The atmosphere became serious at once. What was wanted, Dulles said, was a joint resolution by Congress to permit the President to use air and naval power in Indochina. Dulles hinted that perhaps the mere passage of such a resolution would in itself make its use unneccessary. But the President had asked for its consideration, and, Dulles added, Mr. Eisenhower felt that it was indispensable at this juncture that the leaders of Congress feel as the Administration did on the Indochina crisis.

Then Radford took over. He said the Administration was deeply concerned over the rapidly deteriorating situation. He used a map of the Pacific to point out the importance of Indochina. He spoke about the French Union forces then already under siege for three weeks in the fortress of Dien Bien Phu.

The admiral explained the urgency of American action by declaring that he was not even sure, because of poor communications, whether, in fact, Dien Bien Phu was still holding out. (The fortress held out for five weeks more.)

Dulles backed up Radford. If Indochina fell and if its fall led to the loss of all of Southeast Asia, he declared, then the United States might eventually be forced back to Hawaii, as it was before the Second World War. And Dulles was not complimentary about the French. He said he feared they might use some disguised means of getting out of Indochina if they did not receive help soon.

The eight legislators were silent: Senate Majority Leader Knowland and his G.O.P colleague Eugene Millikin, Senate Minority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson and his Democratic colleagues Richard B. Russell and Earle C. Clements, House G.O.P. Speaker Joseph Martin and two Democratic House leaders, John W. McCormack and J. Percy Priest.

What to do? Radford offered the plan he had in mind once Congress passed the joint resolution.

Some two hundred planes from the thirty-one-thousand-ton U.S. Navy carriers *Essex* and *Boxer*, then in the South China Sea ostensibly for "training," plus land-based U.S. Air Force planes from bases a thousand miles away in the Philippines, would be used for a single strike to save Dien Bien Phu.

The legislators stirred, and the questions began.

Radford was asked whether such action would be war. He replied that we would be in the war.

---

who had been present and began to canvass them. By great good fortune, one of the participants had taken copious notes and, moreover, was prepared in the utmost secrecy to share them with me in an out-of-the-way office in the Capitol, where I could come and go unobserved

"This man, who has never been identified up to now, was then the Democratic Whip in the House and later the Speaker, Representative John W McCormack of Massachusetts."

Asked why John McCormack, who was known for his strong anti-communism, should have divulged this information, Roberts said that McCormack ". . . was so alarmed that the United States might get in a war that he was willing to talk about it, if he could be protected." Roberts added, however, that it was also "strictly Democratic politics" on McCormack's part. "He was protecting the Democratic flank and I think he was telling me this story because it made the Democrats look responsible They really didn't want to get into a war. You can be anti-communist but if you're going to kill a lot of 'our boys,' that's something else. It's one thing to make a speech about it in an Irish section of Boston and it's another thing to vote to send troops overseas to die in foreign fields, from a strictly political standpoint And he was a politician before he was anything else" CRS Interview with Chalmers Roberts, Feb 22, 1979

If the strike did not succeed in relieving the fortress, would we follow up? "Yes," said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Would land forces then also have to be used? Radford did not give a definite answer.

In the early part of the questioning, Knowland showed enthusiasm for the venture, consistent with his public statements that something must be done or Southeast Asia would be lost.

But as the questions kept flowing, largely from Democrats, Knowland lapsed into silence.

Clements asked Radford the first of the two key questions: "Does this plan have the approval of the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?"

"No," replied Radford.

"How many of the three agree with you?"

"None."

"How do you account for that?"

"I have spent more time in the Far East than any of them and I understand the situation better."

Lyndon Johnson put the other key question in the form of a little speech. He said that Knowland had been saying publicly that in Korea up to 90 per cent of the men and the money came from the United States. The United States had become sold on the idea that that was bad. Hence in any operation in Indochina we ought to know first who would put up the men. And so he asked Dulles whether he had consulted nations who might be our allies in intervention.

Dulles said he had not.

The Secretary was asked why he didn't go to the United Nations as in the Korean case. He replied that it would take too long, that this was an immediate problem.

There were other questions. Would Red China and the Soviet Union come into the war if the United States took military action? The China question appears to have been side-stepped, though Dulles said he felt the Soviets could handle the Chinese and the United States did not think that Moscow wanted a general war now. Further, he added, if the Communists feel that we mean business, they won't go "any further down there," pointing to the map of Southeast Asia.

John W. McCormack, the House Minority Leader, couldn't resist temptation. He was surprised, he said, that Dulles would look to the "party of treason," as the Democrats had been called by Joe McCarthy in his Lincoln's Birthday speech under G.O.P. auspices, to take the lead in a situation that might end up in a general shooting war. Dulles did not reply.

In the end, all eight members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, were agreed that Dulles had better first go shopping for allies. Some people who should know say that Dulles was carrying, but did not produce, a draft of the joint resolution the President wanted Congress to consider.

> The whole meeting had lasted two hours and ten minutes. As they left, the Hill delegation told waiting reporters they had been briefed on Indochina. Nothing more.[44]

There is an important difference in these two reports of the meeting of April 3. According to Dulles' account, Radford said that it was "too late" for an airstrike to save Dien Bien Phu, and his account makes no further mention of the matter. (This, of course, would square with the position Radford took on April 2 when he told Eisenhower and Dulles that he no longer favored a strike at Dien Bien Phu.) In Roberts' story the central factor, in terms of the dynamics of the meeting, appears to have been Radford's proposal to conduct such an airstrike after Congress passed an authorizing resolution.

Both accounts, however, confirm the deep concern of congressional leaders, especially the Democrats who were present, about taking military action in Vietnam, first, because the use of air and seapower could lead to ground forces, and second, because there seemed to be lack of support for military action from U.S. allies in the region, particularly the British. This reaction appears to have prevented the realization of Dulles' hope, possibly even his intention, that the group would agree to support a congressional resolution authorizing the President to use air and naval forces, if necessary, in order to strengthen the U.S. negotiating position—"fill our hand," as Secretary Wilson had said.[45] (Dulles may or may not have had in his pocket the text of the resolution, which, as was noted above, the President had approved the day before.)

On the other hand, according to Dulles' account the group agreed that if "satisfactory commitments could be obtained" from U.S. allies, such a resolution could be passed by Congress. Thus, the congressional leaders were, in effect, endorsing Eisenhower's

---

[44]According to Tom Wicker's column in the *New York Times*, May 1, 1966, Senator Russell later remarked, "I sat there listening to him [Dulles] talk about sending American boys off to fight in a war like that and suddenly I found myself on my feet shouting at the Secretary of State, 'We're not going to do that!' " In a letter to Bernard Fall, Russell said that he did not think he had made the statement quoted by Wicker, nor did he recall having been interviewed by Wicker on this subject. He added:

"I did emphatically and vigorously oppose becoming involved in Vietnam and remember some of the arguments that I made verbatim, but I did not find 'myself on my feet shouting.'

"While I do not remember exactly, I am quite sure that Senator Johnson must have spoken before I did, as it is always customary to let the Majority Leader lead off, and his opinion is invariably sought before other conferees have an opportunity to express themselves. I am quite sure I was more vigorous in my reaction than Senator Johnson, but it is my recollection that he did not at any time favor the Dulles-Radford proposals, and it is my recollection that, before the meeting adjourned, Senator Johnson became much more emphatic than he was in his first statement, though at no time did he shout in a loud voice.

"All of the discussion was vigorous and a bit of it might have been described as heated, but there was no shouting that I recall." Russell Memorial Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Richard B. Russell Senatorial Papers, General File, International Series, Richard B. Russell to Bernard B. Fall, June 7, 1966.

In the course of preparing this study CRS consulted Senator Russell's papers and found his notes of the April 3 meeting. Unfortunately, they are too abbreviated to be of value, but they do substantiate the fact that the meeting covered various points mentioned in both Dulles' and Roberts' accounts. They do not, however, substantiate or validate either account.

[45] Robert R. Bowie, Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department at the time, and a close associate of Dulles, points out that a congressional resolution could also have strengthened the U.S. political and diplomatic position by adding to the deterrent effect of the united action speech. "The resolution," Bowie says, "was an excellent device, like the united action speech, for ambiguity, because it suggested the United States was united, that it would have a point at which it will resist, without committing us to when, or under what circumstances, or anything else. So it was a wonderful device for vaguely threatening the Chinese and the Soviets and the Vietnamese without being a bluff that anybody could call." CRS Interview with Robert Bowie, May 5, 1983.

united action approach. From the administration's standpoint, therefore, as well as for congressional Republicans, the April 3 meeting, while raising some problems, had achieved its major purpose, as Dulles indicated in a telephone conversation that afternoon with Knowland: [46] ". . . the Senator said he thought the meeting had been helpful. The Secretary said that it provided him what he needed to go ahead."

Although the meeting may have dashed Dulles' hope for prompt action on a congressional resolution, it also served to fill the President's hand in another important respect. In opposing military action which might lead to "another Korea," congressional leaders reinforced the President's own desire to avoid direct intervention with U.S. forces, thus helping to counter the arguments of Radford and others who favored military action.

With regard to the net effect of the meeting of April 3, however, Thruston Morton, one of the participants, when asked later whether, as a result of the meeting, congressional leaders had influenced the decisionmaking process, said: [47]

> No, I don't think so. Their negative approaches didn't affect Dulles too much. The fact that the President had reservations is what stopped it. Hell, if he had let Raddy go he would have been in there with the whole carrier fleet. Eisenhower put the quietus on that . . . Raddy had it all figured out, how he could get carriers in the area and bomb the hell out of them and knock them out of this high ground. . . . Dulles accepted Raddy's estimate of the situation, but Eisenhower didn't, and that was the end of it so far as Dulles was concerned.

When Eisenhower returned to Washington on Sunday, April 4, he held a White House meeting that evening at which the earlier tentative decision to respond to the situation in Indochina through the united action approach was approved as U.S. policy. Present besides Eisenhower were Dulles, Radford, Bedell Smith, Kyes and Douglas MacArthur II. Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's White House Chief of Staff, who must also have been sitting in, is the source—and the only source—of what happened. This is his account: [48]

> . . . at a Sunday night meeting in the upstairs study at the White House Eisenhower . . . agreed with Dulles and Radford on a plan to send American forces to Indo-China under certain strict conditions. It was to be, first and most important, a joint action with the British, including Australia and New Zealand troops, and, if possible, participating units from such Far Eastern countries as the Philippines and Thailand so that the forces would have to continue to fight in Indo-China and bear a full share of responsibility until the war is over. Eisenhower

---

[46] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1230, fn. 3

[47] CRS Interview with Thruston Morton, Jan. 29, 1979. Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 57, come to this conclusion concerning the April 3 meeting:

"Eisenhower accomplished three things by this meeting. First, he isolated Radford, Vice-President Richard Nixon, and other advocates of unilateral intervention. . . . Second, the President co-opted the congressional leadership. In rejecting the go-it-alone approach, they had been cornered, thus achieving Eisenhower's third purpose of building domestic support for multilateral intervention, or united action."

[48] Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), p. 122

was also concerned that American intervention in Indo-China might be interpreted as protection of French colonialism. He added a condition that would guarantee future independence to the Indo-Chinese states of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

At 11:47 p.m. that night Eisenhower's message to Churchill was cabled to London.[49] If Indochina were to fall to the Communists, he said, ". . . the ultimate effect on our and your global strategic position with the consequent shift in the power ratio throughout Asia and the Pacific could be disastrous and, I know, unacceptable to you and me. . . . This had led us to the hard conclusion that the situation in Southeast Asia requires us urgently to take serious and far-reaching decisions . . . our painstaking search for a way out of the impasse has reluctantly forced us to the conclusion that there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in its essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement." This, which he called the "first alternative," was "too serious in its broad strategic implications for us and for you to be acceptable. . . . Somehow we must contrive to bring about the second alternative." Referring to Dulles' March 29 speech about "united action," he said that this second alternative, "a new, *ad hoc*, grouping or coalition," which would consist of France, the Associated States, England, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines, could be risky, but that ". . . in the situation which confronts us there is no course of action or inaction devoid of dangers and I know of no man who has firmly grasped more nettles than you. If we grasp this one together I believe that we will enormously increase our chances of bringing the Chinese to believe that their interests lie in the direction of a discrete disengagement. In such a contingency we could approach the Geneva Conference with the position of the free world not only unimpaired but strengthened."

Churchill replied that he had received Eisenhower's message and that "we are giving it earnest Cabinet consideration."[50]

Early on Monday morning, April 5, Dulles called Eisenhower to tell him that the State Department had just received a cable from Ambassador Dillon in Paris, who had been called to a meeting at 11 p.m. on Sunday night by Laniel and Bidault and told that the "immediate armed intervention of US carrier aircraft at Dien Bien Phu [Operation VAUTOUR] is now necessary to save the situation."[51] The cable went on to say that the French were making this request in accordance with the report of Admiral Ely "that Radford gave him his personal assurance that if situation at Dien Bien Phu required US naval air support he would do his best to obtain such help from US government." Bidault told Dillon that "for good or evil the fate of Southeast Asia now rested on Dien Bien Phu. He said that Geneva would be won or lost depending on outcome at Dien Bien Phu. This was reason for French request for this very serious action on our part."

---

[49] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1238.
[50] *Ibid.*, fn 2.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 1236 For Operation VAUTOUR, see p. 172, fn 162 above

According to the notes of Dulles' conversation with the President, Eisenhower ". . . supposes Radford thought he was talking to someone in confidence—but says he should never have told foreign country he would do his best because they then start putting pressure on us."[52] Dulles replied, ". . . in talks with Radford and Ely, feeling was unanimous & strong that we must not & could not enter into fight until we had political aspects cleared. Radford did not give any committal talk. Cannot risk our prestige in defeat." Eisenhower responded that "such a move [U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu] is impossible. In the absence of some kind of arrangement getting support of Congress, [it] would be completely unconstitutional and indefensible." Dulles said that Radford was "quite reconciled to fact that it is political impossibility at present time—has no idea of recommending this action." Eisenhower suggested "taking a look to see if anything else can be done—but we cannot engage in active war."

Dulles then called Radford to tell him of his conversation with the President, and of Eisenhower's position that military action could be taken only through a united action framework. He asked Radford whether there were any alternatives to the request made by the French for a U.S. airstrike. Radford said he had been told that there were pilots available in France, and that the U.S. could get planes to them in a week. He added that he would check on this possibility.[53]

Dulles immediately cabled Dillon in Paris:[54]

> As I personally explained to Ely in presence of Radford it is not possible for US to commit belligerent acts in Indochina without full political understanding with France and other countries. In addition, Congressional action would be required. After conference at highest level, I must confirm this position. US is doing everything possible . . . to prepare public, Congressional and Constitutional basis for united action in Indochina. However, such action is impossible except on coalition basis with active British Commonwealth participation. Meanwhile US prepared, as has been demonstrated, to do everything short of belligerency.

Dillon replied late that day (April 5), saying that he had given Dulles' message to Bidault, who said he could understand the U.S. Government's position, but that ". . . unfortunately the time for formulating coalition has passed as the fate of Indochina will be decided in the next ten days at Dien-Bien- Phu."[55]

The NSC Postpones Action on Direct Intervention

The next day, April 6, the NSC met, and there was a long discussion of the question of U.S. military intervention in Indochina, based on the report of the Planning Board that had been requested by the NSC on March 25, as well as a report from the Special Committee on Indochina.[56] The two reports supplemented each other.

