

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THE
VIETNAM WAR
Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships
Part I
1945-1961

PREPARED FOR THE
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LETTER OF SUBMITTAL

HON. CHARLES H. PERCY,
Chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: In response to the request of the Committee on Foreign Relations for an in-depth analysis of the role of the committee, the Senate, and Congress as a whole in the Vietnam war, including major decisions of the Executive and the relationships between the two branches, I am transmitting Part I of a four-part study of this subject, covering the period 1945-61. Part II will deal with 1961-65, Part III with 1965-69, and Part IV with 1969-75.

This study is being prepared by Dr. William Conrad Gibbons, Specialist in U.S. Foreign Policy in the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division.

Sincerely,

GILBERT GUDE, *Director.*

FOREWORD

For most Americans, the Vietnam war was a national tragedy, and for many it was also an intense personal tragedy. Beginning in 1945 as a revolution against France, it eventually became a war against Communist control of state of Indochina. Before it ended, 5½ million American military personnel and thousands of American civilians had served in the area; 58,000 Americans had been killed, and more than 150,000 were wounded and hospitalized. War deaths from both sides amounted to at least 1,300,000 for the period between 1965 and 1975, approximately 45 percent of which were noncombatant civilians. Almost as many deaths, most of them civilians, were said to have occurred during the period 1945-54.

Sometimes called America's "longest war," it was also one of the most expensive in our history, costing an estimated \$150 billion in direct expenses, and probably more than \$500 billion in total costs, which is an amount nearly equal to the size of our national debt in today's currency.

The Vietnam war had a profound effect on America. It helped to unravel a general foreign policy consensus, alienate many young people, and create doubt about the viability of our government's policies. In its wake, new divisions emerged between Congress and the Executive, making it more difficult to reestablish the cooperation, trust, and continuity needed to fashion an effective bipartisan foreign policy.

Thus, by any standard, the Vietnam war represented an enormous commitment, and a grievous loss.

The Congress of the United States shares with the Executive the responsibility for decisions that led to our involvement in the Vietnam war and for approving the personnel and funds it required. Only by examining those decisions can we gain from this bitter experience the full understanding needed to act more wisely in the future.

It has been with this goal in mind that the Committee on Foreign Relations under the chairmanship of Senator John Sparkman asked the Congressional Research Service to conduct an in-depth study of the roles and relationships of Congress and the Executive in the Vietnam war.

The material and findings contained herein are the work of the Congressional Research Service, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Committee or its present or past members.

April 15, 1983.

CHARLES H. PERCY
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations.

PREFACE

This study seeks to describe and to analyze the course of U.S. public policymaking during the 30 years of the Vietnam war, beginning with the present volume (Part I) on the 1945-61 period. It does not seek to judge or to assess responsibility, but it does attempt to locate responsibility, to describe roles, and to indicate why and how decisions were made.

The study is nonpolitical and nonpartisan, as all products of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) are required to be. Occasional references in the text to "liberal" or "conservative," as well as to "internationalist" or "nationalist," "interventionist" or "noninterventionist," or the use of such adjectives as "influential" or "powerful" to denote relative influence or power, are intended to be guides to understanding rather than political labels.

A project of this size and scope requires the cooperation of many people. At the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, strong support has been provided by Chairman Charles Percy and by former Chairmen John Sparkman and Frank Church; by Staff Director Scott Cohen, and former Staff Directors Pat Holt, Norvill Jones, William Bader and Edward Sanders. Editor Jerry Ehrenfreund was very helpful in preparing the study for printing.

CRS and the author also want to express deep appreciation to those distinguished former officials of the executive and legislative branches who were chosen to represent the various facets of government involved in the making of U.S. policy toward Vietnam, and who have read and commented on some or all of Part I: Robert R. Bowie, William P. Bundy, Andrew Goodpaster, U. Alexis Johnson, and Edward G. Lansdale from the Executive; Francis Wilcox (who was subsequently in the Executive) and Carl Marcy (previously in the Executive) from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Boyd Crawford from the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

We also want to thank the many persons who are participating in this project through their oral histories. Material from some of these appear herein.

In the Congressional Research Service, Director Gilbert Gude and members of his staff have provided the support needed for such a large research project. Director Gude was a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives at the time of growing congressional involvement in the war, and his personal interest and encouragement have been very beneficial.

On the CRS director's staff, James Robinson, the Coordinator of Review, and James Price, the Coordinator of Automated Information Services, and his assistant, Robert Nickel, have been especially helpful. Mr. Robinson, an Asian analyst before becoming responsible for review, made a number of excellent suggestions for

strengthening the manuscript. Mr. Price, a former national defense analyst, encouraged and gave technical support to the interviews. Susan Finsen, the Coordinator of Management and Administrative Services, Beatrice Jones, Edgar Glick, Jeanne Hamilton and others have been most cooperative.

In the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of CRS, the author particularly wants to thank the Chief, Dr. Stanley Heginbotham, as well as Dr. Joel Woldman, the section head primarily responsible for supervision of the project, and his successor, Robert Goldich, as well as Alva Bowen and Hugh Wolff at an earlier time, for making the study possible, and for their outstanding contribution to the success of the project. Administrative support was also provided throughout by Irene Lecourt, Phyllis Fitzgerald, and Dale Shirachi. The division's library staff has also been very helpful, especially Ida Eustis, Carolyn Hatcher, and C. Winston Woodland, as well as Cheryl Mobley. Valuable research assistance in preparing Part I was provided by interns Vanesa Lide of Cornell University and Connie Skowronski of Lawrence University, under the supervision of Warren Lenhart.

Patricia L. McAdams, an attorney and former CRS employee, was the person principally associated with the preparation of the research materials, the preliminary drafting of some chapters, and the conduct of the interviews. Her excellent work and loyal collaboration have been vital to the success of the project. Dr. Anna Nelson, a historian on the faculty of George Washington University, also provided valuable assistance with the interviews and the archival research while working on contract with CRS. The author also thanks his friend, Dr. Robert Klaus, Executive Director, Illinois Humanities Council, for his encouragement and his careful review of Part I.

The study is being written while the author is Visiting Professor of Government at George Mason University (the state university for northern Virginia) under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act. The excellent Chair of the Public Affairs Department, Dr. Robert P. Clark, Jr., was responsible for this arrangement, and he and others on the faculty and in the administration of the university have provided exceptionally strong support.

Others from the university whose interest and contributions are appreciated include graduate assistants Robert Olson, who helped organize the research materials; Susan Ragland, who helped with the research; and Candace Brinkley, now a member of the faculty, who began transcribing the interviews.

The unstinting help and encouragement of Anne Bonanno, who transcribed most of the interviews, and has been responsible for typing, proofing and coding the text, as well as compiling the index and performing all other tasks involved in preparing the manuscript for publication, have been indispensable. No other person deserves more credit for assisting with completion of the present volume. Others at the George Mason University Word Processing Center have been very helpful, especially Donna Austin-Hodges, Director, Bonnie Ziegler, Virginia Berry and Charlotte Slater, as well as Byron Peters of the Academic Computing Services.

For assistance with archival materials for Part I of the study we thank John Wickman, Director, and the Eisenhower Library staff,

especially archivist David Haight; Dr. John Glennon, General Editor of the Foreign Relations Series, Office of the Historian, Department of State; Nancy Bressler, Curator of Public Affairs Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University; Sheryl Vogt, Head of the Richard B. Russell Library, University Libraries, University of Georgia; and the staff of the Legislative Records Division at the National Archives. Helen Mattas, Staff Consultant, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, has been helpful with historical references pertaining to that committee.

