficient increase of their will to fight, and, perhaps, a willingness on the part of the Chinese Communists to stop aiding them."

Most of the members of the committee accepted Dulles' testimony, but two Senators, Humphrey and Gillette, had serious reservations. Gillette said, "I think our position relative to Indochina is unsound, illogical and untenable. . . ." Humphrey said that the testimony given the committee by Under Secretary Smith, Admiral Radford, and Dulles, was inconsistent and conflicting, and he did not think that "anybody seems to have any plans whatsoever about Indochina. . . ." He said that at the Geneva Conference "the odds of getting anything very constructive toward the cause of the free nations . . . is very, very limited," and that the U.S. should not look at Geneva as a "great opportunity."

Humphrey was also concerned about U.S. plans in the event the French decided, during the Geneva Conference, that they were going to withdraw from Indochina. Given the position of the administration on the importance of Indochina, what was the U.S. plan of action if this occurred? ". . . we just do not have any plan," he said. Senator Mansfield, however, replied that he thought U.S. policy in Indochina had been "sound to date, and the reason we do

not know what to do in the future is that no one can find that answer at the present time."[143]

Senator Homer E. Capehart (R/Ind.), a newly appointed member of the committee, said that if Indochina was more important than Korea, as Dulles had stated, ". . . then what are we waiting for now? . . . if we were justified in going to war in Korea are we justified in going to war in Indochina?"

The subject of U.S. recognition of Communist China was raised by Senator Knowland, who was opposed to recognition. Fulbright commented that it would be a "great mistake" for the U.S. to freeze its position on that subject, or for Congress to force the administration into the position of opposing any change in U.S. policy toward recognition. He thought that there might be a possibility at some future date of a split between the Russians and the Chinese which the U.S. might want to exploit by recognizing the Communist People's Republic of China.

During the first week of March 1954, there were new and reassuring reports on the military situation in Indochina. Harold Stassen, Director of the U.S. foreign aid agency (Foreign Operations Administration), who had just returned from Asia, reported to the NSC his ". . . strong feeling that the military situation in that area was a great deal better than we had imagined. Indeed, he had found the French actually hoping for a major enemy attack because they were so confident that they would crush it."[144] And in Paris, U.S. Senators Styles Bridges (R/N.H.) and Stuart Symington (D/Mo.), both members of the Armed Services Committee (Bridges was also a Senate Republican leader and chairman of the Appropriations Committee), met with French Defense Minister René Pleven, who had just returned from a trip to Indochina "more optimistic than when he left on military situation but more pessimistic on political picture." In the course of the conversation, Symington asked Pleven's opinion about the possible use of U.S. carrier-based planes armed with tactical nuclear weapons. "Pleven said he would

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[143]In conjunction with the forthcoming Geneva Conference, it is of interest to note that in late March Senator George suggested that there should be bipartisan congressional support for Dulles at Geneva, and Dulles then considered inviting certain Members of Congress to attend the Conference. He had previously asked George to go with him to Berlin, but George had refused.

Thruston Morton, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, told Dulles that George probably would refuse also to go to Geneva. "Morton said there should be a talk with George and [Lyndon] Johnson so we don't just take Green. They agreed Wiley will want to go—The Sec. said Nixon said to him it would be a mistake if Wiley went They thought [Bourke B.] Hickenlooper would be good as he is more conservative—maybe both would go." Eisenhower Library, "Telephone Conversation with Mr. Morton," Mar. 25, 1954, Dulles Papers, Telephone Calls Series, (hereafter cited as Dulles Telephone Calls Series).

Dulles then talked to Vice President Nixon, and related to Nixon his conversation with George. He told Nixon that although George was in favor of having Members of Congress attend the meeting, Knowland, (the Republican leader in the Senate) was opposed, saying that he "can't afford to let anyone go." Dulles said he had asked George to speak to Knowland, but that George was not inclined to do so.

Nixon said that "Wiley and Green would be a burden and a risk, and not to take them." Dulles agreed, saying that Wiley, "will not adequately represent the Senators' viewpoint who are interested in the Far East Green is no help nor will Wiley be when we get back."

Dulles and Nixon agreed that H. Alexander Smith and Fulbright would be good choices The problem, of course, was that they were outranked by Wiley and Smith. Dulles Telephone Calls Series, Mar 29, 1954.

The matter was finally resolved on April 10, when Dulles told Knowland that he was not asking any Member of Congress to go to Geneva because of Knowland's preference that he not do so, "although he imagined George was not too happy." Knowland replied that he "talked with the leadership and they agree." *Ibid.*, Apr 10, 1954

[144]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, p 1093

prefer to have Secretary say at Geneva that Chinese planes flying over IC [Indochina] would be met by US Air Force. When Symington returned to subject of atomic bombs, Pleven stressed lack of suitable targets."[145]

On March 11, Under Secretary of State Smith, on behalf of the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) of the NSC (the purpose of the OCB, composed of representatives of the departments and agencies on the NSC, was to integrate the implementation of NSC decisions), having approved it, sent the President a report from the Special Committee on Indochina "on a program for securing military victory in Indochina short of overt involvement by U.S. Combat Forces. . . ."[146] In this report, prepared by the Erskine subcommittee, the Special Committee repeated the position taken in NSC 5405. "Indo-China is considered the keystone of the arch of Southeast Asia," it said, "and the Indo-Chinese peninsula must not be permitted to fall under Communist domination. This requires the defeat in Indo-China of military and quasi-military Communist forces and the development of conditions conducive to successful resistance to any Communist actions to dominate the area." To do so, the report recommended increasing military assistance to French forces; strengthening the U.S. military mission in Indochina, especially for training Indochinese troops; providing U.S. personnel, "on a voluntary basis," to serve with French forces without loss of citizenship; developing a psychological warfare program to combat Communist propaganda and to provide, among other things, information designed to strengthen nationalist organizations and indigenous leadership while also recognizing the sacrifice of the French. The report stated that such a program, if completed promptly with the help of the French, could result in victory without the use of U.S. forces. But if the French did not cooperate, or if the military situation should "deteriorate drastically," the U.S. "may wish to consider direct military action in Southeast Asia to ensure the maintenance of our vital interests in the area." In that event, the report said, ". . . an area concept including Malaya, Thailand, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as Indo- China, would appear essential."

The report stressed, however, as had previous U.S. Government reports on the problem in Indochina, that "The key to the success of military operations continues to be the generation of well-trained, properly led indigenous forces effectively employed in combat operations against the Communist forces in Vietnam." It also stressed, as had previous reports, that "Such success will ultimately be dependent upon the inspiration of the local population to fight for their own freedom from Communist domination and the willingness of the French both to take the measures to stimulate that inspiration and to more fully utilize the native potential."

On March 17, the Special Committee submitted to the NSC a supplemental report prepared by the Erskine subcommittee on the "Military Implication of U.S. Negotiations on Indo-China at

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[145] *Ibid.*, p. 1096.

[146] This was part 1 of a two-part report. A supplementary position paper dealing with a longer-range policy toward Indochina, including the use of U.S. forces, was submitted on March 17, and part 2 was submitted on April 5. These will be discussed below. For the text of the March 11 report see *ibid.*, pp. 1108–1116.

Geneva,"[147] which recommended that the U.S., Britain, and France reject the various proposals for negotiating an end to the war (a cease-fire, a coalition government, partition of Vietnam, and "free elections"), and if France accepted any of these alternatives ". . . the U.S. should decline to associate itself with such a settlement and should pursue, directly with the governments of the Associated States and with other Allies (notably the U.K.), ways and means of continuing the struggle against the Viet Minh in Indo-China without participation of the French." It also recommended that the NSC "determine the willingness" of the U.S. to use American forces in such a continuation of the struggle in order to bring about "the direct resolution of the war." It further recommended that the NSC ". . . take cognizance of present domestic and international climate of opinion with respect to U.S. involvement and consider the initiation of such steps as may be necessary to ensure world-wide recognition of the significance of such steps in Indo-China as a part of the struggle against Communist aggression."

These recommendations by the Special Committee followed closely the position taken by the JCS in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Wilson on March 12.[148] The proposals of the Special Committee and the JCS were then discussed at an NSC meeting on March 25, as will be seen.

