trying," he said, adding, "The effect of this sort of US intervention might provide the stimulus to overcome the Vietnamese lethargic and jaundiced view toward solo French activities to protect their colonial power status."

Livingston Merchant indicated that he agreed with Bowie. Dulles said, ". . . this proposal in effect means that we were telling the French that Indochina could only be saved if French troops were not doing the fighting. Mr. Bowie and Mr. Merchant agreed that this indeed was the case."

On June 25, Bowie sent Dulles a memorandum on Indochina alternatives for the U.S. which elucidated these same points,[49] and the discussion of this subject was renewed at a subsequent State Department meeting on June 30.[50] Both Dulles and Under Secretary Smith disagreed with Bowie. Dulles said he thought there had to be a "better case for Congressional and public opinion" than would be presented if the U.S. intervened alongside the French. He preferred, he added, to "play a game of tit-for-tat with the Communists, e.g., when the Commies grab land we grab some from them. For example, he would like to take over Hainan Island if the Chinese move from their present boundaries. This, he said, would produce a real scare in the Communist world."

Walter Robertson (Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East), who favored greater U.S. intervention, said that the U.S. might get a good settlement at Geneva if it supported the French diplomatically. Legal Adviser Herman Phleger replied that "this might produce Communist intransigence and thus prolong the war." Robertson said, "this would be better from the US point of view because US public and Congressional opinion could then be more easily convinced of the necessity for intervention."

On July 2, 1954, Bowie sent Dulles the draft of a memorandum for the President arguing that the U.S. should drop its stated conditions for intervention, and should threaten to intervene militarily in order to save the southern part of Vietnam. Otherwise, "the kind of settlement we can expect will inevitably lead to the early communization of all of Indochina." A U.S. threat to intervene, he said, could strengthen the French and prevent their capitulation to unacceptable Communist terms, as well as convincing the Communists to accept the proposed partition of Indochina, thus leaving the South "free."[51] Dulles apparently did not send the memorandum to the President, however, primarily because the situation had begun to change for the better by the end of June.

According to a personal letter from Heath to Bonsal on July 4, 1954, there was strong support in the State Department for Bowie's position. Heath said he had been in Washington for consultations, and that, among others, he saw Ed Gullion, who ". . . made the statement, and I think it is correct, that all the people below the Secretary and Under Secretary are unanimous that we should intervene or rather make up our mind to intervene now with or without the French." Heath added that he had also talked briefly to Eisenhower, Dulles, and Radford, and that "All in all at least at

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 1748–1751.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 1766–1768.
[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 1774–1776

the high levels the attitude was one of pessimism and not knowing what to do."[52]

Bowie later explained the position that he took at the time:[53]

> What I was getting at was that in Geneva the situation was getting more and more to look as if there was just a bluff, in other words as if this approach that we were using was running out. The French were more and more panicky, and there was a cable in from Dillon in Paris suggesting that if we just let the thing go down the drain, looking as if we were saying to the French, "Hands off," and then they go ahead and get chewed up and capitulate, there would be very profound effects in Europe, NATO, and all the rest. And I think we in the Policy Planning Staff tended to share the view that there could be very disastrous results if we seemed to be just standing aside. By that stage we had got ourselves into the stance that we insist that the French must meet the specified conditions, but we won't come in and do anything about it.
>
> I think what I was trying to do was to say we ought to show our hand more than we had. We ought to say, "Look, we accept the idea that there's going to be a partition. We recognize that you're going to have to get out of North Vietnam. You'd better negotiate your way out and accept the fact that we're only going to salvage South Vietnam, and under those circumstances we will see if we can't essentially undertake to guarantee that settlement in order that that line won't be violated."
>
> I was not advocating that we should go in and try to salvage the delta. I just didn't think that was possible. What I was hoping was that we salvage South Vietnam, and see whether we couldn't shore that up, because we did take rather seriously that if the French were driven out and we were simply standing by and doing nothing it would have very profound effects all around, not just in Southeast Asia.

Reactions in Congress

Congress, meanwhile, continued to support the administration's Indochina policy, despite the concern of some Members about the direction of that policy. A few of these, most notably Senator Gillette, who had introduced a resolution proposing such a step, wanted the U.S. to take the issue to the U.N. A handful of others, fearful that the U.S. might be preparing to intervene in Indochina, argued that Congress should take steps to control Presidential war-making. There was also renewed concern about the possible consequences of using American advisers in potentially hostile situations, and the need for reaffirming the limitations contained in the Greek-Turkish aid legislation. And Senator Stennis, upon hearing that the 200 U.S. Air Force technicians who were to have been removed from Indochina by June 12 had simply been replaced by other Air Force "volunteers," warned again about ". . . another

[52] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, pp. 1280–1282. Bonsal, then in Geneva as special adviser to the U.S. Delegation, replied on July 14 that he did not support intervention, and that those who favored it were "in the somewhat sterile position of favoring something which is just not going to happen." *Ibid.*, p. 1374

[53] CRS Interview with Robert Bowie, May 5, 1983.

step leading to a situation where we could be faced with the proposition of having little or no choice as to whether or not we involve ourselves in that war with everything we have, or retire without honor."[54]

At one point during this period, after the Laniel government had fallen and the situation in Geneva looked increasingly hopeless, Senator George himself was reported by Senator Smith, in a phone call to Secretary Dulles, to be "off the reservation" on the Indochina question. George, Smith said, "wants to write off the Far East." The next day (June 17), Dulles met with Smith and George and others from Smith's Far East subcommittee to discuss the question. On June 18, Smith called Dulles, and "Both agreed the meeting yesterday was a good one and both feel George will go along."[55]

By and large, however, Congress approved the position of the Executive, even to the point of agreeing to most of the administration's request for new funds (slightly over $1 billion) for military and economic assistance to Indochina for the next fiscal year (FY 1955), despite the fact that with the collapse of the Navarre plan, and the impending cease-fire, there was no specific justification for the use of such funds. (Motions to eliminate or reduce the requested amount were defeated by large margins in the Foreign Affairs Committee and during House and Senate debate on the mutual security authorization and appropriations bills.)[56] Although there were a few Members, like Gillette, who disagreed with the premises of U.S. policy toward Indochina, and a few others, like Stennis, who opposed any U.S. military involvement in the area, most Members of Congress agreed that the Communists had to be stopped in Indochina and in Southeast Asia, and also agreed that this could only be done with the assistance of the United States. They recognized, however, that there were limits to what could be achieved in a colonialist situation, believing that the U.S. could be more effective if it were in a position to work directly with the indigenous peoples and governments, rather than supporting the French. Most of them seemed fully prepared for this to happen once the French withdrew. Many appeared to be anxiously awaiting that outcome.

There was also considerable agreement in Congress on the possible need for limited U.S. military involvement in Indochina. Most Members were willing to accept a role comparable to that which the U.S. had played (or which they thought had been played) in Greece, but there was also general acceptance of the limited use of U.S. forces, if necessary, provided this consisted primarily of naval and air units, was done through a united action framework, and was not openly supportive of colonialism. Senator Fulbright himself said at the time (July 8, 1954), "If the conditions had been different . . . particularly with regard to colonialism, then intervention might have been quite different. I was reluctant to recommend intervention so long as Indochina was still a colony and there was no real commitment that it would someday cease to be a colony."[57]

---

[54] *CR*, vol. 100, p. 8510.
[55] Dulles Telephone Calls Series, June 16 and 18, 1954.
[56] See *HFAC Hts. Ser.*, vol. XI, pp. 746–749, and *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 12277, 14514.
[57] *CR*, vol. 100, p 10007

On the question of U.S. military intervention in Indochina, however, Congress was anything but enthusiastic. Reflecting a Gallup Poll survey of the public (released June 14, 1954), which showed that 76 percent of Republicans and 70 percent of Democrats were opposed to sending U.S. ground forces to Indochina, Congress generally continued to oppose any major U.S. military action in Indochina, and maintained its strong support of the administration's conditions for U.S. military intervention, especially the requirement for united action.[58] In a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on June 18, 1954, for example, William J. Donovan, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand (former head of the OSS), was asked by Senator Smith about U.S. intervention, and when Donovan replied that he did not think intervention was justified at that time, Smith said "We don't either. . . ." Senator Wiley asked about using U.S. ground forces. Donovan was opposed. Smith added, "we are all against that."[59]

This position tended to run counter, however, to the widespread feeling in Congress that the "loss" of Indochina would have a serious effect on U.S. security interests and the containment of communism. Thus, those like Mansfield, who criticized the administration for failing to defend Indochina, were questioned closely by administration supporters like Cooper, who reminded them of the inconsistency of such criticism, given their opposition to the use of force. "Surely the Senators who criticize," Cooper told Mansfield, "cannot find fault with the administration policy because it did not intervene militarily. . . . My friends on the other side of the aisle cannot have it both ways."[60]

Mansfield, for one, was highly critical of the decision to agree to negotiate the Indochina problem at the Geneva Conference. In a Senate speech in early July he declared, "At Geneva, international communism obtained by diplomacy what it had failed up to then to obtain by threats, bluster, propaganda, intimidation and aggression . . . Geneva was a mistake; and the result is a failure of American policy. It is a profoundly humiliating result." "The Geneva Conference," he said, "has served to increase vastly the stature of the Chinese Communists in Asia and throughout the world." "With respect to Indochina, a serious defeat has been inflicted on American diplomacy. And in the process vast new areas have been opened for potential conquest by Communist totalitarianism."[61]

Homer Ferguson, chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, replied to Mansfield the following day in a speech in which he pointed out that the original mistake was made in 1945, when the U.S. yielded to French and British pressure and acquiesced in the restoration of French colonial rule in Indochina. As far as Geneva was concerned, he said, "The French were determined to talk of peace and would have done so whether or not we consented. . . . The United States has not the power and, if it had, it could

---

[58] In the same poll, both Republicans (54 percent) and Democrats (55 percent) also opposed using U.S. air and naval forces to help the French. In a poll on June 16, 1954, 48 percent of the respondents answered "Nothing" to the question, "What do you think America would gain by getting into a fighting war in Indochina?" George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, Public Opinion, 1935–1971, vol. 2 (1949–1958) (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 1243.

[59] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, p. 342.

[60] *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 10005, 10007.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 9997–9998.

not wisely exercise the power to force France to go on fighting after its will and power to fight had gone. We might ourselves have stepped in and taken over the fighting but that apparently is not what the Senator from Montana [Mansfield] wanted us to do."[62]

This and similar debates during the summer of 1954 tended, of course, to be highly political. It was an important election year, and the Democrats, in the face of Eisenhower's popularity, and his success at ending the Korean war, were struggling to develop issues for the campaign, while the Republicans were working equally hard to maintain their majority in Congress.

Alongside the question of the U.S. role in Indochina, especially the question of military intervention, Congress continued to debate the question of congressional control over warmaking in relation to Indochina. During June, as the House took up the mutual security authorization bill, the argument made in April by Representative Coudert (who, it will be recalled, offered an amendment requiring congressional approval of the use of the armed forces in combat) was made again, first in an executive session of the Foreign Affairs Committee on June 2, 1954. It came up in the form of a suggestion by Representative Vorys that the bill should contain a provision reauthorizing the use of U.S. military advisers under the military assistance program, and that such U.S. military advisers should be subject to the same "noncombatant" limitations as in the Greek-Turkish aid and mutual defense assistance legislation. (The 1954 Mutual Security Act was new legislation, under which previous related legislation, including the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 by which military advisers had first been authorized, was repealed. Hence, the provision for military advisers had to be reenacted.) Vorys said he was raising the issue because of the need to reauthorize the provision for military advisers, as well as to head off another Coudert amendment. He said that in addition to the previous language (in the Mutual Defense Assistance Act) limiting advisers to "noncombatant duty," the words "in an advisory capacity only," (from the language in the Greek-Turkish Act) should be added, thus providing that—and this is the language in the 1954 act subsequently passed by Congress—such persons assigned from the U.S. were ". . . solely to assist in an advisory capacity or to perform other duties of a noncombatant nature, including military training or advice."[63]

Representative Burr P. Harrison, a conservative Virginia Democrat, asked Vorys whether he would object to putting Coudert's amendment in the bill. Vorys said he would, "because it was such a crazy amendment." The committee chairman, Robert Chiperfield (R/Ill.), agreed with Harrison, however, that the bill should also contain "some kind of prohibition against direct military participation and intervention without consent of Congress. . . ."[64]

In another executive session of the committee on June 9, Harrison offered an amendment of his own, as follows:

> Nothing in this Act shall be construed as a delegation to the Executive of the power vested by the Constitution exclusively

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 10135.
[63] Public Law 83-665, sec. 102.
[64] *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XI, pp. 68-72.

in the Congress to provide for the common defense of the United States, to declare war, to raise and support armies, to provide and maintain a navy, to make rules for the Government and regulations of the land and naval forces, and to make all the laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers.

And therefore, no part of the funds authorized in this act shall be expended or allocated for the use, outside of the territories and possessions of the United States, of any military forces of the United States other than as expressly authorized herein for advisory and noncombatant purposes except to such extent as the President as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States may be empowered by the Constitution to repel invasion without act or declaration of Congress.

Harrison said that the purpose of his amendment ". . . is to leave in the hands of this Congress insofar as possible, the decision as to whether or not there should be a war in Asia or elsewhere." ". . . it says that we do not want any war in Indochina, unless it is put before this Congress." He added that the amendment was opposed by the State Department.[65]

Chairman Chiperfield offered a substitute for the Harrison amendment, as follows:

Provided, That none of the funds made available pursuant to this Act or any other Act shall be used to assign or detail such personnel for combatant duty without the approval of Congress, except in the case of defense against invasion or imminent threat to the national safety of the United States, as determined by the President.

It should be noted that Chiperfield's amendment, which had been drafted with the help and approval of the State Department, applied only to the military advisers provided in the bill. No one in the committee seemed cognizant of this fact, which would have meant that, at best, the amendment would have been applicable to only a few thousand men. But even if it had not been limited to military advisers, the amendment would have been totally innocuous from the Executive's standpoint. The provision allowing the President, at his discretion, to assign forces to combat to protect the "national safety of the United States" gave any President all of the latitude needed. In fact, the committee staff member who had prepared the amendment for Chiperfield, when asked by a member of the committee whether the "national safety" exception ". . . would . . . allow the President to take any action he wished in case Indochina fell or some other country fell, without coming to Congress," replied that the President already had the power under the Constitution to protect the "national safety" of the country by committing troops to combat. Harrison asked a State Department official who was present at the hearing whether the Department agreed with this statement, and the reply, in effect, was that the President did have this constitutional power, and had used it in "scores of cases" in the past.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 201-203, 250.

The State Department's principal stated objection to Harrison's amendment was that it would have an adverse effect abroad, where it would not be known that the President already had such power, and that such an action would therefore have "no legal effect." Members of the committee, both Democrats and Republicans, joined in making this point, especially Javits, Judd, Brooks Hays (D/Ark.), Omar T. Burleson (D/Tex.) and Henderson Lanham (D/Ga.).[66] Javits said, ". . . we have constitutional division of powers. It has worked for decades. This President has made it clear that he is not going to commit any combat troops, even as we were committed in Korea, without the consent of Congress. All you are doing by writing a thing like this in the bill, or by adopting a Coudert amendment, is to demonstrate to the world the lack of confidence in the President, and to demonstrate to the world that the United States is unsure of the world because we want to tie his hands somehow. We don't want to depend upon the Constitution and even his own representatives."