---

[52] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, p 1241.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 1242, fn. 3
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 1242.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 1243.
[56] For the text of the Planning Board report see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 462-471 For the "missing material" noted on p 471, see the DOD ed., book 9, pp. 320-324. For the report of the

Continued

The Planning Board report concerned the use of U.S. military forces, and the Special Committee's report dealt with a broader range of possible additional actions.

The Planning Board concluded that without a larger role by the U.S., Indochina might be lost to the Communists, thus raising the question: should U.S. forces be used, and, if so, on what basis? The Board presented three alternatives, (A) U.S. action in concert with the French; (B) U.S. action with the French and the Associated States; and, (C) U.S. action with others, or alone, if the French withdrew.

Whatever choice was made, the paper stressed, ". . . once U.S. forces have been committed, disengagements will not be possible short of victory." It also pointed out that there were many implications in any intervention, including the possible need for "general mobilization."

As far as military requirements were concerned, the paper estimated under courses (A) or (B) that there would not be a need for U.S. ground forces, but that approximately 35,000 naval and 8,600 air force personnel would be required. It added, however, that "either Course A or B may turn out to be ineffective without the eventual commitment of U.S. ground forces."

If the U.S. intervened after French withdrawal, 605,000 ground forces would be required, of which 330,000 would be indigenous and 275,000 (seven divisions and support personnel) would be U.S. or allied forces. (No figures were given for naval forces; 12,000 U.S. air force personnel would be required.) This latter figure (275,000) is quite close to the number of U.S. forces that, during the Kennedy administration, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara first estimated would be needed to win the war.

The Planning Board report stated that the training of indigenous forces was "crucial," and stressed that if the U.S. intervened it would be essential to counteract the colonialist image of the war.

If the U.S. "should now decide to intervene at some stage"—and the report urged that such a decision be made—there were certain steps that should be taken. These included obtaining Congress' "approval of intervention," which headed the list; resistance to negotiating on the Communists' terms; and, of course, the formation of the "regional grouping" for united action.

There was also brief mention of atomic weapons, which the report said "will be available for use as required by the tactical situation and as approved by the President." The pros and cons of their use were discussed.

In a brief memorandum, the Army stated its position on the Planning Board report.[57] It argued that the war could not be won with only U.S. air and naval action, and that U.S. ground forces would be required. It agreed that if the French withdrew seven divisions would be needed, (approximately 275,000, including support personnel) plus naval and air support, unless the Chinese intervened, in which case there would need to be 12 U.S. divisions (ap-

---

Special Committee, which was the second part of its two-part report, the first part of which was submitted on March 11, see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 472–476. For the material missing on p. 475 see the DOD ed., book 9, pp. 352–354. Material missing on p. 476 of Gravel is also missing in the DOD edition.

[57] *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 471–472.

proximately 500,000, including support personnel), plus naval and air support. It also contended that "The use of atomic weapons in Indochina would not reduce the number of ground forces required to achieve a military victory in Indochina."

For its April 6 meeting the NSC also had before it a report from the Special Committee recommending various other actions. ". . . the defeat of the Viet Minh," the report said, "is essential if the spread of Communist influence in Southeast Asia is to be halted." It reaffirmed the following position enunciated in other policy papers and in NSC 5405:

(1) It be U.S. policy to accept nothing short of a military victory in Indochina.

(2) It be the U.S. position to obtain French support of this position; and that failing this, the U.S. actively oppose any negotiated settlement in Indochina and Geneva.

(3) It be the U.S. position in event of failure of (2) alone to initiate immediate steps with the governments of the Associated States aimed toward the continuation of the war in Indochina, to include active U.S. participation and without French support should that be necessary.

(4) Regardless of whether or not the U.S. is successful in obtaining French support for the active U.S. participation called for in (3) above, every effort should be made to undertake this active participation in concert with other interested nations.

In recommending specific actions to implement this position the Special Committee suggested, among other things, that the U.S. work "through indigenous channels" to sponsor regional economic and cultural agreements, and that "Upon the basis of such agreements, the U.S. should actively but unobtrusively seek their expansion into mutual defense requirements. . . ." (This, it might be noted, is of interest in light of subsequent allegations by Senator Fulbright and others that U.S. economic relationships in Vietnam led to military commitments and to war—a position that the executive branch stoutly denied.) As the first step in this direction, the U.S. should seek to have the Associated States and Thailand agree to such a treaty.

The Special Committee also recommended that the U.S. should seek to organize counterguerrilla military units and antisubversion police forces in Southeast Asian countries, especially in Thailand, which would be advised by U.S. military missions. Moreover, the U.S. should, "largely through covert means," promote indigenous political leaders and groups.

As a means of enabling Americans and others to serve in military units in Southeast Asia without any national designation, the Special Committee also recommended U.S. initiative in establishing an International Volunteer Air Group, and proposed the establishment of a similar group for ground forces.

These reports from the Planning Board and the Special Committee served as the agenda for the April 6, 1954, meeting of the NSC, but it was apparent that the President and most of the other members of the NSC were not inclined, as the Planning Board had recommended, to make the decision that, if necessary, U.S. forces

should be used to defend Indochina.[58] They ended up deferring that decision, but agreed that contingency plans should be made for intervention. They also "noted the President's view" that Congress should not be asked to pass a resolution supporting a regional arrangement until after agreement was reached with U.S. allies on establishing such a regional grouping.

Although they postponed the decision on using U.S. forces, the President and the other members of the Council agreed with Dulles' suggestion about seeking united action, and concluded that the U.S. should ". . . direct its efforts prior to Geneva toward:

"(1) Organizing a regional grouping, including initially the U.S., the U.K., France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines, for the defense of Southeast Asia against Communist efforts by any means to gain control of the countries in this area.

"(2) Gaining British support for U.S. objectives in the Far East, in order to strengthen U.S. policies in the area.

"(3) Pressing the French to accelerate the program for the independence of the Associated States."

The Council took only one action to help the French at Dien Bien Phu. It decided to ask Congress to approve additional U.S. technicians (and to extend their assigments in Indochina), on the basis of which the U.S. could then send additional aircraft as well. This decision was made after the Vice President assured the Council that the President had great influence with Congress, and that "Congress would do what the National Security Council felt was necessary." He cited, as an example, Congress' approval of the earlier request for technicians. (The next day, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes called Dulles to ask for his advice on the meeting with Members of Congress to discuss the technicians, which had been scheduled for that afternoon. "The Sec. [Dulles] said he feels the President jumped fast on this one. The Sec. would have been willing to let it ride before taking up Nixon's suggestion. The Sec. said congressmen very easily get impressions they get sucked in for promises. Once they are given, there are excuses to whittle away on them." Dulles added that the important point to make was that the U.S. had to "keep the French will up." After June 15, he said, the rainy season would interfere with air operations.[59] Later that afternoon, Kyes called to tell Dulles about the meeting. "Kyes said the results were 50-50. The dignified ones were for it; the realistic ones against it. . . . There was an undertone in one statement that if No. 1 [Eisenhower] did something, it would be backed up. . . . The Sec. said . . . that it doesn't become a practical matter for quite a while. Kyes said if we send more units over, we will need more technicians. He raised the point to see what the feeling was on that. He talked with leaders of both sides. It was divided between the Houses rather than parties or individuals.")[60]

During the Council's discussion on April 6, the President emphatically rejected U.S. unilateral intervention in Indochina: "As far as he was concerned, said the President with great emphasis,

[58] For the summary of the meeting see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, pp 1250-1265
[59] Dulles Telephone Calls Series
[60] *Ibid*

there was no possibility whatever of U.S. unilateral intervention in Indochina, and we had best face that fact. Even if we tried such a course, we would have to take it to Congress and fight for it like dogs, with very little hope of success. At the very least, also, we would have to be invited in by the Vietnamese."

In reply to Radford and Allen Dulles, both of whom had questioned the Planning Board's estimate that even if Dien Bien Phu fell a military cessation in Indochina was not "imminent," Eisenhower said that the fall of Dien Bien Phu could not be considered a military defeat in view of the enemy's losses. Moreover, he again "expressed his hostility to the notion that because we might lose Indochina we would necessarily have to lose all the rest of Southeast Asia." He also ". . . expressed warm approval for the idea of a political organization which would have for its purposes the defense of Southeast Asia even if Indochina should be lost. In any case, the creation of such a political organization for defense would be better than emergency military action."

At another point Eisenhower stated, "with great conviction," according to the notes of the meeting, "that we certainly could not intervene in Indochina and become the colonial power which succeeded France. The Associated States would certainly not agree to invite our intervention unless we had other Asiatic nations with us."

Secretary Dulles supported Eisenhower's position. He said there was no need for the Council to decide at that time whether the U.S. should intervene in Indochina. "We know that under certain conditions Congress is likely to back us up. We should therefore place all our efforts on trying to organize a regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference. If we can do so we will go into that Conference strong and united, with a good hope that we would come out of the Conference with the Communists backing down."

Dulles said that in the meeting with congressional leaders on April 3 it was apparent that Congress would not approve U.S. unilateral intervention, and that it would approve armed intervention only if these three conditions were met: "One, U.S. intervention must be a part of a coalition to include the other free nations of Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and the British Commonwealth nations. Secondly, the French must agree to accelerate their independence program for the Associated States so that there could be no question of U.S. support of French colonialism. Thirdly, the French must agree not to pull their forces out of the war if we put our forces in."

Dulles said it would be a "hopeless fight to try to overcome Congressional opposition to U.S. armed intervention unless we met these three conditions. This was a plain fact which the Council could not overlook even if this fact involved an undesirable delay from the military point of view."

Robert Cutler asked Dulles whether he proposed going to Congress for approval of a regional pact prior to the Geneva Conference. Dulles said he did not. Congress would not act until the organization had been created and the three conditions met. But he said he felt he already had enough support from Congress to under-

take such negotiations, on the assurance that if they were successful Congress would approve the pact.

Treasury Secretary Humphrey asked Secretary Dulles, ". . . if he succeeded in creating his proposed coalition and the United States adopted a policy of intervening every time the local Communist forces became strong enough to subvert free governments, would this not amount to a policy of policing all the governments of the world?

"The President spoke sharply to Secretary Humphrey and pointed out that no free government had yet gone Communist by its own choice. Certainly the United States could no longer say that internal Communist subversion, as opposed to external Communist aggression, was none of our business. We have got to be a great deal more realistic than that." Secretary Dulles added that ". . . he continued to agree with the JCS view on this issue, namely, that we can no longer accept further Communist take-overs, whether accomplished by external or internal measures. We could no longer afford to put too fine a point on the methods."

Humphrey persisted: "Secretary Humphrey again announced his very great anxiety over what looked to him like an undertaking by the United States to prevent the emergence of Communist governments everywhere in the world. He could see no terminal point in such a process." Dulles replied that there was "no intention of having the United States police the governments of the entire world," and Eisenhower "again speaking with great warmth," asked Humphrey for a "reasonable alternative," saying:

> Indochina was the first in a row of dominoes. If it fell its neighbors would shortly thereafter fall with it, and where did the process end? If he was correct, said the President, it would end with the United States directly behind the 8-ball. "George," said the President, "you exaggerate the case. Nevertheless in certain areas at least we cannot afford to let Moscow gain another bit of territory. Dien Bien Phu itself may be just such a critical point." That's the hard thing to decide. We are not prepared now to take action with respect to Dien Bien Phu in and by itself, but the coalition program for Southeast Asia must go forward as a matter of the greatest urgency. If we can secure this regional grouping for the defense of Indochina, the battle is two-thirds won. This grouping would give us the needed popular support of domestic opinion and of allied governments, and we might thereafter not be required to contemplate a unilateral American intervention in Indochina.

Vice President Nixon emphasized the problem of coping with indirect, internal Communist aggression. "The United States," he said, "must decide whether it is prepared to take action which will be effective in saving free governments from internal Communist subversion. This was the real problem. . . ." He thought that the proposed regional grouping would be helpful against overt, external Communist aggression, but he questioned whether it would be effective against subversion. He asked Dulles whether the proposed organization would provide a means for dealing with "local Communist subversion," and Dulles said that it would. It would also be a way, Dulles added, of forcing colonial powers "to reexamine their colonial policy, which had proved so ruinous to our objectives, not

only in Asia, but in Egypt, Iran, and elsewhere. . . . The peoples of the colonial states would never agree to fight Communism unless they were assured of their freedom."

On the next day (April 7), Radford's assistant (Navy Capt. George W. Anderson, Jr.) called on Dulles' assistant (Douglas MacArthur II) to discuss what Anderson termed a "delicate matter," which he said Radford wanted to convey to Dulles.[61] The Joint Advanced Study Committee of the JCS, Anderson said, had been looking into the use of atomic weapons at Dien Bien Phu, and had concluded that "three tactical A-weapons, properly employed, would be sufficient to smash the Vietminh effort there."[62] Radford wanted to know whether the establishment of a regional pact would interfere with use of such weapons, or whether, once the pact was formed, the U.S. could get the French to agree to their use. MacArthur raised a number of doubts and questions, but said he would report the matter to Dulles. (Dulles' reply was that he did not want to discuss the matter with Radford at that time. He did so subsequently, however.)

Meanwhile, Army Chief of Staff Ridgway continued to argue against U.S. intervention in Indochina. In a memo to Radford on April 6 he said, "Such use of United States armed forces, apart from any local successes they might achieve, would constitute a dangerous strategic diversion of limited United States military capabilities, and would commit our armed forces in a non-decisive theatre to the attainment of non-decisive local objectives." If the situation in Indochina or elsewhere in Southeast Asia required the use of U.S. forces, he added, the U.S., with the support of its allies, should warn the Chinese, who were the major source of the power of the Viet Minh, that they would be destroyed if they did not cease providing such assistance.[63]

The Joint Strategic Plans Committee, however, took issue with Ridgway, calling his position "inconsistent" with NSC 5405. "Direct action against Communist China," the Committee said, had ". . . many advantages from the strictly military point ov view," although there were also "obvious political disadvantages."[64]

Congress Debates Intervention

The rumors of possible U.S. military action in Indochina had a predictable impact on Capitol Hill. The general reaction was that the U.S. should help to defend Southeast Asia against the Communists, but should be very wary about becoming involved in an anti-colonialist struggle in Indochina. There was support for united action because it offered a way of responding to the situation multilaterally rather than through unilateral U.S. action. Most Members also seemed to be aware that implicit in Dulles' March 29 speech was the willingness of the U.S. to enter the Indochina war through the united action framework, and there was general support for going to war, if necessary to save Southeast Asia, provided that other nations carried their share of the burden. There was

[61] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1270–1272.
[62] According to *ibid.*, p. 1271, fn. 1, the pertinent records of the Joint Advanced Study Committee of the JCS have not been found.
[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 1269–1270.
[64] Spector, *Advice and Support*, p 209.

even support, and fairly substantial support, for using U.S. ground forces, if need be, as part of a multilateral force. In other words, most Members of Congress seemed to accept the policy premises and the operational assumptions of the President and the executive branch. They may have been even more inclined than the President to consider using U.S. ground forces in Southeast Asia if that became necessary to stop the Communists, although they, too, wanted to avoid "another Korea."[65]

Senator Guy Gillette (D/Iowa) continued to be one of the few dissenters. In a speech on April 5 he warned that ". . . America is deeply, dangerously, and perhaps inextricably involved in this area." The U.S. approach to the problem, he said, was based on the misconception that it was a military problem, rather than primarily a political problem: "The root of it is nationalism—the demand of the people for freedom and independence." He urged that the U.S. declare its support for complete independence, and couple this with taking the issue to the U.N.[66]

On April 6, the day the NSC met to confirm the decision to seek support for united action, there was a very significant prearranged colloquy in the Senate.[67] The lead speaker was Senator John F. Kennedy, who argued that in order for united action—which he supported—to be effective, the people of Indochina and the peoples of Asia had to be committed to opposing the Communists, which in turn required action by the French granting the Indochinese complete independence. Without such indigenous and regional support, he said, "the 'united action' which is said to be so desperately needed for victory in that area is likely to end up as unilateral action by our own country."