During the latter part of March and the first part of April 1954, the Army continued to study the question of U.S. armed intervention in Vietnam, including the possible use of atomic weapons. On March 25 and April 8, studies by the Army G-3 Plans Division concluded that atomic weapons could be used in a number of ways to help the French defend Dien Bien Phu. "Both studies concluded that the use of atomic weapons in Indochina was technically and militarily feasible and could produce a major alteration in the military situation in favor of the French, turning 'the entire course of events in Indochina to the advantage of the U.S. and the free world. If the act occurred before the Geneva Conference, that Conference might never be held.' "[149] Army and Air Force intelligence officers questioned the effectiveness of using atomic weapons at Dien Bien Phu or elsewhere in Indochina, however, and the Army's G-3 Office of Psychological Warfare warned that even if the use of atomic weapons were effective militarily, there would be serious adverse repercussions on the international reputation of the United States, and on existing alliances.

Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, Chief of Staff of the Army, and Lt. Gen. James M. Gavin, Army Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, were not persuaded by the arguments in favor of using atomic weapons, and Ridgway ordered another study of U.S. intervention.[150] "This time the planners concluded that any form of military action by the United States in Vietnam would be ill-advised. Intervention with U.S. air and naval units operating from bases outside Indochina would probably lead to committing ground troops, would entail a diversion of American air resources in the Far East, might prompt

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[147] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, pp. 475–479. This report is also reprinted in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 451–454.
[148] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 472–475.
[149] Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 200
[150] *Ibid*

retaliatory Chinese air attacks on American aircraft, or even full-scale Chinese intervention, and would still not provide sufficient power to achieve a military victory over the Viet Minh. Using aircraft based inside Indochina would have the same disadvantages and would also require a substantial logistical buildup and commitment of U.S. ground forces to provide security for air bases. Intervention by ground troops . . . would necessitate calling nine National Guard divisions into federal terms of service, extending terms of service for draftees, and resuming immediately war production of critical items. Until the newly mobilized divisions could become fully effective, a period of seven to nine months, the Army's strength and readiness in other areas of the Far East and in Europe would be seriously weakened."[151]

The JCS Joint Strategic Plans Committee, using plans developed by the Army, concluded, however, that Viet Minh forces could be successfully attacked and destroyed in six months by seven divisions, "whether U.S. forces particpated or not."[152]

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu Begins

On March 14, 1954, Ambassador Heath cabled the State Department,[153] "The long expected Viet Minh attack on Dien Bien Phu, the 'Verdun' which the French military command threw up in the 'Thai country' in northern Indochina early last winter, began last evening at 6 o'clock [March 13, in Washington], according to Ambassador [Maurice] Dejean who returned from Paris yesterday morning . . . Dejean is confident that the French will be able to hold Dien Bien Phu because of the strength of its fortifications and its fire-power and inflict heavy losses on the attackers. Everything indicates that the Viet Minh will make a resolute attempt to take Dien Bien Phu. . . . Not only does Dejean think the French will hold Dien Bien Phu but he regards the Viet Minh decision to attack it as evidencing elements of desperation and weakness."

At the weekly NSC meeting on March 18, CIA Director Dulles had reported that the French had about a 50-50 chance of holding Dien Bien Phu.[154] The President remarked that, given the situation, "it was difficult for him to understand General Navarre's earlier statements hoping that he would be attacked by the enemy at Dien Bien Phu since he was sure of defeating them." Allen Dulles responded that ". . . the pessimistic French reports from Saigon might be designed as a build-up to exaggerate the extent of their final victory." Secretary of State Dulles noted that he had warned Bidault that the Communists might attack French forces as preparation for making a strong showing at the Geneva Conference, and that "This was precisely what had happened."

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[151] *Ibid.*, p. 201

[152] *Ibid.*, p. 208. Spector, who gives additional details on the proposal, adds: "This plan—never implemented—appeared to take little cognizance of the underlying causes of French failures. As the French experience had demonstrated, capturing key bases and interdicting lines of communications usually had limited effect on an enemy who put little reliance on conventional road-bound supply and movement. The plan also largely ignored the underlying political and social conditions which contributed heavily to the effectiveness of the Viet Minh. Although the plan specified that 'increased and full support for the indigenous peoples' and the 'corresponding development of adequate responsible [Vietnamese] leadership' were essential to victory, it provided no mechanism for achieving these elusive aims."

[153] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1119-1120

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 1132

On March 20, Gen. Paul Ely, (Chief of Staff of the French Joint Chiefs of Staff), arrived in Washington, at Admiral Radford's invitation, for discussions of the military situation in Indochina. These began with a private stag dinner for Ely that night at the quarters of Admiral Radford, which was also attended by Vice President Nixon, General Ridgway, Douglas MacArthur II, who was an assistant to Secretary of State Dulles, and CIA Director Allen Dulles.[155] Ely admitted, in response to a question from Nixon, that the French were tired of the war, but he said that the French Government "was determined not to capitulate to the Communists." A major defeat at Dien Bien Phu, however, could have "serious adverse effects" on the French public, and hence on the position of the Government. But even if the Communists were to take Dien Bien Phu, they would win only a political victory, while suffering a military defeat as a result of the high rate of Viet Minh casualties that would occur.

On March 22, Ely and Radford talked with Eisenhower. There is no record of that discussion, but Ely later said that Eisenhower had told Radford, "without seeming to set limits, to furnish us with whatever we needed to save the entrenched camp."[156]

Ely then talked with Secretary of State Dulles on March 23, with Radford also present. Ely said that the French were concerned about possible Chinese intervention, and he asked Dulles whether, if the Chinese sent jet fighter planes into Indochina, the U.S. Air Force would come to the defense of the French.[157] Dulles, said he could not answer that question, and added:

> I did, however, think it appropriate to remind our French friends that if the United States sent its flag and its own military establishment—land, sea or air—into the Indochina war, then the prestige of the United States would be engaged to a point where we would want to have a success. We could not afford thus to engage the prestige of the United States and suffer a defeat which would have worldwide repercussions.
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> I said that if the French wanted our open participation in the Indochina war, I thought that they ought also to consider that this might involve a greater degree of partnership than had prevailed up to the present time, notably in relation to independence for the Associated States and the training of indigenous forces.

After talking to Ely, Dulles sent a memorandum on the conversation to the President (quoted above),[158] and on March 24 he telephoned the President to discuss the matter further. According to a memorandum of that conversation, "The President said that he agreed basically that we should not become involved in fighting in Indochina unless there were the political preconditions necessary for a successful outcome."[159]

That same day (March 24), Dulles returned a phone call from Radford, who wanted to tell Dulles how frustrating his talk with

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[155] *Ibid.*, pp. 1137–1140.
[156] Quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 193–194. See also *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1140.
[157] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1141–1144.
[158] For the text see *ibid.*, pp. 1141–1142.
[159] *Ibid.*, p. 1150.

Ely had been, and how little progress they seemed to have made.[160] ". . . we must stop being optimistic about the situation," Radford said. "The Secretary [Dulles] said we must do some thinking on the premise that France is creating a vacuum in the world wherever she is. How can we fill that vacuum? One fellow is trying [i.e., the Communists]. The decision in this regard is one of the most important the US has made in a long time . . . pending a clarified political situation we might step up activities along the [Chinese] coast and from Formosa and also deal more directly with the Associated States.

"The Secretary said the French situation is deplorable. He mentioned EDC and also Germany and said we may have to think of cutting loose on our treaties with France.

". . . The Secretary said he talked with the President—we must stop pleading, etc. and we must have policy of our own even if France falls down. We could lose Europe, Asia and Africa all at once if we don't watch out."

For his own part, Radford reported that Ely "made no significant concessions in response to suggestions which would improve the situation in Indo-China," and that Ely had emphasized the problems he was encountering in dealing with the U.S. "Americans acted as if the United States sought to control and operate everything of importance," Ely said, among other things, according to Radford, and "The United States appears to have an invading nature as they undertake everything in such great numbers of people."