Walter Judd (R/Minn.) said, "In my judgment, this [Harrison amendment] will increase the dangers of war because it will shake further the decreasing confidence that is evident all around the world today regarding the steadfastness and dependability of the American Government." E. Ross Adair (R/Ind.) responded that those who favored the Harrison amendment were "trying to build a national unity," which "has to be a unity based upon a full copartnership between the legislative and executive," with "the representatives of the people taking the action." If there were a "real cause for war," the amendment would not prevent the U.S. from acting. In such a case, he said, "this Congress would quickly acquiesce."

Judd responded, "I don't admit there is any danger of us getting into war without the action of the people."

The committee rejected both amendments, tabling Chiperfield's by a voice vote, and disapproving Harrison's by a vote of 6–7, with a number of members absent. All four Democrats present, except for Harrison, voted against the amendment, as did most of the top Republicans on the committee. Voting with Harrison were Republicans Chiperfield, Adair, Laurence H. Smith (Wis.), Marguerite Stitt Church (Ill.), and Alvin M. Bentley (Mich.).[67]

In other action on the 1954 mutual security bill, the Foreign Affairs Committee again approved language favoring the creation of a Pacific pact, which was subsequently approved by the Senate and became law.[68] Javits also offered an amendment stating, "The Congress favors the peaceful attainment of self-government and independence by states and countries which are not yet fully self-governing as rapidly as they are prepared to assume the responsibilities of self-government and independence." However, after a number of suggestions about wording, and expressions of opposition to including that kind of "high policy" in the bill, he withdrew the proposal.[69]

---

[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 248–254.
[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 257–258.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 490 Public Law 83–665, sec 101 and sec. 106(a).
[69] *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XI, pp. 832–836.

On June 24, 1954, as it completed action on the bill, the Foreign Affairs Committee considered taking steps to voice its disapproval of a statement the previous day by Anthony Eden, in which he expressed hope that there could be an international guarantee of the Geneva settlement, thus implying, according to congressional critics, that Communist gains could and should be accepted. In congressional debate this was referred to as a Locarno-type proposal for the Far East, (a reference to a 1925 agreement among several European countries), which, in Judd's opinion, would completely undermine the mutual security program, and the attempt to develop a Pacific pact. He proposed a resolution on the subject, but at that point the committee appeared not to be in favor of such action.[70]

On June 25, the committee reported the bill. Stating that it had given "particular consideration to the problems of the EDC and Indochina," the committee said that in order to give the President the necessary authority to respond to the changing situation in Indochina it was approving the request for military and economic assistance for Indochina with authority for the funds to be used in "Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific," particularly in relation to the proposed Pacific pact. It voted to give the Executive wide discretion in the use of such funds, "on such terms and conditions as the President may specify." It also broadened the President's transfer authority, by which he could take funds from other regions and apply them to the Far East.[71] In a minority report, Representatives Smith, Church, Adair and Bentley voiced their opposition to approving the funds for Indochina, stating, among other things, "It is shocking to consider that the United States has been paying approximately 65 percent of the dollar cost of the Indochina war for a discredited Navarre plan. More shocking still, however, is the necessity to remind the House that $800 million is now proposed—not for even a Navarre plan or an Ely plan, but for a 'No' plan."[72]

During House debate on the mutual security bill June 28–30, 1954, these and other points made during committee action were reiterated, and amendments to delete the $800 million in military assistance for Indochina, and to add the Harrison language on congressional approval of combat, were defeated by voice votes.[73]

The House approved, however, an amendment by Vorys, which he said the Foreign Affairs Committee had approved that morning, to strike back at Eden's statement by providing that none of the funds for the Far East could be used "on behalf of governments which are committed by treaty to maintain Communist rule over any defined territory of Asia."[74] Vorys said that the administration had no objection to the amendment. (On June 28 this subject was discussed at the regular weekly meeting of Republican congressional leaders with the President. Dulles reported that there was a possible settlement emerging in Geneva, whereby Thailand, Laos and Cambodia and a part of Indochina "would be put on the

[70] *Ibid.*, vol. XII. pp. 12–18.
[71] H. Rept. 83–1925, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 237 ff.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 434.
[73] *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 9203, 9210
[74] According to the records of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, there is no verbatim transcript of the committee meeting on June 29, 1954, at which this amendment was approved.

side of the free world." He said that if such a line were drawn, ". . . it must be a line that the people in that area are prepared to join in defending, for the United States cannot be expected to rush in singlehandedly. . . . The President wanted to add emphasis to the impossibility of the United States going into any area to give support unless the support was requested. Also, the U.S. would be bogged down from the start if the people of any area got the idea that we would rush in on their request no matter how they handle things. So there will not be any sort of guarantee as was involved in the Locarno Pact.")[75]

The Vorys amendment was passed by the House on a voice vote, and then on final passage of the bill it was reaffirmed without opposition (the vote was 389–0) on a separate roll call vote. It was later accepted by the Senate and became law.[76]

In Senate action on the 1954 mutual security bill, the Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate itself strongly supported the administration's position on Indochina and its request for funds. "The sudden increase of Communist-sustained Viet Minh pressure in Indochina," the committee said in its report on July 13, "threatens the entire Pacific area," and "The dangers that now exist are not to be met by withdrawal, but by firmly pressing on with a policy of collective security." Justifying the authorization of funds for a non-existent program, the report stated:

> The Committee has given much reflection to the uncertainties latent in the Indochina program. It has concluded that the United States must remain in a position to support those forces resisting Communist aggression in southeast Asia. It would seem to be unwise not to have available for immediate use adequate sums to build up those forces against the gathering threat of Communist aggression in that region. Millions of people who reside within a 600-mile radius of Communist China will not turn Communist if we give them faith, if we strengthen them militarily and economically, and if we give them a basis for believing in our support. A cease-fire or other settlement of the present fighting might make this support even more important.[77]

The End of the First Indochina War

In keeping with the U.S. decision not to become an active participant in the Indochina part of the Geneva Conference, Dulles had returned to Washington in early May, leaving Under Secretary Smith in charge in Geneva. On June 20, Smith was brought home, and the U.S. group in Geneva was left under the direction of U. Alexis Johnson.

One of Smith's first acts upon arriving back in Washington was to join Eisenhower, Nixon, and Dulles on June 23 for a briefing of 29 Members of Congress, from both Houses and both parties, on the status of the negotiations.[78] At the meeting, Smith "prophesied

---

[75] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1754–1755.

[76] Public Law 83-665, sec. 121. For House action see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 9205–9206, 9352.

[77] S. Rept. 83-1799, p. 45.

[78] Present were Republican Senators Knowland, Bridges, Ferguson, Saltonstall, Wiley, and H. Alexander Smith, and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, George, Green, Russell, Harry F.

Continued

that a continuance of French political weakness, a continuance of UK desire to avoid conflict in the Far East, a continuance of the Communist firmness of position" would result in a settlement in which Vietnam would be divided, Cambodia would be free of Communist control, and the Communists would control one-third to one-half of Laos.[79] (It will be recalled that Smith had anticipated the terms of this settlement when he testified before congressional committees in January 1954.) He predicted that if there were to be a "free election" in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh would get 80 percent of the vote, "as Bao Dai was corrupt and the French still continue to impose colonialism."

Senate Republican Leader Knowland asked Smith about the future, saying that "we now have a Far Eastern Munich." Smith retorted that "in Indo-China we haven't given up anything that wasn't first occupied by force of arms which cannot now be retaken." Eisenhower added that at Munich territory was given up without war, whereas in Indochina it was done as a result of war.

There were comments and questions from some of the Members of Congress, but few of interest or significance. This was symptomatic of the fact that Congress generally supported the administration's position, and, with the exception of several Members like Knowland, considered the emerging settlement to be the best that could be achieved under the circumstances.

Judd asked about an international guarantee of the agreement—the "Locarno" question—and Under Secretary Smith replied that the object was to "draw a line somewhere," and then to defend the "truly neutral countries" back of that line.

There was a brief discussion of mutual security funds for Indochina, and Dulles emphasized the need for the funds, and for flexibility in their use. He went on to state his own view of the situation:

> Dulles said that he felt there were some redeeming features coming out of the Geneva Conference. Many more countries were now saying that the original proposal of the US for a regional grouping, made in March, had been sound. It was unfortunate that it took so long to educate these other countries for the need of action. In the second place, France now had a Government responsive to the people, whereas the Laniel Government had been really fictional (although on the US side). Because the French position in Indochina was confused and unpopular, the US had never wanted to support it unless it became purified. Dulles felt that it should soon be possible to salvage something from Southeast Asia, free of the taint of French colonialism, with the support of Burma and other Asian States, and with probably the benevolent neutrality of India which would be a strong factor in influencing UK action

---

Byrd, and Carl T. Hayden (Ariz.), and from the House, Speaker Martin and Republicans Halleck, Leo E. Allen (Ill.), Chiperfield, Vorys, Judd, Short, Taber, Richard B. Wigglesworth (Mass.), and Democrats Sam Rayburn, McCormack, James P. Richards (S.C.), Vinson, Overton Brooks (La.), Cannon and George H. Mahon (Tex.)

[79]This account of the meeting is drawn from two summaries, the first by Cutler, which is in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1730-1734, and the second, by Bryce Harlow of the White House legislative liaison staff, located in the Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, Legislative Meetings Series.

and this something could be guaranteed by a regional grouping which would include the US.

Dulles added that there were two problems: "a. The establishment of a military line which could not be crossed by the enemy, and b. prevention of internal and creeping subversion." He ". . . feared the latter more than the former. To meet it, he said it would be necessary to build up indigenous forces, and to give some economic aid." He ended by stressing that "we must hold the western side of the Pacific or it will become a communist lake."

Several days later (on June 29), during a visit to Washington by Churchill and Eden, the U.S. and the U.K. agreed on a seven-point position on Indochina, and agreed that they would be willing to respect a settlement based on those points, as follows:[80]

1. preserves the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assures the withdrawal of Vietminh forces therefrom;

2. preserves at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Delta; in this connection we would be unwilling to see the line of division of responsibility drawn further south than a line running generally west from Dong Hoi [18th parallel];

3. does not impose on Laos, Cambodia or retained Vietnam any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers;

4. does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control;

5. does not exclude the possibility of the ultimate unification of Vietnam by peaceful means;

6. provides for the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam; and

7. provides effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement.

In early July, Mendès-France began urging Dulles or Smith to return to Geneva when the Conference, which had been recessed since the latter part of June, resumed on July 14. Ambassador Dillon urged Dulles to do so, saying that it would strengthen U.S. influence with the French and help to secure a more favorable settlement at Geneva: "The indication which French now have that no matter what the settlement may be, we cannot be counted upon for support with Vietnam obviously greatly weakens our influence with French."[81] This was Dulles' reaction on July 8:[82]

> Our present intentions to leave representation at Geneva at the present level of Ambassador Johnson is primarily because we do not want to be the cause of any avoidable embarrassment by what might be a spectacular dissociation of the United States from France. Whatever France may be determined to do, we accept as within its prerogatives. We only

[80] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1758.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 1785.
[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 1795-1796.

regret that we cannot agree to associate ourselves in advance with an end result which we cannot foresee. Equally, we do not want to be in a position of seeming to obstruct an end result which from the French national standpoint seems imperative to its parliament and people.

Dulles added that if the French were to take a definite stand on conditions for a settlement, the U.S. could then make its own decision. In the absence of such a stand, however, it seemed preferable for the U.S. not to increase its presence in Geneva.

The response of Mendès-France was, ". . . if Americans on high-level were absent, the Communist side would automatically and inevitably draw conclusion that there was important split between three Western powers and that result would be that their terms would be even harsher." He added that he would not accept terms which did not substantially fulfill the seven-point U.S./U.K. position.

Based on this reply, Dulles talked on July 9 to several key Senate leaders about whether he or Smith should return to Geneva. Knowland was strongly opposed, as was Homer Ferguson. George was also opposed, saying he feared that the meeting would "elevate into a great international conference at which the Reds will be present and dominant." Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson said he did not have enough information to make a judgment, but thought it might be better for the U.S. not to be represented at such a high level.[83]

Secretary Dulles also called Vice President Nixon and this is the memo of that conversation.[84]

> N. returned the call and the Sec. asked how he felt re Geneva. N. said he feels strongly neither the Sec. or S. [Under Secretary Smith] should go. After Mansfield's speech, he feels the line will be that Geneva is a sell-out—a failure of diplomacy. We would be put on the spot where we have to go along or repudiate what we have said. N. said he does not think world reaction will be bad because we don't go. The Sec. said they want us to give respectability to what they are going to do. N. thinks the Vietnamese will be fighting the French. N. doesn't like to see us give respectability or be a part of a deal which we don't believe in. We have been critical of our predecessors on this. The Sec. said it is hard under the pressures of the immediate environment. He said he would rather go because he can stand up to it better. N. said what we have there is enough, but if anyone goes, the Sec. should.

On Saturday, July 10, Dulles met with the President to discuss the matter. Eisenhower thought it would be better for the U.S. to be represented, but the two agreed to send a message to the French and British restating the U.S. position, and if their replies "indicat-

---

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 1803; Dulles Telephone Calls Series, July 9, 1954. On July 10, Dulles met with Johnson to discuss the matter further. There is a memorandum of that meeting in the Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, Chron File, but it has not yet been processed according to a letter to CRS from Director John Wickman, Nov. 4, 1982.

[84] Dulles Telephone Calls Series, July 9, 1954. For the cable see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1807–1810. See also Hagerty's arguments in favor of returning, pp. 1797–1798, one of which was that "If we are not on record to oppose the settlement when it happens, it will plague us through the fall and give the Democrats a chance to say that we sat idly by and let Indochina be sold down the river to the Communists without raising a finger or turning a hair."

ed a firmness . . . for a position that we could go along with," then Dulles or Smith might return to Geneva.

On July 11, before receiving a reply from the French, Eisenhower decided that Dulles should go to Paris to confer with Mendès-France and Eden on the questions of returning to Geneva.[85] On July 12, Dulles attended an executive session hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he was scheduled to testify on the mutual security bill, and told the members that he had to leave immediately for Paris. He briefly explained the reasoning for not going back to Geneva.[86]

As a result of Dulles' trip, during which the French indicated their support of the seven-point conditions, and the U.S. indicated that it would respect the Geneva settlement to the extent that it conformed to those conditions, the U.S. agreed to send Under Secretary Smith back to Geneva.[87]

On July 15, Dulles reported to the NSC:[88]

> Secretary Dulles began by explaining the dilemma which had confronted the United States with respect to participation at a high level in the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference. He said that we had been reluctant thus to participate, in the first instance, out of fear that the Communists might say to the French that they would be willing to accept a certain solution of the Indochina problem provided the United States joined in guaranteeing such a solution. Had the United States been faced with such a proposition, we would have had to reject it, said Secretary Dulles. We couldn't get ourselves into the "Yalta business" of guaranteeing Soviet conquests, but to have rejected such a proposal would nevertheless have left us exposed to the hostility of French public opinion as the power responsible for blocking a settlement of the unpopular Indochinese war. There would have been more talk of too many stiff-necked Presbyterians, of sanctimoniousness, and of invoking lofty moral principles.
>
> The other danger—the other horn of the dilemma—was the possibility that high-level U.S. representation at Geneva might so stiffen the French as to preclude their accepting any settlement offered by the Communists. They might then turn to us and ask us to participate unilaterally with them in continuing the war.
>
> In the event that either of these two possibilities had been realized, the result would have been very great French antagonism. The whole structure of Franco-U.S. friendship might have been destroyed, and there would have been an end of any hope for EDC. These reasons had led us to believe that it was wisest for the United States to withdraw from the Indochina phase of the Conference inconspicuously. We had found, however, that we could not withdraw inconspicuously. There had been very strong French pressure on us to return to Geneva.