These are some of the major points made by Kennedy:

> Certainly I, for one, favor a policy of a "united action" by many nations whenever necessary to achieve a military and political victory for the free world in that area, realizing full well that it may eventually require some commitment of our manpower.
>
> But to pour money, materiel, and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive.
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, "an enemy of the people" which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> The hard truth of the matter is, first that without the wholehearted support of the peoples of the Associated States, without a reliable and crusading native army with a dependable officer corps, a military victory, even with American support, in

[65] For confirmation of the existence of this attitude, see the article by William S. White, *New York Times*, Apr. 5, 1954

[66] *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 4577–4578.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 4671–4681

that area is difficult, if not impossible, of achievement; and, second, that the support of the people of that area cannot be obtained without a change in the contractual relationships which presently exist between the Associated States and the French Union.

Kennedy pointed out that since the defeat of the Goldwater/Kennedy amendment on July 1, 1953, and the announcement by the French on July 3, 1953 that they wanted to "perfect" the sovereignty of the Associated States, 9 months had elapsed, during which there had been almost no progress toward negotiating such changes.[68] ". . . if the French persist in their refusal to grant the legitimate independence and freedom desired by the peoples of the Associated States," Kennedy said, "and if those people and the other peoples of Asia remain aloof from the conflict, as they have in the past, then it is my hope that Secretary Dulles, before pledging our assistance at Geneva, will recognize the futility of channeling American men and machines into that hopeless internecine struggle."

Kennedy was congratulated on his speech by a number of Senators, Republicans as well as Democrats, including Majority Leader Knowland. (Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson did not make any public comments.) Knowland said that he agreed with most of what Kennedy had said, especially the need for indigenous support and for the French to act on granting complete independence. Warren Magnuson (D/Wash.), who, it will be recalled, had been to Indochina in 1953, agreed that independence was important, but he warned that if the French were to declare independence and to withdraw, the Indochinese could not defend themselves and the area would go Communist. Dirksen, who had been on the trip with Magnuson, opposed sending U.S. troops, and agreed with the need for indigenous support. But he urged restraint, and the setting of a target date for independence—he used five years as an illustration—rather than abrupt action which might cause the French to leave, thereby depriving the Indochinese of administrative cadres that would be needed until they could develop their own.

Senator Stennis also emphasized the importance of united action, which he said must be based on the Indochinese and Asian "will to fight":

> While there are conditions on which Congress would vote to support united action, and I believe the people would back it up, I do not believe that Congress would ever vote, or should vote, to have the United States go in on a unilateral basis. It would have to be a united effort; not a token effort, but a real united effort.
>
> In other words, if there is not sufficient power and strength in Asia, or in some Asiatic country which is willing to take the chance, to stop communism, as we say, or give freedom, with some support from the other free nations of the world, then it is a lost cause, as I see it. Unless these conditions are brought

[68] For the State Department position on this situation see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1155–1156, 1212-1214, 1298–1299. It should be noted that on April 28, 1954, the French finally agreed to sign two treaties with Vietnam, as the Vietnamese had requested, one providing for total independence and the other defining the terms for Vietnamese association with the French Union. These treaties were never ratified.

about we should not go in. To go in on a unilateral basis would be to go into a trap. It would be to send our men into a trap from which there could be no reasonable recovery and no chance for victory.

Only one Senator, Henry Jackson (D/Wash.), mentioned the need for a congressional resolution:

> I think the people should be told in no uncertain terms that we cannot allow Indochina to fall into Communist hands. To do so would mean that we will lose Southeast Asia. . . . In my opinion, the Congress of the United States, Democrats and Republicans, have a responsibility to support the administration in trying to save southeast Asia. I think the administration should come to Congress with a resolution stating in no uncertain terms our wishes and aspirations for the people of Indochina and for all Asia and to outline the policy to be pursued . . . I do not believe we can wait much longer lest we lose southeast Asia to the Communist forces which are about to take over.

Kennedy replied that the U.S. should not adopt a policy of intervention "unless minimum guarantees for real independence have been made." Jackson agreed that it was essential to support indigenous desires for independence and freedom, but he thought that it was time for the President to present his proposals to Congress, and for Congress to act to support him.

In addition to this kind of public debate, the issue of what the U.S. should do in Indochina was also being debated privately on Capitol Hill, and, as is often the case, the private debate may have been more important in shaping public policy. The most significant instance of this of which there is any knowledge may have been the discussion at the regular weekly meeting of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, a group of about 12 of the more senior and influential Democrats from the various regions of the country, of which the Democratic leader, then Lyndon Johnson, was chairman. This occurred on April 6, three days after the meeting of congressional leaders with Dulles and Radford. George E. Reedy, Jr., an assistant to Johnson, who was one of only two non-Senators present, has given this account:[69]

> It was a fascinating meeting. Walter George was there, and very obviously there to play the devil's advocate, and to argue that we should go into Indochina. Of course, Walter George was a very commanding personality in the Senate. Nobody liked to be disrespectful to him. And I have never seen a group of men explode like that, especially Bob Kerr [Oklahoma]. George said something like, "If we don't go in we will lose face," and Bob Kerr slammed that big fist of his down on the table saying, "I'm not worried about losing my face; I'm worried about losing my ass."

---

[69]CRS Interview with George E. Reedy, Jr. Mar. 29, 1979. The other non-Senator participant in the meeting was Felton M. "Skeeter" Johnston, then Secretary to the Minority, and later Secretary of the Senate There were nine Senators present. (This information was provided to CRS by the staff of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee.)

Reedy added that "When the thing was over, there was no doubt whatsoever where the Democratic Policy Committee stood. They were against it. And Johnson so reported back to Eisenhower."

The British Oppose Intervention

Meanwhile, Dulles began the process of consulting the British and others about united action. In a meeting in Washington on April 8, he told French Ambassador Henri Bonnet that it was ". . . 'crazy' to think that the US would be drawn into a war without any political prearrangements of any kind or description in order to save one outpost such as Dien Bien Phu and when we were not attacked and were without Allies. He pointed out that we did not have an alliance with France in regard to Indochina. M. Bonnet concluded by saying that he knew our country and Congress well enough to know our position in this regard."[70]

From both Ambassador Dillon in Paris and his own assistant, Douglas MacArthur, Dulles also received advice concerning the attitude of the French toward united action, namely, that if the French could not negotiate an acceptable settlement in Geneva, they would try to "internationalize" the war, thus confronting the U.S. with the alternative of intervening or having to accept a French deal with the Viet Minh. MacArthur said that the French assumed the U.S. had already decided to intervene, and he advised Dulles to make it clear that the U.S. would intervene only through united action.[71]

On April 10, 1954, Dulles, Robertson, Bowie and MacArthur flew to London to try to persuade the British to become a united action partner.

Dulles told British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that "if some new element were not injected into the situation, he feared French might be disposed at Geneva to reach an agreement which would have the effect of turning Indochina over to the Communists." The "new element," of course, was to be united action. During the discussion, according to a cable from Dulles to Under Secretary Smith, Eden "indicated a real willingness to consider defense arrangements in SE Asia on the basis of united action but he is obviously against implementation of any coalition prior to Geneva." Eden was not certain that Indochina could be successfully defended, however, and doubted whether additional sea and air support could turn the tide.[72]

The U.S. delegation gave the British a draft declaration for a united action arrangement, by which the signatories would agree "That if the lands of any of them in the Southeast Asia and Western Pacific area fell under the domination of international Communism that would be a threat to the peace and security of them all," and they would agree to create a collective defense arrangement "to prevent such threat," and to "maintain peace and security" in the region.[73]

---

[70] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1292.
[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 1294–1295.
[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 1307–1308.
[73] For the text, see *ibid.*, pp. 1314–1315.

A British Foreign Office spokesman (Denis Allen, Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs) ". . . expressed great reserve and doubted that the UK would wish at this stage to issue such a declaration. He said that for UK internal political reasons as well as for general world opinion it was important not to take any definitive action prior to Geneva which would give the impression that decisions had been made with respect to Southeast Asia which foreclosed the possibility of a successful negotiation on Indochina at Geneva." He also said that the U.S. draft "appeared to him a commitment to clean up the Communists in Indochina, and if the UK and others undertook such a commitment they would have to see it through successfully." He said that the British Joint Chiefs were less optimistic than some U.S. military leaders, such as Admiral Radford. They thought that additional ground forces would be required to defend Indochina, and that this might precipitate a war with China, possibly involving atomic weapons, which could lead to a world war if the U.S.S.R. fulfilled its defense treaty with China.[74]

In the final joint communiqué the U.S. and Britain agreed on "an examination of the possibility of establishing a collective defense, within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, to assure the peace, security and freedom of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific." Dulles cabled Eisenhower, "Believe accomplished considerable in moving the British away from their original position that nothing should be said or done before Geneva. . . . However, obviously, the British are extremely fearful of becoming involved with ground forces in Indochina, and they do not share the view of our military that loss of northern Vietnam would automatically carry with it the loss of the entire area. They think more in terms of letting a buffer state be created in the north; then attempting to hold the rest of the area by a south Asia NATO. This would give Churchill the enlarged ANZUS which he has always sought." Dulles also reported that the British had agreed on establishing an informal working group in Washington to prepare for such a collective defense arrangement.[75]

On April 13, 1954, Dulles and his party flew to Paris for two days of talks with the French, after which a similar communiqué was issued.[76]

On April 14, there was another colloquy on Indochina in the Senate. Mansfield made the opening statement, which he titled

---

[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 1311-1312.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 1322, fn. 1. For the British position see Eden's memoirs, *Full Circle*, pp. 104-110.

[76] See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1327-1338. During Dulles' meeting with French President Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault on April 14, Bidault suggested that Laniel and Dulles should talk privately, whereupon everyone else left the room for a brief period, leaving only Laniel, Dulles, and Lt Col Vernon A. Walters. There is no official record of what they discussed, but Bernard Fall suggests that at some point during the meeting with the French, Dulles said to Bidault, in French, "And if we gave you two atomic bombs to save Dien Bien Phu?" Bidault is said to have rejected the alleged proposal, saying that this would cause as many casualties among French forces as among the Communists. *Hell in a Very Small Place*, pp. 307, 475 fn 12. There is no reference to this matter in the summary of the April 14 meeting which was prepared after the meeting by one of the participants. (There is no indication of its authorship.) The only reference to the private conversation of Laniel and Dulles is that they discussed the European Defense Community (EDC). The memorandum of conversation is in the Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda Series.

Dulles later denied that he made this statement. See below, p. 213, fn. 92. For Radford's suggestion to Dulles that a small number of tactical atomic bombs could be used at Dien Bien Phu, see p. 203 above.

"Last Chance in Indochina." He argued that the non-Communist countries had to establish, prior to the Geneva Conference, "the minimum conditions to prevent Communist seizure of Indochina without full-scale war." The U.S. had this "last chance" to keep the Conference from "ending in disaster." Criticizing the French for not giving complete independence to the Associated States (and the executive branch for not taking a stronger position on this point), as well as leaders such as Bao Dai for not providing adequate leadership, Mansfield proposed action to grant full independence to the Associated States and to permit the Indochinese to remain in the French Union only if they chose to do so. The "failure," he said, "lies not in the military but in the political realm . . . failure to understand fully the power of nationalism in this struggle against communism." A number of other Senators agreed. Humphrey said it was important for Dulles to be aware of the strong support among Members of the Senate for Indochinese independence. John F. Kennedy said that united action was not the answer; that it was dubious whether guarantees to counter the Chinese would even be needed. The principal problem was indigenous—"an effective native army to meet other native armies."

Mansfield's position was also strongly supported by Knowland, the Republican's own leader, and supposedly, therefore, the administration's leader in the Senate, who again declared that the Indochinese should be given their freedom, including the right to decide whether or not to remain in the French Union. "No matter how powerful their friends abroad may be," Knowland said, "unless people desire freedom and have the will to resist, their resistance will not be effective. . . ."[77]

During the colloquy, Mansfield stated that he thought Dulles was aware of the importance of satisfying nationalist political demands, and he believed that Dulles was doing something about the problem. Dulles was, in fact, meeting that day with French leaders in Paris, and during these talks he strongly emphasized the need for independence, including freedom of choice about belonging to the French Union. The reaction of the French was, in the words of Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, ". . . French public and parliamentary opinion would not support the continuation of the war in Indochina if the concept of the French Union were placed in any doubt whatsoever."[78]

Vice President Nixon Says Troops Might Be Sent

A few days later it was revealed that Vice President Nixon had suggested possible U.S. intervention in Indochina, and Congress reacted sharply. Nixon's remark, for attribution only to a "high Administration source," was made during a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors on Friday, April 16, where he said that the U.S. might have to send in troops if the French with-

---

[77] For the colloquy see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 5111-5120. Except for Mansfield and Knowland, as well as Humphrey, no one on the Foreign Relations Committee joined in the discussion. Only that morning the committee had received a military briefing from Admiral Radford, which continued the following day (April 15), when it dealt specifically with Indochina. Both meetings were in executive session, but unfortunately the meeting of April 15 was totally off the record, and there is no known record of its contents. See *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI., pp. 211-218.

[78] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1335

drew.[79] Senator Edwin ("Big Ed") Johnson (D/Colo.), calling it "Mr. Nixon's War," said that ". . . as a guest at a private party in the company of a large number of Democratic Senators some weeks ago, I heard the Vice President, Mr. Nixon, 'whooping it up for war' in Indochina." He said he thought Nixon had been expressing a private opinion, but that he felt free to speak now that the news of Nixon's remarks had been made public. "I am against sending American GI's into the mud and muck of Indochina," he said, "on a blood-letting spree to perpetuate colonialism and white man's exploitation in Asia."[80]

Humphrey and Morse called on the administration to consult with Congress. This was particularly important, Morse said, in view of the fact that "the present times are such that if we ever get into another war it will be without a declaration of war. . . ." Leverett Saltonstall, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, replied that there had been no change in the administration's position with respect to the U.S. role in Indochina, and that there would be appropriate consultation if a change were made. Senator Gillette offered a resolution providing for Senate endorsement of a request to the U.N. to consider the Indochina situation as a threat to peace.[81]

Other Senators, including Knowland and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Wiley, remarked to reporters that while they agreed with Nixon, they did not think the U.S. would have to send its forces, and that any action by Congress, would, in Knowland's words, "be influenced by what other nations would contribute to collective action."[82] Eisenhower himself did not take the incident too seriously. Sherman Adams said that "Nixon was mortified by the confusion he had caused, but Eisenhower, who was in Augusta [Georgia] at the time, called the Vice President on the telephone and told him not to be upset. Trying to cheer up Nixon, the President reassured him that the uproar over his comment had been all to the good because it awakened the country to the seriousness of the situation in Indochina."[83] This was also Dulles' reaction, as he told Nixon in a telephone conversation. In another telephone conversation, Dulles told Senator H. Alexander Smith that he was strongly opposed to using U.S. ground forces in Asia, and that "Other things we can do are better." He added, "it was unfortunate, but it will blow over."[84]

---

[79] *New York Times*, Apr. 17, 18, 20, 1954. According to *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1346, fn. 2, the text of the speech has never been found.