This was the conclusion Radford drew after his meetings with Ely: ". . . I am gravely fearful that the measures being undertaken by the French will prove to be inadequate and initiated too late to prevent a progressive deterioration of the situation in Indo-China. If Dien Bien Phu is lost, this deterioration may occur very rapidly due to the loss of morale among the mass of the native population. In such a situation only prompt and forceful intervention by the United States could avert the loss of all of South East Asia to Communist domination. I am convinced that the United States must be prepared to take such action."[161]

At this point, (March 24), Ely was asked to remain an extra day. There had obviously been a decision, at least by Radford, to carry the discussion one step further. The two men met on March 25, and reportedly discussed a possible U.S. airstrike on Dien Bien Phu.[162] According to Radford, Ely asked him what the U.S. would do if the French needed assistance at Dien Bien Phu. Radford said he replied that this would have to be decided by the President, who had committed himself to consulting with or securing the approval of Congress before involving the U.S. directly in the war. He said he added, however, that ". . . if the French government requested such aid and our government granted it, as many as 350 aircraft,

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[160] *Ibid.*, p. 1151.

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 1159, and *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 283, 285.

[162] A plan for such an airstrike, called "Operation VAUTOUR [VULTURE]" by the French, had apparently been developed in Indochina by French and U.S. military personnel. See Melvin Gurtov, *The First Vietnam Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 80, 188. Plans were also being developed in Washington, as was indicated above. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 204-207. A recent book on this subject, John Prados, *The Sky Would Fall, Operation Vulture: The U.S. Bombing Mission in Indochina, 1954* (New York: Dial Press, 1983), is a tendentious and superficial account which adds very little to the existing literature

operating from carriers, could be brought into action within two days." Ely, according to Radford, said that his government was "so fearful of provoking the Chinese that he would not hazard a guess as to whether his government would ask for our help to save Dien Bien Phu."[163]

Radford said that his comments were in the nature of an offer and nothing more, but Ely stated in his memoirs that Radford told him he would push for the plan, and believed he had the President's support.[164]

Before Ely left Washington, he and Radford initialed a minute on their discussions, as follows:[165]

> In respect to General Ely's memorandum of 23 March 1954 [in which Ely explained French concerns about Chinese intervention and asked for clarification of the U.S. position], it was decided that it was advisable that military authorities push their planning work as far as possible so that there would be no time wasted when and if our governments decided to oppose enemy air intervention over Indo-China if it took place; and to check all planning arrangements already made under previous agreements between CINCPAC and the CINC Indo-China and send instructions to those authorities to this effect.

In a draft of this minute prepared by Ely there had been an additional paragraph which Radford refused to agree to, and which was not in the final version of the minute initialed by the two men, which stated: "There was complete agreement on the terms of General Ely's memorandum, dated 23 March, dealing with intervention by US aircraft in Indochina in case of an emergency, it being understood that this intervention could be either by Naval or Air Force units as the need arises, depending on the development of the situation."[166]

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[163] *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 394. Radford's statement was based on the existing operational capability of the U.S. to launch such an attack. An Attack Carrier Striking Group (Task Group 70.2) had been alerted on March 19 to take up a position off the coast of Indochina and to be prepared to carry out offensive operations on a 3-hour notice. On March 22 the Group was told to prepare to attack Communist forces at Dien Bien Phu if so ordered, but the French were not to be told that these preparations were being made. Edwin Bickford Hooper, Dean C. Allard, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The Setting of the Stage to 1959*, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976), p. 247.

[164] Gurtov, pp. 80, 188.

[165] The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam. History of the Indochina Incident, 1940–1954*, vol. 1 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982), p. 373.

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 373a.

CHAPTER 4

RATTLING THE SABER

From late March 1954 until the end of the Geneva Conference in July, the Eisenhower administration undertook a series of moves aimed at holding the line in Geneva and in Indochina and preparing for the expanded post-Geneva role of the U.S., while maintaining good relations with the French and political support at home.

Once again it is important to recall the context in which U.S. policy toward Indochina was being formulated. Although tension between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had eased somewhat after the death of Stalin in February 1953 and the cease-fire in Korea in July 1953, the perception in Washington was that under the new leadership (Georgi Malenkov, who became Premier in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev, then the Secretary General of the Communist Party, who became Premier in 1956), the goals of Russian foreign policy would generally remain the same, even though there might be changes in style and in tactics. The prevailing view was that the new Russian leaders might be less inclined to resort openly to force, but were more determined to establish Russian influence in other countries, especially "less-developed" countries like the Associated States which were faced with serious internal problems.

Despite these first signs of what became known as "peaceful coexistence," there was also no apparent slackening in Russian military preparedness, even after the U.S.S.R. successfully tested a hydrogen bomb in the summer of 1953, and thereby achieved more of a parity with the U.S. in the development of thermonuclear weapons. Thus, in the U.S. and other NATO countries it was considered important to continue strengthening Western military defenses, and to complete the establishment of a defense "community" in Western Europe which would include a rearmed West Germany.

On the other hand, U.S. perception of the intentions and goals of the Chinese, which constituted the other international major factor in the Indochina situation, had changed very little since the period of Chinese intervention in the Korean war. China was still considered by U.S. policymakers to be a direct threat to other countries in Asia, especially Southeast Asia, whether through intimidation, subversion, or direct military action, and it was assumed that the U.S. should take the leadership in preventing the Chinese or the "Communist Bloc" (Russia and China), as it was then called, from expanding their territorial control in Asia. In the U.S. itself, there was still a very strong and vocal political faction, the "China Lobby," which was opposed to any conciliation of China under the conditions then prevailing, and was pushing for a firm stand by the U.S. at the Geneva Conference.

These were some of the major factors affecting the formulation of U.S. policy toward Indochina during the spring and early

summer of 1954, as the Eisenhower administration sought to combine the end of the Korean war with the securing of acceptable terms for concluding the First Indochina War.

Toward the end of March, as the French struggled to maintain their position at Dien Bien Phu, and General Ely arrived in Washington to request additional U.S. assistance, the administration decided that the time had come to enunciate a position designed to help it to achieve the purposes it was then pursuing; a position that would at one and the same time avoid unilateral U.S. military involvement, as well as remove some of the stigma of French colonialism from any multilateral military action in which the U.S. might decide to become involved; bolster the French in Indochina and in Geneva, as well as with respect to the European Defense Community; act as a deterrent to the Communists by creating uncertainty as to U.S. intentions, and thereby create an incentive for the Communists to be more amenable to a reasonable settlement in Geneva; and avoid insofar as possible the domestic political costs of either getting too involved militarily or agreeing to a settlement that would be deemed to be too soft.

The administration also wanted to facilitate the establishment of a Pacific pact, or South Asia NATO as some called it, which could provide the multilateral framework for defending Southeast Asia after the Geneva settlement.

A concept was needed that would be concrete enough to be effective and vague enough to be flexible, as well as providing a way of rationalizing and justifying future decisions. The answer, deceptively simple and appealing in its wording and tone, was "united action."

Efforts to create uncertainty in the minds of other nations, however, frequently create uncertainty at home as well. Thus, the administration's use of united action to keep the Communists guessing about possible U.S. military moves also created concern in Congress and the public. As the guessing game was being played, especially in April and May 1954, there were numerous rumors of war circulating in Washington in conjunction with various White House or State Department meetings on Indochina attended by congressional leaders. One episode in particular, a meeting of congressional leaders with Dulles and Radford on April 3, 1954, has since been singled out as an example of action by Congress that supposedly prevented the Executive from going to war.[1] Upon closer examination, it appears that this was not the case. While it wanted Congress' support, perhaps even in the form of a resolution, the administration was using the threat of intervention to achieve the diplomatic goals it was pursuing.

Even though Eisenhower and his associates had decided to avoid U.S. military intervention, and to work toward a post-Geneva arrangement by which to defend Southeast Asia from further Communist expansion, they also faced contingencies that might necessi-

[1]Years later, Admiral Radford admitted in his memoirs that Eisenhower had been right in supporting united action, and that he (Radford) had been wrong in advocating unilateral action in the absence of agreement on multilateral action *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p 449. He added, " . . whether, had our conditions been met and had we intervened, we would have been successful in defeating the Communists I am not sure I feel that we would have continued to encounter great problems in getting along with the French "

tate charges in that general approach. If the French had succeeded in winning at Dien Bien Phu, there might have been less pressure for their withdrawal from Indochina. This, in turn, might have stengthened the existing French Government and its position at the Geneva Conference. However, it might also have affected the behavior of the Chinese, who might have responded to any crushing defeat of the Viet Minh by increasing their own assistance, or even intervening in the situation. If the Chinese intervened in force, there was little doubt that the U.S. would retaliate against China itself, probably with nuclear weapons.