---

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 1812.
[86] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 621 ff
[87] For a summary of the Paris meetings see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1819 ff. For the resulting French/U.S. "position paper" see pp. 1830-1831.
[88] *Ibid.*, pp. 1834 ff.

Dulles told the NSC about his meetings with Mendès-France, and the conclusion to send Smith back to Geneva. There was discussion of public and congressional reaction. Vice President Nixon said that the reaction of Congress would depend on the press and on the reactions of leading Republicans in Congress. He said that the advantages of the settlement, such as the independence of Laos and Cambodia, should be stressed with the press. Dulles commented, "we must be careful not to go too far to make the forthcoming settlement appear to be a good bargain."

The next day (July 16), Dulles met again in executive session with the Foreign Relations Committee.[89] He gave a detailed report of the Paris meetings, and he concluded by saying that if the U.S. had rejected Mendès-France's request to resume high-level representation in Geneva this would have seriously affected U.S. relations with Europe and approval of the EDC. He was asked whether the U.S. had made any commitments with respect to Indochina. He replied that the U.S. had agreed to try to help the French get a settlement that the U.S. could then support, but that any commitment to the defense of the area would be made through a regional pact which would be sent to the Senate for approval.

The question of the division of Vietnam was raised, and Dulles said, among other things, ". . . the situation is such that we are not as urgent about elections here as we would be in either Germany or Korea, because as things stand today, it is probable that Ho Chi Minh would get a very large vote." He hoped that the Geneva settlement would postpone the election until a more favorable time, "and if by that time conditions are more favorable to them, then probably the other side won't want to have elections."

On Sunday, July 18, Dulles met with the President to discuss what the U.S. should do if the Communists deliberately stalled, thus delaying the settlement beyond the July 20 deadline set by Mendès-France. Dulles suggested that if the word were passed in Geneva that in such an event a larger war would be likely, it might strengthen Mendès-France as well as cause the Communists to be more amenable. Eisenhower said this could be done by letting it be known that he would speak to a joint session of Congress. Dulles replied that he "doubted whether this was advisable at the present time as we were not yet in a shape to ask for any authority from Congress whereas if he made a talk to the American people, he could speak in terms of personally supporting a presentation of the situation to the United Nations as a threat to the peace, and he could do so directly or with U.S. support through others, without Congressional authorization." The President agreed, and told Dulles to tell Smith that he would make the speech on July 21.

On Monday, July 19, Dulles telephoned Smith in Geneva to see whether he thought some "announcement or 'leak'" about the President's speech should be made in Washington. Smith said that a settlement seemed imminent and suggested postponing the speech. Dulles reported this to Eisenhower, who agreed.[90]

---

[89] *SFRC Hts. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 633–658. Lyndon Johnson and Russell also attended the meeting, and except for George, all of those who had been consulted by Dulles on July 9–10 were present.

[90] *FRUS*, 1951–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1851–1853, and vol. XVI, p. 1436.

During the night of July 20–21, 1954, a cease-fire was concluded in Geneva and the First Indochina War came to an end. On July 21, an unsigned "Final Declaration" was issued.

The Geneva Accords of 1954 provided for a cease-fire, and for the temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, followed by nation-wide elections in 1956 to determine the future of the country. Neither part of the country was to join any military alliance, and no new military equipment or personnel were to be brought into either area from outside, nor were there to be any foreign military bases. An International Control Commission, composed of representatives from Canada, Poland and India, was to supervise the truce. (There were somewhat different provisions for Laos and Cambodia.)[91]

The U.S. refused to be associated with the Final Declaration, issuing instead a unilateral declaration in which it stated that it would refrain from using force to disturb the provisions of the cease-fire agreements (one for each of the Associated States), or the Final Declaration, but that it would "view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." The U.S. declaration also reiterated U.S. support for "free elections" in countries "divided against their will," but in the case of Vietnam it also respected the right of a state to determine its own affairs. The U.S., therefore, would respect the right of the South Vietnamese, as declared by their representative during the final meeting in Geneva, "to full freedom of action," including action with respect to the date (July 1956) on which, according to the Final Declaration, a general election "shall be held" in Vietnam.[92]

In Saigon, flags flew at half-mast, as the Vietnamese Government, which had deeply resented, among other things, the action of the French in agreeing to a division of the country and in relinquishing Tonkin, said in a statement, "in spite of our pain, in spite of our revulsion, we must remain calm and intend to hold out our arms to our refugee brothers . . . while preparing ourselves without delay for the peaceful and difficult struggle which must finally liberate our country from all foreign direction, no matter what it may be, and from all opposition."[93] The announcement was made by Ngo Dinh Diem, who had become Prime Minister in June 1954.

Over the years since the Geneva Accords there has been considerable speculation as to why the Viet Minh accepted a cease-fire and a partition of the country, rather than seeking a complete military victory. This is U. Alexis Johnson's assessment:[94]

> From my limited field of view at Geneva, my own impression, which I cannot document, has always been that the Soviets, and to some degree the Chinese acted as a restraining influence on the Viet Minh who were flush with victory and saw no reason that they should not get all of at least Vietnam.

---

[91] For a detailed discussion of the accords see Randle, *Geneva 1954*.

[92] For the U.S. statement see *ibid.*, vol XVI, pp. 1500–1501. For the texts of the cease-fire agreements and the Final Declaration see pp. 1505–1542. For a discussion of the factors involved in the agreement of the North Vietnamese to the decisions made at Geneva, see Randle, *Geneva 1954*.

[93] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1861

[94] Letter to CRS from U Alexis Johnson, Dec. 14, 1982.

However, they were persuaded to settle for the "two bite" election approach [getting the south—the second bite—in the 1956 election] by the Soviets who explicitly or implicitly were satisfied that Mendès-France would kill the EDC, the Soviet first priority, if Mendès-France's face was saved by the two-bite approach. (Of course, another factor might have been concern over what action the United States might take if they insisted on taking it all in one bite.)

From the standpoint of the Viet Minh the gamble probably seemed to be a good one for there were few on either side who gave the South much chance of surviving. But through the sheer force of will and stubbornness of Diem it did survive with some American aid, and thus required Hanoi to change its strategy in 1960 by moving into guerrilla war, and then when that did not succeed, moving to organized NVN forces in 1964–65.

Reaction in Congress to the Geneva Accords—and there were very few public statements—was muted. Although few if any Members seemed pleased with the settlement, except for scattered charges of "appeasement" there was also very little significant opposition to the U.S. position. The general attitude, especially among the internationalists in both parties, was that while the settlement represented a setback for the "cause of freedom," it provided a new opportunity for the U.S. As Senator Herbert H. Lehman, a liberal Democrat from New York, expressed it, "The cease-fire agreement can give us time to strengthen the forces of freedom and to increase the powers of resistance to the Communist pressure in this area, or can merely be a stopgap leading to a new series of disasters. Bold, imaginative and constructive diplomacy is called for, along with practical measures to mobilize and strengthen the forces of resistance in this and other areas."[95]

The Foreign Affairs Committee held an executive session with Dulles on July 21, at which he explained the settlement and the U.S. position, but the discussion was not very informative, and the committee appeared resigned to what had happened. One of the few comments of interest was the suggestion by one member of the committee that if a large part of the 2 million Catholics were to move South, there would be enough of a population shift (there were then 12 million people north of the 17th parallel and 10 million south of that line) to enable the South Vietnamese to win the general election in 1956. Dulles replied, "That is right."[96]

The Senate held an executive session with Dulles on July 23, but it is indicative of the low priority which was being given at that time to Indochina that the hearing was devoted entirely to the question of German rearmament and the EDC.

In both the House and the Senate, questions were being raised after the Geneva settlement about the justification for the mutual security funds requested for Indochina. (The authorization had passed the House, but not the Senate, and neither body had acted on the appropriations bill.) This worried the administration, and prompted the President to say in a meeting of the NSC on July 22

[95] *CR*, vol. 100, p. 11372.
[96] *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, p. 184.

that members of the Council should support the request, and that "those who could not support the Secretary of State should stay away from Capitol Hill."[97]

When the mutual security appropriations bill was debated by the House a few days later, a conservative Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Laurence H. Smith of Wisconsin, moved to reduce military assistance to Indochina by $212 million (from $712 million to $500 million), arguing in part that only $100 million had been spent of the $745 million approved by Congress for the previous year. The amendment was denounced by a battery of powerful senior Members of the House from both parties, who said that the situation was more dangerous than ever. Republican Majority Leader Halleck called it "one of the most critical in the whole world." John J. Rooney (D/N.Y.), a ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said that one of the ways in which the funds might be needed was, as one aspect of the building of a new "bastion" against communism, the transportation to South Vietnam of up to a million people "who might be executed by the Communists." Despite considerable support for the amendment, it was defeated on division, 63–98.[98]

Lending support to House passage of the funds for Indochina was the "heroine of Dien Bien Phu," the French nurse, Mlle. Genevieve de Galard-Terraube, who spent the day attending the debate and meeting Members. It was not just happenstance that she was there at that particular time. Her visit to the U.S. and to Congress has been arranged by the executive branch in conjunction with administration supporters in Congress. (The initiative came in part, at least, from Representative Frances P. Bolton (R/Ohio), a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who suggested to the Dulles brothers that she be brought to the U.S. for just such a purpose.)[99]

A similar amendment offered by Russell Long (D/La.) in the Senate was defeated by voice vote, after Knowland, joined by other conservatives and by liberal Democrats, vigorously defended the need for the funds.[100]

In these and other congressional debates after the Geneva settlement there was very little discussion of future U.S. policy toward Indochina, or the role that the U.S. should seek to play in Vietnam. There seemed to be the assumption, unspoken for the most part, that the United States now had the major responsibility for defending the area, and that, as Congress (especially the House) had been urging for some years, the organization of an anti-Communist Pacific pact should be the first objective of this new role.

Clearly, there was as strong a consensus in Congress as there was in the executive branch. As William Bundy has concluded:[101]

> . . . what is, of course, striking about that whole period is that nobody in the Congress was saying, "Don't get involved in this situation, we had better just wash our hands of it." On the contrary, when the Eisenhower administration, particularly Dulles, went right ahead and worked out the whole plan of

---

[97] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, p. 1870.
[98] *CR*, vol 100, pp 12277 ff
[99] Dulles Telephone Calls Series, May 19, 1954
[100] *CR*, vol 100, p 14517
[101] CRS Interview with William P Bundy, Aug 3, 1979

action in the summer of 1954 that led first of all to the SEATO Treaty and then to the Eisenhower commitment on aid, and then in the course of 1954–55 to the really quite strong American effort to support Ngo Dinh Diem as President, which included a certain amount of activity by Colonel Lansdale and others in the agency where I then worked [CIA], Congress was very much sympathetic to that effort, and did nothing to block the initiation of a legal commitment which became a progressively expanded practical commitment in the course of the 1950s. In other words, Congress was, as far as one could tell, wholly sympathetic to the effort to salvage this position if it could be done, and by voting very large sums of economic and military aid to the Diem regime Congress played a very full part in the gradual broadening and deepening of the commitment.

First Steps After Geneva

On July 22, the day after the Geneva settlement was announced, the NSC discussed the Indochina situation at some length.[102] (Dulles had already asked his Legal Adviser for his opinion on the question of restrictions imposed by the settlement, particularly how the U.S. could protect Indochina through SEATO against external or internal aggression, and how South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia could be associated with SEATO in military and economic matters.)[103]

"The Communist demands had turned out to be relatively moderate in terms of their actual capabilities," Dulles reported. He thought this resulted from one or both of two causes—their belief in the inevitability of victory, or their fear of general war.

"The great problem from now on out," Dulles told the Council, "was whether we could salvage what the Communists had ostensibly left out of their grasp in Indochina." Plans were being made for SEATO, but he thought that the "real danger" was internal "subversion and disintegration." For this reason, "he would almost rather see the French get completely out of the rest of Indochina and thus permit the United States to work directly with the native leadership in these states."[104]

What Dulles did not reveal to the full NSC or to Congress was the extent to which the U.S. had already begun actively working with the "native leadership" of Vietnam. Beginning at least as early as January 1954, Secretary Dulles and his brother Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, had started developing plans for a covert mission for that purpose, to be headed by Col. Edward Lansdale. Lansdale was then in Washington, but before he could leave for Vietnam he was recalled to the Philippines for a brief time. In late May 1954 he was told to report immediately to Saigon as head

---

[102] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1867–1871.

[103] *Ibid*., vol. XVI, p. 1503. For the reply of Herman Phleger, the State Department's Legal Adviser, see pp. 1552–1562.

[104] It is of interest to note a comment made by Dulles some 18 months later, when he was discussing world affairs with Emmet John Hughes, a leading speech writer for Eisenhower. According to Hughes, Dulles spoke of the problem of being caught between "the new nationalism and the old colonialism," and, referring to Vietnam, said: "We have a clean base there now, without a taint of colonialism. Dienbienphu was a blessing in disguise." Emmet John Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), p. 208.

of the Saigon Military Mission (a CIA operation that was not bureaucratically a part of the regular CIA station in Vietnam), through which the new covert program was to be carried out.[105]

Lansdale was given broad responsibility for conducting operations similar to those he had successfully carried out in the Philippines. These ran the gamut from psychological warfare to counterguerrilla activities and subversion. The key to his success in the Philippines had been his close personal relationship with Defense Minister and later President Ramon Magsaysay, an effective nationalist leader. This was also to become the key to Lansdale's success in Vietnam, where he cultivated the friendship of leading Vietnamese officials, beginning with Ngo Dinh Diem.

Lansdale was not directly involved, however, in the decision of Bao Dai in June 1954 to make Diem his Prime Minister. Although evidence as to how this decision was made is still very sketchy, there is some information available on the events leading up to it.

On May 18, 1954, Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Luyen, who was Bao Dai's personal representative to the Geneva Conference, met at his (Ngo's) request with Under Secretary Smith and Philip Bonsal to discuss Bao Dai's interest in making Diem the Prime Minister. Ngo Dinh Luyen said that the French would be opposed, but that Bao Dai would make the appointment if he had the support of the U.S.[106]

After the meeting, Smith recommended to Washington that the U.S. Embassy in Paris contact Diem (who had been at a Catholic seminary in Belgium since leaving the U.S. in 1953, but by May 1954 was in Paris) for a discussion of the matter. At Smith's direction, Bonsal also informed the French of the conversation with Diem's brother.[107]

Meanwhile, Washington had received a cable from Chargé Robert McClintock in Saigon, in which he again urged that Bao Dai return to Vietnam. If this was not possible, McClintock said, ". . . I recommend that French and we place utmost pressure on local elements, it being recalled that most of this valorous Vietnamese Government is safely in Paris, to depose Bao Dai and establish a Council of Regency with a new government operating on a streamlined constitution which would have real powers. . . . Regents would in fact be figureheads and we would write their constitution." He said that this plan (which he explained in greater detail) would help in the Geneva negotiations, adding, "To objections that this program is injurious to theory of sovereignty I would reply that Vietnamese will be far worse off under government presided over by Ho Chi Minh and that in case of bankruptcy which we now confront, bankers have right to organize a receivership."[108]

Ambassador Heath, who was with the U.S. delegation in Geneva, disagreed with McClintock. Among other problems and obstacles he

---

[105] Lansdale was called back to Washington from the Philippines after the fall of Dien Bien Phu to address a group of State Department and CIA officials. Secretary Dulles was at the meeting, and told him that he was to go to Vietnam, and to develop quickly a way to keep it from going Communist.