[80] *CR*, vol. 100, p. 5281. Several authors, including Alexander Kendrick, Robert Divine, and George Herring, have erroneously attributed this statement to Lyndon Johnson. For a full statement of Senator Edwin Johnson's views, see his speech in *ibid.*, pp. 5477–5480. The private party mentioned by Senator Johnson was held at the home of Senator Estes Kefauver. It was one of two or more meetings of Democratic Senators held at Nixon's request to discuss the Indochina situation.

"Seventeen years later, in 1967, at the age of eighty-three, retired and living in Colorado, Big Ed spoke out again on Vietnam in a letter to his old colleague and close friend Lyndon Johnson. He urged an end to the bombing of the North, 'that we go strictly on the defensive in Vietnam south of the demilitarized zone.' He went on: 'Frankly, it's a political war, pure and simple. And it can be ended only by statesmanship You are the one man, in my humble opinion, who can successfully start that very involved movement to end it.'" Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *Advise and Obstruct, The Role of the United States Senate in Foreign Policy Decisions* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), p. 295.

[81] For these various statements see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 5289–5294, 5297–5298, 5309–5310.

[82] *New York Times*, Apr 18, 1954.

[83] *Firsthand Report*, p. 122. See also *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1347, fn. 4.

[84] Dulles Telephone Calls Series, Apr. 19, 1954

At the April 26 weekly meeting of Republican congressional leaders with the President, House Republican Leader Charles A. Halleck said, according to Nixon's memoirs, that Nixon's comments about sending troops " 'had really hurt,' and that he hoped there would be no more talk of that type." Nixon said that the President ". . . immediately stepped in and said he felt it was important that we not show a weakness at this critical time and that we not let the Russians think that we might not resist in the event that the Communists attempted to step up their present tactics in Indochina and elsewhere."[85]

On April 19, Dulles met with Eisenhower. Among the topics he discussed with the President was the Department of Justice paper on the President's war powers, which had been prepared in late March-early April in conjunction with the administration's consideration of using U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina. This is Dulles' memorandum of that part of their discussion:[86]

> I said I thought it [Justice's memo] was unduly legalistic. I thought that the heart of the matter was that the Government of the United States must have the power of self-preservation. If Congress was in session and in a position to act to save the Union, concurrent action would be the preferred procedure. If the danger was great and imminent and Congress unable to act quickly enough to avert the danger, the President would have to act alone.
>
> The President agreed, stating that, in his judgment, the President would have to take the responsibility of carrying out the will of the people. If he made a mistake in this respect, then he was subject to impeachment, and repudiation by the Congress. The President thought, however, that it was unwise to ventilate this problem at the present time in view of Bricker Amendment problems. I said I wholly agreed. I had expressed my views merely as views which I thought should be in the background of the NSC thinking and planning.

On April 20, Dulles left again for Europe and a NATO session prior to the Geneva Conference after meeting that morning with congressional leaders for a briefing on Indochina, Geneva, and the status of united action. Those present were Republican Senators Knowland, Millikin, Saltonstall, Wiley, Bridges, and Bourke B. Hickenlooper (Iowa), and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, Russell, Green and Fulbright and, from the House, Republicans Chiperfield, Arends and James G. Fulton (Pa.) and Democrat Brooks Hays (Ark.). Unfortunately, there is apparently no record of that meeting.[87] It would be interesting to know what was said, particularly in view of the fact that on the previous day Dulles had complained privately to White House Press Secretary Hagerty about the lack of support from congressional leaders, especially Knowland and other Senators. According to Hagerty, Dulles said:

> We have the greatest President since Washington—a military genius and a statesman who is trying to guide our country

---

[85] *RN*, p. 153.

[86] Eisenhower Library, "Memorandum of Conference with President Eisenhower, Augusta, Ga., Apr. 19, 1954," sent to Legal Adviser Phleger on April 21, Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda Series. The Justice Department memorandum has never been made public

[87] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, p. 1351

> through a very delicate situation with war on both sides of the road we are taking. We must not give in to Communists and we must keep our allies. That is a tough job. Why those people on the Hill cannot understand that and cannot back us up is more than I can understand. They are interested only in themselves and their own seat and apparently care nothing or less than nothing for our country.

On the day Dulles left, Hagerty talked privately to Eisenhower: "Told him I was getting fed up with leaders not supporting us; that Knowland was trying to cut Dulles' heart out every time he had a chance and that other leaders, with the exception of Halleck, didn't have the guts to come out of the rain." The President agreed with this, as well as Hagerty's complaint about lack of support from the leadership for the administration's legislative program, and authorized Hagerty to prepare and release "a series of magazine articles and other publicity on this whole question."[88]

The French Again Request U.S. Airstrikes

On April 22, 1954, Dulles met in Paris with Eden and Bidault for a further discussion of united action and of the Geneva Conference, at which he emphasized that ". . . knowledge by the Russians that a common defense system was in prospect [united action] would strengthen our hand at Geneva and help convince the Soviets that they should come to a reasonable agreement."[89] A key member of the State Department team for the Geneva Conference, Philip Bonsal, who was traveling with Dulles, threw considerable cold water, however, on the practicality of united action except as a negotiating posture. In a memo prepared on the day of Dulles' meeting with Eden and Bidault, Bonsal said that the implication that the French had failed politically and militarily, and that American intervention was necessary in order to salvage the situation, would, if put into practice, have a devastating effect on the plans and efforts of the French. Thus, he concluded:[90]

> Every effort must be made to convince the French and the Vietnamese that a failure to achieve success within the present framework, a failure to furnish all the means necessary to that end (including French conscripts and a major stepping up of American aid) would be suicidal from the point of view of French interests generally, of the interests of the current Vietnamese regime and of free world interests in the Far East. The "united action" alternative, useful as it may be in improving the chances of a negotiated settlement, is a very poor second choice, if carried to the action stage. Its ultimate political success seems highly dubious both in terms of Indo-

[88]Eisenhower Library, Hagerty Diary for Apr 20, 1954, Hagerty's diary has now been published. See Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Mid-Course, 1954–1955* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983). Hagerty also noted, "Fred Seaton [then an Assistant Secretary of Defense] called in afternoon to inform me that Defense Department, with clearance by [Sherman] Adams, had prepared a statement on Indochina airlift to be used if story ever breaks. We have been carrying French personnel in American planes—more than has ever been reported. They do not land in war zones but airlift has been considerable, and sooner or later the Chinese Communists are going to break it."

[89]*FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XVI, p. 547.

[90]*Ibid.*, p. 549

china and in terms of South and Southeast Asia and the Far East generally.

As it happened, the U.S. was already confronted with the kind of problem Bonsal feared might develop later. At an earlier meeting that same day with Dulles (accompanied by Radford and Ambassador Dillon), Bidault (accompanied by General Ely) again requested U.S. military intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Such U.S. support, he said, was the only way to save the garrison, and if the garrison fell not only would the French reject united action, but "His impression was that if Dien Bien Phu fell, the French would want to pull out entirely from southeast Asia. . . ."[91] Dulles cabled the President a report on the meeting, and Eisenhower replied that he understood ". . . the feeling of frustration that must consume you. I refer particularly to our earlier efforts to get the French to ask for internationalization of the war, and to get the British to appreciate the seriousness of the situation of Dien Bien Phu and the probable result on the entire war of defeat at that place." He suggested that Dulles make the British fully aware of the situation, but in his reply he did not comment further on the French request.

The next day (April 23), in the middle of an afternoon NATO meeting, Bidault gave Dulles a message which Prime Minister Laniel had just received from General Navarre, in which Navarre said that the only alternative to a cease-fire in Indochina was Operation VAUTOUR, using U.S. heavy bombers (B-29s). Dulles replied that he thought this was out of the question, but that he would report it urgently to Eisenhower.[92]

After conferring with Under Secretary Smith, the President reaffirmed the U.S. position, and rejected the French request. On the night of April 23, at an official dinner at the Quai d'Orsay (the French foreign office), Dulles drew Eden aside to tell him of Navarre's cable, and, according to Eden, the two of them, along with Gen. Alfred M. Gruenther (NATO Supreme Commander) had "a brief conversation amid the expectant diners," during which Eden told Dulles that he did not think an airstrike would change the situation, and that it might precipitate world war III. Dulles, according to Eden, agreed that an airstrike would not be decisive, but he and Gruenther argued that if the French collapsed in Indochina they might collapse as a world power. Dulles, Eden said, told him that if the British would support the U.S. on this issue he was prepared to recommend to the President that he ask Congress for authority to use U.S. air and naval forces in Indochina. As the conversation ended, Eden asked that the U.S. consult the British before taking any military action, and Dulles agreed.[93]

---

[91] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1362

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 1374. In August 1954, the U.S asked the French to review a proposed statement on the history of the requests made by the French for U.S. assistance, and the U.S. response. A high-ranking French diplomat, Roland Jacquin de Margerie, said that the document was accurate, but that it omitted Dulles' offer of atomic bombs to Bidault, which he said was made during their discussion of Navarre's cable on the afternoon of April 23. When Dillon reported this to Washington, Dulles denied that he had made such a statement, adding " . . . it is incredible that I should have made offer since the law categorically forbids it as was indeed well known not only to me but to Bidault because it had been discussed at NATO meetings." *Ibid.*, p. 1928. For Bidault's version see Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (New York. Praeger, 1967), p. 196. De Margerie agreed with the U.S suggestion that Bidault was "overwrought" at the time, and might have misunderstood. *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, p. 1933.

[93] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, p 1375, and Eden, *Full Circle*, p 113-114

Eden said in his memoirs, "I am fairly hardened to crises, but I went to bed that night a troubled man. I did not believe that anything less than intervention on a Korean scale, if that, would have any effect in Indo-China. If there were such intervention, I could not tell where its consequences would stop. We might well find ourselves involved in the wrong war against the wrong man in the wrong place."[94]

The next day, Saturday, April 24, while the White House staff was on an hour's call to return to Washington, if need be,[95] Dulles and Eden talked again. They were joined by Admiral Radford, who had just flown in from the States. Dulles said that in order to keep the French fighting in Indochina it was essential for the British and the Americans to join them under a collective action plan.[96] But he did not propose an airstrike at Dien Bien Phu. This was "impossible constitutionally . . . under existing conditions."

Moreover, according to Admiral Radford, airstrikes at Dien Bien Phu would not, at that stage, save the garrison. He emphasized, however, that if the British and Americans announced their intention to join the French in defending Indochina, and began moving air units into the area, the French would have more of a will to continue fighting, and the French public would be less likely to demand a new government.[97] Eden's response was that "Politically, . . . intervention would be 'hell at home,' and that he could not imagine a worse issue with the public."

In order to clarify the French position, Eden and Dulles met that afternoon with Bidault, who hedged on whether or not the French would withdraw from Indochina if Dien Bien Phu fell, but said that the French would appreciate assistance from the British and the U.S.[98]

Later that day Dulles met with Laniel for a further discussion of the French position. Laniel said that the French had asked the U.S. for military assistance because of their concern about the "psychological blow" if Dien Bien Phu fell. "He feared it would affect the morale of the Vietnamese army and if Vietnamese units began to desert it could upset the military equilibrium and lead rapidly to disaster. In France he was afraid that the loss of Dien Bien Phu would strengthen the hands of those who wished to end the war at all costs and he believes that his government . . . will probably be overthrown."[99]

Dulles told Laniel that the U.S. was doing all it could, short of belligerency, and that ". . . under our Constitution the President did not have the authority to authorize acts of belligerency without the approval of the Congress except in the case of an attack on the US. Action in Indochina would definitely require Congressional approval." Dulles said that, if desired by the French, the President

---

[94] *Full Circle*, p 114

[95] Hagerty Diary for Apr. 24, 1954

[96] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1386 For an excellent statement by Dulles of his position at the time see *ibid.*, p. 1404.

[97] See *ibid.*, p. 1397 On April 27, on behalf of the JCS, Radford sent Secretary of Defense Wilson a memorandum concluding that the French request for an airstrike at Dien Bien Phu would be "of little value" in relieving the garrison, and could lead to U S military involvement in Indochina. See *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp 392-394

[98] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, pp. 1391-1393.

[99] *Ibid.*, pp. 1394-1395

was prepared to ask for such authority on the condition that the British also join, and that Indochina be given complete independence. He added that he hoped that such an alliance could be formed, and that "in a few weeks" the U.S. and Britain would send military forces to help the French.[100] After the meeting with Dulles and Bidault, Eden flew to London to consult Churchill, and in his memoirs he said that he received late that evening a message from Denis Allen stating that ". . . Bidault was, on reflection, far from enthusiastic about the American proposals. If Dulles pressed the matter, it was probable that Bidault would advise Laniel not to accept American intervention."[101]

Later that evening (April 24), Eden conferred with Churchill, who agreed that it would be a mistake for the British to join the U.S. in sending forces to Indochina. "Sir Winston summed up the position by saying that what we were being asked to do was to assist in misleading Congress into approving a military operation, which would in itself be ineffective, and might well bring the world to the verge of a major war." Both men agreed that a partition of Indochina was the best that could be hoped for, but that once an agreement was reached in Geneva, the British would join in guaranteeing that settlement through a collective defense plan.

On Sunday morning, April 25, the British Cabinet approved this position unanimously. Several hours later, however, according to his memoirs, Eden says he received word from the French Ambassador that the U.S. now proposed that if the British could agree to a united action declaration, Eisenhower would ask Congress for authority to act, and U.S. planes would strike at Dien Bien Phu on April 28. The Ambassador said that the U.S. Government had urged the French to get the British to agree to this scheme. The Cabinet was called back into an emergency session, and rejected the proposal.[102] Eden then flew to Geneva, where he met that night (April 25) with Dulles. He reported on the British position, and concluded by saying, "None of us in London believe that intervention in Indochina can do anything." Dulles replied that unless the French could be given some hope of help from the British and Americans they would be unwilling to continue after the loss of Dien Bien Phu.[103]

The Geneva Conference opened the next day, April 26, 1954. (The first item on its agenda was the Korean settlement.) In Washington that same day, at the weekly meeting of Republican congressional leaders, Eisenhower discussed the situation in Indochina and U.S. efforts to get support for united action. He said he did not think U.S. ground forces would have to be used, but that if U.S. "allies go back on us, then we would have one terrible alternative—we would have to attack with everything we have." The U.S., he said, ". . . must keep up pressure for collective security and show determination of free world to oppose chipping away of any part of the free

---

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 1395. Before leaving Paris for Geneva on the evening of the 24th, Dulles sent Bidault a letter replying to the request of the French for a U.S. airstrike in which he made some of the same points he had made in talking with Laniel. For the text of the letter see *ibid.*, pp. 1397–1398. Randle, p. 99, was incorrect in speculating that the letter was never sent.