A more likely contingency, however, and one which the Eisenhower administration was particularly concerned about, was that the French would be defeated at Dien Bien Phu, and the Communists would then attempt to drive the French out of Indochina. There was general agreement among U.S. policymakers, beginning with the President himself, that this could not be permitted to happen, and that the U.S. would have to intervene with its own forces if necessary to prevent such an outcome. Even in the event of this exigency, however, Eisenhower envisioned a united action response, if only in the form of joint participation by U.S. forces and those of the Associated States, together with whatever help might be provided by the French and other U.S. allies.

The U.S. Announces the United Action Concept

The genesis of the united action concept is not entirely clear, but the idea of acting through a multilateral framework had many different roots, including the suggestions from Congress, beginning as early as 1949, for developing a Pacific pact. The Eisenhower administration itself, based in part on Eisenhower's personal views and preferences, had started moving in this direction, particularly after it became apparent that the Indochina issue would be negotiated in Geneva, which could lead to French withdrawal from the area.

The concept was announced on March 29, 1954, by Secretary of State Dulles, who said that Communist control of Southeast Asia would be a "grave threat," and that this threat should be met by united action.

Beginning at least a week before the speech, the administration had developed bipartisan congressional backing for the announcement.

Although the documentary record is weak, and the direct evidence is therefore not entirely conclusive, it would appear that the decision to take the united action approach was made by President Eisenhower, with the advice of Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford (Chairman of the JCS), on Sunday, March 21, 1954, following the meeting on Saturday night, March 20, of Radford and others with General Ely, Commander of French Union forces in Indochina. This can be deduced from the fact that on Monday, March 22, at 8 a.m., the President, Dulles and Radford met with a selected group of Republican congressional leaders, apparently for the purpose of getting their tentative approval of united action, and from the fact that on Sunday, March 21 at 12:16 p.m. there had been a White House meeting with the President attended by Dulles, Radford, Secretary of Defense Wilson, Allen Dulles, and Douglas Mac-

Arthur II,[2] which it can reasonably be assumed was held for the purpose of discussing united action (including approval by Congress) prior to further conferences with General Ely, and at which presumably it was agreed to hold the meeting with congressional leaders the next morning.

At that meeting with Republican leaders on March 22, Eisenhower, Dulles, and Radford briefed what the State Department's historical series calls "a restricted number of unnamed leaders" of Congress on the situation in Indochina. These were probably the top Republican leaders of the House and Senate, drawn from the larger Republican leadership group (8-10 leaders usually attended) that met at 9 a.m. that morning for the regular Monday legislative conference with the President. (Following the 8 a.m. meeting, Dulles invited senior Republicans on the foreign policy committees—Wiley, Smith and Vorys—to meet with him at 5 p.m. that evening at the State Department, "to discuss something discussed this morning at the White House re Indochina.")[3] There are no official records of this March 22, 8 a.m. meeting except for a short mention of it in the diary of James C. Hagerty, the White House Press Secretary.[4] However, in two other sources there is corroborating evidence that the meeting was held, and that it was held for the purpose of getting a preliminary and tentative reaction from Republican leaders to the decision to respond to the situation in Indochina under the concept of united action.

The first of these sources is Admiral Radford, who said in his memoirs that "with encouragement from the President, Mr. Dulles reviewed with congressional leaders the situation in Indochina and possible American actions. He told them the administration was considering a public call for united (free world) action and would appreciate their endorsement."[5]

The second source is Louis L. Gerson's biography of Dulles as Secretary of State, in which there is this statement: "At the suggestion of the President he [Dulles] reviewed for Congressional leaders the situation in Indochina and possible American action. He told them the administration was considering a public call for united action in Indochina and would appreciate their endorsement." Moreover, according to this source, the congressional leaders present at the meeting responded favorably to the idea, and this led to a memorandum on this subject by Dulles which was ap-

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[2]This information on the March 21 meeting has been provided by the staff of the Eisenhower Library, which says that "No subject of the meeting is given and we have found no record of the conversation." Letter to CRS from John E. Wickman, Director, Apr. 1, 1982. It is also of interest that Arthur Summerfield, then the Postmaster General, and previously chairman of the Republican National Committee, attended the meeting. His presence is further confirmation of the fact that one of the points discussed at the meeting was how to handle the matter with Congress, and probably to do so outside the normal White House or departmental congressional liaison channels.

[3]Dulles' telephone conversations with Wiley, Smith and Vorys, Mar. 22, 1954, Dulles Telephone Calls Series. The Eisenhower Library has not located any further information on or records of this 5 p.m. meeting. Letter to CRS from John Wickman, Aug. 11, 1982.

[4]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1140. The Eisenhower Library reports that there is no mention of such a meeting in the President's appointment records. Letter to CRS from John Wickman, Apr. 1, 1982.

[5]*From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 396. Although Radford's memoirs seem to have been written on the assumption that this meeting with congressional leaders occurred after Dulles met with Ely on March 23, he does not seem to be referring to the meeting of April 3, which was the next known meeting with congressional leaders, and therefore would appear to be referring to the meeting of March 22.

proved by Eisenhower and by congressional leaders of both parties. The memo was then submitted to ambassadors of allied countries, and was incorporated in Dulles' speech on March 29.[6]

The foreign policy committees of Congress, or at least some members of those committees, were also consulted prior to Dulles' March 29 speech. Dulles himself said subsequently that he had discussed the speech with members of the committees, as well as with other Members and leaders of Congress.[7]

Based on these sources, it can be assumed not only that the concept of united action was discussed at the meeting of March 22 with Republican congressional leaders, but also that between March 22 and 29 it was discussed with leaders of both parties in Congress, by members of both foreign policy committees of Congress, and by major U.S. allies.

During this time, the question of U.S. military intervention, raised by the Special Committee on Indochina and by the JCS a few days previously, was discussed at some length at the regular NSC meeting on March 25.[8] Although the President continued to criticize the military judgment and decisions of the French relative to the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and appears to have rejected any thought of using U.S. forces in that battle, he also seems to have been increasingly more determined to prevent the fall of Indochina, and to use U.S. forces, if necessary, in order to do so. In response to a suggestion from Secretary of Defense Wilson that the U.S. "forget about Indochina for a while" and concentrate on establishing a Pacific pact, "The President expressed great doubt as to the feasibility of such a proposal, since he believed that the collapse of Indochina would produce a chain reaction which would result in the fall of all of Southeast Asia to the Communists."

In considering U.S. intervention, the President said that although he understood the reluctance of the French to take the issue to the U.N., "he himself did not see how the United States or other free world nations could go full-out in support of the Associated States without UN approval and assistance." Although there would be opposition to such a move from some countries, especially if the appeal came from France, he thought that there was a possiblity the U.N. might intervene "if Vietnam called for assistance and particularly cited Chinese Communist aid to the rebels."

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[6] Louis L. Gerson, *John Foster Dulles*, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, vol. XVII (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), p. 158. Gerson's authoritative study was supported by interviews and access to official papers. (See also Dulles' speech on May 7, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XVI, p. 723.) Note that Radford and Gerson's statements are almost identical. Either Radford used Gerson, who published earlier, or both were quoting from an unpublished memo.

[7] Cf. *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1476, 1472, 1917, and *HFAC Hts. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, p. 131. The printed records of the two committees do not contain any references to such consultations, with the possible exception of a brief discussion of Indochina that occurred during an executive session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 23, 1954, dealing with another subject. See *HFAC Hts. Ser.*, vol. XVI, pp. 505–510. See, however, the remarks of Representative Thomas J. Dodd (D/Conn.) in *CR*, vol. 100, p. 4748, and the prior exchange between Dodd and Dulles in *HFAC Hts Ser.*, vol. X, pp. 425–426. In this same exchange, Dulles noted that he talked to one Democratic Senator (Walter George). It is not known what other Senate Democrats or congressional Democratic leaders were consulted. Dulles subsequently stated that his consultation with the House Foreign Affairs Committee did take place at the meeting on March 23. See *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1917.