[106] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 843-849.

[107] *Ibid.*, pp. 894-895

[108] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp 1576-1577.

cited the fact that "The French would certainly not agree to such a proposal at the present time and without their consent, in view of the French armed forces in Saigon, the coup could hardly be pulled off." He also pointed out that Diem seemed to be moving toward supporting Bao Dai, and he concluded that the U.S. should, "at least for the time being, bear with the Bao Dai solution."[109]

Washington apparently did not reply directly to McClintock's suggestion of a coup, but in a cable drafted by Sturm and Gullion the State Department advised Smith to continue to discuss the future of Vietnam with Bao Dai and his representatives. The cable is of interest for what it reveals about U.S. planning, and the extent to which American officials were prepared for the U.S. to assume an active role. "If we are to take active part in Indochina war," it said, "we must work toward rapid establishment of authentic Vietnamese nationalist government." The first step would be to create a national assembly, whose primary initial function "aided by French and American constitutional experts," would be to write a constitution. But for the present the U.S. would have to work with Bao Dai because of the lack of an acceptable substitute.[110]

On May 24 and 25, Diem met with officials of the U.S. Embassy in Paris, including Ambassador Dillon. They reported that Diem had already met with Bao Dai, and appeared ready to become Prime Minister, as unlikely as they considered this to be. "On balance we were favorably impressed," they cabled Washington, "but only in the realization that we are prepared to accept the seemingly ridiculous prospect that this Yogi-like mystic could assume the charge he is apparently about to undertake only because the standard set by his predecessors is so low."[111]

In a separate cable, the U.S. Embassy also commented on the question of U.S. relations with Bao Dai.[112] The Embassy agreed that there was no available substitute for Bao Dai. "The point is," the cable said, "to get Bao Dai to go to work and the United States should be able to help considerably in this task, both because of the position of special influence we occupy in the Imperial eye, and because we can apply the same methods which the French have used, but we hope, more efficiently. Without getting into the question of specific means to be employed, we think one of the main weapons to use in driving Bao Dai into action is control of his Exchequer. Nothing impresses him as much as gold and we should endeavor to arrive at arrangement with the French on controlling that portion his income we can in order to enforce our objectives." The cable added that the Embassy was encouraged by the prospect of Diem's becoming Prime Minister. "Even with his personal limitations, he is step in right direction and diametric change from prototype of suave Europeanized money-seeking dilettante represented by Buu Loc, Tran Van Huu and General Xuan, all of whom have failed so miserably."[113]

---

[109] *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 857
[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 892–894.
[111] *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 1608–1609.
[112] *Ibid.*, pp. 1616–1618.
[113] Buu Loc was Prime Minister at the time; Tran Van Huu was one of his predecessors; General Nguyen Van Xuan had served as President in 1948 before Bao Dai resumed office.

Although available documents do not indicate what the U.S. told Bao Dai or did about the matter, in the middle of June 1954 Bao Dai appointed Diem Prime Minister.

Robert Amory, then Deputy Director of the CIA, provided this vignette about Diem, (which is pronounced Ziem):[114]

> . . . you know who first put Ngo Dinh Diem in power? . . . this goes way back to 1954.[115] I was at an after-theater party in Martin Agronsky's house—pleasant, a couple of scotches and some canapes—and got off in a corner with Mr. Justice [William O.] Douglas, and Douglas said, "Do you know who's the guy to fix you up in Vietnam? He's here in this country, and that's Ngo Dinh Diem." Well, I wrote it down in my notebook on the way out as, you know, Z-I-M Z-I-M. I came back and asked the biographic boys the next morning, "Dig me up anything you've got on this guy." "We ain't got anything on this guy." And the next morning meeting I said to Allen Dulles and Frank Wisner, "A suggestion out of the blue. . . ." But Wisner picked it up and looked at the thing. And that's how "Ngo Zim Zim" became our man in Indochina. [laughter] The long hand of Mr. Justice Douglas.

With respect to the possible role of the CIA, as well as that of Lansdale himself, it is of interest to note, however, that on May 27, 1954, Ngo Dinh Nhu formed a coalition of political groups, the Front for National Safety, which called for a new regime to fight the Communists, with his brother Diem in charge.[116] (It will be recalled that Ngo Dinh Nhu had played a similar role in the summer of 1953 in organizing the Movement of National Union for Independence and Peace, followed by the Congress of National Union and Peace in September, and thence to his role in the Front for National Safety.) There is some doubt that these developments were of spontaneous indigenous origin. According to one authoritative source, "The successive arrivals in Saigon of Colonel Lansdale on June 1 and General Donovan [U.S. Ambassador to Thailand and former head of the OSS] on June 3 were directly connected with this move by Nhu."[117]

Shortly after his arrival, Lansdale was present at the scene of Diem's inconspicuous entry into Saigon on June 25, 1954. He was appalled at what he considered to be Diem's lack of political sophistication and administrative skill, and drew up a suggested plan of political operations and government action which he was given permission by General O'Daniel and Ambassador Heath to present to Diem as a "personal" recommendation. Diem did not adopt the plan, but the two men developed such a close friendship that Lansdale soon began seeing Diem daily, eventually living for a time at the Presidential palace.[118]

---

[114]Kennedy Library, Oral History Interview with Robert Amory, pp. 59–60. It should also be noted that at the time there was considerable support in the CIA for Phan Quang Dan, who was in graduate studies at Harvard.

[115]The year was probably 1953, before Diem left the U.S. in May. Hoopes says, however, based on an interview with Amory, that the date was April 1954. See *The Devil and John Foste Dulles*, p. 251.

[116]Jean Lacoutre and Philippe Devillers, *End of A War, Indochina 1954* (New York: Praeger 1969), pp. 223–224. There is no mention of this in the cables reprinted in *FRUS*.

[117]Lacoutre and Devillers, p. 224.

[118]For Lansdale's account of these events see *In the Midst of Wors*, pp. 154–159. See also Sha plen, *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 103–104.

The text of the plan submitted to Diem by Lansdale has never been made public, but judging by Lansdale's own brief description it was almost a blueprint of the kind of Western democratic reformist thinking, combined with an emphasis on modernization of living conditions, that tended to characterize the American approach to Vietnam during the entire course of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war.

Based on his own reactions, and on talking to some of those on the scene, Lansdale thought that by riding rapidly into the city in a closed limousine Diem had disappointed those who had come out to welcome him. "Diem should have ridden into the city slowly in an open car," Lansdale said, "or even have walked, to provide a focus for the affection that the people so obviously had been waiting to bestow on him." In the paper he presented to Diem, Lansdale said that he discussed this incident, and went on to talk about the actions which a leader can take to solve problems, as well as how the government could be made "more responsive to the people, about agrarian economics and reforms, about encouraging the institution of public forums around the countryside, about veteran care, about public health, about making the government more effective in the provinces, and about the personal behavior of a prime minister who could generate willing support by the majority toward accomplishing these ends."[119]

When asked later about the basis for these recommendations, Lansdale said, "What I was recommending to him was what people were telling me that they needed and I could see that they needed it. They were wanting certain things from their own government and their own people, and this was pretty much what I was writing about. But these were Vietnamese views that I tried to pass along to him."[120]

On July 1, Lucien Conein arrived in Saigon to join Lansdale. (Ten others came in August.) A major in the U.S. Army and also a CIA agent, he had been in the OSS in Vietnam in 1945, but apparently had not been associated with the Archimedes Patti mission (and thus was not considered by the bureaucracy to have been a party to the involvement of the Patti mission with Ho Chi Minh). Ironically, he later played a key role, on the U.S. side, in the overthrow of Diem in 1963.

Conein, who was assigned to the MAAG for "cover," was put in charge of activities in Tonkin (North Vietnam), beginning with U.S. assistance in encouraging and helping refugees to move to the South after the Geneva settlement. Later, as the Viet Minh occupied the area during the early part of October, Conein's paramilitary groups engaged in sabotage in and around Hanoi: ". . . in contaminating the oil supply of the bus company for a gradual wreckage of engines in the buses, in taking the first action for delayed sabotage of the railroad . . . and in writing detailed notes of potential targets for future paramilitary operations (U.S. adherence to the Geneva Agreement prevented SMM from carrying out the

[119] *In the Midst of Wars*, pp. 157–158. Many of these ideas were also to be found in the various internal and external U.S. Government documents, both then and later, explaining American goals and programs.

[120] CRS Interview with Edward Lansdale, Nov. 19, 1982.

active sabotage it desired to do against the power plant, water facilities, harbor, and bridge)."[121]

Although Lansdale's team was proficient in covert political and paramilitary operations, none of the members of the group spoke Vietnamese, and, except for Conein and Lansdale, none of them had any experience in Vietnam. Lansdale, whose experience prior to his assignment in 1954 consisted of several weeks of extensive traveling in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1953 "familiarizing myself with problems faced by the French forces," said later, "I knew too little about Vietnam at the time. There simply were no U.S. books about Indo-China when I went there in 1954. . . . The books I could get my hands on were French paperbacks, usually sketchily or journalistically written, about the war."[122]

Among the programs, both overt and covert, by which the U.S. was seeking to influence the course of events in Vietnam in the period following the Geneva Conference, was also a program of "public administration" designed to improve the efficiency and strength of the Diem government. From 1955 through 1962, when it was discontinued by Diem, this program was operated by Michigan State University under contract with Vietnam and with the International Cooperation Administration (the U.S. foreign aid agency in the State Department). In part, it was also a CIA cover operation.[123]

The head of the Michigan State team (beginning in 1956) was Wesley Fishel, who, it will be recalled, first met Diem in 1951, and persuaded him to come to the United States. Fishel became one of Diem's closest American friends, and in early September 1954 he took up residence in the Presidential palace in Saigon, ostensibly as an adviser on "governmental reorganization." Judging by Heath's cables, Fishel immediately began keeping the U.S. Embassy closely advised on Diem's thoughts and plans.

---

[121]Saigon Military Mission report on operations during 1954–55, *PP,* Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 579. For related activities of the northern SMM teams see pp. 578–579.

[122]Letter to CRS from Edward Lansdale, June 21, 1983. Lansdale adds that of the available French books, "The most useful of these was by Major A. M. Savani, *Visage et Images du Sud-Vietnam,* about French pacification efforts along the Mekong. It gave me insights into the Hoa Hao, particularly their leaders. I note as I look at my copy now, it is very thumb-worn from my study. I had many dealings later with the people in its pages."

[123]The Michigan State-CIA relationship was revealed in 1965 by former MSU team members Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox in *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 11, 21, and more fully by a former coordinator of the Michigan State program, Stanley K. Sheinbaum, a member of the MSU sociology faculty, for an article in *Ramparts,* 4 (April 1966), pp. 11–22 by Warren Hinckle entitled "The University on the Make." In an opening statement (p. 13) Sheinbaum said, in part:

"Looking back I am appalled how supposed intellectuals . . . could have been so uncritical about what they were doing. There was little discussion and no protest over the cancellation of the 1956 elections. Nor were any of us significantly troubled by the fact that our Project had become a CIA Front. . . . The Michigan State professors performed at all levels. . . . But in all this they never questioned U.S. foreign policy which had placed them there and which, thereby, they were supporting. . . . This is the tragedy of the Michigan State professors: we were all automatic cold warriors." For the Michigan State University reply to the *Ramparts* article, see the *New York Times,* Apr. 23, 1966.

During the Eisenhower administration the U.S. Government carried on a very active program of "stabilizing" friendly governments and "destabilizing" governments considered unfriendly. Very little has been or probably will for some time be published on this subject. For two of the few efforts thus far, neither of which, especially Cook, is very successful, see Stephen E Ambrose, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), and Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1981). There have also been several case studies of U.S. actions in specific countries. See, for example, Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982)

One of the activities of the U.S. during and after Geneva was to assist as well as to maximize the movement of refugees from the north to the south.[124] Throughout the Conference, the U.S. had taken a firm position on the right of relocation, and succeeded in having it recognized in the final agreements. Anticipating that Vietnam would be divided, and that elections would be scheduled, U.S. officials wanted to make sure that as many persons as possible, particularly the strongly anti-Communist Catholics, relocated in the south. (Four-fifths of the total number of refugees who moved to the south were Catholics, representing about two-thirds of the Catholics in the north.) This would help to balance the population of the two sectors in the event of an election; it would strengthen the southern region's anti-Communist political base; and it would serve as a propaganda point against the Communists, thereby enabling the U.S. to assert, as American officials did and have continued to do, that "one million Vietnamese voted with their feet" against the Communists by leaving North Vietnam.[125]

In addition to the one million Vietnamese who left the north and moved to the south in the late summer and fall of 1954, many others would have moved south if they had not been prevented by the Viet Minh from doing so. Hammer concluded: "It was clear not only that the exodus constituted a serious popular indictment of the northern regime, but that it would have been multiplied several-fold had the refugees been permitted to leave freely."[126]

A large number of the refugees were transported by the French, but the U.S. Government also made a vital contribution. The Navy conducted a sizeable sealift, known as "Passage to Freedom."[127] Lansdale's Saigon Military Mission (SMM) also played a key role. Using the CIA's Civil Air Transport, it persuaded the French to give CAT a contract for helping to move refugees, and was closely associated with helping the CAT to carry out that role.

SMM was also active in encouraging potential refugees to move to the south. When Lansdale was asked later about the mission's role he replied:[128]

---

[124]A Special Working Group on Indochina established within the NSC's Operations Coordinating Board on August 4, 1954, took the position that refugees would be given top priority. *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1924.

[125]For Diem's interest in creating a Catholic "sect" in the south, see Lacoutre and Devillers, *End of a War*, pp. 333-336.

[126]*The Struggle for Indochina*, p. 345.

[127]See chapter XII of vol. I of the U.S. Navy's Vietnam War history, by Hooper, Allard and Fitzgerald, cited above. One of the participants was Lt. (JG) Thomas A. Dooley, an M.D., who became well known to American audiences through the support of the Catholic Church, and through his writings and his subsequent medical activities in Southeast Asia, where he established a clinic in Laos after leaving the Navy. In 1956, Dooley published a book on the refugee movement, subsequently a movie, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Story of Viet Nam's Flight to Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1956). Many years later, it was revealed that Dooley's activities were supported by the CIA. Ralph McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA* (New York: Sheridan Square, 1983), p. 132. Gen. Edward Lansdale, who worked closely with Dooley, denies, however, that Dooley worked for the CIA.