[101] *Full Circle*, p. 116.

[102] *Ibid.*, pp. 116–119. This account has not been confirmed by U.S. sources.

[103] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XVI, pp. 553–557. See also pp. 570–571 for another Dulles-Eden conversation on April 26.

world. . . . Where in the hell can you let the Communists chip away any more. We just can't stand it."[104]

One of the congressional leaders at the meeting said that the administration would be criticized if it did not warn about the danger of "losing" Indochina. Eisenhower agreed, recalling what had been said about the Democrats in the case of China, and he "asserted our determination to lead the free world into a voluntary association which would make further Communist encroachment impossible."[105]

That afternoon (April 26), Under Secretary Bedell Smith, at Dulles' suggestion, held an important briefing at the State Department for members of the Far East Subcommittees of the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees.[106] In a brief cable to Dulles, which is the only published record of the meeting, Smith reported: "I was actually surprised by the restrained gravity of all who participated. With no carping questions or criticisms, there appeared to be full realization of the seriousness of the situation, and among the Congressional group there was open discussion of the passage of resolution authorizing use of air and naval strength following a declaration of common interest, with, or possibly even without British participation."

It was apparent that these key members of the foreign policy committees were coming around to the point of view held, as will be seen, by Under Secretary Smith if not by Dulles or the President himself. Smith seems to have decided that the U.S. might have to intervene, or at least threaten to intervene, without British support, in order to bolster the French and to keep the Communists guessing as to what U.S. intentions might be.

Among other Members of Congress, however, especially the conservatives of both parties, there was a growing fear of U.S. military involvement, and of having Congress placed in the position of having to acquiesce in Executive action. This concern surfaced in a brief debate in the House of Representatives on April 28 on an amendment offered by a conservative Republican, Frederic R. Coudert, Jr. (N.Y.) to the defense appropriations bill for FY 1955.

Coudert spoke briefly on April 27, saying that he was going to offer the following amendment the next day:

> None of the funds appropriated by this act shall be available for any of the expenses of maintaining uniformed personnel of the United States in armed conflict anywhere in the world: *Provided*, That this prohibition shall not be applicable with respect to armed conflict pursuant to a declaration of war or other express authorization of the Congress or with respect to armed conflict occasioned by an attack on the United States, its Territories, or possessions, or attack on any nation with which the United States has a mutual defense or security treaty.

---

[104] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1411 and vol. XVI, pp. 599–600

[105] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1413.

[106] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 574. From the Senate there were Republicans H. Alexander Smith, Hickenlooper, and Langer, and Democrats Fulbright, Gillette and Mansfield. From the House there were Republicans Chiperfield, Vorys, Fulton and Smith of Wisconsin, and Democrats A. S. J. Carnahan (Mo.), Zablocki, and Omar T. Burleson (Tex.)

On April 28, Eisenhower again stated in a press conference that the United States would not go to war except through "the constitutional process which, of course, involves the declaration of war by Congress." But when asked about the Coudert amendment he said he opposed action by Congress that might interfere with his emergency powers: ". . . in this day and time when you put that kind of artificial restriction upon the Executive, you cannot fail to damage his flexibility in trying to sustain the interests of the United States wherever necessary."[107]

When he offered his amendment during House debate that afternoon, Coudert expressed disappointment that the President had opposed it, noting that all he was proposing was that Congress ". . . take at face value the declaration of our great President, Mr. Eisenhower, that he will not and would not commit the United States to armed intervention in Indochina without the approval of Congress." He said, "All this amendment will do will be to prevent, by limiting the right to use the funds, any more Koreas entered into irresponsibly by any President without the participation of Congress and solely upon his own individual responsibility." He added that he had first introduced a similar amendment early in 1951 (his was the first proposal offered in what then became the "Great Debate" in the Senate), which "has been reposing quietly in a pigeonhole of the Committee on Armed Services for these 3½ long years," and that the only option he had was to offer it as a prohibition on an appropriations bill.

The proposal was very strongly attacked by many of the powerful Members of the House, and of the Foreign Affairs Committee, from both parties, and on division it was defeated 37–214. The Republican majority leader, Halleck, joined by John Taber (R/N.Y.), chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Clarence A. Cannon (D/Mo.), the ranking Democrat on Appropriations, as well as Republicans Vorys, Judd, and Javits from the Foreign Affairs Committee, were among those who assailed the amendment, calling it misleading, confusing, divisive, and dangerous. It is especially interesting that Javits should have taken this position, given his leadership in later years of the War Powers Resolution.

Vorys reported that the Foreign Affairs Committee had met briefly that morning to consider the amendment, and had voted unanimously to oppose the amendment, in part because it fell under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Affairs Committee which, he said, was considering legislation of that type.[108] (There is no indication that the committee was doing so.)

Coudert was supported by only a few Members, the most notable of whom was Graham A. Barden (D/N.C.), a senior Member of the House and a staunch conservative. Barden said that the amendment, while not "perfect," gave the House, for the first time, the opportunity to vote on a measure intended to insure that Congress, and only Congress, except in an emergency, could commit the nation to war. "It hurts me," he said, "to be asked a thousand

[107] *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, pp. 427, 429.

[108] According to the records of the Foreign Affairs Committee, there was no verbatim transcript of this meeting of the committee on the morning of April 28, 1954.

questions about Indochina and about when our boys are going to war. . . ."

On the same day (April 28) as the House debate, the NSC held its weekly meeting, and there was a long discussion of what the U.S. should do in relation to Indochina.[109] Allen Dulles summarized a new national intelligence estimate on the consequences of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, in which the entire intelligence community concluded that it would be "very serious but not catastrophic." Admiral Radford said he thought the conclusions were too optimistic.

Under Secretary Smith then reported on the Geneva Conference, where Dulles had been continuing to confer, without much success, with the British and French, as well as the Russians. Smith read a cable he had just received from Dulles, who concluded by saying, "The decline of France, the great weakness of Italy, and the considerable weakness in England create a situation where I think that if we ourselves are clear as to what should be done, we must be prepared to take the leadership in what we think is the right course, having regard to long-range US interest which includes importance of Allies. I believe that our Allies will be inclined to follow, if not immediately, then ultimately, strong and sound leadership." But he added that he was not suggesting "that this is the moment for a bold or war-like course. I lack here the US political and NSC judgments needed for overall evaluation."[110] Smith said that this position appealed to him.

The President disagreed with what seemed to be the implication of Dulles' statement: ". . . in spite of the views of the Secretary of State about the need of leadership to bring the French and British along, he did not see how the United States, together with the French, could intervene with armed forces in Indochina unless it did so in concert with some other nations and at the request of the Associated States themselves. This seemed quite beyond his comprehension."[111]

Admiral Radford then reported to the NSC on his discussions in Europe, and on the desperate situation of the garrison at Dien Bien Phu. His report had an obvious impact on the members of the Council. The notes of the meeting state that after he spoke there was a "brief interval of silence." At that point, Harold Stassen (former member of the U.S. Delegation to the San Francisco Conference on the U.N., as well as former Republican Governor, then head of the Foreign Operations Administration) said he thought that ". . . if the French folded, and even if the British refused to go along with us, the United States should intervene alone in the southern areas of Indochina in order to save the situation." He recognized that Congress would have to approve, but he thought that if part of Indochina could be defended the U.S. would have a better chance of defending the rest of Southeast Asia.

---

[109] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1431–1445.

[110] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 607

[111] Of related interest is the April 29 memorandum for Dulles from Livingston Merchant, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, then a special adviser to the U.S. delegation at Geneva, in which he concluded that the preconditions for U.S. military intervention in Indochina could not be met, and that "the odds are overwhelmingly in favor of the loss of Indochina to the Communists." He recommended that the U.S. work on establishing a coalition to save the rest of Southeast Asia. *Ibid.*, p 620.

Again, Eisenhower disagreed. "It was all well and good," he said in part, "to state that if the French collapsed the United States must move in to save Southeast Asia, but if the French indeed collapsed and the United States moved in, we would in the eyes of many Asiatic peoples merely replace French colonialism with American colonialism." He also wondered where the U.S. would get the forces to replace those withdrawn by the French. Stassen replied that he thought the Indochinese would welcome U.S. assistance, and that the phased withdrawal of the French would enable the U.S. to replace them.

"The President remained skeptical in the face of Governor Stassen's argument, and pointed out our belief that a collective policy with our allies was the only posture which was consistent with U.S. national security policy as a whole. To go in unilaterally in Indochina or other areas of the world which were endangered, amounted to an attempt to police the entire world. If we attempted such a course of action, using our armed forces and going into areas whether we were wanted or not, we would soon lose all our significant support in the free world. We should be everywhere accused of imperialistic ambitions . . . to him the concept of leadership implied associates. Without allies and associates the leader is just an adventurer like Genghis Khan."

Later in the same exchange, Stassen said, ". . . it would be impossible to let the Communists take over Indochina and then try to save the rest of the world from a similar fate. This was the time and the place to take our stand and make our decision."[112] Eisenhower replied that before he made such a decision, and committed 6, 8, 10 or more U.S. divisions to Indochina, "he would want to ask himself and all his wisest advisers whether the right decision was not rather to launch a world war . . . he would earnestly put before the leaders of the Congress and the Administration the great question whether it would not be better to decide on general war and prepare for D-Day," rather than "frittering away our resources in local engagements." "If our allies were going to fall away in any case, it might be better for the United States to leap over the smaller obstacles and hit the biggest one with all the power we had. Otherwise we seemed to be merely playing the enemy's game—getting ourselves involved in brushfire wars in Burma, Afghanistan, and God knows where."

Under Secretary Smith, supported by Vice President Nixon, suggested that there was a way of becoming involved in Indochina that would avoid the extremes of doing nothing or doing too much. He proposed that the U.S. consider undertaking airstrikes to support the French, as they had requested, even if Dien Bien Phu should fall. This might encourage the French to keep fighting, and also enable the U.S. to assume more of the responsibility, such as training indigenous troops. "If it were possible to prevent a collapse of the French will, and to keep a training plan for the indigenous forces alive by means of a U.S. training mission and by U.S. airstrikes, we might ultimately save the situation in Indochina without being obliged to commit U.S. ground forces." Smith added

[112]For a full statement of Stassen's position see his letter to Dulles on May 3, 1954, in *ibid.*, vol XIII, pp 1463-1467

that "General Navarre, however, would have to go. He had proved incompetent. We should also have to have absolute assurance from France for the complete independence of the Associated States."

Smith said that although the U.S. "could not go into Indochina alone," even in the absence of the British it might be possible to get enough allies in Asia to satisfy the "concerted action" principle.

The President agreed that this plan might be feasible, and said that if the French proved that they would be willing to stay and fight, even if they lost at Dien Bien Phu, he would agree to ask Congress to consider the idea. The Council then agreed that, despite the British position, the U.S. should continue seeking a basis for united action. The President ended the meeting with this warning: "If we wanted to win over the Congress and the people of the United States to an understanding of their stake in Southeast Asia, let us not talk of intervention with U.S. ground forces. People were frightened, and were opposed to this idea."

Eisenhower's position on the Indochina situation was candidly summarized in a letter on April 26, 1954, to his old friend Gen. Alfred Gruenther, NATO Supreme Commander, who had been his Chief of Staff when he was Supreme Commander. He said in part:[113]

> . . . While I had practically abdicated, I had not before known of your personal views with respect to the astonishing proposal for unilateral American intervention in Indo-China. Your adverse opinion exactly parallels mine.
>
> As you know, you and I started more than three years ago trying to convince the French that they could *not* win the Indo-China war and particularly could not get real American support in that region unless they would unequivocally pledge independence to the Associated States upon the achievement of military victory. Along with this—indeed as a corollary to it—this Administration has been arguing that no Western power can go to Asia militarily, except as one of a concert of powers, which concert must include local Asiatic peoples.
>
> To contemplate anything else is to lay ourselves open to the charge of imperialism and colonialism or—at the very least—of objectionable paternalism. Even, therefore, if we could by some sudden stroke assure the saving of the Dien Bien Phu garrison, I think that under the conditions proposed by the French the free world would lose more than it would gain. Neither the British nor the French would now agree with the coalition idea—though for widely differing reasons. Consequently, we have had to stand by while the tactical situation has grown worse and worse. Now, unless there should be a sudden development of discouragement on the part of the enemy, it looks as if Dien Bien Phu could scarcely survive.
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> In any event, it is all very frustrating and discouraging, but I do believe as follows:

[113] *Ibid.*, pp 1419-1421

(a) That the loss of Dien Bien Phu does not necessarily mean the loss of the Indo-China war.

(b) The heroic exploits of the French garrison (which are all the more wonderful in view of the weak support they have had from Paris) should be glorified and extolled as indicative of the French character and determination.

(c) We should all (United States, France, Thailand, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, et al.) begin conferring at once on means of successfully stopping the Communist advances in Southeast Asia.

(d) The plan should include the use of the bulk of the French Army in Indo-China.

(e) The plan should assure freedom of political action to Indo-China promptly upon attainment of victory.

(f) Additional ground forces should come from Asiatic and European troops already in the region.

(g) The general security and peaceful purposes and aims of such a concert of nations should be announced publicly—as in NATO. Then we possibly wouldn't *have* to fight.

In its meeting later that day (April 28), the NSC Planning Board discussed the earlier NSC meeting, and, among other things, decided that ". . . it is impossible to meet the President's requirement that the indigenous peoples invite and actively desire U.S. intervention. (This has been told to President.)"

The Board also considered the question of atomic weapons, which the summary of the meeting referred to as "new weapons." Later, Cutler discussed this with Eisenhower and Nixon, who took the position that such weapons would not be effective in the area around Dien Bien Phu, but that the U.S. might consider offering some "new weapons" to the French. They also agreed that the key policy goal remained the development of a collective defense arrangement.[114]

The Final Decision Not to Intervene at Dien Bien Phu

By May 5, 1954, the size of the ground area still controlled by the French Union garrison at Dien Bien Phu had shrunk to the equivalent of a baseball field, within which 3,000 defenders who were able to fight (almost half of those still living had been wounded) continued fighting against what were by then overwhelming odds. "There was a clear realization that they, the last 3,000 men—the French and Vietnamese paratroopers, Foreign Legionnaires, and African cannoneers—literally represented all that stood between defeat and stalemate in the Indochina war. The main theme repeated throughout the shrinking fortress was 'they simply can't let us lose the war.' "[115]

On the morning of May 5, Dulles, back from Geneva, joined the President for a meeting at the White House at which Dulles reviewed with Eisenhower the entire course of negotiations on united action since his speech of March 29.[116] He blamed both the British

[114] *Ibid.*, pp. 1447–1448.
[115] Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, p. 371.
[116] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1466–1470.

and the French for undercutting the U.S. position, and said that Congress would be angry with both countries if it knew the truth about what had happened. He said that the British were motivated by reactions from their Commonwealth countries, particularly India, as well as by their fear of the consequences of U.S. military action. The French, he said, had resisted all U.S. efforts to "internationalize" the war, as well as U.S. efforts to encourage independence for Indochina. He added that the French had never formally asked for U.S. airstrikes at Dien Bien Phu—that there had been "one or two oral and informal requests." "What the French fear," he said, "is if the US is brought into the struggle, France will not have a free hand to 'sell out and get out.'"