Permission to quote from the Dulles papers at the Eisenhower Library has been given by the Dulles Manuscript Committee, John W. Hanes, Jr., Chairman; to quote from the Richard B. Russell papers by the Richard B. Russell Library; and to quote from the Senator H. Alexander Smith papers by his daughters, Marian Smith (Mrs. H. Kenaston) Twitchell, and Helen Smith (Mrs. Samuel M.) Shoemaker, and by Princeton University Library. We appreciate the cooperation of all of these parties, as well as the cooperation of those individuals who have given permission to quote from their interviews with or letters to CRS.

None of those cited above, nor anyone else connected with the project, bears any responsibility, however, for the facts and views presented herein, which are the final responsibility of the author and CRS.

CONTENTS

	Page
LETTER OF SUBMITTAL.....	III
FOREWORD.....	V
PREFACE.....	VII
MAP:	
Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Conference	XIII
CHAPTER 1. FRANCE RESUMES CONTROL AND THE WAR BEGINS	1
Development of the U.S. Position on Trusteeships.....	7
The Communist Threat and Its Effects on U.S. Policy Toward Colonial Problems.....	17
The Executive Branch Debates U.S. Policy Toward Indochina.....	18
Congress Begins Debate on U.S. Policy in Asia	23
The War Begins in Vietnam, 1946-48.....	25
The Commitment is Made to "Containment" and to the Defense of "Free Peoples".....	26
Congress Also Approves the Use of Military Advisers	34
The Debate Over Intervening in China	38
China Falls to the Communists and Debate Begins on Defending Vietnam	48
Approval of Funds for the "General Area of China"	54
CHAPTER 2. THE U.S. JOINS THE WAR	64
The Decision to Become Involved in the War in Indochina.....	65
Congress Passes Legislation to Provide New Aid for Indochina.....	68
The Anti-Communist Offensive and NSC 68.....	71
The Effects of the Korean War.....	73
The Question of Using American Forces in Indochina.....	78
Congress Provides Additional Aid for Indochina.....	85
Developments in Indochina During 1951 as the U.S. Becomes More Involved.....	86
Congress Approves 1951 Legislation for Aid to Indochina.....	94
Renewed Concern About Indochina.....	97
Fear of Chinese Intervention	102
Deterring the Chinese.....	104
Approval of NSC 124/2	108
Congress Acts on 1952 Aid to Indochina.....	118
CHAPTER 3. PRELUDE TO FRENCH WITHDRAWAL	120
U.S. Increases Pressure on the French.....	121
Congressional Dissatisfaction with the French	129
The U.S. Increases Its Commitment.....	135
Further U.S. Efforts To Support French Forces	141
Another Reevaluation of U.S. Policy in Indochina.....	146
NSC 5405 and the Continuing Debate Over the U.S. Commitment to Defend Indochina.....	149
The Decision to Send U.S. Aircraft Technicians to Vietnam	155
The U.S. Prepares for Negotiations, and for War?.....	163
The Battle of Dien Bien Phu Begins	170
CHAPTER 4. RATTTLING THE SABER.....	174
The U.S. Announces the United Action Concept.....	176
"The Day We Didn't Go To War?".....	187
The NSC Postpones Action on Direct Intervention.....	197
Congress Debates Intervention.....	203
The British Oppose Intervention.....	207
Vice President Nixon Says Troops Might Be Sent	209

	Page
CHAPTER 4. RATTLING THE SABER—Continued	
The French Again Request U.S. Airstrikes.....	212
The Final Decision Not to Intervene at Dien Bien Phu.....	221
Dien Bien Phu Falls and the U.S. Again Considers Intervening in Indo- china.....	225
CHAPTER 5. THE NEW U.S. ROLE IN VIETNAM.....	228
Preparing to Intervene and to Take Over From the French.....	232
The Army Objects.....	237
Eisenhower Continues to Insist on Conditions, and the U.S. Pulls Away from the French.....	238
Reactions in Congress.....	243
The End of the First Indochina War.....	250
First Steps After Geneva.....	259
NSC 5429—Redefining U.S. Interests and Role.....	267
Establishment of SEATO.....	271
The Formosa Resolution.....	276
CHAPTER 6. COUNTER-REVOLUTION AND "NATION BUILDING" DURING THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE WARS.....	282
The Collins Mission.....	287
Dien Clashes with the Sects and Washington Agrees to Seek a New Government.....	293
Dien Consolidates His Power.....	299
The U.S. and the "New Vietnam": Waging the Counterrevolution.....	305
Overt Aid for "Nation-Building".....	311
Congress and Aid to Vietnam and Laos.....	316
The Colegrove Hearings.....	321
Congressional Oversight of the CIA.....	329
The Beginning of the End of Dien's "Miracle".....	331
Resumption of the Armed Struggle.....	334
Leadership in Vietnam and Laos Reconsidered.....	339
Another Step Toward the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.....	343
NOTES ON SOURCES AND STYLE.....	350
INDEX.....	353

Vietnam After the 1954 Geneva Agreement



CHAPTER 1

FRANCE RESUMES CONTROL AND THE WAR BEGINS

This chronicle of the U.S. Government and the Vietnam war begins in 1945 with the end of World War II and concludes in 1975 with the helicopter evacuation of remaining American personnel from the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

For most Members of Congress, "Indochina," as the area comprising Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was called in 1945, was a small, distant, insignificant place of little interest to the United States. It is even doubtful whether any Member of the 79th Congress sitting in 1945 had ever been to Indochina or had any direct knowledge of its peoples and cultures. But this was not unusual. The State Department itself, in part because the area had been a French colony, had only a handful of staff who were knowledgeable on the subject.

For one future Member of Congress, however, the impressions created by a visit to Vietnam in 1945 were unforgettable. In a letter to his parents, Navy Lt. Mark O. Hatfield, later a leader in Senate opposition to the war, described his feelings when his ship anchored at Haiphong:¹

It was sickening to see the absolute poverty and the rags these people are in. We thought the Philippines were in a bad way, but they are wealthy compared to these exploited people. The Philippines were in better shape before the war, but the people here have never known anything but squalor since the French heel has been on them . . . I tell you, it is a crime the way we occidentals have enslaved these people in our mad desire for money. The French seem to be the worst and are followed pretty closely by the Dutch and the English. I can certainly see why these people don't want us to return and continue to spit upon them.

Thirty-five years later Senator Hatfield reflected again on this experience:²

One of the most impressive things was to come into that Haiphong port in an early morning hour when the rising sun was reflecting on the colored tiles of the casino that was on a hill-top overlooking the harbor—sort of the Monte Carlo of Southeast Asia prior to the war—and to see, as we landed, the poverty and the absolute deprivation of the people living in squalid huts at the base of that hill. Here you had the casino, symbolic of the western colonial world, and the poverty of the people themselves, which sharpened the contrast for me between the oppression of colonialism, or occupation, or whatever, and

¹ Mark O. Hatfield, *Not Quite So Simple* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 153-154.

² Congressional Research Service (CRS) Interview with Mark Hatfield, Jan. 11, 1979.

what was emerging as a new spirit of identity for these people. It was going to be independent of any western power, France, America or any other.