[128]CRS Interview with Edward Lansdale, Apr. 29, 1983. According to Lansdale (letter to CRS, June 21, 1983), "There were two large groupings of Catholics then in the North. They were in two bishoprics, led by very energetic bishops. They were country people, living in the provinces outside the cities. Before the Americans ever came to the scene, the bishops had undertaken strong measures to help their people defend themselves, even to the extent of forming a Catholic militia, led by the first Vietnamese to be named as a general; (he was trained in China by the Chinese Nationalists). When the French readjusted their defense lines in the Red River Valley and Delta, during the battle of Dien Bien Phu, French troops were withdrawn from supporting this Vietnamese (Catholic) militia. The bishops started moving their troops and provincial popu-

Continued

> Some of the critics of the war have said that I caused the refugees to leave the north, by propaganda. That isn't really true. I pointed out to the people in the north what was going to happen. Most of the work was really information work of being fairly clear about the future, sometimes dramatized a little bit. But people don't leave ancestral homes that they care a lot about without very good reason, particularly in Asia. So it took tremendous personal fear to get them to leave, and when a million of them did it wasn't just words and propaganda making them do it.

This was the frank statement of one official of the U.S. Information Agency (called U.S. Information Service, or USIS, overseas), to the House Foreign Affairs Committee:

> The USIS side of this consisted of three general steps: First, that of stimulating the movement itself, of persuading these people that their best hope lay in coming out of this Communist dominated area and settling in the free south, of keeping these refugees informed and preventing chaos as a result of the very powerful Viet Minh and Communist propaganda that was being thrown at them throughout the whole long process of staging areas, of transporting by ship, and so forth, down to the south, and then of doing all we could to counter disillusionment when they are down there.

This official showed the committee copies of posters (which, like most of the material encouraging the refugees, were printed and paid for by USIS but attributed to the Diem government), the general message of which was "Come to the South for happiness and good life."[129]

According to Bernard B. Fall:

> Although there is no doubt that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese would have fled Communist domination in any case, the mass flight was admittedly the result of an extremely intensive, well-conducted, and, in terms of its objective, very successful American psychological warfare operation. Propaganda slogans and leaflets appealed to the devout Catholics with such themes as "Christ has gone to the South," and the "Virgin Mary has departed from the North"; and whole bishoprics . . . packed up lock, stock, and barrel, from the bishops to almost the last village priest and faithful.[130]

U.S. Catholics were, of course, heavily involved in helping the refugees. Catholic Relief Services and an action group established for helping resettle the refugees—the Catholic Auxiliary Resettlement Committee—were the only private organizations on the coordinating board established by the South Vietnamese Government to handle the refugee program.[131] New York's Cardinal Spellman

---

lations up into the Red River Delta, aiming for the vicinity of Haiphong. Thus, when the plebiscite agreement was drawn up by the French and Viet Minh at Geneva, many of the Northern Catholics already were refugees, having left home and moved to the vicinity of Haiphong, which became the major port of embarkation during the refugee sealift. The main appeals to the Catholics were not from Americans, but from Catholic leaders, Vietnamese themselves."

[129] *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XVII, p. 335.

[130] *The Two Viet-Nams*, pp. 153–154.

[131] For this and other aspects of the refugee movement see part two of Richard W. Lindholm (ed.), *Viet-Nam: The First Five Years* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1959).

himself went to Vietnam in August 1954 to present the first check for refugee aid to the Catholic Relief Services' representatives.

There is no evidence that Congress was informed about these various covert activities being carried out by the U.S. in Indochina, but there can also be little doubt that some Members, primarily those like Mansfield, Judd, and Zablocki, who had a special interest in Asia, and who took frequent trips to the area, knew generally of the existence of those programs.

There is also no question that these and all of the covert U.S. activities in Indochina were authorized by Congress, (beginning in the 1940s with authorization for such activities in China or the "general area of China,") under the provision in foreign assistance legislation allowing the use of unvouchered funds.[132] Thus, while Congress may not have been informed about such activities, it supported them during that period.

NSC 5429—Redefining U.S. Interests and Role

Assisting the movement of refugees was but one of a series of steps taken by the U.S. immediately after the Geneva Conference pursuant to a new policy position on Asia and Southeast Asia, NSC 5429, agreed upon by the NSC on August 12, 1954.[133]

NSC 5429, entitled "Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East," began with a preface on the "Consequences of the Geneva Conference":

> a. Regardless of the fate of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Communists have secured possession of an advance salient in Vietnam from which military and non-military pressures can be mounted against adjacent and more remote non-Communist areas.
>
> b. The loss of prestige in Asia suffered by the U.S. as a backer of the French and the Bao Dai Government will raise further doubts in Asia concerning U.S. leadership and the ability of the U.S. to check the further expansion of Communism in Asia. Furthermore, U.S. prestige will inescapably be associated with subsequent developments in Southeast Asia.
>
> c. By adopting an appearance of moderation at Geneva and taking credit for the cessation of hostilities in Indochina, the Communists will be in a better position to exploit their political strategy of imputing to the United States motives of extremism, belligerency, and opposition to co-existence seeking thereby to alienate the U.S. from its allies. The Communists thus have a basis for sharply accentuating their "peace propaganda" and "peace program" in Asia in an attempt to allay fears of Communist expansionist policy and to establish close relations with the nations of free Asia.

---

[132]In addition to such authority, the executive branch has steadily maintained that there is full authority for covert activities in the President's constitutional powers and in the National Security Act of 1947.

[133]For the text see *PP*, DOD ed., book 10, pp. 731–741. As approved by the NSC on August 12, NSC 5429 was identified as 5429/1. A subsequent version, NSC 5429/2, was approved on August 20. The version cited here is probably NSC 5429/2. There were additional versions of NSC 5429, including one on December 22, 1954, NSC 5429/5, which dealt more specifically with actions against China. For the text of this see *ibid.*, pp. 835–852. In September 1956, NSC 5612, which superceded most of 5429, but was basically similar in tone and content, was approved. This was superceded in 1958 by NSC 5809, which was superceded in 1960 by NSC 6012, but both of these were almost identical to the previous documents. For the texts see *ibid.*, pp. 1082, 1104, 1281

d. The Communists have increased their military and political prestige in Asia and their capacity for expanding Communist influence by exploiting political and economic weakness and instability in the countries of free Asia without resort to armed attack.

e. The loss of Southeast Asia would imperil retention of Japan as a key element in the off-shore island chain.

The first section of the "Courses of Action" portion of NSC 5429 was directed at China, which U.S. policymakers continued to assume was the major threat in Asia, and therefore the primary object of U.S. interests. The U.S, it stated, should "Reduce the power of Communist China in Asia even at the risk of, but without deliberately provoking, war." Among the recommended ways of accomplishing this was to "Create internal division in the Chinese Communist regime and impair Sino-Soviet relations by all feasible overt and covert means."[134]

With respect to Southeast Asia generally, NSC 5429 stated that "The U.S. must protect its position and restore its prestige in the Far East by a new initiative in Southeast Asia, where the situation must be stabilized as soon as possible to prevent further losses to communism through (1) creeping expansion and subversion, or (2) overt aggression."

One aspect of this should be the negotiation of a Southeast Asia security treaty which, besides committing each member country to act, would "Provide so far as possible a legal basis to the President to order attack on Communist China in the event it commits such armed aggression which endangers the peace, safety and vital interests of the United States." It should also "Not limit U.S. freedom to use nuclear weapons, or involve a U.S. commitment for local defense or for stationing U.S. forces in Southeast Asia." In addition, NSC 5429 contained a provision that presaged President Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution:

> If requested by a legitimate local government which requires assistance to defeat local Communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack, the U.S. should view such a situation so gravely that, in addition to giving all possible covert and overt support within Executive Branch authority, the President should at once consider requesting Congressional authority to take appropriate action, which might if necessary and feasible include the use of U.S. military forces either locally or against the external source of such subversion or rebellion (including Communist China if determined to be the source).

Concerning Indochina itself, NSC 5429 directed that the following actions be taken:

> a. Make every possible effort, not openly inconsistent with the U.S. position as to the armistice agreements, to defeat Communist subversion and influence, to maintain and support friendly non-Communist government in Cambodia and Laos, to

[134]During discussion of NSC 5429, the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized the importance of U.S. policy toward China, and the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ridgway, stressed the need to "split communist China from the Soviet Bloc." He also warned against U.S. destruction of the military power of China, which he said would "create a vacuum to be filled by Russia." *Ibid.*, pp 709-713.

maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam, and to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections.

b. Urge that the French promptly recognize and deal with Cambodia, Laos and free Vietnam as independent sovereign nations.

c. Strengthen U.S. representation and deal directly, whenever advantageous to the U.S., with the governments of Cambodia, Laos and free Vietnam.

d. Working through the French only insofar as necessary, assist Cambodia, Laos and free Vietnam to maintain (1) military forces necessary for internal security and (2) economic conditions conducive to the maintenance and strength of non-Communist regimes and comparing favorably with those in adjacent Communist areas.

e. Aid emigration from North Vietnam and settlement of people unwilling to remain under Communist rule.

f. Exploit available means to make more difficult the control by the Viet Minh of North Vietnam.

g. Exploit available means to prevent North Vietnam from becoming permanently incorporated in the Soviet bloc, using as feasible and desirable consular relations and non-strategic trade.

h. Conduct covert operations on a large and effective scale in support of the foregoing policies.

The NSC also agreed that Diem had to broaden his political base, establish an assembly, draft a constitution, and "legally dethrone Bao Dai."[135]

The NSC's Special Working Group on Indochina, established on August 4, 1954, within the Operations Coordinating Board, with Robert McClintock, former Chargé in Saigon, as Chairman, also reported on August 12 on a proposed program for Indochina, in which it recommended U.S. assistance to the three countries, as well as guarantees of territory and "political integrity" by SEATO.[136] All aid, however, "should be conditioned upon performance by the three countries in instituting needed reforms and carrying them out if necessary with U.S. or other assistance."

The Working Group report noted that "In Free Vietnam there is political chaos. The Government of Prime Minister Diem has only one virtue—honesty—and is bereft of any practical experience in public administration. The Vietnamese National Army has disintegrated as a fighting force. Cochin-China is the seat of three rival private armies and the security services of Free Vietnam have, by decree of Bao Dai, been handed over to a gangster sect, the Binh Xuyen, whose revenues are derived from gambling, prostitution, and extortion." "It must not be forgotten," the report added, "that Vietminh elements throughout Vietnam are working with hot haste to take over the entire country by cold war means before national elections are held two years hence."

---

[135] *Ibid.*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 204. This additional course of action, which does not appear in the version of NSC 5429 cited above, may have been decided in the NSC meeting of August 20 and incorporated in NSC 5429/2. These materials are in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XII.

[136] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1937-1938. There were 18 pages of attachments which are not printed. This report is in the form of a memo by McClintock, but it is apparently from the Working Group.

General O'Daniel, for one, thought that the U.S. should also go to work with hot haste to shore up South Vietnam. In a memorandum on July 27, he concluded, "I feel this is great opportunity US assist in pointing Vietnam right direction. This area can be used as testing ground to combat—the warfare Communist [*sic*] would hope employ everywhere including US. I personally feel that consideration should be given to make effort toward establishing US strongly here." He also urged that the U.S. take over from the French the entire military training program in Vietnam.[137]

On August 8, O'Daniel, head of the U.S. military mission in Saigon, cabled Washington a brief summary of a report by the MAAG on the U.S. role in Indochina, in which he proposed that the U.S. assume the "dominant role," in cooperation with the French and Vietnamese, in developing "strong democratic state oriented toward West." This would require, he said, that ". . . US advisors and operation agencies assist Free Vietnam all echelons and in all functional activities. Generally every key Free Vietnam official and government agency will have along side one or more US specialists for steering in discharge responsibilities, all with French concurrence." O'Daniel added that Heath agreed with these proposals, ". . . although he has reservations as to some of methods proposed, as he doubts necessity of US to become quite so far involved in operation of this government except on military training side. *Comment:* I feel this is war in every sense. Wartime methods, therefore, are in order all fields until emergency passed."[138]

The attitude in the Pentagon was much more guarded, however, both among civilian and military officials. The reaction of the JCS was that even before assuming training responsibilities for Indochinese forces, there should be assurance, first, that there was a "strong, stable civil government," second, that any of the three governments wanting to have the U.S. provide training and equipment should formally request such assistance, and, third, that the French should grant full independence and that French forces should make a phased withdrawal, enabling the U.S. to deal directly and independently with the countries concerned.[139] Secretary of Defense Wilson agreed.[140] The State Department disagreed with the Pentagon, and asked that the training missions be established.[141] JCS conditions were mentioned, however, in the subsequent communication with the French.

The U.S. sought to impress upon the French and the countries of Indochina its determination to move ahead in preventing further Communist advances in the area, including support for Diem, as well as making it clear to the French that their hegemony was over. On August 18, 1954, Dulles sent a personal message to Mendès-France in which he emphasized U.S. backing for Diem, and said that Eisenhower would soon be sending Diem a message to this effect. (This message, conveyed in a letter of October 23, 1954, had been suggested by Heath on July 23 as a way of assuring Diem

---

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 1885.
[138] *Ibid.*, pp. 1926–1927.
[139] *PP*, DOD ed., book 10, pp. 701–702 and *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1943–1945. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 228.
[140] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, p. 1939.
[141] *Ibid.*, pp. 1954–1956.

of U.S. support.)[142] He also told Mendès-France that henceforth the U.S. would deal directly with the three governments. Besides strengthening them, this approach was also dictated by Congress, he said, referring to the provision in the 1954 foreign aid bill that assistance should be given directly, rather than through France as in the case of the Navarre plan. In addition, he told Mendès-France that, depending on the establishment of independence and the stability of the recipient governments (the JCS conditions), the U.S. was prepared to consider requests for military training and assistance from the three countries.[143]

Establishment of SEATO

Completion of a Pacific pact was also a top U.S. priority after Geneva. Dulles was reluctant to enter into a treaty that would commit the U.S. to action in the area of Southeast Asia, especially the defense of Indochina, but he also felt it had to be done. In a conversation with the President on August 17, 1954, he said, "I expressed my concern with reference to the projected SEA Treaty on the grounds that it involved committing the prestige of the United States in an area where we had little control and where the situation was by no means promising. On the other hand, I said that failure to go ahead would work a total abandonment of the area without a struggle." He added this interesting and prescient comment: "I thought that to make the treaty include the area of Cambodia, Laos and Southern Vietnam was the lesser of two evils, but would involve a real risk of results which would hurt the prestige of the United States in this area."[144]

On August 30, just before leaving for the Southeast Asia Treaty Conference in Manila, Dulles talked to Livingston Merchant about the trip. He was not pleased with the attitude of the British and the French, who "are blocking everything we want to do." And if he went to the meeting, Dulles said, (speaking of himself), "he is hooked on it—he can't come back without a treaty."

> The Sec. said he is not happy at the way things are going. The idea they are signing the Treaty to please him does not please him at all. He has great reservations about the Treaty—whether it will be useful in the mood of the participants—whether we are not better off by ourselves. This running away from the word Communist—the unwillingness to allow unofficial observers to come from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the objection to our having any military mission to Cambodia are examples. They seem to have no desire or intention to hold the balance of Indochina. By going into a treaty of this sort, we limit our own freedom of action. Once we sign, then we have to consult re any action. They are more concerned with trying not to annoy the Communists rather than stopping them.

Merchant tried to assure Dulles that the British and French would participate in good faith, and told him that if he did not attend, "the effect on the Thais and the Cambodians . . . will be

---

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 1873.

[143] *Ibid.*, pp. 1957–1959. Consistent with this approach, the U.S. also announced that it was establishing embassies in each country. Robert McClintock was made Ambassador to Cambodia, and Charles W. Yost was made Minister to Laos.