The position of the British, Dulles said, was to divide Vietnam, and then to create a regional defense grouping that would attempt to defend the non-Communist position, together with Laos, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. He said he doubted whether the Communists would agree to such a division, however. Their strategy would be to have all foreign troops removed, followed by an election. "In such an event," Dulles added, "all of Vietnam would be lost, except perhaps some enclave."

Dulles concluded by saying, ". . . conditions did not justify the US entry into Indochina as a belligerent at this time." "The President firmly agreed." "The President commented that our allies were willing to let us pull their chestnuts out of the fire, but will let us be called imperialists and colonialists."

Dulles said he concurred with the action of the NSC at its April 28 meeting in continuing to organize the regional grouping as rapidly and with as many members as possible.

That afternoon (May 5), Dulles and several of his State Department associates held a 1½ hour briefing at the Department for congressional leaders and chairmen and ranking members of the foreign policy and armed services committees of both Houses of Congress.[117] (It should be noted that in the series of congressional consultations on Indochina that began in March, this was the first meeting in which the committees as well as the leadership were included. The meeting of April 3 had consisted only of leaders, and representation at the meeting of April 26 was entirely from the foreign policy committees.)

Dulles repeated the general presentation he had made to the President, beginning with his speech of March 29 on united action. He also discussed the two "informal" requests for U.S. airstrikes, and the events that finally led to the failure to achieve agreement on united action prior to the Geneva Conference. He said he had reached three conclusions—first, that the United States should not intervene in Indochina unless U.S. preconditions had been met. Second, the U.S. should seek to establish a Southeast Asia defense arrangement as soon as possible. He added that partition of Viet-

[117] *Ibid.*, pp. 1471-1477 and vol. XVI, pp. 706–708. Present were, from the Senate, Republicans Knowland, Ferguson, Millikin, Saltonstall, Wiley, H. Alexander Smith and Bridges, and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, George, Russell and Green, and from the House, Speaker Martin, and Republicans Halleck, Arends, Chiperfield, Vorys, Judd and Dewey J. Short (Mo.), and Democrats McCormack, Thomas S. Gordon (Ill.), Henderson Lanham (Ga.), and Vinson. Short was chairman and Vinson was ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee

nam did not appear likely, and that there would probably be a withdrawal of all foreign troops, followed by a coalition government and a general election, "all of which would probably result in the loss of Vietnam to the Communists." Third, the U.S. should not "write off" the British and French as allies.

The discussion was friendly. There were a number of critical comments about the British, in particular, but generally the Members of Congress who were present were in complete agreement with the administration's handling of the situation and plans for the future.

Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson asked one of the few questions that were raised during the course of the meeting. When Dulles said he thought the first request from the French for a U.S. airstrike had been based on General Ely's impression, after his trip to Washington, that the U.S. would intervene, Johnson asked whether Ely had gotten this impression from the Pentagon or from Dulles. "The Secretary replied that he had definitely not gotten it from him and that he didn't believe he could accurately say from whom he had gotten it."

Although Johnson was less active in the meeting of May 6 than in the meeting of April 3, he was continuing to show considerable interest in U.S. policy toward Indochina, and its ramifications for his position in the Senate and in national politics. This was not an easy task, however, caught as he was between political differences among Senate Democrats as well as among his friends and political supporters outside the Senate. He was being urged to resist intervention, but he was also being urged by some influential friends to take a stronger stand in defense of Indochina. On April 29, two of these close friends and advisers, James Rowe, Jr., a prominent Washington lawyer and former top Roosevelt staff member, and Philip Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post,* sent Johnson a long letter about Indochina.[118] The letter, signed by Rowe, said, "A couple of your admirers, one Philip Graham and I, have been discussing the fate of the world in open-mouthed despair. The only conclusion we were able to reach was that Lyndon Johnson might be able to do something about it. We do not regard that as a hopeful possibility but the alternatives are so despairing we think it is worth a try.

"It seems to us that Indochina is so desperate in terms of the future of the world, and particularly of the United States, that everything else should be put aside. At this point, it does no good to recount the abysmal performance of the Eisenhower Administration in the past few weeks. The only thing that is worthy of comment about all the incredible statements that have been made is that it is clear the Administration is in panic, very much like a neurotic personality when the pressures get too great and that that panic is slowly communicating itself to the American people."

Rowe said that there were three possibilities facing the U.S.:

1. Indochina will be lost to the Communists because the French and the British would accept terms favorable to the Communists, with the United States, in effect, not participat-

[118] Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Staff Files of Dorothy Territo, LBJ-A, Select Names. (emphasis in original)

ing at all. The United States cannot participate because the United States *Senate* has completely and effectively tied the hands of John Foster Dulles behind his back—and the world knows it.

2. If the United States determines not to accept this diplomatic defeat, which is now occurring at Geneva, the second possibility is war. Many Americans, for good reasons and for bad reasons, think that time has come. I personally am inclined to prefer this to the first possibility (only because I remember the road from Munich only too well). I would guess that Radford would prefer this and hopes that he could keep the war localized but is willing, as anyone who prefers this possibility must be, to accept the fact that it might be necessary to extend it to China and to Russia and ultimately to atomic and hydrogen war. But if there is any way to avoid this most frightful alternative—which undoubtedly means the end of civilization and you know it—it should be tried. That leads to:

3. Negotiations. The Senate must give the Secretary of State room to negotiate. While Graham may be chameleon in his political life, you know that I am an intense Democratic partisan on both domestic and foreign policy. If there is any man whom I have thoroughly despised in twenty years of observation in W .shington it is John Foster Dulles. You may, therefore, measure my concern over the world when I try to convince you it is imperative that Dulles be given this necessary room for maneuver.

I would not be so brash as to suggest how much room to negotiate he should have. I know that today, due solely to the institution of which you are a member, he has none. And the United States, because of the Senate, is no more effective in the world than a fifth rate power like the Dominican Republic. The most, I suppose, that Dulles should ever be given (and I am not sure about that) is to trade out a UN seat for Red China for something substantial. He should also be given, with his bargaining power, the power to say to Russia and to China that this is their last best hope and that the next step means war.

This is tough talk, I know. But either of the other two possibilities are infinitely worse—the loss of Indochina, and therefore of all Asia, or total war.

There is no available information on Johnson's reaction to the letter, but several days later (May 6, 1954 the day after the State Department meeting), he made the following statement during the course of a speech to a Democratic fund-raising dinner in Washington:[119]

> What is American policy on Indochina?
>
> All of us have listened to the dismal series of reversals and confusions and alarms and excursions which have emerged from Washington over the past few weeks.
>
> We have been caught bluffing by our enemies, our friends and Allies are frightened and wondering, as we do, where we are headed.

[119] *New York Times*, May 7, 1954.

We stand in clear danger of being left naked and alone in a hostile world.

Dien Bien Phu Falls and the U.S. Again Considers Intervening in Indochina

The NSC held its weekly meeting on May 6, and Dulles repeated for the Council the information he had given the President and congressional leaders. He also mentioned, among other things, that the French were preparing to propose a cease-fire in Indochina.

Robert Cutler brought up a related subject on which the OCB (Operations Coordinating Board) of the NSC had been working since January. This was a proposal for creating an "international volunteer air group" for combat in Southeast Asia. This group, which would consist of U.S. and other volunteers, would be equipped with three squadrons of F-86 fighters. "Secretary Dulles inquired whether the proposed air group would be under the ultimate control of the President. Mr. Cutler replied in the negative, indicating that we would have no responsibility for the group, which would be developed along the lines of General Chennault's 'Flying Tigers' in the second World War. This would mean, said Secretary Dulles, that our volunteers could join the air group without Congressional approval. The answer seemed to be in the affirmative."[120]

The next morning, Dulles met with Eisenhower to go over the decisions of the May 6 NSC meeting and the views expressed at the meeting of the Planning Board which, as usual, followed the NSC meeting.[121] Cutler reported that some members of the Board, principally military members, were opposed to the French proposal for a cease-fire. (The principal Defense member of the Planning Board was General Bonesteel, who, at that stage at least, believed that Asia might be "lost" to the Communists if the U.S. did not intervene in Indochina. He proposed two regional groupings, the smaller of which, composed of France, the U.S., the Associated States, Thailand and the Philippines, would be the instrumentality through which the U.S. would intervene while organizing the larger grouping.)[122] These Board members argued that this would destroy the will to fight of the French and the Vietnamese, and that the Communists would "covertly evade cease-fire controls." Instead, they proposed that, "as a last act to save Indochina," Congress should be asked to approve U.S. military intervention if the French agreed to these five conditions:

a. grant of genuine freedom for Associated States.

b. US take major responsibility for training indigenous forces.

c. US share responsiblity for military planning.

d. French forces to stay in the fight and no requirement of replacement by US forces.

e. (Action under UN auspices?)

---

[120] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1491. At least three of the actions taken by the NSC at that meeting have been deleted from the published text. Judging by a "note" in the portion of the text which was published, however, one of these would appear to have dealt with atomic weapons. See p. 1492 of *ibid.*

[121] *Ibid.*, pp. 1495-1498.

[122] See his memoranda in *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 442, 460-461.

Cutler also summarized the objections to this plan that were raised by other members of the Board:

a. No French Government is now competent to act in a lasting way.

b. There is no indication France wants to "internationalize" the conflict.

c. The US proposal would be made without the prior assurance of a regional grouping of SEA States, a precondition of Congress; although this point might be added as another condition to the proposal.

d. US would be "bailing out colonial France" in the eyes of the world.

e. US cannot undertake *alone* to save every situation of trouble.

Eisenhower did not disagree with the idea of presenting the proposal for U.S. intervention to the French as an alternative to a cease-fire, but he said that if this were done ". . . it should also be made clear to the French as an additional precondition that the US would never intervene alone, that there must be an invitation by the indigenous people, and that there must be some kind of regional and collective action."

Late on the morning of May 7, 1954, the news came that Dien Bien Phu had fallen, and its 8,000-10,000 living defenders, (of the original 15,000), 40 percent of them wounded, had been taken captive. Upon hearing this news, Members of Congress, especially in the Senate, expressed various sentiments, but they all agreed that the defenders had fought valiantly, and that Dien Bien Phu should not be considered as a defeat. Senator Mansfield said that it could serve as a symbol of hope for the future: "Together, against great odds and in the face of insurmountable obstacles, those soldiers made clear what free men can do and will do to stop the march of aggressive communism." He added, "To withdraw now, to negotiate a settlement which would lay open all of Indochina to the conqueror's heel, would be to break faith with those of Dien Bien Phu who gave so much." He called on France and the Associated States, with U.S. help, to continue the battle. Senator Humphrey agreed, as did most of the others who spoke.[123]

Senator Morse, however, expressed concern about the possibility that the administration might get the U.S. involved in military action in Indochina, and said he was not reassured by statements from the President that the U.S. would not go to war without a declaration by Congress. "We shall never see the time," he said, "when we get into a war, first, by a declaration of war by Congress. The next time we go to war we will find that we were plunged into it by events and then the Congress will be called upon to draft a declaration of war, simply to make it legal."

Morse also continued to be critical of the French: "We must make clear to France we are not going to enter into any agreement which will result in shiploads of coffins draped in American flags being shipped from Indochina to the United States in any attempt to support colonialism in Indochina."[124]

---

[123] *CR.* vol. 100, pp 6227–6228

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 6249

That night (May 7), Secretary Dulles gave a nation-wide radio and television address on "The Issues at Geneva,"[125] in which he said of Dien Bien Phu, "An epic battle has ended. But great causes have, before now, been won out of lost battles." Using the Korean war as an example, he listed the preconditions that had been agreed upon for U.S. intervention in Indochina, and ended by saying, ". . . if an armistice or cease-fire were reached at Geneva which would provide a road to a Communist takeover and further aggression . . . or if hostilities continue, then the need will be even more urgent to create the conditions for united action in defense of the area."

The Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference began on May 8. The French offered their proposal for an immediate cease-fire, after which political arrangements would be negotiated.[126] That same day, the NSC met to consider the U.S. position, and agreed to oppose any cease-fire prior to an acceptable armistice agreement with international controls. According to the *Pentagon Papers*, the position of the Joint Chiefs (which was generally supported by the State Department), who opposed the French proposal, thus ". . . became U.S. policy with only minor emendation."[127]

[125] *Department of State Bulletin*, May 17, 1954.

[126] On May 10, the Viet Minh offered their peace proposal at Geneva which, as anticipated, called for a cease-fire followed by the withdrawal of foreign troops and a general election. *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 753-755. The U.S. delegation at the Conference cabled that the proposal would "result in rapid turnover Indochina to Communists." *Ibid.*, p. 772.

[127] *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 118, and *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p 1509. For the position of the Chiefs see *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 430-434, and *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. 1, pp. 401-404. See also pp. 407-408 for the position of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. On May 12 a cable was sent to the U.S. delegation in Geneva with instructions on participation in the Indochina phase of the Conference. Dulles told Smith that these had been cleared with the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees. See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp 778-779. These consultations took place on May 11-12 during unrecorded executive sessions of the two committees.

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW U.S. ROLE IN VIETNAM

The U.S. reacted to the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the opening of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference by taking the initiative with the French on the question of "internationalizing" the war. The issue was raised at NSC meetings on May 6 and 8, 1954. At the May 8 meeting Vice President Nixon took the position that it was important for the U.S. to indicate to the French its willingness to discuss intervention. They should know, he said, that there "is at least an alternative to a course of action involving negotiation." President Eisenhower, probably by prearrangement with Secretary Dulles, suggested that the best way to handle the matter was for Dulles to talk to French Ambassador Bonnet.[1]

That night, Dulles called on Bonnet, who was ill, and told him that the U.S. continued to be ". . . prepared to sit down and talk with the French about what the French called 'internationalizing' the war and working out a real partnership basis. I said that as far as the immediate present was concerned, I assumed that the French Government would still not want this. However, they might change their mind after the full harshness of probable Communist terms was revealed. Then this might seem to them an alternative worth exploring."[2]

This initiative brought immediate results. A cable from Ambassador Dillon arrived on May 10 reporting a discussion he had just held with Laniel, in which the French President expressed concern about possible Viet Minh military moves, and said that he wanted U.S. military advice in making decisions about protecting the French Expeditionary Corps. He also wanted to know what military action the U.S. might be prepared to take in Indochina, and said that if there was no prospect of any direct assistance he would be forced to withdraw French Union forces from Laos and Cambodia.[3]

When Dulles received Dillon's cable, he immediately called Radford at 3 p.m. (May 10) to tell him about the message. ". . . it is of the utmost importance," he said, ". . . for the first time they want to sit down and discuss the military situation, regrouping of troops, etc. It is encouraging that they seem willing to do business with us so we can move and get Congressional support." Radford agreed. At 4:22 p.m., Radford called Dulles to say that he had read the Dillon cable and wondered what the next step would be. Dulles replied that he had been talking to MacArthur and Bowie about the request, and they agreed it was an encouraging development. Rad-

[1] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1509.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1516. Gerson, *John Foster Dulles*, p. 173, incorrectly states that Bonnet called on Dulles.
[3] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1524.

ford said it was "too bad it wasn't done two months ago." Dulles said the big hurdle would be acting without the British. He added that he would be lunching with Eisenhower the next day, and would discuss the cable with him. Radford replied that it was important to act more quickly, and Dulles said he would call the White House to try to arrange something.[4] That call resulted in an immediately scheduled meeting at the White House at 4:30 p.m. attended by the President, Dulles, Radford, Robert Anderson (the newly-appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense), and others.