When World War II ended in August 1945, the nationalist feelings observed a few weeks later by Mark Hatfield began to be expressed throughout Indochina. In Vietnam, the League for the Independence of Vietnam, popularly known as the Viet Minh, had become the dominant political force. Claiming full leadership, it had taken political control of much of the country after Japan surrendered.³ On August 26, 1945, Emperor Bao Dai abdicated in favor of the Viet Minh and its leader Ho Chi Minh, having told both the French and the Americans of the deep desire of the Vietnamese for their independence, as well as having warned the two Western powers of the consequences if the French returned. In a message in mid-August of 1945 to General Charles de Gaulle, Bao Dai said, addressing himself to the French people:⁴

You would understand better if you could see what is happening here, if you could sense the desire for independence which runs to the bottom of every heart and which no human force can curb. Even if you should manage to reestablish a French administration here, it would no longer be obeyed; each village would become a nest of resistance, each former collaborator an enemy and your officials and your colonials themselves would demand to leave this asphyxiating atmosphere. . . . We could so easily understand each other and become friends if you would drop this claim to become our masters again.

On August 20, 1945, when de Gaulle was about to meet with President Harry S Truman in Washington, Bao Dai sent a similar message to Truman, saying, in part:⁵

. . . we are opposed with all our forces to the reestablishment of French sovereignty over the territory of Vietnam under whatever regime it would be. The colonial regime no longer conforms to the present course of history. A people such as the Vietnamese people who have a two-thousand year old history and a glorious past cannot accept remaining under the domination of another people. The French people must yield to the principle of equity which the powerful American nation has proclaimed and defends. France must recognize this with good grace in order to avoid the disaster of a war breaking out on the territory of our country.

When de Gaulle conferred with Truman, however, he was told that the U.S. "offers no opposition to the return of the French Army and authority in Indochina."⁶

³For a more detailed discussion of events during this period see Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), and the first-hand account by the head of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA) mission to Vietnam in 1945, Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Also useful is the first volume in the United States Army in Vietnam series: Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington Center of Military History, United States Army, 1983).

⁴Quoted in Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970), p. 45.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶Charles de Gaulle, *The War Memoirs: Salvation, 1944-1946* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 242. See below for further discussion of the reasoning behind Truman's position.

On September 2, 1945, the Viet Minh declared the independence of Vietnam in a document which began with these words:

All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.⁷

Bao Dai's prophetic warnings were soon confirmed. During September 1945 French forces began reentering Vietnam, and on September 23 they staged a coup d'etat in Saigon. Violence erupted, and on September 25, 1945, an American was killed by Vietnamese forces resisting the return of the French. He was A. Peter Dewey, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, and the head of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services, predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency) team in Saigon. The irony is that he was known for having established close relationships with nationalist leaders. The further irony is that he, the first uniformed American to die in a war in which Congress was to play such a prominent role, was the son of a former Member of Congress, Charles S. Dewey, an isolationist Republican from Illinois (and a well-known international banker). (Lt. Col. Dewey was also the nephew of Thomas E. Dewey, Governor of New York, and Republican nominee for President in 1948.)

On October 1, 1945, several Members of the House of Representatives eulogized Lt. Col. Dewey. Of particular interest, looking back, were the comments of Representative Harold Knutson (R/Minn.), who said that the shot that killed Dewey "... may, in a sense, be another shot 'heard round the world' in awakening the American people to the necessity of deciding how far we as a Nation are going to support with military forces the colonial policies of other nations. If the death of valiant Peter Dewey ... may result in saving the lives of many other American boys, his sacrifice may not have been in vain."⁸

The reactions of Representative Knutson and of Mark Hatfield reflected the strong public and congressional opposition to colonialism that prevailed at the time. Typical of this attitude was the position of Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg (R/Mich.), the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee and the foremost Republican supporter of a bipartisan foreign policy after World War II. In a major speech in the Senate on January 10, 1945, as well as subsequently during his role as a member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Conference in San Francisco, Vandenberg emphasized the importance of having a "just peace," in which the rights of small nations would be protected. He was concerned both about the occupation by Russia of the countries of Eastern Europe and the fate of

⁷Allan Cameron (ed.), *Viet-Nam Crisis. A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 1940-1956 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 52.

⁸*Congressional Record*, vol. 91 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.), p. 9156 (hereafter cited as CR). For discussion of the incident see Patti, and R. Harris Smith, O.S.S. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 337-345. For declassified OSS reports on the incident and comments by former OSS officials see U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War*, Hearings, 92d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1972), p. 184 and appended documents.

Western European colonies. He was fearful that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was beginning to compromise the principles of the Atlantic Charter, especially the principle in paragraph 3 of the charter recognizing "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." He urged the President to stand fast. "These basic points," he said in his speech, "cannot now be dismissed as a mere nautical nimbus. They march with our armies. They sail with our fleets. They fly with our eagles. They sleep with our martyred dead. The first requisite of honest candor . . . is to re-light this torch."⁹

For many Americans, India was the colony that symbolized colonialism. But it was also the keystone of the British Empire, and American suggestions that it be given its independence after the war invariably evoked strong protests from the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who said that he had not "become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,"¹⁰ declared repeatedly that the reference in the Atlantic Charter to people's freedom to choose their form of government referred only to European countries freed from Nazi rule, and did not apply to colonies such as India. When Roosevelt specifically mentioned the problem of India, Churchill, according to his memoirs, "reacted so strongly and at such length that he [Roosevelt] never raised it verbally again."¹¹

The British were also opposed to suggestions for lessening control over other colonies, such as Indochina, because of the possible effect on their own Empire. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek both approved Roosevelt's proposal for a trusteeship for Indochina, but Churchill was vehemently against the idea. Roosevelt said he told Churchill that Chiang Kai-shek did not want either to assume control over Indochina or to be given responsibility for administering a trusteeship in Indochina. Churchill, he said, replied, "Nonsense," to which Roosevelt retorted, "Winston, this is something which you are just not able to understand. You have 400 years of acquisitive instinct in your blood and you just do not understand how a country might not want to acquire land somewhere if they can get it. A new period has opened in the world's history, and you will have to adjust to it." "The British," Roosevelt said in 1944, in recounting this episode, "would take land anywhere in the world even if it were only a rock or a sand bar."¹²

In Congress, there was strong opposition to colonialism, and widespread support for the independence of India in particular. At an executive session (closed to the public and press) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 1, 1943, the U.S. Ambassador to India, William Phillips, testified that India's demands for independence posed serious problems for the allies in the war as well as for the postwar period. This was Senator Vandenberg's entry in his diary:¹³

⁹CR, vol. 91, p. 166.

¹⁰London Times, Nov. 11, 1942.

¹¹Winston Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 209.

¹²Thomas Campbell and George C. Herring (eds.), *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), p. 40.

¹³Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr. (ed.), *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), p. 53.

Senator [Robert M.] La Follette bluntly said to Phillips that the fate of India is no longer Britain's own exclusive business, since our American boys are supposed to die there for Allied victory, and that F.D.R. should tell Churchill that he either yields to a reasonable settlement of the Indian independence question . . . or that American troops will be withdrawn from that sector. Phillips substantially agreed and, to our amazement, said he had told F.D.R. that precise thing. All of which moved Senator [Tom] Connally to say that he himself had told the President that he ought to "turn the heat" on Churchill; that we ought to be "giving" instead of "taking" orders. It was clear from Phillips' testimony that India is "dynamite"—and that its destiny will be a bone of contention at the peace table.