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 1953

fatal. . . . The Sec. has to be there. . . . M. said we can't afford to hand the other side the complete victory in both quarters on a silver platter." Dulles responded that he was "willing to fight it out, but is it good to tie oneself up with people who are not willing to fight."[145]

Despite Dulles' misgivings, he attended the meeting at which the treaty was agreed to in early September 1954. Its title was the "Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty." It became known as SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) even though, unlike NATO, there was to be no organization as such.[146] Its members were the U.S., Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. Other Asian countries declined to join. In order to avoid possible conflict with the Geneva settlement (which prohibited all of Indochina, including North Vietnam, from participating in military pacts) the members also agreed to a protocol stipulating that Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would be covered by the treaty, rather than becoming actual members.

The key provision of the treaty was article IV, by which the parties agreed to defend the territory of members (and protocol states designated as being included). This was the text of article IV:

> 1. Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.
>
> 2. If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.
>
> 3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any State designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this Article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned.

In order to avoid other local conflicts, especially colonial conflicts, the U.S. insisted, however, that paragraph 1 of article IV would apply only to "communist aggression," and a statement of understanding on this point was included as the final paragraph in the treaty.

In connection with article IV, there is another important point that does not seem to have been recognized in the discussions of SEATO over the years, especially those concerning the application

---

[145] Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

[146] Dulles had hoped to call it MANPAC, after "Manila Pact." Gerson, *John Foster Dulles*, p. 195.

of SEATO to the U.S. decision to wage war in Vietnam. According to the *Pentagon Papers*,[147] U.S. representatives to Manila were given "four uncompromisable pre-conditions:

"(a) The U.S. would refuse to commit any U.S. forces unilaterally;

"(b) Were military action to be required, one or more of the European signatories would have to participate;

"(c) The U.S. intended to contribute only sea and air power, expecting that other signatories would provide ground forces;

"(d) The U.S. would act only against communist aggression."

As the *Pentagon Papers* narrative states, "These instructions not only clearly exempt the use of U.S. ground forces, but presuppose multilateral action before the U.S. would act in any capacity." However, this position, on which U.S. participation in SEATO originally was based, appears to have been ignored by policymakers during the Johnson administration, when SEATO was said to be one basis for the decision to send U.S. forces, including ground forces, into combat in Vietnam.

Although it requires skipping ahead of the narrative, it is helpful here to note the action taken on the treaty by the U.S. Senate. In a sense, the Senate was already committed. Although the congressional initiative for a Pacific pact had come generally from the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Senate also had moved toward that position, and the Foreign Relations Committee had endorsed the idea at the time of the Korean Mutual Defense Treaty in early 1954. In addition, Dulles had decided to include members of the Foreign Relations Committee as U.S. representatives to the SEATO Conference, thereby further assuring the acceptance of the plan. Thus, the treaty was signed for the United States by Dulles, by Senator H. Alexander Smith and by Senator Mike Mansfield. (Except for the U.N. Treaty, this was the first and only time that Members of Congress have been treaty signators.)

Action on SEATO began when the Foreign Relations Committee held an open hearing on the treaty on November 11, 1954, with Dulles as the principal witness.[148] There was no controversy, or even serious questioning of the treaty, and the hearing lasted only 2 hours. The only significant discussion concerned the interpretation of article IV. Dulles was asked whether Congress would be consulted before action was taken in the case of both paragraph 1 (open attack) and paragraph 2 (subversion). He replied that it would be. He was also asked about the provision in paragraph 2 of article IV for consultation in the event of a threat, and he replied that it required consultation, but did not require action. Moreover, any of the parties could act before consulting. He was not asked the obvious question as to whether the U.S. could also act independently of the other parties in unilaterally implementing the treaty. (This interpretation was subsequently placed on the treaty, and was used to help to justify U.S. involvement in the war.)

Dulles pointed out that the language of article IV was deliberately designed to avoid the constitutional questions that had been

[147] *PP*, DOD, ed., book 1, IV. A. 1., p. 3.

[148] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty*, 83d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954).

raised about the so-called "automaticity" provision of NATO (an attack on one is an attack on all). Instead, it was provided in article IV that an attack on one of the parties would endanger the peace and security of each party. Moreover, language was added with respect to acting in accordance with "constitutional processes." No one on the committee asked the Secretary what was meant by this phrase, but the question was discussed later in an executive session of the committee on January 13, 1955, when the committee, then under the new leadership of the Democrats, (who regained control of the Senate and the House in the election of 1954) heard Dulles again.[149]

> Senator Smith. And you used the words "constitutional processes," having in mind that the President undoubtedly would come to Congress in case of any threat of danger in the area, unless we had some sudden emergency.
>
> Secretary Dulles. Unless the emergency were so great that there had to be some prompt action to save a vital interest of the United States, then the normal process would of course be to act through Congress if it is in session, and if not in session, to call Congress.

In another open hearing on January 19, former Republican Representative Hamilton Fish testified against the treaty, objecting to its warlike character, and the danger of U.S. military involvement in Indochina in the future. He proposed a "reservation" to the treaty, as follows: "No United States ground, air or naval forces shall engage in any defense actions in accordance with the provisions of this treaty before the Congress has consented to their use against Communist armed attack or armed aggression by a declaration of war."

In a final executive session on January 21, 1955, the Foreign Relations Committee discussed Fish's proposal, as well as the question of Congress' role.[150] Senator Smith took the position that the treaty required the President to get congressional approval before using U.S. forces, except in an emergency. He was asked whether the President could retaliate immediately if U.S. ships were attacked. He replied that he could, but that "constitutional processes mean and imply that the Congress be a part of any action. . . ." He was then asked whether the Fish proposal should be accepted. He said it should not be; that the President should be able to come to Congress for approval of military action short of a full-scale declared conflict. Senator Morse, a new member of the committee, pointed out that a situation might arise "where we might want to authorize the President of the United States to take certain military defensive action to protect American interest short of a declaration of war . . . a resolution of approval or a congressional directive, so to speak, to the President, without getting us involved in war, at least at that point." This, he said, would be a "constitutional process."

Senator Mansfield said he agreed with Smith, and that ". . . there was no doubt in the minds of any of us [at Manila] as to just what that meant; that anything short of an immediate and direct

---

[149] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VII, pp. 1-24.
[150] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-63.

emergency under the terms of this treaty, any action contemplated, would have to be brought before the Senate for consideration and disposition."

> Senator Capehart. In other words, there is no possibility then for the President under this treaty to go to war on the scale, let us say, of the Korean war, without getting a declaration of war by Congress. Is that your thought?
>
> Senator Mansfield. That is my understanding.

The new chairman of the committee, Senator George, who had been closely involved in action on the NATO Treaty, took the position that it was impossible to define or delimit the power of the President to use the armed forces under the SEATO Treaty, even though he recognized Capehart's concern that the President might define an "emergency" as he saw fit. "I do not think any President under our Constitution," George said, "can go all around the world and pick out a spot and say, 'Here is a vital interest' or 'The lives or liberty or property of an American citizen is at stake that requires emergency action.' But happily, I think that the President of the United States is not disposed to take that extreme view in this instance, and while we do not know who else may be President of the United States, I do not believe we should undertake to delimit a power here which we cannot do to our own satisfaction, because I assure you that if we could have done it in the NATO Treaty, it would have been done." Except for Capehart, members of the committee expressed agreement with George's position. Among these was Fulbright, who made, in retrospect, an interesting statement: ". . . there is no way to escape the risk of having someone possibly who is arbitrary or ill advised . . . we can only rely on our good sense not to elect Presidents who are so unwise or arbitrary or uncivilized as to exercise arbitrary powers under the President's powers, which he does have."

SEATO was approved by the Foreign Relations Committee 14-1, with Langer in the minority. No action was taken on Fish's proposal. In its report, the committee said that after discussing the matter it had decided against "throwing open the entire controversial topic of the relative orbit of power between the executive and the legislative branches." For the same reason, it also decided against trying to "develop the meaning of 'constitutional processes.' "[151]

Senate debate on SEATO was also perfunctory, with no dissent and no opposition votes except for Langer.[152] Perhaps this was symbolic not only of the broad congressional consensus in support of SEATO, but the nature of the commitment itself. As Chester Cooper, who was a member of the delegation, commented, ". . . realists in Washington recognized that SEATO was primarily a morale building exercise, and in the last analysis both the conference and its treaty organization were frail instruments for either the military containment of China or as a bulwark against Communist subversion."[153]

---

[151] S. Exec. Rept. 84-1, p. 12.

[152] *CR*, vol. 101, pp. 1049-1066.

[153] *The Lost Crusade*, pp. 112-113. For the French viewpoint, especially the way in which the French viewed SEATO as the U.S "guarantee" for Indochina that the U.S. had refused to give at Geneva, see Lacoutre and Devillers, *End of A War*, ch. 25.

Also of interest are the perceptive comments of the military representative on the U.S. delegation to the SEATO Conference, Vice Adm. Arthur C. Davis (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs), in his report to the Secretary of Defense:[154]

> As you know, the Manila Conference convened following Communist military achievements in Indochina and political and psychological successes at Geneva. Against this background the effort of the Manila Conference to construct a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific was directed in large measure to recovering from the psychological blow thus administered to the Free World. Much of what was said at the Conference bore witness to the preeminence of psychological objectives in the thinking of the participating States. In a real sense, the Treaty that emerged at Manila is a response to the Geneva Agreements.
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> The United States was faced in this issue, I believe, with the dilemma of attempting to attain two objectives that were not completely compatible: on the one hand there was a desire to place the Communists on notice as clearly as possible that further aggression in the area would meet with effective collective counter-action. Such unequivocal notification would tend to enhance the psychological effect of the Treaty on the Free World and the deterrent effect on the Communists. Yet on the other hand, in spite of the greater psychological effect that a strongly worded Treaty might have, the attainment of this objective was necessarily limited by the extent to which the United States, in its own interest could undertake advance military commitments under the Treaty in restriction of its freedom of action. A further limitation was the fact that the United States can commit itself to take military action only in accordance with its Constitutional processes. Thus, opposed to the objective of maximum psychological effect was the necessity that the United States retain essential freedom of action, and avoid treaty commitments that were inconsistent with Constitutional requirements and therefore prejudicial to support for ratification of the Treaty by the Senate.
>
> The Treaty as it stands agreed is in effect a reconciliation of these conflicting objectives. At the moment it serves more a psychological than a military purpose. The area is no better prepared than before to cope with Communist aggression. As time goes on, however, the Treaty can provide a nucleus for coordinated defense, and may rally presently uncommitted States to the non-Communist side.

The Formosa Resolution

Beginning in September 1954, the China problem, which continued to dominate U.S. policy in the Far East, became more serious, and once again there was a flurry of activity in Washington as the government sought to deal with this new situation. This led to Con-

[154] *PP*, DOD ed., book 10, pp 746–747.

gress' passage of the Formosa Resolution authorizing the President to protect Formosa and the adjacent Pescadores Islands against attacks by the Communist Chinese. Because of the effects of these events on the attitudes of U.S. policymakers toward Asia and toward Indochina, as well as the significance of the Formosa Resolution for the policymaking system itself, it is important to review briefly what occurred.

The Formosa Straits crisis, which began at about the time of the Manila Conference on SEATO, and may have been, at least in part, a response to that development, arose when the Communist Chinese began military action against some of the small islands close to the coast of China (some within a couple of miles), the so-called "offshore islands," which were occupied by the Nationalists. (There were three groups, the Tachens, the Quemoys, and the Matsus, but the first of these, being more difficult to defend, was not considered as important as the other two groups, and the Nationalists subsequently withdrew from them.) This caused an immediate and very strong reaction in Washington, where there was growing concern about protecting what was called the "Western Pacific Island chain," of which Formosa was a part. The JCS advocated bombing China (Ridgway dissented) because of the adverse psychological effects of losing the offshore islands, but the Chiefs agreed that they were not required for the defense of Formosa, and Eisenhower refused to go to war over the issue.[155]

In early January 1955, the Chinese attacked the offshore islands again, and this time the administration decided that the situation might become serious enough to require U.S. action. To warn the Chinese, as well as to prepare for possible action against China, Eisenhower asked Congress on January 24, 1955, to approve the Formosa Resolution.

Prior to sending the resolution to Congress, Secretary Dulles had discussed with his Legal Adviser, Herman Phleger, whether it was necessary to get Congress' approval. This is the record of that conversation:[156]

> The Sec. said there is some question about asking Congress for authority on the theory the President has it. P. has thought of it—other resolutions use "authorize." He will be up to show the Sec. some drafts. P. said a constitutional argument would be very bad. The Sec. referred to Wilson's asking Congress to arm ships. P. said the Pres. really has to go to Congress.

Dulles also asked his congressional affairs adviser, Thruston Morton, whether Walter George should see the draft of the resolution before it was sent to Congress, and Morton replied that he should, as should Chairman Richards of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Republican counterpart in both committees.[157] This was done.

The text of the Formosa resolution as it was submitted to Congress was as follows:

> That the President of the United States be and hereby is authorized to employ the Armed Forces of the United States as

---

[155]See Eisenhower's memoirs for a discussion of these events.
[156]Dulles Telephone Calls Series, Jan. 21, 1955.
[157]*Ibid.*, Jan. 22, 1955

he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the securing and protection of such related portions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.

The resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, and shall so report to the Congress.

This resolution was the first of a series of resolutions passed by Congress during the 1950s and 1960s, of which the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was the sixth and last, which approved or authorized Presidential use of the armed forces to protect a country or countries, or declared U.S. determination to defend a country or an area.[158]

In part because it was a new way of securing congressional consent to use force, based on getting a prior commitment from Congress, and in part because of the great controversy over the Formosa question, the resolution was hotly debated, especially in the Senate. Although it passed easily, 410–3 in the House and 83–3 in the Senate, and without any amendments, there was considerable apprehension that Congress was, for the first time in its history, voting to delegate to the President the power to declare war. Many Members agreed with the characterization of the resolution by Senators Barkley of Kentucky and Byrd of Virginia, (which was given greater currency by Senator Morse), as a "predated declaration of war."

Secretary Dulles met in executive session on January 24, 1955, with the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees sitting as a joint committee. He told the group that unless the U.S. acted, this "probing operation" could lead to a conclusion by the Communists that the U.S. was not going to defend its interests, at which point ". . . the situation will disintegrate. Then I think that we will be faced with the clear alternative between what would be a general war with China, which might also, under the treaty between China and Russia, involve Soviet Russia, or an abandonment of the entire position in the western Pacific."

During 3 days of executive sessions on the resolution, the joint committee indicated two principal concerns. The first was whether the resolution should be limited to defense of Formosa and the adjacent Pescadores Islands. (The language of the resolution gave the President the option of defending the offshore islands, as well as taking "such other measures" as he considered "required or appropriate" in defending Formosa and the Pescadores.) Motions to exclude the offshore islands were defeated in committee and on the Senate floor, in part, as Senator Russell stated so forcefully in committee, because the purpose of the resolution—to threaten China

[158]These were, besides the Formosa and Gulf of Tonkin Resolutions, the Middle East Resolution in 1957, the Cuban Resolution in 1962, the Berlin Resolution in 1962, and the Resolution on Communist Subversion in the Western Hemisphere in 1965.

with war—was so momentous as to make the question of the offshore islands seem inconsequential.[159]

The other concern expressed by many members of the joint committee was what Congress would be doing by approving the resolution, and the effect of this on the war power of Congress. Dulles testified, as the President had stated in sending the resolution to Congress, that the President did not necessarily need the resolution in order to act, but he added that there was "some doubt whether the President could take the action that might be necessary without the approval of Congress." To clarify the legal-constitutional question, and to indicate to the world that the U.S. had a united position, he thought it was essential for Congress to pass the resolution.