[8] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1163–1168.

He added, "in any case . . . he was clear that the Congress would have to be in on any move by the United States to intervene in Indochina. It was simply academic to imagine otherwise."

Secretary Dulles commented that the Attorney General "was presumably preparing an opinion with respect to the prerogatives of the President and of the Congress in the matter of using U.S. military forces to counter aggression, and he hoped that the Attorney General would hasten completion of his report,"[9] whereupon the President suggested ". . . that this might be the moment to begin to explore with the Congress what support could be anticipated in the event that it seemed desirable to intervene in Indochina." Dulles, however, said that "a lot more work" was needed before the executive branch would be ready to discuss the subject with Congress. Moreover, "the fighting season in Indochina would end soon, and he believed would end without a clear military decision." At this stage, he said, the Communists were "seeking a political rather than a military victory. . . ." Thus, there was adequate time for the U.S. to secure U.N. backing. Dulles suggested that the NSC should consider the larger question posed by the diminished role of France as a world power:

> We are witnessing, said Secretary Dulles, the collapse or evaporation of France as a great power in most areas of the world. The great question was, who should fill the void left by the collapse of French power, particularly in the colonial areas. Would it be the Communists, or must it be the U.S.?

He said that the NSC Planning Board should also consider the fact that the U.S. could not replace the French in Indochina "without estimating the repercussions in other parts of the world."

It was agreed that the Planning Board would make recommendations prior to the Geneva Conference on ". . . the extent to which and the circumstances and conditions under which the United States would be willing to commit its resources in support of the Associated States in the effort to prevent the loss of Indochina to the Communists, in concert with the French or in concert with others or, if necessary, unilaterally." These, it should be noted, were the recommendations that had been suggested by both the JCS and the Special Committee.

President Eisenhower again reflected on how the U.S. might intervene through united action. It might be done through an expanded ANZUS Treaty he said. (The ANZUS Pact, established in 1952, was a mutual defense treaty between the U.S., Australia and New Zealand.) Whatever the mechanism, the nations agreeing to assist with such an effort could then intervene under the auspices of the U.N., or through treaties between each of the countries and Vietnam. "This latter offered the United States a good chance," he said, "since we could in all probability get the necessary two-thirds majority vote in the Senate on such a treaty. There was the added advantage, continued the President, that this procedure avoided solely occidental assistance to Vietnam . . . of one thing at least he was absolutely certain: The United States would not go into China [*sic*]—probably should be Indochina] unless the Vietnamese welcomed our intervention."

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[9]See below, p. 211, for further discussion of this report

Later that same day (March 25), Dulles returned a telephone call from Radford, who reported that the military were looking into French requests for additional aircraft, but that "there would be no commitments." "The Sec. agreed. The total implications involve such a commitment. The Sec. said he would not like to see us do it until we had better assurances from the French that we can work effectively together."[10]

On March 27, Dulles gave Eisenhower the draft of the speech he proposed to make on Indochina and on the United Action concept on March 29. Eisenhower approved it after changing only a few words. Dulles then called the State Department's press officer, Carl W. McCardle (Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs), to tell him that the President had approved the speech. Dulles also told McCardle that "Bowie [Robert R. Bowie, Director of State's Policy Planning Staff] thinks the country will not be willing to go along with a tough program. McC. said it has to. Bowie said we may have to compromise. The Sec. said if it won't go along on a strong policy, it won't go along on appeasement. Neither policy is popular—we better take the one that is right. The President agreed—though the Sec. said he is not as critical."

Dulles and McCardle also talked about an appointment Dulles had made to see Senator George later that day. "The Sec. said he was going to tell him about the speech so the Democrats could not say they were not advised."[11]

On March 29, the President and the Vice President met with Republican congressional leaders at the weekly leadership conference, and according to Nixon's memoirs, which is the only available account by a participant of this aspect of that meeting, Eisenhower told them ". . . that if the military situation at Dien Bien Phu became desperate he would consider the use of diversionary tactics, possibly a landing by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Forces on China's Hainan Island or a naval blockade of the Chinese mainland. Very simply, but dramatically, he said: 'I am bringing this up at this time because at any time within the space of forty-eight hours, it might be necessary to move into the battle of Dien Bien Phu in order to keep it from going against us, and in that case I will be calling in the Democrats as well as our Republican leaders to inform them of the actions we're taking.' "[12]

That same morning Dulles called Representative Judd to thank him for sending a copy of the report on his 1953 trip to the Far East, which he said he took into account in preparing his speech to be delivered that night. During the conversation, Dulles said he was not hopeful about Dien Bien Phu, and Judd said he was not either. Dulles added that the President was more optimistic than he was.[13]

That night, in a speech to the Overseas Press Club in New York on "The Threat of Red Asia," Secretary Dulles announced united action.[14]

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[10] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, p. 1168.
[11] Dulles Telephone Calls Series.
[12] Richard Nixon, *R.N.: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), p. 151
[13] Dulles Telephone Calls Series.
[14] For the text of the speech see *Department of State Bulletin*, Apr 12, 1954

> Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today.

This speech, which was made at a time when there was growing concern in Congress and the public about the situation in Indochina and about possible administration plans for U.S. military action, provoked a number of questions in Congress about what Dulles' language was intended to mean. In the Senate the next day there was a brief discussion of Dulles' speech generated by remarks of Paul H. Douglas (D/Ill.), who supported the administration, in which several Members expressed uncertainty about the situation, and urged the administration to provide more information to Congress. There was no opposition to Dulles' statement, however, and the tone of the discussion indicated that there was broad support in Congress for the position enunciated in the speech.[15]

Senator Knowland called Dulles to congratulate him on the speech. "The Sec. said it would make plenty of trouble in certain quarters. The British and the French are very unhappy. But the Sec. said he had to puncture the sentiment for appeasement before Geneva. They [Dulles and Knowland] agreed it needed to be said."[16]

Senator H. Alexander Smith noted in his handwritten diary for March 29, "Went to Dulles' at 6:15 p.m. Dulles showed me his speech on Indochina and Red China which he will give tonight. It is very stiff but it stands up as I believe it should. It will probably upset the British and French, but they should come along and stand by us. If we are firm Russia will have to yield."[17] (The Smiths had Mrs. Dulles to dinner, after which they watched the speech. Smith said, "It was fine.")

In his press conference on March 31, Eisenhower was asked whether united action meant that U.S. troops might be used in Indochina. Eisenhower evaded the question, saying that each case would have to be judged on its merits, but once again he expressed his own reservations about the use of U.S. forces in such a situation: ". . . I can conceive of no greater disadvantage to America

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[15]See *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 4207–4212. On August 2, 1954, Dulles sent a memorandum to the President suggesting the publication of a statement about French requests for U.S. intervention and U.S. efforts to gain support for united action. Such a publication, he said, ". . . would have the *advantage* of dispelling generally accepted rumors such as the United States proposed an air strike to save Dien Bien Phu, and the British vetoed it. The statement would have *disadvantages*. It might reopen controversy between Britain and France. . . . Perhaps more important is that it gives the Communists a 'case study' of how we operate in matters from the standpoint of our own Constitution and our desire not to 'go it alone.' This might tempt them in the future to try to make some close calculations—perhaps miscalculations—to our disadvantage." *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1899.

The President agreed that such a statement might be useful. (It was also noted that leading members of the two congressional foreign policy committees were also interested in getting such a statement.) *Ibid.*, p. 1914.

The British and French approved the statement, but in a memorandum to the President on August 24, 1954, Dulles suggested that it should not be published, since publication would "artificially stimulate controversy that has subsided." *Ibid.*, p. 1977. The President agreed.