On the other hand, there was growing concern in the executive branch and in Congress about the need for avoiding any postwar international territorial arrangements that would threaten U.S. base rights in the Mariana, Caroline, and Marshall islands which had been governed by the Japanese under mandates from the League of Nations, and were being taken during the war by U.S. forces. The argument was that in order to acquire bases in the Pacific necessary for future U.S. security these islands had to be either annexed or controlled completely by the United States.

Within the executive branch, there was solid support among civilian as well as uniformed authorities for protecting U.S. base rights in the mandated islands. The Navy was the strongest proponent, and in a discussion with one of his advisers Roosevelt asked, "What is the Navy's attitude in regard to territories? Are they trying to grab everything?" The adviser, Charles W. Taussig, replied that the Navy "did not seem to have much confidence in civilian controls," and that "the military had no confidence" in the U.N. He told the President of one admiral's letter to the Secretary of the Navy urging that the Navy be represented at the San Francisco Conference "to protect themselves against 'the international welfare boys.'"¹⁴

Beginning in 1944, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and all of the service secretaries, led by Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox (and subsequently James A. Forrestal), strongly opposed State Department plans for an international trusteeship system. This, they argued, could prevent the U.S. from obtaining the kind of control over the Pacific islands which it needed, as well as weakening the strategic position of the Western powers in other areas of Asia and the world.

In Congress, this position was strongly supported by the naval affairs committees in the House and Senate. The Senate committee, chaired by Harry F. Byrd (D/Va.), even traveled to San Francisco to confer with U.S. representatives to the U.N. Conference in order to make sure that U.S. naval base rights in the Pacific were adequately protected.¹⁵ Although the House was not directly involved in approving the U.N. Treaty, its naval affairs committee became very concerned about the effect of the U.N. on U.S. bases, and on

¹⁴U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.), p. 122 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 614.

January 23, 1945, established an investigative subcommittee to pursue the matter. Members of the House committee also toured the Pacific in July 1945, and in a report on August 6 the committee recommended, among other things:¹⁶

For (a) our own security, (b) the security of the Western Hemisphere, and (c) the peace of the Pacific, the United States should have at least dominating control over the former Japanese mandated islands of the Marshalls, the Carolines, and the Marianas—commonly known as "Micronesia"—and over the outlying Japanese islands of the Izu, Bonins, and Ryukyu.

The opposition of the British on the one hand and the U.S. military on the other created a serious political and policy problem for the President and his foreign policy advisers as well as the foreign policy committees (Senate Foreign Relations, House Foreign Affairs) of Congress. This was compounded by the fact that, as Secretary of State Cordell Hull maintained, U.S. acquisition of the mandated islands would be grounds for similar claims by the U.S.S.R.¹⁷ And, indeed, the Russians subsequently asked for U.S. approval of a Russian trusteeship for one or more former Italian colonies in North Africa.

The solution to this problem, which was the omission of specific provisions in the U.N. Charter for the future of dependent territories such as India and Indochina, weakened the position of the U.S. in relation to dependent peoples, and, of course, worked directly against efforts to place Indochina under some kind of international trusteeship after the war. On the other hand, it may also have strengthened the postwar international security system, as well as regional security arrangements, especially NATO.

It is important to note that Congress played a double-edged role in these decisions. On the one hand, the military committees of Congress, by supporting the acquisition of Pacific islands for U.S. bases, helped to force the President and the State Department to take a position in the drafting of the U.N. Charter that favored the European powers, and made it more difficult for the U.S. to deal with the French on Indochina or the British on India or the Dutch on Indonesia.

On the other hand, the foreign policy committees of Congress, while generally favoring independence and self-determination for colonial territories, failed to anticipate adequately or to grapple with the postwar consequences of instability in the colonies. Rather, they tended to accept the compromises being made in the executive branch, and to yield to the concerns of the naval affairs committees about base rights. In part, this resulted from their preoccupation, especially in the Senate, with approval of the U.N. Treaty. They were keenly aware, as was Secretary of State Hull, a former Member of Congress, that the treaty could be threatened by the issue of military bases, and in their efforts to obtain maximum support for the U.N., and to neutralize major opposition, they tried to work out an accommodation on this point. In larger part, howev-

¹⁶U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Naval Affairs, *Study of Pacific Bases*, No. 106 in the series of printed hearings of the committee, 79th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1945), p. 1010. (Pages in the hearings series were numbered consecutively. This report begins on page 1009.)

¹⁷Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 1466

er, the foreign policy committees of Congress supported the position finally worked out in the executive branch, first, because they considered it to be the only practicable and workable compromise, and, second, because they were participating hand and glove with the executive branch on the development of the U.N., and therefore tended to support both the process and its results. This had the effect, however, of reducing the legislative choices of the foreign policy committees, as well as causing the "loyal opposition" party to be more loyal and less opposite.

As a consequence, during the formation of U.S. policy toward the U.N. neither of the foreign policy committees of Congress conducted any independent inquiries or reviews of the proposal for the U.N. or the position of the U.S. toward such vital questions as the fate of the colonies and the provision for trusteeships. There were no hearings or other inquiries concerning the postwar prospects for areas such as Indochina, and what U.S. policy should be with respect to these areas.

When the U.N. Treaty was sent to the Senate for its advice and consent there was such an outpouring of approval and support that any possible questions about the colonial problem or trusteeship arrangements must have appeared inappropriate if not moot. And there were none, either in the hearings or in floor debate. Only in the report of the Foreign Relations Committee were these matters raised, and this was done by way of reassuring critics. According to the report¹⁸ the security of the U.S. was fully protected by the charter, as evidenced by letters from U.S. military authorities to this effect which had been included in the printed hearings.

The U.N. Treaty was passed by the Senate, 89-2, and neither of the two Members voting in the negative raised the colonial question or trusteeships. Thus, the achievement of this remarkable political consensus, one of the highest ever achieved in the history of U.S. foreign policy, had the effect of chilling debate at the time. It also set the stage for the use of similar consensual techniques in the postwar period, including the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964.

Could the foreign policy committees of Congress have played a stronger role in the development of the trusteeship arrangements of the U.N.? Should they have been less concerned about passage of the treaty and more concerned about the consequences of a postwar plan that did not deal with the problem of the colonies? These important questions transcend the scope of this study, but a brief review may help in clarifying why the foreign policy committees were not more active in relation to the colonial problem, and how this affected their role in relation to Vietnam.

Development of the U.S. Position on Trusteeships

In 1942, when the U.S. Government first began considering the creation of the U.N., the colonial issue was deemed to be a major factor in the development of a postwar international organization. Roosevelt told Russian Foreign Minister Vladimir M. Molotov, for example, that there was "a palpable surge toward independence" in colonial areas, and that the Europeans could no longer hold colo-

¹⁸S. Exec. Rept. 79-8.

nies. In Asia, each colony, including Indochina, was going to be ready in a matter of time, within 20 years, for self-government. Meanwhile, he said, they might be administered under an international trusteeship system.¹⁹

Roosevelt's views were echoed by Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. In a speech in May 1942 Welles declared:²⁰

Our victory must bring in its train the liberation of all peoples. . . . The age of imperialism is ended. The right of a people to their freedom must be recognized as the civilized world long since recognized the right of an individual to his personal freedom. The principles of the Atlantic Charter must be guaranteed to the world as a whole. . . .