In response to questions, Dulles stated that under the resolution the President could order U.S. forces to strike first, but he dismissed the possibility that the resolution would encourage Presidential warmaking. ". . . there has never been any President of the United States who was not able, if he wanted to, to involve this United States in war. . . . There is nothing that the Congress can do to diminish effectively that danger, because if the President wants to get us into a war, resolution or no resolution in my opinion he can do it."[160]

In a question of significance for later events in Vietnam, Dulles was asked whether, if the resolution were approved, and the U.S. then became involved in a "progressively developing" war with China, it would be necessary for the President to return to Congress for a declaration of war. Dulles replied that he doubted whether such an action would be required, but that the President would, of course, come back to Congress for approval of additional funds or forces.[161]

Most members of the Senate joint committee, as well as of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (which held an afternoon's executive session hearing on the resolution),[162] agreed that the resolution, in the words of Senator Morse, "calls for no power that the President of the United States doesn't already have as a matter of constitutional power."[163] Several Members, especially Mansfield in the Senate and Judd in the House, went even further, arguing that because it expressly "authorized" action by the President, it might be considered a precedent which would limit the ability of the President to act in the future. Mansfield asked whether a resolution supporting the President's constitutional powers would not be preferable:[164]

> Senator Mansfield. Mr. Secretary, I would like to have your opinion of a concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the President has the full confidence of Congress in the exercise of his powers as Commander in Chief to deploy Armed Forces and so forth.

---

[159] See the excellent discussion in *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VII, pp 256 ff.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 122.
[161] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[162] See *HFRC His. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pt. 2, pp. 371 ff.
[163] *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VII, p. 116.
[164] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

I ask for your opinion because I am somewhat disturbed at the possibility that the President may be abdicating in a sense a power to us which he already has, and I want to see the President retain his full powers as Commander in Chief and retain freedom of action accordingly.

At the same time, I want the Congress to maintain its powers. . . .

Secretary Dulles. . . . I am confident that the President would not regard that as adequate under the present circumstances. You may feel that the President has authority to use the Armed Forces of the United States as contemplated by this resolution, that he already has that authority. I say that the President himself does not feel that, the Attorney General does not feel that, the legal adviser at the State Department does not feel that. And I would suspect that there were a good many people in Congress who did not feel that.

In reporting the resolution, both the House Foreign Affairs Committee (which approved the resolution 28–0) and the Senate joint committee (which approved the resolution 27–2, with Langer and Morse in opposition) touched on these concerns, taking the position on the war powers issue that the resolution did not, in the words of the Senate joint committee, "enter into the field of controversy over the relative powers of the President and the Congress."[165] The Senate report added, "It does call for the two branches of the Government to stand together in the face of a common danger. With such unity there can be no question that the necessary constitutional powers exist for such action as may be required to meet the kind of emergency contemplated by the resolution."

Both reports emphasized that the resolution was intended to clarify U.S. intentions and to act as a deterrent. Both reports also recognized that the President was being authorized, in the words of the House report, ". . . to decide the time, the place, and the substance of defensive action that he may find necessary to take. . . ." The Senate report specifically approved a possible "preemptive" or first strike by which the President could act first, "in the event Chinese Communist forces should be grouped in such a way as to present a clear and immediate threat to the security of Formosa or the Pescadores."

House debate on the resolution was brief and perfunctory, in part because the Rules Committee had decided to keep debate to a minimum by reporting the resolution under a "closed rule" allowing no amendments. The Rules Committee chairman, Howard W. Smith (D/Va.), set the tone by his opening statement, in which he said ". . . it is the earnest hope of the Democratic leadership that when this resolution comes to a vote at least on the Democratic side there shall not be a dissenting voice heard." And a high-ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Mendell Rivers (D/S.C.), was even more fervent: ". . . I am voting today," he declared, "to give him [the President] authority to use whatever is necessary, including nuclear weapons, which he has marked for the Chinese Communists, and I hope he will start at Peking and work right down."[166] Others, however, expressed the belief that the resolution

[165] H. Rept. 84–4, and S Rept 84–13.
[166] *CR*, vol. 101, p. 675.

would promote peace. Only three Members of the House voted against the resolution—Graham Barden (D/N.C.), Timothy P. Sheehan (R/Ill.), and Eugene Siler (R/Ky.).

In the Senate there was a somewhat longer but also uneventful debate, and in the end only Langer, Morse and Herbert H. Lehman (D/N.Y.) opposed the resolution.[167]

What was eventful, however, was the passage by Congress of the first "predated declaration of war," thus establishing a precedent that would have more serious consequences in the years ahead. As for the Formosa Resolution itself, it was repealed by Congress in 1974[168] as part of Congress' attempt, based on its experience in the Vietnam war, to clear the books of legislation by which it had authorized or approved advance, open-ended military action by the President in the Far East.

Although the Formosa Resolution may have helped to establish precedents that Congress later regretted, this use of such a resolution as a consensual device for bridging the separation of powers, and enabling the U.S. Government to speak with one voice on an important foreign affairs problem, appeared at the time, as on earlier occasions during and after World War II, to be an effective way of achieving national unity and supporting national policy. It also produced generally positive results, as evidenced by the fact that in 1955, and again in 1958, the Eisenhower administration's handling of the situation appeared to be successful, thus confirming claims that the resolution would act as a deterrent, and was therefore a step toward peace.

---

[167]The House debate was on January 25, 1955, and the Senate's on January 26–28. After passing the Formosa Resolution, the Senate also approved on February 9, 1955, a mutual defense treaty with Nationalist China (the Republic of China) which had been negotiated during the fall of 1954. For the executive session hearings and markup on that treaty see *SFRC His Ser.*, vol. VII, pp. 309 ff. The report was Exec. Rept. 84-2. Senate debate took place on February 9. The vote was 65–6. Those voting against were Democrats Dennis Chavez (N.M.), Albert Gore (Tenn.), Estes Kefauver (Tenn.), Herbert Lehman (N.Y.), Wayne Morse (Ore.), and Republican William Langer (N.D).

[168]Public Law 93-475. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had already been repealed in 1970.

CHAPTER 6

COUNTER-REVOLUTION AND "NATION BUILDING" DURING THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE WARS

During September and October 1954, as the U.S. continued to take determined action to support the Diem government, the political turmoil in South Vietnam increased, and many American officials doubted that Diem would be able to remain in power. Faced with this situation, the U.S. Government sought to rally support for Diem in Vietnam, in France, and in the United States itself. In Vietnam, Ambassador Heath, Lansdale, and Fishel, worked to head off the threat of a coup by General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Army, (and the son of former Prime Minister Nguyen Van Tam).[1] At the same time, Heath tried to persuade General Paul Ely (then French Commissioner in Indochina and Chief of French Union forces in the area) and other French representatives to give full support to Diem. (The French preferred former Prime Ministers Nguyen Van Tam, Tran Van Huu or Buu Loc.) Lansdale, in particular, worked on the problem of getting support for Diem from the three principal sects that dominated the politics of South Vietnam (Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen), and on persuading Diem to broaden his government to include representatives from the sects.[2] At one point in late September, Heath met with leaders of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao to emphasize U.S. support for Diem and the need for support from the sects. He said that the U.S. would not condone Hinh's proposed overthrow of Diem, but that it recognized Diem's limitations, and that if his government did not "produce results and show progress within reasonable period of time, US would naturally wish to re-examine its position."[3]

Meanwhile, Secretary Dulles waged a double-edged campaign for Diem with French and American leaders. In late September a meeting of U.S. and French officials was held in Washington, and the French representatives agreed to support the Diem govern-

---

[1] See the various cables in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, *passim*. Heath was also trying to restrain General O'Daniel, Chief of the U.S. MAAG in Vietnam, who was a supporter of Hinh. See also Heath's letter to Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, *PP*, DOD ed., book 10, pp. 753-755.

[2] See *In the Midst of Wars*, pp. 171 ff. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979), pp. 51-52, has succinctly described these groups as follows:

"The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao represented the most potent political forces in the fragmented society of post-Geneva Vietnam. Organized along the lines of the Catholic Church with a 'pope' as head, the Cao Dai claimed two million adherents, maintained an army of 20,000, and exercised political control over much of the Mekong Delta. The Hoa Hao, with as many as one million followers and an army of 15,000, dominated the region northwest of Saigon. In addition, the Binh Xuyen, a mafia-like organization headed by a colorful brigand named Bay Vien, had an army of 25,000 men, earned hugh revenues from gambling and prostitution in Saigon, and actually ran the city's police force."

[3] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 2048-2052. Earlier, Heath had made the same points to General Bay Vien of the Binh Xuyen. See pp. 2000-2001.

ment. Following this, Dulles talked to Mendès-France, who said that although he thought Diem lacked the "necessary qualities," there was no one else with those qualities, and therefore he agreed that France should support Diem.[4]

At the same time, Dulles had help from Senator Mansfield in influencing both the French and the U.S. Congress. In conjunction with his trip to Manila in September 1954 as a U.S. representative to the SEATO Conference, Mansfield first stopped in Paris, where he and Ambassador Dillon talked to French officials, and then in Saigon, where he saw Diem. After the latter visit, Heath cabled a report to Washington, in which he said that Diem had "glossed over" his political problems "in order," Heath said, "that Senator should not have too dark a picture of situation here."[5]

Later in September, just before U.S. discussions with the French, Dulles asked Mansfield (then in Berlin on a trip) for his appraisal of the situation in Vietnam and of Diem's chances. Mansfield sent Washington a cable which Dulles was then able to use, particularly with the French, but also within the executive branch itself, in urging support for Diem.

In his cable, Mansfield said:[6]

> The political crisis in south Vietnam arises from the insistence of Diem on forming a government that is free of corruption and dedicated to achieving genuine national independence and internal amelioration . . . only a govt of the kind Diem envisions—and it would be a govt worthy of our support—has much chance of survival, eventually free of outside support because only such a govt can hope to achieve a degree of popular support as against the Viet Minh. If Diem fails, the alternative is a govt composed of his present opponents, no combination of which is likely to base itself strongly in the populace. Such a govt would be indefinitely dependent on support of the French and could survive only so long as the latter are able to obtain Viet Minh acquiescence in its survival.

He added, however, that the "fundamental question . . . may well be not can Diem form a worthy govt but do the French really want Diem and what he stands for to succeed?"

On October 15, 1954, Mansfield's report on his trip to Vietnam was issued.[7] In Vietnam, he said, "events have now reached a stage of acute crisis. . . . Unless there is a reversal of present trends, all of Vietnam is open in one way or another to absorption by the Vietminh." In order for a government to survive, he said, it would have to be based on "genuine nationalism," "deal effectively with corruption," and demonstrate "a concern in advancing the welfare

---

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 2101, 2115.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 2002.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 2056. Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 118, quotes a discussion of the subject which he had with Kenneth Young, then in FE: " 'We realized we had to proceed carefully with the French,' Young has recalled, 'so when they made clear their position on Diem, we sent a cable to Senator Mansfield, of the Foreign Relations Committee, who was abroad, asking him what he thought of Diem as Premier. Mansfield was an old friend of Diem's and we knew what the answer would be in advance, of course, but it stunned the French.' "

[7] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report on Indochina*, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield on a Study Mission to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Committee Print, 83d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954). Representatives Vorys and Richards of the Foreign Affairs Committee also made a trip to Vietnam in the fall of 1954, and reached conclusions similar to Mansfield's. H Rept 84-295.

of the Vietnamese people." If Diem were forced out of office, he questioned the "salvagability" of U.S. policy toward Vietnam, and concluded, therefore, that if the Diem government fell, ". . . the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in Free Vietnam."

Diem, Mansfield said later, reprinted and distributed 100,000 copies of the report.[8] Dulles also made frequent reference to it, especially in conversations with the French.[9]

As the U.S. Government poured its energy and resources into helping Diem, however, the situation in Vietnam appeared to be continuing to deteriorate, and Diem's position seemed increasingly insecure. On October 11, Heath reported that a Hinh-led coup could come in a matter of hours. General Ely, he said, had offered Diem the protection of French armor and troops, which Diem refused.[10] After a series of meetings, in which Heath told Hinh that a coup would result in suspension of U.S. aid to the Army, and would be "disastrous" for Hinh personally,[11] the threat was momentarily lifted.

In Washington, meanwhile, the President had signed the letter to Diem (which had originally been suggested by Heath in July, as was mentioned earlier), but its delivery was being delayed, in part because of the situation in Vietnam, but also because of continuing disagreements between State and Defense on the U.S. program. Secretary of Defense Wilson was still strongly opposed to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In a meeting of the NSC on September 24, and again in a meeting with the President and Dulles on October 19, Wilson stated that the U.S. should "get completely out of the area."[12] In another NSC meeting on October 26, after the Eisenhower letter had been given to Diem, Wilson continued to argue that the U.S. should get out of Vietnam. "These people should be left to stew in their own juice," he said. This exchange ensued:[13]

> The President replied by pointing out to Secretary Wilson that what we were doing in Indochina was being done for our own purposes and not for the French. If we continued to retreat in this area the process would lead to a grave situation from the point of view of our national security. Accordingly, the President expressed a preference for Admiral Radford's earlier view that we should try to get the French out of the Indochina area. To the President's point Secretary Wilson replied that if we had ever been in control of Indochina, as we had once been in the Philippines, he would feel differently about it. As matters stood, however, he could see nothing but grief in store for us if we remained in this area.

The military also continued raising questions about the U.S. training role in Vietnam that the State Department was insisting

---

[8] *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 2379. For the reaction in Paris and in Saigon to Mansfield's report see pp. 2141-2142, 2145.
[9] See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 2165.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 2131.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 2130.
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 2059, 2142.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 2185-2186.

upon, saying that the precondition of local political stability still had not been met, and that the limit on MAAG personnel imposed by the Geneva settlement (which set a ceiling on the numbers of foreign military personnel permitted in South Vietnam) would make such a program impossible in any event.[14]

There was also a sharp disagreement between State and Defense on the role, and therefore the cost, of the proposed Vietnamese Armed Forces. Defense (JCS) argued that they should provide limited defense against external attack, as well as internal subversion, and that the initial cost would be about $500 million. State argued that SEATO would defend Vietnam, and that Vietnamese forces should be used against subversion, which should not cost more than about $100 million.[15] (If the Viet Minh waged an "out-out" attack, Dulles said in a State Department staff meeting, ". . . he foresaw American bombing of Tonkin and probably general war with China. Our concept envisages a fight with nuclear weapons rather than the commitment of ground forces.")[16]

Despite Wilson's reservations and the objections of the JCS, Dulles' position prevailed, and the State Department proposals were approved by the NSC and the President. At the NSC meeting on October 22, 1954, at which the training program and the letter to Diem were given final approval, Radford restated the JCS objections. To this, "Speaking with conviction, the President observed that in the lands of the blind, one-eyed men are kings. What we wanted, continued the President, was a Vietnamese force which would support Diem. Therefore let's get busy and get one, but certainly not at a cost of $400 million a year." He ordered that an "urgent program" of U.S.-supported training should begin, with the primary objective of providing troops loyal to Diem, in order to "assist him in establishing and sustaining a broadly-based government in Free Vietnam. . . ."[17]

In explaining this action to Dulles (who was in Paris) and to Heath, Under Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr. (who had replaced Smith) said, in a cable drafted by Kenneth Young (who had replaced Bonsal as the Director of the Office of Philippine and South Asia Affairs), "If a government of national union is not formed, or if formed does not receive full and unreserved support of national army or other groups and personalities throughout free Vietnam, or if Diem is removed from office or effectively prevented from developing broad government, the US will have to reconsider its aid to Vietnam and in particular whether it will continue even limited, short term assistance to prevent a critical emergency." In keeping with the *pas de deux* between the State Department and Senator Mansfield, the cable added, "In this respect conclusions of Senator Mansfield are relevant. At this time we see no satisfactory alternative governmental solution insofar as effective US assistance or forthcoming Congressional support are concerned."[18]

---

[14] *PP*, DOD ed., book 10, pp. 756–760, 771–774

[15] Dulles made these points in a letter to Wilson and in the meeting of the two of them with Eisenhower. See *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 2132, 2142

[16] *Ibid.*, p 2125

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 2157. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 229–230

[18] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, p. 2160.