[16]Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

[17]Princeton University, H. Alexander Smith Papers, Diary, box 282.

than to be employing its own ground forces, and any other kind of forces, in great numbers around the world, meeting each little situation as it arises."[18]

In another action on March 29, the NSC executive secretary released for the use of the Planning Board the highly sensitive Special Annex to NSC 177 (NSC 5405) which had been recalled on January 8, setting forth alternatives for the U.S. in the event the French withdrew from Indochina.[19]

The administration also put on a quickly-organized public relations campaign to sell Congress and the public on united action.

> Richard Rovere of the *New Yorker* wrote in early April that the Secretary of State was conducting "one of the boldest campaigns of political suasion ever undertaken by an American statesman." Congressmen, political leaders of all colorations, newspapermen and television personalities were being "rounded up in droves and escorted to lectures and briefings on what the State Department regards as the American stake in Indo-China." Were that area to be "lost," the color charts showed that "Communist influence" would radiate drastically in a semicircle outward from Indochina to Thailand, Burma, Malaya and far down across the South China Sea to Indonesia; the briefing officers listed strategic raw materials that would accrue to Russia and China and thereafter be denied to the free nations; if America should fail to save the day, the prospect was faltering resistance to Communism in the whole Asian arc from India to Japan. On the basis of both his public and off-the-record remarks to the press, Dulles was represented as believing that "we should not flinch at doing anything that is needed to prevent a Communist victory"; indeed if American moral and material support should prove unable to hold the French in line, "then we ought to commit our own forces to the conflict."[20]

Meanwhile, the position of French forces in the battle of Dien Bien Phu was becoming more critical, and on March 30–April 1 the Viet Minh successfully assaulted the central bastion known as "Five Hills, although the French then regained some of that area."[21] In Washington, Admiral Radford polled the Joint Chiefs on March 31 as to whether the U.S. should use its air power to assist French forces at Dien Bien Phu. Of the five members of the JCS, only Radford was in favor of doing so. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, took the position that the question was improper, and that because the advice of the JCS had not been requested by a "proper [civilian] authority," any recommended action would be "outside the proper scope of authority" of the JCS, and would "involve the JCS inevitably in politics."

On April 1, Radford again posed the question, but this time he asked what the position of each member would be if requested by

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[18] *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, p. 366.

[19] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1182. At that time, the assistant to the representative of the CIA on the Planning Board (Robert Amory) was William P. Bundy, who played a leading role in Vietnam policymaking during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

[20] Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 212. Footnotes have been omitted.

[21] For this and other aspects of the battle see Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place* (Philadelphia: J. B Lippincott, 1967).

"proper [civilian] authority." The response was the same: by 4-1 they rejected the proposal to intervene.

Later that day the NSC met, and Admiral Radford pointed out the seriousness of the situation at Dien Bien Phu.[22] The President responded by again questioning the military judgment of the French, but he added that because of the situation the U.S. had to consider whether to intervene. He said he understood that, except for Radford, the JCS opposed an American airstrike. But the question of intervention, he added, was "a question for 'statesmen,' and while . . . he could see a thousand variants in the equation and very terrible risks, there was no reason for the Council to avoid considering the intervention issue."

Secretary Dulles asked whether there was anything that the U.S. could do in time to save the garrison. Radford replied that if the decision were made to use U.S. planes, an airstrike could be conducted the next day. At this point the President, obviously not wanting to discuss this sensitive issue with the full Council, said that he wanted to discuss the matter further with "certain members of the National Security Council" in his office after the meeting of the NSC had concluded.

Unfortunately, the State Department reports that it has been unable to find any record of that subsequent meeting,[23] but in Dulles' records of his telephone conversations that afternoon there is the following information:[24]

> At 2:27 p.m., Dulles informed Attorney General [Herbert] Brownell that something fairly serious had come up after the morning NSC meeting. Dulles was working on it with Legal Adviser [Herman] Phleger. Dulles indicated that if there was to be a meeting with Congressional leaders the following day, he would like to have something to show them. At 2:54 p.m., Dulles informed the President that he was going ahead with arrangements for a Congressional meeting on the following day. He would have a draft to show the President in the morning. At 3:05 p.m., Dulles told Admiral Radford that he was going ahead with the meeting and had confirmed the matter with the President. Radford pointed out that time was a factor, that the President might be criticized for not doing something in advance should a disaster occur. It was agreed that a meeting would be held on Apr. 2 if feasible, otherwise on Apr. 3. Secretary Dulles said that it was necessary to consider methods for restraining the Chinese Communists by means of air and sea power. Dulles and Radford agreed that Congress must be convinced that the job which the Administration wanted to do could be done without sending manpower to Asia.

It is possible only to speculate as to what happened at the April 1 meeting that took place after the NSC adjourned, and what Dulles was referring to when he told the Attorney General that "something fairly serious" had come up after the NSC meeting, but it would appear that Eisenhower, Dulles, and Radford (Secretary

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[22] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp 1201-1202.
[23] *Ibid.*, p 1202, fn 3
[24] *Ibid* The Eisenhower Library has not located any additional information on the Dulles-Brownell conversation. Letter to CRS from John Wickman, Aug 11, 1982.

Wilson may also have attended) agreed that Congress would have to be consulted about possible U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu, and that "something fairly serious" was in reference to the drafting of a resolution by which Congress could authorize such intervention.

Another piece of information further supports the proposition that as of April 1 Eisenhower may have been considering the possiblity of an airstrike at Dien Bien Phu, but one that would be covert rather than public. White House Press Secretary Hagerty reported that at a luncheon that day Eisenhower said to two close publisher friends that the "US might have to make decisions to send in squadrons from 2 aircraft carriers off coast to bomb Reds at Dien Bien Phu—'of course, if we did, we'd have to deny it forever.' "[25] (How a covert plan would square with a request to Congress for a resolution is not clear. This may have been one aspect of the "fairly serious" matter that had arisen in the meeting.)

The next day, April 2, Eisenhower met with Secretaries Dulles and Wilson and Admiral Radford, and Dulles presented the draft of the congressional resolution. Eisenhower read it, and said (to quote from Dulles' memo of the meeting) ". . . it reflected what, in his opinion was desirable. He thought, however, that the tactical procedure should be to develop first the thinking of congressional leaders without actually submitting in the first instance a resolution drafted by ourselves."[26] Dulles said that was his intention, but that "he had put the matter down at this point in resolution form so as to be sure that we ourselves knew what it was that we thought desirable." He added that there might be "some difference of approach" between himself and Radford that should be clarified before the meeting with congressional leaders. "Mr. Dulles said that it was his view that the authority which we sought was designed to be a deterrent, and to give us a strong position with which to develop strength in the area by association not merely with France and the Associated States, but also with Thailand, Indonesia if possible, the UK (Malaya), the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand . . . he felt it very important from the standpoint of congressional and public opinion that adequate participation in any defensive efforts should be made by these other countries."

Dulles said that Radford, on the other hand, wanted to use the resolution in connection with an immediate airstrike.

Surprisingly, Radford replied that while he had been thinking of a strike at Dien Bien Phu, he now felt that "the outcome there would be determined within a matter of hours, and the situation was not one which called for any US participation." He said that although he had "nothing specific now in mind," later events in Indochina might call for U.S. intervention.

Secretary Wilson's interpretation was that the congressional resolution "was designed to 'fill our hand' so that we would be stronger to negotiate with France, the UK and others." Dulles agreed.

The operative paragraph of the proposed joint resolution read as follows:[27]

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 1204
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 1210.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 1212

That the President of the United States be and he hereby is authorized, in the event he determines that such action is required to protect and defend the safety and security of the United States, to employ the Naval and Air Forces of the United States to assist the forces which are resisting aggression in Southeast Asia, to prevent the extension and expansion of that aggression, and to protect and defend the safety and security of the United States.

The proposed resolution referred only to naval and air forces, and not specifically to army ground forces. Naval forces can include marines, however, and depending on the interpretation of the other provisions of the resolution, army ground forces could be authorized by the language about preventing the extension and expansion of aggression, and/or in protecting and defending the safety and security of the U.S.