Secretary of State Hull, however, had not been consulted by Welles about the speech, and, besides being piqued by Welles' "disloyalty," he was concerned about proposals to divest European allies of their colonies, particularly at a time when they and the U.S. were together in war. Thus, when the first State Department staff proposal for the postwar period, drawn up in 1942 by a committee under Welles' direction, recommended an international trusteeship for all colonial areas, Hull, "for obvious reasons of political feasibility," in his words, had the proposal rewritten to include only former German and Italian colonies and islands controlled by the Japanese under League of Nations mandates.²¹ There is no indication that Congress was consulted about this change, although Hull was generally in close touch with key Members of Congress, and seldom took a step of any importance without their acquiescence or concurrence.

Beginning in May 1942, Hull asked Members of Congress to join State Department committees engaged in postwar planning. Senators Tom Connally (D/Tex.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Warren R. Austin (R/Vt.), were the first Members, and a number of others were added subsequently. By May of 1943, there were eight Members of Congress on the 23-member group.²² The record does not show, however, whether Connally and Austin were consulted by Hull about the change in the trusteeship plan.

Roosevelt approved Hull's proposal for allowing colonial powers to decide whether to place dependent territories under trusteeship, but he continued to propose an international trusteeship for Indochina. Here, too, there is no indication that any Member of Congress was consulted, but most Members doubtless would have agreed with Roosevelt's opposition to continued French rule, while also approving Hull's concession to what he perceived as realism.

Although Hull felt that it was not politically feasible to propose trusteeships for all dependent territories, he also thought that it was important for the U.S., as he said in the summer of 1942, "to use the full measure of our influence to support the attainment of freedom by all peoples who, by their acts, show themselves worthy of it and ready for it."²³ Thus, in recommending to Roosevelt in

¹⁹Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1948), p. 573.

²⁰*Department of State Bulletin*, May 30, 1942, p. 488.

²¹Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 1228, 1638.

²²See U.S. Department of State, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945*, Publication No. 3580 by Harley A. Notter (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950), pp. 74, 97.

²³*Department of State Bulletin*, July 25, 1942, p. 642.

November 1942 that colonies not be mandatorily included in the trusteeship system he also proposed a declaration, "The Atlantic Charter and National Independence," applying the Atlantic Charter (a Roosevelt-Churchill declaration in 1942 on principles for the postwar world) to all peoples, whatever their status, in which the allies would commit themselves to help colonies become independent. Colonial peoples would, in turn, be obliged to prepare themselves for independence.

Roosevelt approved the proposed declaration. In February 1943, the British then suggested a joint declaration on colonial policy which, while maintaining control in the "parent" or "trustee" state, would require each colonial power to prepare colonies for self-government. The State Department thereupon revised its earlier declaration to incorporate some of the ideas of the British, and sent the new version, "Draft Declaration by the United Nations on National Independence," to the President in March 1943. The British did not support the new U.S. proposal, however. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden objected to the use of the word "independence," saying that he had to think of the British Empire system, which was based on Dominion and colonial status. Also objectionable was the proposal for setting dates for achieving independence.²⁴

At the Moscow Conference in October 1943, the British refused to discuss the declaration on national independence. At the Tehran Conference in December 1943, as noted earlier, Churchill rejected Roosevelt's proposal for an international trusteeship for Indochina.

In January 1944, the question of U.S. policy toward Indochina was raised by the British. Despite several statements by the President himself and by officials of the State Department to the effect that the U.S. would not prevent the French from reasserting sovereignty over the area, Roosevelt told the British Ambassador that he preferred an international trusteeship. "France has had the country—thirty million inhabitants—for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning . . . France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that."²⁵

Meanwhile, the State Department redrafted in early 1944 the proposed declaration on national independence, substituting "self-government" for "independence," and generally weakening the provisions of the earlier draft. The new title was "Draft Declaration regarding Administration of Dependent Territories." Omitted, among other things, was the proposed timetable for independence. After again consulting the British, the U.S. toned down the draft declaration even further, however, as well as the trusteeship arrangements under the proposed U.N.²⁶

The role of Members of Congress in decisions about these compromises in the U.S. position is not clear from the record. After passage by both Houses of Congress of resolutions supporting the

²⁴Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 1237. For the development of the U.S. position see also pp. 1234-1235, and Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations Charter* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1958), pp. 86-91. For the text of the March 1943 draft of the declaration see *FRUS*, 1943, vol. I, p. 747.

²⁵Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 1597. In November 1943 Roosevelt had made a similar comment in a private meeting with Stalin at the Tehran Conference. See *FRUS*, 1943, "The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran," p. 485.

²⁶See Russell, pp. 339-343.

creation of the U.N., which occurred in the fall of 1943, direct participation by Members of Congress in the formulation of U.S. policy was replaced by consultation.²⁷ Active participation resumed only in the spring of 1945 when Members of Congress were appointed as members of the U.S. delegation to the San Francisco Conference.

Although they no longer were actual members of the State Department Planning Group, leading Members of Congress were consulted very closely by Secretary of State Hull and his associates during the 1943-44 period. In the spring of 1944, Hull asked the Foreign Relations Committee to appoint a bipartisan group for the purpose of such consultation. This group, the "Committee of Eight,"²⁸ met frequently with Hull to discuss the U.S. position, and to review confidential working drafts of the proposed U.N. Charter. Additional sessions were held with House leaders, and they too were given the draft of the charter for review. After the 1944 election these consultations were resumed, and Members of Congress were given the Dumbarton Oaks proposal for review. In January 1945 there were additional meetings by the President and State Department officials with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss plans for the U.N.²⁹

Throughout this process of consultation the question of trusteeship arrangements was among the topics of discussion, and it is clear that there was ample opportunity for Members of Congress, especially members of the Foreign Relations Committee, to consider the U.S. position on trusteeships and on the colonial issue. There is no available record as to whether they did, but there is also no indication that, if they did, it had any impact on policymaking. Nor is there any evidence that those members who were consulted disagreed with the way in which the executive branch was handling the colonial issue and the plans for trusteeships. It may be safely assumed, however, that while supporting some moves toward independence, they were also concerned about U.S. base rights in the Pacific.

In the spring of 1944 the internal dispute began between the War and Navy Departments and the State Department over the postwar status of the Pacific islands. As noted earlier, it was the position of the military authorities, civilian as well as uniformed, that these should be tightly controlled by the U.S. At the request of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (who were also concerned that such discussions might adversely affect U.S.-U.S.S.R. relationships at a time when the U.S. was trying to get the Russians to enter the war against Japan), the State Department agreed to remove the section on trusteeships from the draft charter of the U.N. that the U.S. was to present at the Dumbarton Oaks meeting in August 1944, at

²⁷The Subcommittee on Political Problems of the Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations, on which Members of Congress served during 1942-43, gave way in late 1943 to the Informal Political Agenda Group, composed entirely of State Department officials and consultants, which in turn gave way to two similar State Department groups, the Post-War Programs Committee and the Policy Committee, in early 1944. In addition, there was an interdepartmental postwar planning group, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee.

²⁸Democrats Tom Connally (Tex.), Walter F. George (Ga.), Alben W. Barkley (Ky.), Guy M. Gillette (Iowa); Republicans Wallace H. White (Maine), Warren R. Austin (Vt.), Arthur H. Vandenberg (Mich.); and Progressive Robert M. La Follette (Wis.).