The President agreed with Dulles and Radford's position that the U.S. should respond favorably to Laniel's initiative.[5] It was decided that General Trapnell, who had been the MAAG chief in Saigon, would be the best U.S. military representative to send to Paris. With respect to U.S. military intervention, Dulles had prepared a list of conditions for U.S. action which the group discussed and agreed upon. In the form they were cabled to Dillon later that day these seven conditions were as follows:[6]

(a) That US military participation had been formally requested by France and three Associated States;

(b) That Thailand, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom also had received similar invitations and that we were satisfied that first two would also accept at once; that next two would probably accept following Australian elections, if US invokes ANZUS Treaty; and the U.K. would either participate or be acquiescent;

(c) That some aspect of matter would be presented to UN promptly, such as by request from Laos, Cambodia or Thailand for peace observation commission;

(d) That France guarantees to Associated States complete independence, including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time;

(e) France would undertake not to withdraw its forces from Indochina during period of united action so that forces from U.S.—principally air and sea—and others would be supplementary and not in substitution;

(f) That agreement was reached on training of native troops and on command structure for united action.

During the group's discussion of the condition regarding participants, Eisenhower ". . . made it quite clear that he would *only* propose U.S. intervention on the basis of collective action." The group agreed that it would be sufficient to have, in addition to France and the U.S., the Associated States, Thailand and the Philippines, and "perhaps eventually the U.K. . . ." This, of course, was a marked change in the original concept of united action, and in the position that congressional leaders had taken on April 3 concerning British participation.

Moreover, the group then proceeded also to weaken the original condition with respect to Indochinese independence:

---

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 1526, fn. 3.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 1526–1528.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 1534–1535. It will be that this list is identical to that suggested by Genera. Bonesteel. See above, p. 225.

Secretary Dulles said that we were on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, it was essential to eliminate from the minds of the Asians any belief that we were intervening in Indochina in support of colonialism. On the other hand, the truth of the matter was that the Associated States were not in a position to enjoy complete independence. They did not have the trained personnel necessary to administer their respective countries and the leadership was not good. In a sense if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured. After some discussion as to whether the French might specify that the Associated States could opt for withdrawal from the French Union either five or ten years after the cessation of hostilities, it was agreed that the exact period of time should not be fixed at this moment. There would, however, prior to action on the part of the U.S. have to be a satisfactory agreement on specific length of such a period and this agreement would have to be entirely satisfactory to the Associated States and could not be the result of French pressure.

This done, the President said that if the French agreed to these terms he would present the idea to Congress. The manner of his presentation to Congress and the public, he added, was "of great importance." He thought he should go before a joint session of Congress to explain the circumstances and to request a resolution "which would enable him to use the armed forces of the U.S. to support the free governments that we recognize in that area." He asked Dulles to have the State Department begin drafting the speech.

The President and Dulles then discussed the matter further over lunch the next day (May 11), and the President suggested adding the words "principally sea and air" to condition (e).[7] They talked about going ahead without the British. Dulles said that while this had some disadvantages, ". . . there were perhaps greater disadvantages in a situation where we were obviously subject to UK veto, which in turn was in Asian matters largely subject to India veto, which in turn was largely subject to Chinese Communist veto. Thereby a chain was forged which tended to make us impotent, and to encourage Chinese Communist aggression to a point where the whole position in the Pacific would be endangered and the risk of general war increased." The President agreed.

That afternoon (May 11), the cable replying to Laniel's request was sent to Dillon. It has been argued by some writers that the seven conditions contained in this response were deliberately designed to be unattainable. Townsend Hoopes, for example, has said that the conditions were ". . . so formidable that they could be judged only as having been carefully calculated to impede, if not indeed to preclude, American military involvement. . . . Taken together, the seven conditions were a set of interlocking booby traps for the French, and, if by some miracle they had been able to render them harmless and unacceptable, it is likely that a now thoroughly disenchanted Eisenhower would have developed further obstacles."[8] Hoopes quotes an interview statement of Robert Bowie,

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 1533.
[8] *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, p. 229.

Director of State's Policy Planning Staff at the time, that the conditions were "makeweights."

Randle has taken a similar position: "It appears the administration had again parried a 'request' for commitment from an importunate France; the American formulators of the seven conditions could not have believed France would be willing or able to fulfill them." Randle adds that although the conditions "were quite reasonable from an American point of view," each condition ". . . embodied a form of protection against results 'the party of caution' in Washington feared. The conditions, so imposed, would to a great extent allay the doubts and suspicions of 'hesitant' administration officials and congressmen. The activists must either have agreed with some of the conditions or realized that they could not fairly object to them. They had, in effect, been finessed."[9]

These points would appear to be well-taken with respect to the impossibility of French compliance with the U.S. conditions, given the realities of the situation in France. There is also reason to believe that the President and Secretary Dulles had concluded that the U.S. should not intervene militarily in Indochina on the side of the French, and that the chances of defending Indochina and the rest of Southeast Asia would be greatly improved after the French withdrew. For these reasons, it can be argued that the conditions were intended to be "makeweights." The U.S. wanted to keep the French from capitulating on the battlefield or in Geneva (as well as on EDC), and thus had to seem responsive. Yet the U.S. also wanted the French, after they had secured the best possible deal in Geneva, to remove themselves from the scene and leave Indochina to the Americans.

The administration also was trying to maintain its political position domestically and internationally, and in both respects it wanted to appear to be continuing to take a strong stand. Thus, news stories that appeared immediately after the U.S. reply to the French, reporting that the U.S. and France were discussing terms for U.S. intervention, were undoubtedly designed, as Townsend Hoopes suggests, ". . . to demonstrate forward movement and tough American resolve, thereby to disarm domestic critics of immobilism and to bolster the sagging French negotiating position at Geneva."[10]

These explanations omit one important additional factor, however. Based on documentation now available, it seems clear that the alternative of U.S. military intervention in Indochina was more of a consideration than it had been earlier, and that, in this sense, the response to Laniel was genuine and straight-forward. If the U.S. decided to intervene, it could reasonably and effectively do so only if the stated conditions had been met. And, indeed, the U.S., under Dulles' leadership, spent the next several weeks watering down the seven conditions in what was undoubtedly designed as a move to continue to show support for the French, but appears also to have been further preparation for the contingency of intervening with force.

---

[9] *Geneva 1954*, pp. 224-225

[10] Hoopes, p. 228.

On May 11, while working on the reply to Dillon, Dulles gave an executive session briefing on Geneva to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and on May 12 he held a similar session with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In both meetings he summarized U.S. efforts to form a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia, as well as the conditions for U.S. military involvement in Indochina. He stated that at that time these conditions had not been met, and that if they were met the President would request approval by Congress of any use of U.S. forces in hostilities.[11]

Senator Fulbright, saying that "we are in a devil of a difficult situation" in Indochina because of the problem of colonialism, asked Dulles whether, if the French were to pull out of Indochina, thus freeing the Indochinese from their colonial rule, the U.S. would then consider intervening, even with troops, to defend the area. Dulles hedged in answering the question, but said that the U.S. "would be receptive to discussing the matter with them [the French], as we did in relation to the British with Greece."

After the Senate hearing, Senator Mansfield, at his own request, had lunch with Paul J. Sturm, a Foreign Service officer working on Indochina. Mansfield, saying that ". . . our most serious mistake . . . has been to assume that a military victory was possible, in the absence of suitable political settlements," wanted to know Sturm's feelings about the importance of defending Indochina, and about possible U.S. military actions to this end. Sturm stressed the need to take action, saying, "To accept the writing-off of Southeast Asia or even of Indochina" would be a mistake. He thought that an ". . . initial limited intervention with ground forces, primarily in the Haiphong area, might enable us to hold the line until we could undertake serious training of a National Army and the construction of a regional defense organization. . . ." In his memorandum reporting the conversation, Sturm added: "On each previous occasion on which I have talked with Senator Mansfield, and as recently as April 21, he has been vehemently opposed to the use of American ground forces in Indochina. Today however he did not react adversely when I mentioned this possibility."[12]

Preparing to Intervene and to Take Over From the French

On May 13, the Laniel government survived a vote of confidence in the French General Assembly by two votes, 289–287.

On May 14, Ambassador Dillon talked to President Laniel about the terms proposed by the U.S. Laniel generally agreed, but said that the provision allowing the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union would not be accepted by the French. In his report to Washington, Dillon said, "I am certain that unless we can

[11] *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 129–160, and *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 257–281. It is of interest to note an expression used by Dulles in his meeting with the Foreign Relations Committee. Referring to the President's position that U.S. belligerency in Indochina would have to be authorized by Congress, he used the term "the equivalent of war authority" to describe such an authorization. The use of the expression "the functional equivalent of a declaration of war" by Under Secretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1967 to describe the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, produced an uproar among members of the committee. Yet Dulles took the same position in 1954 without even a murmur of disapproval from the committee.

[12] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, pp 1538–1540.

find some way to get around this requirement, French will never ask for outside assistance."[13]

On Sunday, May 16, Secretary Dulles held a very high-level secret dinner meeting at his home to discuss the situation and to plan U.S. strategy. In attendance were, among others, his brother, Allen Dulles, and Douglas MacArthur II. Vice President Nixon was also there. He had been on a trip to the Greenbriar Hotel in West Virginia, but Dulles told him that the meeting was important, and that he would arrange to have an Army plane bring him back to Washington. The only "outsider" was Dean Rusk, formerly Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East under Truman, and at this point president of the Rockefeller Foundation.[14]

There is no information available with respect to what was discussed except for Dulles' phone call to Rusk inviting him to attend, in which Dulles said "we will have to make critical decisions in relation to British and French—whether we go alone or allow ourselves to be bogged down."[15]

In another development, Senate Republican leaders met privately on May 14 for a luncheon in the office of the Secretary of the Senate, Mark Trice, to discuss how they could support the administration's position on Indochina and on the Geneva Conference. Present were Vice President Nixon and Senators Knowland, Bridges, Ferguson, Saltonstall, Hickenlooper, Edward J. Thye (R/Minn.), and H. Alexander Smith.[16]

On May 17, Dulles sent an important cable to Dillon, which may well have been influenced by the discussion during the secret meeting the previous evening, in which he expressed doubts about the intentions of the French, and warned that the U.S. might have to reconsider its offer to intervene. He told Dillon:[17]

> If the French want to use possibililty of our intervention primarily as a card to play at Geneva, it would seem to follow that they would not want to make a decision inviting our intervention until the Geneva game is played out. However, this is likely to be a long game particularly as the Communists may well be deliberately dragging it out so as to permit their creating a *fait accompli* before Geneva ends. It should not be assumed that if this happens, the present US position regarding intervention would necessarily exist after the Communists have succeeded in this maneuver.

The NSC met on May 20, 1954, and Dulles, reacting to Dillon's advice, suggested modifying the U.S. position on independence.[18] He said that the U.S. ". . . might be exaggerating the significance of the independence issue for the Associated States. The Associated States had already achieved in fact a very high degree of independence. Moreover, if we harped on the independence issue it might well rise to embarrass us when the scene shifted from Indochina to Malaya."

---

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 1567. For Washington's reply see pp 1569–1571.
[14] Dulles Telephone Calls Series, May 14, 1954. Dulles and Rusk had been closely associated in the negotiation of the Japanese peace treaty, among other things.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Princeton University, H. Alexander Smith Papers, Diary, box 282.
[17] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1576.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 1586–1590.

Dulles said that if the talks with the French were successful, which he doubted ("he did not believe that the French had really made up their minds whether or not they wanted to continue the war in Indochina with U.S. participation" and that the talks "were probably being used chiefly to strengthen the French bargaining position with the Communists at Geneva"), he did not think the French parliament would approve the U.S. plan. "He was therefore inclined to the view that in our conversations with the French on pre-conditions we were going through an academic exercise except in so far as these conversations affected the Geneva Conference. He did not exclude, however, all possibility that the French might ultimately agree to internationalize the conflict."

Vice President Nixon asked Dulles whether the situation could be summed up as follows: "The British and the French were dragging their feet until such time as the possibility for a settlement by the Geneva Conference appeared clearly hopeless. The Communists were well aware that the British and French were dragging their feet, and would protract the negotiations until they were sure they had won the war in Indochina."

Dulles said that this was "substantially correct," and that "The only ray of hope would be Communist fear of United States intervention in Indochina or of general war. This fear might conceivably induce the Communists to moderate their demands on the French at Geneva."

This comment was representative of the trend of thinking of Dulles, as well as Radford and others, in the face of a situation that was perceived as becoming increasingly more serious. The French Government, hanging by a parliamentary thread, appeared to be unwilling to fight, either in Indochina or in Geneva, but was also unwilling to internationalize the war. The Viet Minh were beginning to present a more serious threat in the Vietnamese delta (Tonkin). The Bao Dai government was disintegrating, and Bao Dai himself refused to return from the French Riviera. In Geneva, the Communists were taking a very hard line, and it had begun to look as if the Conference might end in failure unless the French capitulated to Viet Minh demands.[19] Meanwhile, little progress was being made in organizing a regional defense pact for Southeast Asia.

The U.S. Government was faced, therefore, with the possibility of having to take additional steps to defend the rest of Southeast Asia, recognizing that the die might already be cast in Indochina.

On May 19, 1954, Dulles met privately with Eisenhower to discuss this general problem.[20] He told the President that the delay of the British in acting on the regional defense pact ". . . enabled the Communists by delaying tactics at Geneva to prevent any action on our part until they had in effect consolidated their position throughout Indochina." Eisenhower replied that the behavior of the British was "incomprehensible" to him, and that he might tell Churchill that the British were "promoting a second Munich."

---

[19] For good accounts of events in Geneva see Randle and vols. XIII and XVI of *FRUS*, 1952-1954. There is also a good discussion in the *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 122 ff. For an account by Chester Cooper, who was with the U.S. delegation, see chapter IV of *The Lost Crusade*.

[20] For Dulles' memo of the conversation see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1584-1586.

Dulles then got to his main point: ". . . it might well be that the situation in Indochina itself would soon have deteriorated to a point where nothing effectual could be done to stop the tide of Chinese Communists overrunning Southeast Asia except perhaps diversionary activities along the China coast, which would be conducted primarily by the Nationalist forces, but would require sea and air support from the United States." Eisenhower agreed that such military moves might be required if the situation continued to deteriorate.

Dulles, it seems, had already taken some soundings on Capitol Hill about a possible congressional resolution on the subject. (This, too, was probably discussed at the secret meeting on May 16.) On May 17, he showed this draft to Senator Knowland: [21]

> The President is authorized to employ Naval and Air Forces of the United States to assist friendly governments of Asia to maintain their authority as against subversive and revolutionary efforts fomented by Communist regimes, provided such aid is requested by the governments concerned. This shall not be deemed to be a declaration of war and the authority hereby given shall be terminated on June 30, 1955, unless extended.

In passing, note should be taken of the principal differences between this resolution and the April 1954 draft.[22] Both drafts were limited to naval and airpower. The earlier draft resolution required the President, before providing such assistance, to make a finding that it was "required to protect and defend the safety and security of the United States." It did not, however, unlike the new draft, state that such aid could be provided only if requested. The earlier draft also specified that the goal was to stop Communist aggression "in Southeast Asia," and did not mention internal aggression. The new draft specifically directed action to help maintain governments threatened from within by Communist subversion and revolution.