By contrast, the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin (Southeast Asia) Resolution[28] passed by Congress at the request of President Johnson, did not "authorize" action by the President. Its language was very carefully drafted to avoid any suggestion that the President needed Congress to authorize his use of the armed forces, and, in fact, the wording was intended to put Congress on record as agreeing that he had that power as Commander in Chief. Accordingly, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution stated that Congress "approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The 1964 resolution went on to declare that, consistent with its international commitments, the U.S. would, "as the President determines, . . . take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force," to assist Vietnam (or any other members or "protocol state" of SEATO).

The proposed 1954 resolution also contained the following language: "This Resolution shall not derogate from the authority of the Congress to declare war and shall terminate on June 30, 1955, or prior thereto if the Congress by concurrent resolution shall so determine." By contrast, the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had no termination date, and would expire ". . . when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress." Nor did the Johnson administration draft of the 1964 resolution provide for such termination by Congress. This was added, at the suggestion of Senator Russell, before the resolution was sent to Congress.

What happened prior to the meeting of April 2 to cause Admiral Radford to change his mind about the airstrike at Dien Bien Phu? Radford himself does not discuss this in his memoirs, nor is it discussed in other sources, but judging from the available evidence it can be surmised that the change occurred as a result not only of the reluctance of Eisenhower and Dulles to become overtly involved at Dien Bien Phu, but also the strong and virtually unanimous opposition of the other service Chiefs. After having twice

[28]Public Law 88-408.

polled the JCS on the question of intervention, Radford polled the group for a third time on April 2, at a meeting which probably occurred prior to the meeting at the White House at which he said he had changed his mind. This time the question was in writing, and the Chiefs were told by Radford that it came from Secretary of Defense Wilson. Once again the vote was against intervention, but with Air Force Chief of Staff General Nathan F. Twining giving qualified support to Radford's position.

Each Chief responded in writing to the question: "If the United States Government is requested by the Government of France to render assistance in Indo-China by committing USAF units and/or naval air forces in combat, what position do the JCS take?"[29] Army Chief of Staff Ridgway replied as follows:

> From the military viewpoint, the United States capability for effective intervention in the Dien Bien Phu operation was altogether disproportionate to the liability it would incur.
>
> From the military viewpoint, the outcome of the Dien Bien Phu operation, which ever way it might go, would not in itself decisively affect the military situation there.
>
> If recommended and executed, intervention by United States armed forces would greatly increase the risk of general war. If the United States, by its own act, were deliberately to risk promoting such possible reaction, it must first materially increase its readiness to accept the consequences.

Adm. Robert B. Carney, Chief of Naval Operations, replied that the JCS should reaffirm their opinion on the need, if possible, to prevent the "loss" of Indochina, and should report on the capabilities of U.S. airpower to come to the defense of Dien Bien Phu. The JCS, he said, should take the position that such assistance "would improve the French tactical situation," but should not state that it would be "decisive," and, moreover, that this "tactical advantage" would have to be weighed against the "potential consequence of this U.S. involvement in the Indochina war."

General Twining said that his answer was a "qualified 'Yes' " provided France agreed to let the U.S. have command of air and naval elements under overall French command, gave the U.S. "leadership in the training of troops and employment of combat forces," agreed to let the U.S. "train and organize indigenous forces under indigenous leadership," and granted "true sovereignty" to the Associated States.

Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commandant of the Marines, replied:

> Upon consideration I have reached the conclusion that air intervention in the current fighting in Indo China would be an unprofitable adventure. If I could convince myself that such intervention—on any scale now available to us—would turn the tide of military victory in favor of the French I would hold an entirely different opinion despite the hazards and uncertainties attending such a course. But I feel that we can expect no significant military results from an improvised air offensive against the guerrilla forces. They simply do not offer us a target which our air will find remunerative—they are nowhere

[29] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, pp 1220–1223.

exposed at a vital point critical to their continued resupply and communications. The initial morale effect of our appearance would therefore soon give way to a feeling of disappointment as it became evident that our efforts were without important effect on the fortunes of the soldier on the ground.

The essentials of the problem appear to be these:

a. Can we, by overt military action in the air, contribute significantly to a French victory in Indo China?

b. Would such direct intervention on our part at this time serve as a deterrent to Communism elsewhere?

I believe that a negative answer is indicated in both cases.

It follows that action by our forces in Indo China, if initiated today, would be taken in the face of impending disaster and holds no significant promise of success. For us to participate in a defeat cannot be accounted as a means either of combatting Communism effectively, or of enhancing our position in the eyes of the Asiatics.

The inevitable result would be the necessity of either admitting a fresh military failure on our part or intervening further with ground forces in an effort to recoup our fortunes. We can ill afford the first. I do not believe the other is a matter which we should even consider under present circumstances.

It is with regret that I record conclusions which run so counter to my natural instincts to support our friends in their efforts to halt the Communist advance.

"The Day We Didn't Go to War"?

The meeting with congressional leaders which then occurred on April 3, 1954, is especially important in examining the role of Congress in the Vietnam war, as well as the more general analysis of the role of Congress in the making of foreign policy. Some practitioners and scholars have alluded to this episode as a "model" of successful legislative-executive relations in foreign policy and of effective congressional participation in foreign policymaking.[30]

Before discussing the details of the April 3 meeting, it would be well to reflect briefly on the trend in legislative-executive relations during the period leading up to the meeting in order to understand better the attitudes and responses of participants. It was not, to say the least, a restful time. Beginning in 1953, and climaxing during the early part of 1954, there was a battle between the Executive and the Senate over the so-called Bricker Amendment.[31] After one month of debate the amendment was defeated in February 1954, but a substitute version offered by Senator George then fell only one vote short of the two-thirds needed. During this debate it was apparent that the Senate continued to be concerned about its constitutional powers. There was strong support for Eisenhower, even among the proponents of the amendment, but the debate served to

[30]See, for example, comments in *Congress and Foreign Policy*, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations, 94th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976), pp. 131, 152-154.

[31]S.J. Res. 1, a proposed amendment to the Constitution which, in its original version, stated that a provision of a treaty conflicting with the Constitution shall be without "force or effort"; that a treaty shall become effective as internal law only by legislation "which would be valid in the absence of treaty"; and that Congress would have the power to regulate "all executive and other agreements." The author was John W. Bricker (R/Ohio).

reinforce the concern expressed in the 1951 "Great Debate" about protecting Congress' role in the making of national commitments and of war. It had the effect, therefore, of heightening the Senate's sensitivity to any actions by the Executive which appeared to infringe on Congress' role.

Another example of this sensitivity was the consensus of a number of Senators, primarily the "constitutionalists" among Southern Democrats like Stennis and conservative Republicans like Arthur V. Watkins (R/Utah), over a provision in the mutual defense treaty with Korea approved by the Senate on January 26, 1954.[32] This was the provision, which appeared again in 1955 in the SEATO Treaty, that in the event of an attack on either party, each would act "to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes." Stennis and Watkins, as well as A. Willis Robertson (D/Va.), tried unsuccessfully to get Alexander Wiley (R/Wis.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to define what was meant by "constitutional processes" in terms of the role of Congress. They wanted assurance that the language would not permit the President, as in the case of the Korean war, to commit the country to war without the approval of Congress. As Stennis said, "we are treading on dangerous ground when we commit ourselves to take action thousands of miles from home without giving Congress an opportunity to participate in the decision." Wiley, carrying the case for the administration, replied that the term did not detract from the power of either Congress or the President, but he and others among the "internationalists," including Senator Hubert Humphrey (D/Minn.), took the position that Congress should not "tie the President's hands," and argued that the term "constitutional processes" included both the power of Congress to declare war and the President's power as Commander in Chief.