²⁹See *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation*, pp. 258, 380, 412.

which the general framework of the U.N. was to be approved.³⁰ The result was that the draft proposal for the U.N.³¹ worked out at the Dumbarton Oaks "Conversations," as they were called, omitted all reference to the trusteeship system and the settlement of territorial questions after the war.

After Dumbarton Oaks, the State Department continued to urge that action be taken on establishing a trusteeship system as well as expressing the position of the U.S. on the future of French, British and Dutch colonies. This was especially important, in the opinion of the State Department, because, as Hull contended, "... we could not help believing that the indefinite continuance of the British, Dutch, and French possessions in the Orient in a state of dependence provided a number of foci for future trouble and perhaps war. Permanent peace could not be assured unless these possessions were started on the road to independence, after the example of the Philippines."³²

In a State Department memorandum to the President on September 8, 1944, Hull suggested a declaration by the governments concerned making "definite commitments" about the granting of independence or full self-government (with Dominion status, where appropriate) to their colonies, including a timetable for such action. He said that they should also pledge that prior to independence each colony would be governed as an international trusteeship. Roosevelt approved the proposal, and sent word to the three countries involved that the U.S. expected to be consulted on postwar plans for Southeast Asia.³³ No action was taken, however, to follow up on the State Department proposal, in part, no doubt, because of Hull's illness followed by his resignation toward the end of 1944.

In November 1944, the State Department proposed that the dispute between State and the War and Navy Departments be referred to an interdepartmental committee. Roosevelt agreed, and reiterated his support for international trusteeships, and his opposition to military demands for U.S. annexation of the mandated island, which, he contended, was neither necessary for U.S. security nor consonant with the Atlantic Charter.³⁴

He said that the Army and the Navy had been urging upon him the point of view that the United States should take over all or some of the mandated islands in the Pacific, but that he was opposed to such a procedure because it was contrary to the Atlantic Charter. Nor did he think that it was necessary. As

³⁰Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 1599, 1706-1707, and Russell, pp. 343-348. For the text of the JCS request, see *FRUS*, 1944, vol. I, p. 700.

³¹"Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization," known as the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals.

³²Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 1601.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 1600-1601.

³⁴*FRUS*, 1945, "The Conferences at Malta and Yalta," p. 57. Robert Dallek has argued that Roosevelt's "... commitment to a trusteeship system for former colonies and mandates is another good example of how he used an idealistic idea to mask a concern with power. Believing that American internationalists would object to the acquisition of postwar air and naval bases for keeping the peace, Roosevelt disguised this plan by proposing that dependent territories come under the control of three or four countries designated by the United Nations. The 'trustees' were to assume civil and military responsibilities for the dependent peoples until they were ready for self-determination for emerging nations around the globe." Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 536-537. This conclusion is not supported, however, either in Dallek's study or by historical evidence.

far as he could tell, all that we would accomplish by that would be to provide jobs as governors of insignificant islands for inefficient Army and Navy officers or members of the civilian career service.

The issue of the trusteeships was raised again at the Yalta Conference in early February 1945, despite a plea to Roosevelt from Secretary of War Stimson to delay any discussion of the issue.³⁵ Stimson, as mentioned earlier, was supported by the House Naval Affairs Committee, which, in response to a bill introduced in the House in January 1945 to provide for administration by the Navy of all U.S. possessions, including the Pacific islands, had established a subcommittee to study the need for U.S. acquisition and control of the Pacific islands.

At Yalta, the U.S. proposed adding a trusteeship system to the U.N. framework approved at Dumbarton Oaks. The Foreign Ministers agreed that this should be considered, and they proposed further consultations prior to the San Francisco Conference. But when the heads of state met, Churchill was reported to have "exploded," declaring, "I absolutely disagree. I will not have one scrap of British territory flung into that arena. . . . As long as every bit of land over which the British Flag flies is to be brought into the dock, I shall object as long as I live."³⁶ When it was explained that no reference to the British Empire was intended, Churchill appeared to be reassured, but it was clear that the British would only agree to a trusteeship system which did not directly affect colonial territory.

After further discussions, agreement was reached on the following language with respect to the recommendations for a trusteeship system:³⁷

The acceptance of this recommendation is subject to its being made clear that territorial trusteeship will only apply to: (a) existing mandates of the League of Nations; (b) territories detached from the enemy as a result of the present war; (c) any other territory which might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship; and (d) no discussion of actual territories is contemplated at the forthcoming United Nations Conference or in the preliminary consultations, and it will be a matter for subsequent agreement which territories within the above categories will be placed under trusteeship.

The Interdepartmental Committee on Dependent Areas which had been proposed by the State Department in November 1944 did not begin to function until early 1945. In January 1945, the State Department submitted to that committee a revision of its earlier trusteeship proposals. This proposal was vigorously attacked by the War and Navy Departments.³⁸ The argument continued for several weeks. Meanwhile, President Roosevelt had appointed the U.S. representatives to the San Francisco Conference, including four Members of Congress: Senators Connally and Vandenberg, and Repre-

³⁵Russell, pp. 511-516. See *FRUS*, 1945, vol. I, pp. 18-22 for a State Department summary of the War-State controversy, as well as differences between the U.S. and Britain. See also pp. 23-27 for Stimson's memo on his position.

³⁶Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., *Roosevelt and the Russians: The Yalta Conference* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949), p. 236, and James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper and Row, 1947), p. x. See also *FRUS*, 1945, "The Conferences at Malta and Yalta," pp. 844, 855-56.

³⁷*FRUS*, 1945, "The Conferences at Malta and Yalta," p. 977.

³⁸See Russell, pp. 577-578.

representatives Sol Bloom (D/N.Y.), chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Charles A. Eaton (R/N.J.), the committee's ranking minority member. On March 13, 1945, at its first meeting in Washington, the U.S. delegation discussed the proposed U.N. organization, including the arrangements for trusteeships. Representative Eaton asked whether the provision for trusteeships would include the "treatment of colonial problems." Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., who had just replaced Hull, replied that it would not be possible to deal with dependent areas at the San Francisco Conference except for former League of Nations mandates. Senators Vandenberg and Connally stressed the importance of clarifying for the public the fact that the Conference would deal only with creating the organization, and not with the peace settlement itself or other postwar questions such as the future of colonies. They obviously had been well briefed on the U.S. position on postponing the consideration of territorial settlements, including the future of colonial areas, and had accepted that position.³⁹

As the debate continued in the executive branch, the military argued against any consideration of trusteeships at San Francisco, with the possible exception of a resolution agreeing that the matter would be considered later.⁴⁰ This suggestion was rejected by the State Department on April 9, 1945. State sent a memorandum to the President summarizing the status of the issue, and asking for a meeting of the three departments with the President.⁴¹ Roosevelt, then in Georgia, replied that he agreed with State's position, and that they would talk about it when he returned. He died on April 12, before the meeting could be held.