It is also of interest that both of these draft resolutions provided that the President would be "authorized" to order military units into action. At least one government lawyer, Wilbur M. Brucker, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, argued that the resolution drafted for this purpose should not use the word "authorize." He said that ". . . as a matter of constitutional law, the President has authority to use the armed forces to repel aggression abroad without specific approval from the Congress where the circumstances of the situation require it." He added that the passage of a resolution containing the word "authorize" would establish a precedent "for the proposition that the President *must* under the Constitution have an authorization from the Congress before he can use the armed forces to repel aggression abroad in cases of this sort in the future where the time element may be even more critical than in the present case."[23] (As noted earlier, the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution did not contain the word "authorize." Instead, it provided that "the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President. . . ." and that "the United States is, there-

---

[21] According to *ibid.*, p. 1584, fn. 6, no record of this discussion has been found

[22] For the text of the April resolution see p. 185 above.

[23] *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, p. 520.

fore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps. . . .")

At their meeting on May 19, Dulles told Eisenhower that "we were hamstrung by the constitutional situation and the apparent reluctance of the Congress to give the President discretionary authority," but that Knowland had reacted strongly against the draft resolution, "saying it would amount to giving the President a blank check to commit the country to war." Eisenhower apparently agreed, however, with Dulles' decision to pursue the matter. His response, according to Dulles, was that the proposal might be "redrafted to define the area of operation more closely as being in and about the island and coastal areas of the Western Pacific."

There is no available information as to what happened after that conversation, but apparently Knowland's opposition, together with the changing situation in relation to Indochina, resulted in a change of direction. On June 8, 1954, Dulles announced that the administration did not intend to ask Congress for any additional authority for U.S. action in Indochina, and the President made a similar statement on June 10.[24]

On May 20, as planning for possible intervention continued,[25] the JCS sent Secretary Wilson a memorandum[26] commenting on U.S. participation in the war in Indochina, in which the Chiefs took the position that it would be undesirable to base large numbers of U.S. forces in Indochina, and that the U.S. should commit only a carrier task force and air units operating from present bases outside Indochina. (Moreover, "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage.") "From the point of view of the United States," the Chiefs said in a memorable statement, "with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities."

The Chiefs also took the position that because Viet Minh military supplies came primarily from outside Vietnam (i.e., China), "The destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina."

---

[24] See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1670, 1684. In testimony on mutual security aid for Southeast Asia before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 26, 1954, Maj. Gen. George C. Stewart, U.S. Army, who was Director of the Office of Military Assistance in the International Security Affairs Office of the Pentagon, volunteered that ". . . there is nothing more tangible that this country can do at the present moment to reassure these peoples of our intentions than for the Congress to authorize and make possible such actions in this area as may be proper and as may be decided upon by the appropriate people of the Government, as the situation develops and changes." There was no comment on this statement from any member of the committee. See *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. X, p. 564.

[25] Studies were prepared for the NSC by various departments and agencies, and after their submission toward the end of May one copy of each was circulated to each member of the NSC for review on an "absolute need-to-know basis." The transmittal memo stated that, should the conditions for U.S. intervention in Indochina be met, the studies would serve as the basis for considering such intervention. For the list by agency see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1651-1652. For the text of the JCS study and Cutler's response see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 511-516. For DOD comments about several of the papers see *ibid.*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 514-529 The papers themselves, with the exception of the JCS paper, have not been declassified. These include the State Department draft of a Presidential message to Congress and a Justice Department study of the legal and constitutional aspects of a congressional resolution. On the draft message see the biting memo by Charlton Ogburn, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1620-1621.

[26] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol XIII, pp. 1590-1592. See also *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 509-516.

The Chiefs also reiterated their position that "the best military course for eventual victory in Indochina is the development of effective native armed forces," and proposed that the U.S. take over this responsibility, and that the MAAG in Saigon, which then had a complement of less than 150, be increased to 2,250.

The State Department took issue with the JCS. Both FE and the Policy Planning Staff questioned whether the U.S. could accomplish its purposes by making such a limited military commitment.[27] They thought the situation required at least the commitment of some U.S. ground forces. They questioned the use of atomic weapons, however, both from the standpoint of military strategy and from the standpoint of the adverse reaction of other countries, especially in Asia, to such use. They also took issue with the proposed bombing of supply lines in China.

The Army Objects

Within the JCS, the Army continued to argue against U.S. military intervention in Indochina. On May 17, Army Chief of Staff Ridgway, accompanied by the Secretary of the Army, Robert T. Stevens, told Deputy Secretary Robert Anderson, (then Acting Secretary during Secretary Wilson's absence), ". . . that I felt in conscience bound to express my opinion as to the consequences involved in United States armed intervention in Indo-China. I pointed out that my opinion had not been asked. In substance I stated the following:

"a. The foregoing has highlighted the problems and difficulties which would be encountered by a large modern military force operating in Indo-China. The adverse conditions prevalent in this area combine all those which confronted U.S. forces in previous campaigns in the South and Southwest Pacific and Eastern Asia, with the additional grave complication of a large native population, in thousands of villages, most of which are about evenly divided between friendly and hostile.

"b. The complex nature of these problems would require a major U.S. logistical effort.

"c. They explode the myth that air and sea forces could solve the Indo-China problems. If U.S. shore-based forces are projected any appreciable distance inland, as would be essential, they will require constant local security at their every location, and for their every activity. The Army will have to provide these forces and their total will be very large."[28]

Ridgway reported that Anderson "seemed receptive" to his statement.

After the meeting, Ridgway told Stevens that over the weekend he had told two military officers on the White House staff ". . . that the Army had a short, factual logistic briefing on Indo-China, highlighting the problems the U.S. would face if it intervened in that Theater, and that in the event the President should like to hear it, I thought it would be of great interest and perhaps helpful to him." Stevens agreed, and asked Ridgway to prepare for him a

[27] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1505–1607, 1624–1626.

[28] From Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway's "Memorandum for Record," May 17, 1954, 2 pages. A copy of this memorandum was given to CRS by General Ridgway for use in this study.

memorandum that he could send to Secretary Wilson summarizing the Army's position. This was done.[29]

At some point during this period, General Ridgway also briefed the President, who was accompanied by one aide. The meeting was held in the Cabinet Room of the White House. According to the only published account of this meeting, "Eisenhower did not say much at the time, Ridgway recalled, just listened and asked a few questions. But the impact was formidable."[30]

Ridgway's views were subsequently confirmed by a report on July 12, 1954, from a team of seven Army officers, led by Col. David W. Heiman, who spent May 31–June 22 in Indochina on a secret mission (ostensibly inspecting the MAAG) to study the situation. Their conclusions were, in brief, that Indochina was "devoid of the logistical, geographic, and related resources necessary to a substantial American ground effort."[31]

"The land was a land of rice paddy and jungle—" General Ridgway said, in describing the report, "particularly adapted to the guerrilla-type warfare at which the Chinese soldier is a master. This meant that every little detachment, every individual, that tried to move about that country, would have to be protected by riflemen. Every telephone lineman, road repair party every ambulance and every near-area aid station would have to be under armed guard or they would be shot at around the clock."[32]

This was Ridgway's conclusion in his memoirs published in 1956:[33]

> We could have fought in Indo-China. We could have won, if we had been willing to pay the tremendous cost in men and money that such intervention would have required—a cost that in my opinion would have eventually been as great as, or greater than, that we paid in Korea. In Korea we had learned that air and naval power alone cannot win a war and that inadequate ground forces cannot win one either. It was incredible to me that we had forgotten that bitter lesson so soon—that we were on the verge of making that same tragic error. That error, thank God, was not repeated.

Eisenhower Continues to Insist on Conditions, and the U.S. Pulls Away from the French

Although President Eisenhower may have shared Dulles' conclusion that the U.S. might have to strike at China to prevent the loss of all of Southeast Asia, he continued to insist that this could be done only through united action, and he reacted very sharply to efforts by the French, as reported in cables from Ambassador Dillon on May 30–31, to extract a firm commitment from the U.S. to retaliate against China if the Chinese bombed French forces in Indochina. Cutler reported that when he briefed the President on these cables this was his reaction:[34]

---

[29]For a copy, see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. 1, pp. 508–509.

[30]David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 143 and letter to CRS from General Ridgway, May 25, 1982.

[31]*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 127. The report is in the National Archives, RG 319. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 213 for a full citation.

[32]Matthew B. Ridgway, *Soldier* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1956), p. 277.

[33]*Ibid.*

[34]*FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1648.

> The President expressed himself very strongly in reaction to my remarks. He said the United States would not intervene in China [*sic*] on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China [*sic*] alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United States would in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia, but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese communist overt aggression.

According to Cutler, he reminded the President of the policy stated in NSC 5405 (January 16, 1954) that if the Chinese intervened in Southeast Asia, the U.S. would retaliate with, or, if necessary, without allies, as well as the fact that Dulles had stated that in the event such intervention occurred, the reaction of the U.S. would not necessarily be limited to the area of Indochina. Eisenhower replied that there was no difference in his and Dulles' position. "However, he expressed the strong view that there should be no failure to make the U.S. position absolutely clear to the French so that there would be no basis of misapprehension on the part of the French."[35]

In a meeting the next day (June 2) with Dulles, Acting Secretary of Defense Anderson, Radford, and Douglas MacArthur II, Eisenhower ". . . said that since direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including 'new weapons') in reply, he would need to have much more than Congressional authorization. Thai, Filipino, French and Indochinese support would be important but not sufficient; other nations, such as Australia, would have to give their approval, for otherwise he could not be certain the public would back a war against China."[36] On June 3, the NSC supported this position.[37]

In late May and early June 1954, U.S. military leaders conferred with their French counterparts, and at the NSC meeting on June 3 Radford reported that the French were demoralized, and did not think they could withstand an all-out attack on the Tonkin delta, expected within a few days. The loss of the delta, Radford said, would mean the rapid loss of the remainder of Indochina. "The Communists want all of Southeast Asia, and seem to be in a fair way to get it."[38]

On June 8, as mentioned earlier, Dulles announced that the administration was not going to seek authority from Congress with respect to intervention in Indochina. On June 9, Dulles told Ambassador Bonnet that the U.S. had stipulated its conditions for intervention, and was "still in the dark as to what French intentions

---

[35]For notes on a White House meeting on this subject on May 28 see *ibid.*, vol. XII.
[36]*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 129.
[37]See *ibid.*
[38]*FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, pp. 1660–1661. For a good discussion of the state of U.S. military planning and opinion at the time see *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. I, pp. 427 ff

really were." He said that the U.S. was "not willing to make commitment ahead of time which French could use for internal political maneuvering or negotiating at Geneva and which would represent a kind of permanent option on US intervention if it suited their purposes."[39] In a telegram to Washington on June 10 (while on a speaking tour) Dulles said "As regards internationalization, it should be made clear to the French that our offer does not indefinitely lie on the table to be picked up by them one minute before midnight." ". . . I believe," he added, "we should begin to think of putting a time limit on our intervention offer."[40]

On June 9, the U.S. also received a request from General Ely for further discussions of U.S. plans. At the regular State-JCS meeting that day it was agreed that until the French met the conditions stated by the U.S., further discussions of this type should not be held, even on the U.S. role in training national forces.[41] Ambassador Dillon was then told: "With regard to US training Vietnamese troops, we feel that situation Viet Nam has degenerated to point where any commitment at this time to send over US instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider US training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for US participation war Indochina."[42]

On June 12, 1954, the Laniel government fell in a 306–293 vote on the Indochina issue. On June 17, Pierre Mendès-France was elected Premier by a vote of 419–47. He promised that he would obtain a cease-fire in Indochina by July 20 or resign on that date.[43]

In Washington, the reaction to these events was that the Geneva Conference was, to all intents and purposes, over, and that the U.S. would have to pursue an independent course in Indochina. In a cable to Smith on June 14, Dulles stated ". . . it is our view that final adjournment of Conference is in our best interest provided this can be done without creating an impression in France at this critical juncture that France has been deserted by the US and UK and therefore has no choice but capitulation on Indochina to Communists at Geneva and possibly accommodation with the Soviets in Europe." He added that he trusted "developments at Geneva will have been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known."[44]

Dulles felt, as he said at an NSC meeting on June 17, that it might be "best to let the French get out of Indochina entirely and then to try to rebuild from the foundation."[45]

---

[39] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XVI, p. 1100. See also vol. XIII, pp. 1710–1713 for a Dulles-Monnet discussion on June 16.

[40] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 1118. For Dillon's reaction see vol. XIII, p. 1689.

[41] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1677.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 1678. For Dillon's response and State's subsequent cable on this subject see pp. 1681–1685.

[43] For a brief but excellent account of "The Role of the French National Assembly in Ending the First Indochinese War (1947–1954)," prepared in 1971 by Pauline A. Mian, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, see *CR*, vol. 117, pp. 17625–17631.

[44] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XVI, pp. 1146–1147.

[45] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1716

On June 21, Eisenhower received the following message from Prime Minister Churchill:[46]

> I have always thought that if the French meant to fight for their Empire in Indo-China instead of clearing out as we did of our far greater inheritance in India, they should at least have introduced two years' service which would have made it possible for them to use the military power of their nation. They did not do this but fought on for eight years with untrustworthy local troops, with French cadre elements important to the structure of their home army and with the Foreign Legion, a very large proportion of whom were Germans. The result has thus been inevitable and personally I think Mendès-France, whom I do not know, has made up his mind to clear out on the best terms available. If that is so, I think he is right.
>
> I have thought continually about what we ought to do in the circumstances. Here it is. There is all the more need to discuss ways and means of establishing a firm front against Communism in the Pacific sphere. We should certainly have a S.E.A.T.O., corresponding to N.A.T.O. in the Atlantic and European sphere. In this it is important to have the support of the Asian countries. This raises the question of timing in relation to Geneva.
>
> In no foreseeable circumstances, except possibly a local rescue, could British troops be used in Indo-China, and if we were asked our opinion we should advise against United States local intervention except for rescue.

During the latter part of June, Dulles and his associates debated what to do about the situation. In several memos and meetings Bowie expressed the feeling of the Policy Planning Staff that the U.S. should not withdraw from the Geneva Conference (at least one member of his staff, however, recommended that the U.S. "bust up" the Conference by persuading the Associated States to leave, and joining them in a walkout),[47] but should take a firmer and more open position, including threatening to use U.S. forces if the Communists did not agree to a reasonable settlement. At a meeting of Dulles with his executive staff on June 15, Bowie is reported to have said that if the U.S. withdrew from the Geneva Conference, this action, together with U.S. refusal to help the French, could lead to a Communist military victory in Indochina which could have a "tremendous and thus probably disastrous" effect on world opinion, and could even be the "straw which breaks the camel's back of resistance throughout the free world to Communist aggression."[48] Bowie suggested the possibility of offering four U.S. divisions to the French to be used in holding a defense line at about the 17th parallel. "In back of this line, we could perhaps build up a truly nationalist Vietnamese Government and a suitable national army." If necessary, he added, the U.S. should consider "full mobilization" in order to muster the four divisions, and should run the risk of precipitating Chinese intervention. "At least, it's worth

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 1728–1729.
[47] See *ibid.*, pp. 1741–1743
[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 1693–1695.