Senator John Sherman Cooper (R/Ky.), who was to become a leader in the opposition to the Vietnam war in later years, said that although Congress could not and would not "take away from the President his constitutional powers to protect our security," that if the Korean war were resumed he hoped Congress would have the "opportunity . . . to take proper constitutional action." Sixteen years later, during Senate consideration of proposals to seek an end to the Vietnam war, Cooper had this to say:[33]

> I do not believe that any of the Presidents who have been involved with Vietnam, Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, or President Nixon, foresaw or desired that the United States would become involved in a large scale war in Asia. But the fact remains that a steady progression of small decisions and actions over a period of 20 years had forestalled a clear-cut decision by the President or by the President and Congress—decisions as to whether the defense of South Vietnam and involvement in a great war were necessary to the security and best interest of the United States. In the light of experience in Vietnam, a basic change in attitude has taken place. In constitutional terms, the recognition that "constitu-

[32] For the debate see *CR.* vol. 100, pp. 782-818.
[33] *CR.* vol 116, p 40441

tional processes" become difficult if not irrelevant once engaged in a war, has underlined the urgency of the debate of the past few years over Cambodia . . . [and] a growing awareness on the part of the Congress that it must carry out its constitutional responsibilities to share the burden of decision-making and judgment on vital issues of policy and national security.[34]

This general congressional sensitivity was further increased early in February 1954 by the decision to send the 200 Air Force technicians to Indochina, a decision that was made without the knowledge of Congress, and was executed over its objections and without its express consent.

Thus, as a result of these factors, and other lingering effects of the Korean war, there was considerable concern in Congress, particularly the Senate, about the possible military involvement of the U.S. in Indochina, especially the use of ground forces, at the time of the meeting on April 3. Congress and the public clearly did not want "another Korea," nor did they want to be committed to a war by unilateral action of the President.[35]

The Saturday, April 3 meeting with leaders of Congress was held at the State Department, with Dulles presiding. (The President was at Camp David for the weekend.) Participants from the executive branch were, besides Dulles, Admiral Radford, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes, Robert B. Anderson (Secretary of the Navy, who was about to succeed Kyes as Deputy Secretary), Under Secretary of State Smith, and Assistant Secretary of State Morton. From the Senate came Republicans Knowland (majority leader) and Eugene D. Millikin (chairman of the Republican Conference), and Democrats Lyndon Johnson (minority leader), Russell, and Clements (minority whip), and from the House, Speaker Joseph W. Martin, Jr. (R/Mass.), John W. McCormack (D/Mass.), the minority whip, and the chief deputy whip, J. Percy Priest (D/Tenn.). For unknown reasons, House Minority Leader Sam Rayburn was not there, nor was the House majority leader, Charles A. Halleck, or the House majority whip, Leslie C. Arends. Also missing was Leverett Saltonstall, the Senate majority whip.

Because of the importance of the meeting, it would be well to quote in full the brief memo on it that Dulles wrote for his files:[36]

> Admiral Radford gave a very comprehensive briefing on the military situation in Indochina. He went into particular detail in connection with the battle now raging at Dien Bien Phu.
>
> The Secretary [Dulles] explained the significance of Indochina, pointing out that it was the key to Southeast Asia, that if the Communists gained Indochina and nothing was done about it, it was only a question of time until all of Southeast

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[34]It is of interest to note that on March 22, 1954, Senator William Langer (R/N. Dak.), who consistently warned against and opposed enlargement of the President's power to commit the country to war, introduced a bill to provide that ". . . the Armed Forces of the United States shall not be ordered into action against the territory or armed forces of any foreign nations without a prior declaration of war, except to the extent necessary to repel an armed attack against the United States or any of its territories or possessions." *CR*, vol 100, p 3607.

[35]For a good discussion of these domestic political/institutional factors and the way in which they conditioned U.S. Government policymaking on Indochina before and during the Geneva Conference, see Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[36]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, pp 1224-1225.

Asia falls along with Indonesia, thus imperiling our western island of defense.

The Secretary then said that he felt that the president should have Congressional backing so that he could use air and seapower in the area if he felt it necessary in the interest of national security. Senator Knowland expressed concurrence but further discussion developed a unanimous reaction of the Members of Congress that there should be no Congressional action until the Secretary had obtained commitments of a political and material nature from our allies. The feeling was unanimous that "we want no more Koreas with the United States furnishing 90% of the manpower".

Both the Secretary and Admiral Radford pointed out that the Administration did not now contemplate the commitment of land forces. The Congressmen replied that once the flag was committed the use of land forces would inevitably follow.

The Secretary said that he had already initiated talks to secure unity of action. He had spoken with the British Ambassador yesterday and was meeting with Bonnet in a few minutes. He had talked with Romulo[37] but he could not go further without knowing that he could expect U.S. action if the others responded.

Admiral Radford was asked if airpower could save Dien Bien Phu today. He replied that it was too late but that if we had committed airpower three weeks ago, he felt reasonably certain that the Red forces would have been defeated. It was apparent that the Congressional group, especially Senator Russell, had very little confidence in the French. There was less criticism of the British, but it was nevertheless substantial. Senator Russell said that if the U.K. flinched in this matter, it would be necessary to reconsider our whole system of collective security from the standpoint of dependability. Admiral Radford pointed out the extensive British military deployment in Malaya and elsewhere throughout that area.

It was decided that the Secretary would attempt to get definite commitments from the English and other free nations. If satisfactory commitments could be obtained, the consensus was that a Congressional resolution could be passed, giving the President power to commit armed forces in the area.

That afternoon (April 3), Dulles telephoned Eisenhower at Camp David to tell him about the meeting.[38] He said, ". . . on the whole it went pretty well—although it raised some serious problems . . . the feeling was that Congress would be quite prepared to go along on some vigorous action if we were not doing it alone. They want to be sure the people in the area are involved too." Eisenhower and Dulles "did not blame the Congressmen for this thought. They agreed that the stakes concern others more than us. The President said you can't go in and win unless the people want you. The French could win in 6 months if the people were with them." Dulles said that Congress' concern was with the British. "It is hard

[37]General Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines, personal representative of President Magsaysay. Romulo was then on a visit to the United States

[38]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1230

to get the American people excited if they are not." He suggested that Eisenhower contact "the PM" (Prime Minister Churchill), and the President agreed.

Radford's reaction to the meeting with congressional leaders, as recounted in his memoirs,[39] was that "It was obvious from this meeting that the government had not yet undertaken a task set forth in 1952 and reaffirmed in 1954: making clear to the American people the importance of Southeast Asia to the security of the United States."

On Capitol Hill, as one former Senator recalls the events of April 3, a small group of four Democratic Senators waited for Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson to return from the meeting. These four, two of whom were Albert A. Gore of Tennessee and Mike Monroney of Oklahoma, had met with Johnson before he went to the White House to express their concern that the U.S. might be preparing to intervene at Dien Bien Phu. This is Senator Gore's account:[40]

> The four of us waited until late in the afternoon or early evening for Johnson's return. We waited in the Democratic Cloak Room. As I recall it, the Senate had already adjourned that day, or maybe it was not even in session that day. Anyway, we waited for his return. He gave us, in the Johnsonian manner, a vivid, muscular and athletic recounting of the meeting. I believe I correctly remember that Admiral Radford was strongly in favor of intervention, as were Mr. Dulles and others. But the one strong opponent from within the administration was the then head of the U.S. Army, General Ridgway. He strongly opposed it, and utilized some of what may have been, within the military circles, rather trite phrases about the unwisdom of the United States becoming involved in a land war in Asia, etc. Eventually, the reaction of the congressional representatives was solicited, and, according to Senator Johnson's description, he outlined his opposition and told us that he pounded the President's desk in the Oval Office to emphasize his opposition.[41]

In addition to Dulles' account of April 3, which is the only available official record of the meeting, there is an account by journalist Chalmers M. Roberts, based on interviews with participants and other government officials, that made a rather sensational appearance in 1954 under the title, "The Day We Didn't Go to War."[42] It was such a detailed and apparently accurate report of the meeting that it touched off an FBI investigation of Roberts' sources.[43] This is his account of what happened:

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[39] *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 398.

[40] CRS Interview with Albert Gore, Dec. 4, 1978.

[41] The meeting, contrary to Gore's impression, was held at the State Department rather than at the White House, and the President did not attend. Presumably Johnson pounded Dulles' desk.

[42] *Reporter*, Sept. 14, 1954. The original version of this story was published in the *Washington Post*, June 7, 1954.

[43] There is no indication that the FBI ever found the source of Roberts' information. How did Roberts get it? In his memoirs, published many years later, he told the story. Chalmers M. Roberts, *First Rough Draft* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 114. ". . . my State Department friends talked. One tipped me off that Dulles and Radford had held a secret meeting on April 3 with congressional leaders of both parties to put forward some sort of intervention plan. I found out

Continued