On April 17 the Secretaries of State, War and Navy met with the U.S. delegation to discuss the trusteeship question. Although President Truman had not yet officially acted on the matter, the three departments had finally agreed on a paper for presentation to the White House. After hearing from Secretaries Stimson and Forrestal, the delegation discussed the proposed position. In another meeting the following day each delegate was polled, and all approved the proposal. Senator Vandenberg said the "Congressional opinion is totally in sympathy with the position of the Secretaries of War and Navy."⁴²

It should be noted that this discussion centered on the questions of protecting U.S. security in the Pacific. There was almost no discussion of the broader question of the future of dependent areas, and no official of the executive branch, Member of Congress, or nongovernmental members of the delegation raised the colonial question with the exception of Dr. Isaiah Bowman, (president of The Johns Hopkins University, and a consultant to the State Department prior to being named a member of the delegation). Bowman said, "We have been led into a situation in which the world expects us to do something on trusteeship. We are faced with such questions as whether we wish Somaliland to go to the British. We will have to participate in its disposition. What in this situa-

³⁹*FRUS*, 1945, vol. I, p. 117.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 311-321, 330-332.

tion is our safeguard? It is in the fact that we have set up a principle—a principle of trusteeship in the interests of the natives."⁴³ He agreed, however, that U.S. military needs should be met, and at the meeting the following day he joined the rest of the delegation in approving the proposed position.

Immediately after approval by the delegation, the interdepartmental paper was submitted to President Truman and was approved by him on April 18.⁴⁴ There is no indication that he had any questions or reservations about the proposal, nor did he, unlike Roosevelt, indicate any particular commitment to trusteeships or concern about the future of colonial areas.

Final approval of the U.S. position, which had been slightly modified since the President's action, occurred on April 26, when the delegation met in San Francisco and adopted the revised language.⁴⁵ There was no discussion of the colonial problem. In its final form the proposal provided that all territories, including League mandates and former German and Italian colonies, would be placed under trusteeship only by "subsequent agreement," based on action initiated by the country holding such territory. Moreover, two classes of trusteeships were to be created: strategic and non-strategic. The latter would be under the administrative control of the General Assembly; the former, primarily the Pacific islands being occupied by the U.S., would be under the Security Council, where the U.S. could protect its interests, if necessary, by the veto. Nothing was said in the U.S. paper about the future of British, French or Dutch colonial areas or generally about the responsibilities of nations for dependent areas under their control. Moreover, proposed oversight of trust territories, including investigations and reports, was to be limited, in the U.S. draft, to nonstrategic areas.

During the San Francisco Conference the status of the U.S. trusteeship proposal was reviewed continuously by the American delegation. According to John Foster Dulles, a nongovernmental member of the delegation, this "ritual" was observed: "At the daily meetings of the United States Delegation, Senator Connally and Senator Vandenberg would always put to [U.S. Navy] Commander [Harold E.] Stassen this question: 'Are you sticking to the "subsequent agreement" provision?' Commander Stassen would regularly reply in the affirmative. Then the meeting would go on."⁴⁶

On May 2, 1945, M. Georges Bidault, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, made it quite clear that the French did not intend to place Indochina under the trusteeship system. The principle of trusteeship, he said, applied to other areas, not to Indochina, whose future rested solely with France.⁴⁷

Ultimately, the American trusteeship plan prevailed, and became chapter XII of the United Nations Charter. Pressure from the Soviet Union, China, and some of the smaller countries resulted, however, in the addition of language about the responsibilities of trustee nations toward trust territories. The Soviet Union and China wanted to add the word "independence" as an objective of

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 445-451, 459-460.

⁴⁶John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷Quoted by Patti, p. 117.

the trusteeship system. This was opposed by the British, French, Dutch, South African, and American delegations, which favored the wording "progressive development toward self-government." The U.S. position was that self-government might lead to independence. To support inclusion of the word "independence" would be "butting in on colonial affairs," according to Commander Stassen, the delegate who was representing the U.S. position on the trusteeship question. "While it was unfortunate to oppose Russia on this matter," Stassen said in a meeting of the U.S. delegation, "we also did not wish to find ourselves committed to breaking up the British empire . . . if we sided with the Chinese and the Russians on this issue, there probably would be no trusteeship system since the British will never accept that position." Furthermore, he said, "Independence . . . was a concept developed out of the past era of nationalism. It suggested, and looked in the direction of, isolationism. We should be more interested in interdependence than in independence and for this reason it might be fortunate to avoid the term 'independence.'" Dulles agreed with Stassen. Other delegates disagreed. Charles Taussig, who had been personally close to Roosevelt, reminded the group that both Roosevelt and Hull had insisted that "independence" should be the objective of the trusteeship system. "Mr. Taussig explained that in talks with the President it was clear that he felt that the word 'independence' rather than progressive self-government would alone satisfy the Oriental people. To deny the objective of independence, he felt, would sow the seeds of the next world war."

Of particular interest in relation to Congress' treatment of Vietnam is the position of Members of Congress on the U.S. delegation. Senator Connally supported Stassen's position, as did Senator Vandenberg and Representative Eaton. Representative Bloom's position is not clear, although he was known to favor an independent state of Israel. Connally said he was "afraid that, if the word 'independence' was put in, there would be a good deal of stirring up of a desire for independence and the orderly procedure in the direction of self-government would be interrupted."

Secretary Stettinius as well as Leo Pasvolosky, the State Department's principal specialist on the U.N., indicated, however, that they hoped a way could be found to insert the word "independence" without giving it too much importance. Eventually this was done, and the final language in the charter⁴⁸ provided for the "progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement."⁴⁹

Later in the Conference, the question arose as to the U.S. position on a proposal by the Russians to add "self determination" to the language on trusteeships. The British and French had objected, Stassen said, and had proposed instead the words "in accord with the freely expressed will of the people." Stassen thought the U.S.

⁴⁸United Nations Charter, ch. XII, art. 76(b).

⁴⁹For the discussion in the U.S. delegation see *FRUS*, 1945, vol. I, pp. 792-797, and see generally Russell, pp. 810 ff.

ought to yield to some reference to "self determination." Senator Connally argued, however, that either version, that of the Russians or that of the British and French, "would weaken the position of the United States. . . . To accept 'the principle of self determination' in any form would be to invite trouble," he said, but he agreed to let Stassen handle the problem.⁵⁰ In the end, as the charter language quoted above indicates, the British/French version prevailed.

There is one final note of interest concerning the U.N. Conference and the arrangements for trusteeships. Taking advantage of the opening provided by U.S. insistence on controlling the mandated islands in the Pacific, the Russians themselves asked whether they would be eligible for a trusteeship, and Secretary of State Stettinius was forced to admit that they were, whereupon, as indicated earlier, they asked to become the trustee for the former Italian colony of Tripolitania in North Africa.⁵¹

Several tentative conclusions may now be suggested with respect to the question raised earlier about the role of Congress in the development of postwar U.S. policy toward dependent areas. The debate on trusteeships began with the assertion of broad national principles, based on traditional American values, and ended with decisions based on the immediately perceived political and military requirements for approval of the U.N. Treaty and continued cooperation of America's European allies. As frequently if not commonly happens in the formulation of national policy, broad general principles tend to be qualified and compromised in the process of translating the abstractness of principle into the reality of policy. Thus, even Roosevelt himself, while continuing to favor trusteeships, and opposing restoration of French rule in Indochina, was forced to recognize that the U.S. had important strategic interests in the Pacific islands that might be affected by a trusteeship system. He also found that in order to assure British and French cooperation after the war, he would have to accept compromises in that trusteeship system, beginning with the most important of all, the exclusion from the system of the colonies of Britain, France and the Netherlands. Even with respect to Indochina, which he particularly wanted to see freed from the French, Roosevelt had begun in the several months before his death to accept the possibility of renewed French rule, even though he clung to the hope of ultimate independence.⁵²

Although they may not have been consulted on several of the important decisions made during the process of narrowing the range of choice and finally choosing alternatives, Members of Congress who participated in postwar policymaking tended to arrive at the same or similar conclusions as the President and officials of the executive branch. They, too, were concerned about protecting U.S. strategic interests in the Pacific, and they were, of course, acutely

⁵⁰FRUS, 1945, vol. 1, p. 1055

⁵¹Russell, p. 835.