Ironically, on the same day that the President and the NSC approved giving the letter of commitment to Diem, Heath cabled a report to Washington that said, in effect: "Diem must go."

> I believe there has been every reason to have upheld Diem to date since he does represent an ideal and he enjoys certain prestige and confidence among masses of population. He has largely lost during course continuing deadlock, prestige and confidence of literate, articulate sections of Vietnamese community. There is still no worthy successor in sight, and we must gain time to prepare what Mendès-France calls "another structure of government." We cannot however lose much time. Everyone in Embassy is convinced that Diem cannot organize and administer strong government.[19]

The letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem on October 23, 1954, has frequently been referred to as the beginning of the U.S. commitment to Vietnam, and thus as the first in the series of decisions leading to U.S. belligerency in Vietnam. This is correct only in the sense that the first commitment and offer of assistance in 1950 had been made through the French, whereas the proffer of U.S. help in 1954 was based on direct assistance to the Government of Vietnam. As was noted earlier, however, the U.S. commitment to the defense of Vietnam and of Southeast Asia began in 1950 and was reaffirmed and strengthened at numerous points after that time. Eisenhower's letter to Diem was another step in a progression that began with Truman. It was not by any means the beginning of the U.S. commitment, but it did represent a new era in U.S. relations with Vietnam, and a new role for the United States.

These were the key paragraphs in Eisenhower's letter to Diem:[20]

> We have been exploring ways and means to permit our aid to Viet-Nam to be more effective and to make a greater contribution to the welfare and stability of the Government of Viet-Nam. I am, accordingly, instructing the American Ambassador to Viet-Nam to examine with you in your capacity as Chief of Government, how an intelligent program of American aid given directly to your Government can serve to assist Viet-Nam in its present hour of trial, provided that your Government is prepared to give assurances as to the standards of performance it would be able to maintain in the event such aid were supplied.
>
> The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Viet-Nam in undertaking needed reforms. It hopes that such aid, combined with your own continuing ef-

---

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 2152.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 2167. When Heath gave the letter to Diem he said he did not tell Diem ". . . the lengths that we are prepared to go to support his government, since much encouragement would, with reason I fear, encourage him in his instinctive tendency to reject any compromise in forming and administering his government." *Ibid.*, p. 2169. This comment suggests the difficulty of knowing the substance or content of the U.S. "commitment" to Vietnam, then or at any other time.

forts, will contribute effectively toward an independent Viet-Nam endowed with a strong government. Such a government would, I hope, be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance, that it will be respected both at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people.

It will be noted that Eisenhower's letter avoided stating or restating any specific U.S. commitment to Vietnam. Instead, it emphasized the need for Diem and his government to undertake the reforms which the U.S. felt were necessary in order for South Vietnam to survive, and the standards of performance which were expected in return for U.S. agreement to provide assistance to Vietnam.

There is no evidence of any consultations by the executive branch with Congress about the offer of assistance contained in Eisenhower's letter to Diem, although the foreign policy committees may have received prior notification that the letter was being sent. The absence of such consultation would not be at all surprising, however, given the virtually solid consensus in Congress in support of the administration's position, and Mansfield's very strong support in particular. The existence of this consensus is further demonstrated by the total absence of public comment by Members of Congress when the letter was made public. (Lack of comment was probably also due to the fact that Congress was not in session at the time, and to the fact that the Eisenhower letter was generally perceived as being a renewal and strengthening of the U.S. position rather than a new commitment.)

The Collins Mission

In late October 1954, when it appeared that little progress was being made, the U.S. decided to send to Vietnam a prestigious, high-ranking envoy as a temporary replacement for Heath. In a meeting with the President, Dulles suggested that this should be a general, and mentioned several names, including Maxwell Taylor, who later served as U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam. Eisenhower agreed with the idea, but thought Gen. J. Lawton Collins was the best qualified. Collins was called in the next day, and left a few days later, having been appointed Special U.S. Representative with rank of Ambassador.[21] Dulles, Collins said, told him, ". . . the chance of my mission was only one in ten, but that the importance of checking the spread of communism in Southeast Asia was worth the effort."[22]

At the same time, in an effort to steady Diem, an important and secret personal message to Diem from Wesley Fishel, then in Washington, was sent to Saigon on October 30 by State Department cable. It read as follows:[23]

Very dear Friend: There is no longer time for meditation. You must move ahead boldly, confidently, and with trust in

[21]See *ibid.*, pp 2194, 2198, 2205 For the Collins' mission see also chapter 13 of Spector, *Advice and Support.*

[22]Gen. J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe*, An Autobiography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 379.

[23]*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p 2196.

your friends. Compromise with Hinh as Heath has urged is only course possible for the moment. There is no alternative. Be wise and patient. Give our military advisors time and opportunity to become effective. We will not permit Hinh or others to use American aid for their own selfish purposes. Act as a statesman. If Hinh states publicly that he and army will cooperate with your government, accept his offer graciously, as we agreed weeks ago. Tour provinces with him and also members of your government to show people you are concerned about their welfare and that government and army are united against communist danger. Reference President Eisenhower's message of support, we await your statement of approval to proceed with technical assistance program. You must act now if you want to save your people and your country. Sorry I am not with you now when you need me. I shall come to Saigon again however as soon as possible. Sincere best wishes and thanks for your many kindnesses. Wesley Fishel.

Collins and his party (which included Paul Sturm, the Foreign Service officer whose memorandum on Mansfield's position was cited earlier) arrived in Vietnam on November 8, 1954, and within a few days he reported that he was very favorably impressed with Hinh He was less sure about Diem.[24]

After reviewing the situation, Collins proposed to General Ely that at the beginning of 1955 the U.S. would assume full responsibility for all training of Vietnamese forces (but would use some French personnel); that the French Expeditionary Corps would be maintained at a level adequate to guard against an attack from the North (U.S. aid for French forces, then about $400 million a year, would drop, however, to $100 million); that the Vietnamese Army should become fully autonomous by June 1955, and that its size (then 170,000), would be reduced to 77,000 by that date. (This was later changed to 100,000 and then to 150,000.) Collins also recommended that the Vietnamese Army should contain a small "blocking force" of combat units to be used, if necessary, against external attack, rather than for the entire military establishment to be directed toward controlling internal subversion.[25]

The French objected to having the U.S. take full responsibility for training, as well as replacement of other French personnel, and Dulles warned that the assumption by the U.S. of such a leading role might have adverse results: "We do not wish to be saddled with full responsibility for what happens in Vietnam," he cabled Collins, "because prospective developments there are very dubious. Furthermore, it seems clear that if Vietnam is to be saved it will require full French cooperation. Our feeling is that if we force them and if they finally agree to accepting replacement French personnel (which we do not believe they are willing to do) it would be only a nominal agreement which would create serious difficulties for us with the French and saddle us with the full burden."[26]

---

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 2245, 2250.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 2251–2254. These and several other stipulations in Collins' seven-point proposal became known as the Collins-Ely agreement

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 2271.

The Pentagon's reaction to Collins' proposal was that it was generally acceptable, even though there was some question as to whether Vietnam could be adequately defended after the French withdrew all of their forces, in view of the small size of the proposed Vietnamese combat force, and the fact that no U.S. ground forces were being committed to SEATO. There was also the continuing problem of political stability: "The Joint Chiefs of Staff further consider that the chaotic internal political situation within Viet-Nam will hamper the development of loyal and effective security forces for the support of the Diem Government and that it is probable that the development of such forces will not result in political and military stability within South Viet-Nam. Unless the Vietnamese themselves show an inclination to make the individual and collective sacrifices required to resist Communism no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay a complete Communist victory in South Viet-Nam."[27]

The end result of U.S.-French discussions of Collins' proposals was that in February 1955 the French finally acceded to the U.S. assumption of training and to the autonomy of the Vietnamese Army, but the French responded by cutting their expeditionary force to 35,000 men by the end of 1955 rather than the level of 100,000 previously planned for that date.[28]

Meanwhile, there were important political developments in Vietnam. In late September 1954, Diem included in his government several representatives of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. After persuading the two religious sects to cooperate, Diem then moved to eliminate Hinh. Late in October, when it looked as if Hinh was going to stage his threatened coup, Lansdale offered to take several of Hinh's top assistants for a visit to the Philippines. Lansdale said he asked Hinh if he would "like a visit to the nightclubs of Manila," but Hinh declined. The others accepted, and left with Lansdale for a week-long trip. Lansdale said he left them in the Philippines and hurried back to Saigon, where "General Hinh told me ruefully that he had called off his coup. He had forgotten that he needed his chief lieutenants for key roles in the coup and couldn't proceed while they were out of the country with me. I never did figure out how serious Hinh was with his talk of overthrowing the prime minister."[29]

Hinh continued to refuse to leave office, however, despite the fact that he had been dismissed by Diem in September. Finally, Generals Collins and Ely persuaded him to do so, and he left permanently for France in late November. At this point, General Collins urged Diem to appoint Phan Huy Quat (an M.D., and a leader of the northern Dai Viets, a strong political faction, who had served in previous Cabinets) as Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Defense and Interior, or to one of these two Cabinet posts. Diem refused, asserting that this would be strongly opposed by the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. On December 13, Collins, deeply troubled by Diem's position, told Washington, in response to a cable from

---

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 2310-2311.
[28] For a good explanation of these events see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 224-225.
[29] *In the Midst of Wars*, p. 175.

Dulles requesting a report on the situation, that he thought the U.S. had three alternatives in Vietnam:

"(a) Continue support of Diem Government.

"(b) Support establishment of another government which may be able to save situation.

"(c) Gradually withdraw support from Vietnam."

Collins said he was ". . . quite convinced that Diem and brothers Luyen and Nhu are afraid to turn over control of armed forces to Quat or any other strong man. They may also fear Quat as potential successor to Diem and hence are doing everything they can to keep him out of any post in government." Collins said that although he recognized the "disadvantages of forcing Diem to accept 'American choice' of Quat," continuation of the ". . . status quo . . . is merely postponing evil day of reckoning as to when, if ever, Diem will assert type of leadership that can unify this country and give it chance of competing with hard, effective, unified control of Ho Chi Minh." He said that with Lansdale's help he was checking on opposition of sects to Quat, and would then consider whether to try to induce the sects not to block Quat's appointment. This would include suggesting to the Hoa Hao that "with Quat in defense all rice for armed forces would be purchased from Hoa Hao," as well as telling both sects that "any rebellion would lead to withdrawal all American aid and inevitable victory for Ho Chi Minh who would certainly not tolerate private empires of Hoa Hao or Cao Dai."[30]

Concerning the second of the three U.S. alternatives in Vietnam, Collins told Washington:

> Realize abandonment of Diem would embarrass US in view our public support present government. However, if it proves necessary, believe such embarrassment would prove insignificant compared to blow to anti-Communism in Asia and throughout world if US-supported free Vietnam were lost to Communism. I believe it would be better to take slight loss of prestige in near future while time to attempt other solution remains, rather than continue support Diem should failure appear relatively certain. We have not reached this point, though I have grave misgivings re Diem's chance of success.

In view of Diem's possible failure, Collins recommended two options. The first would be to make Quat the Prime Minister. "Second alternative is to have Bao Dai return to Vietnam under 'state of emergency' conditions, assume Presidency of Council and rally entire nation to unified action. What is needed here more than anything else is leader who can fire imagination and patriotism of people and instill in them determination to fight for freedom of Vietnam. Bao Dai may be the last possible candidate for this task."

The third U.S. alternative—withdrawal—was the "least desirable," Collins said, but it might be the "only solution."[31]

Two days later (December 15), Collins went even further. He cabled Washington that Diem's final rejection of Quat for a post in the government had convinced him that Diem did not have the ca-

[30] *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol XIII, pp. 2363–2364.
[31] *Ibid.*, pp 2362–2366.

pacity to unify the factions in Vietnam, and that if he did not perform better in the immediate future it would be necessary for Bao Dai to return to head the government. If that was not possible, he advocated reevaluation of the U.S. position, and consideration of withdrawal. Pending a final decision about Diem's performance, he suggested that the U.S. postpone taking responsibility for training on January 1, 1955. "It is possible that by a month from now some radical improvement will have come along but I strongly doubt it. Meanwhile, I feel that we should make a sober reevaluation of the situation here before we commit over $300 million and our national prestige under current conditions."[32]

Dulles used Mansfield to answer Collins and to try to persuade Diem to accept Quat. On December 7 and 15, top State Department officials met at their request with Mansfield to discuss Collins' analysis and recommendations. These were Mansfield's conclusions as reported by Assistant Secretary of State Robertson.[33]

1. The prospects for helping Diem strengthen and uphold South Vietnam look very dim given the best of circumstances. Any elections in 1956 will probably favor the Communists.

2. Nevertheless, the United States should continue to exert its efforts and use its resources, even if it will cost a lot, to hold Vietnam as long as possible. Any other course would have a disastrous effect on Cambodia, Laos and Southeast Asia. The Senator strongly opposed the idea of abandoning our effort in Vietnam. That course of action would lead to the absorption of Cambodia and Laos by the Communists.

3. Therefore, he felt we should continue to do whatever was possible to support the government of Diem. Senator Mansfield sees no alternative Prime Minister. While recognizing Diem's weaknesses as an administrator and manager, Senator Mansfield feels we ought to continue to back Diem, strongly encourage him to make Dr. Quat Minister of Defense immediately, and urge Diem to delegate as much as possible of the day-to-day operations of the government to others. Senator Mansfield was of the opinion that General Collins' time limit of two to three weeks was playing with "political dynamite" because it was giving Diem such an awfully short time in which to show results or be replaced.

4. With respect to Mr. Robertson's point that the French would subject the Secretary to great pressure on immediately finding a replacement for Diem, Senator Mansfield took the strong position that this line of action would only compound the already great difficulties in Vietnam. It would add much confusion, take time, and probably increase the divisions within Vietnam beyond what they are today. Senator Mansfield was certain the refugees and many of the Catholic bishops and church officials would oppose the replacement of Diem. The Senator felt that Diem represented what small hope there may be in building something in Vietnam. He was against re-

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 2379-2382
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 2351.