⁵²On these points see especially Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina: 1942-45," *American Historical Review*, 80 (December 1975), pp. 1277-1295; Christopher Thorne, "Indochina and Anglo-American Relations, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, 45 (February 1976), pp. 73-96, and George C. Herring, "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," *Diplomatic History*, 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 97-117.

aware of the implications of this issue for public and Senate acceptance of the U.N. Treaty. But they also appreciated the significance of British and other opposition to including colonies under the trusteeship system, and the need for maintaining strong relationships with British and European allies after the war. For most Members of Congress, as well as most officials of the executive branch, these factors tended to outweigh the demands, real or potential, of the dependent areas.

The Communist Threat and Its Effects on U.S. Policy Toward Colonial Problems

The primacy of these political and strategic factors was greatly reinforced during the closing months of World War II as the American people and the U.S. Government became progressively alarmed about Russian (Communist) expansionism. By the spring of 1945, in fact, the debate over postwar policy was shifting toward a new anti-Communist perspective. Spurred in part by warnings from W. Averell Harriman and George F. Kennan in Moscow, U.S. policymakers were rapidly abandoning their hopes for Great Power cooperation, and instead began stressing the maintaining of U.S. power, and of U.S. relationships with Western European and British allies, in order to block the Russians. This, in turn, changed the focus on the colonial issue. Rather than a problem in itself, it was becoming subordinated to the larger problem of preventing Communist expansion. This was exemplified by an OSS policy paper in April 1945 stating that the Russians seemed to be seeking to dominate the world, and recommending that the U.S. take steps to block Russian expansionism. The first priority of the U.S., it argued, should be to create a strong European-American bloc in which France should play a key role. The U.S. should avoid "championing schemes of international trusteeship which may provoke unrest and result in colonial disintegration, and may at the same time alienate us from the European states whose help we need to balance Soviet power." The memorandum went on to say, "The United States should realize its interest in the maintenance of the British, French and Dutch colonial empires. We should encourage liberalization of the colonial regimes in order the better to maintain them, and to check Soviet influence in the stimulation of colonial revolt."⁵³

By the time of the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Russian threat seemed increasingly ominous. During the Conference, Averell Harriman met with Secretary of War Stimson, Assistant Secretary John J. McCloy, and Stimson's assistant, Harvey H. Bundy, and, according to Stimson's diary, "confirmed the expanded demands being made by the Russians." Harriman said, among other things, that Stalin had raised the question of a trusteeship for Korea, and Stimson's reaction was that unless the British and French were willing to consider trusteeships for Hong Kong and Indochina, the Russians might demand sole control of Korea. Stim-

⁵³Office of Strategic Services, "Problems and Objectives of United States Policy," Apr. 2, 1945, cited by Herring in "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," p. 101, and by Thorne, in "Indochina and Anglo-American Relations, 1942-1945," p. 96, from the OSS memorandum located in the Truman Library.

son was so concerned about this possibility that he sought out President Truman, who supported what Harriman had said. Truman also said, according to Stimson, that the Russians were bluffing in some of their moves and demands, and that the U.S. was standing firm. And there is at this point in Stimson's diary only the briefest reference to the reason why Truman was willing to stand firm, and why he did not think that the Russian position on Korea required corresponding action by the British and French. Truman, said Stimson, "... was apparently relying greatly upon the information as to S-1."⁵⁴

S-1 was the atomic bomb, which had just been tested successfully, and Truman assumed that this change in the relative military power of the two countries would enable the U.S. to call any bluffs by the Russians.

The Executive Branch Debates U.S. Policy Toward Indochina

Fear of Communist expansion also tended to strengthen the Office of European Affairs (EUR) in its argument with the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (FE) over U.S. policy toward Indochina. (Prior to 1944, the Office of Far Eastern Affairs had no jurisdiction over colonies. In 1944, a Division of Southwest Pacific Affairs was created in FE, and was later renamed the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs. It could act on colonial questions only with the concurrence of the Office of European Affairs.) FE contended that the U.S. should insist on French concessions to the nationalists in Indochina. EUR on the other hand, urged the strengthening of France, and endorsed French repossession of Indochina. In support of this position, the U.S. Ambassador to France, Jefferson Caffery, reported a conversation with de Gaulle, who said he did not understand American policy. (At that time, March 1945, the Japanese, after letting the Vichy French continue to administer Indochina during the war, had dismissed the French administration and were fighting the French forces stationed in the area. The French had appealed to the U.S. to assist them, but direct assistance had not been approved, and de Gaulle was upset about the failure of the U.S. to come to their aid.) "What are you driving at?" de Gaulle asked Caffery. "Do you want us to become, for example, one of the federated states under the Russian aegis? The Russians are advancing apace as you well know. When Germany falls they will be upon us. If the public here comes to realize that you are against us in Indochina there will be terrific disappointment and nobody knows to what that will lead. We do not want to be Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit, but I hope that you do not push us into it."⁵⁵

In April 1945, shortly after Roosevelt's death, it became apparent that decisions on U.S. policy toward Indochina could no longer be postponed. The immediate need was to respond to French demands

⁵⁴FRUS, 1945, vol. II, p. 260, fn. 51, quoting the Stimson diary.

⁵⁵FRUS, 1945, vol. VI, p. 300. For the controversy in the State Department see Herring, "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," pp. 102-105, and the testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1972 by Abbot Low Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, 1944-47, in *Causes, Origins and Lessons of the Vietnam War*.

for a role in the liberation of Indochina, a decision with obvious implications for subsequent decisions affecting the area.

In a meeting of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee on April 13, 1945, Robert A. Lovett, then Assistant Secretary of War for Air, said that Admiral Raymond Fenard, Chief of the French Naval Mission in the United States, "had been using a technique of submitting a series of questions to various agencies of the United States Government and by obtaining even negative or noncommittal responses thereto had been in effect writing American policy on Indo-China." Lovett added that U.S. policy needed to be clarified, and that Roosevelt's prohibition on discussing the postwar status of Indochina should "be reconsidered or reaffirmed promptly." The State Department representative on the committee, H. Freeman Matthews (Director of the Division of West European Affairs in EUR), concurred, but he also confirmed the existence of a "divergence of views" within the State Department that was blocking action on the subject. The committee agreed to request the State Department to take up the matter with the President.⁵⁶

In response to this action, the Division of West European Affairs proposed on April 20 a memorandum for the President essentially recommending support for the French position:

The United States Government has publicly taken the position that it recognizes the sovereign jurisdiction of France over French possessions overseas when those possessions are resisting the enemy and has expressed the hope that it will see the reestablishment of the integrity of French territory. In spite of this general assurance, the negative policy so far pursued by this Government with respect to Indochina has aroused French suspicions concerning our intentions with respect to the future of that territory. This has had and continues to have a harmful effect on American relations with the French Government and people.

Referring to the Yalta agreement that the trusteeship arrangements of the U.N. would be based on voluntary action by Allied powers in placing dependent territories under trusteeship, the memorandum stated:

General de Gaulle and his Government have made it abundantly clear that they expect a proposed Indo-Chinese federation to function within the framework of the "French Union." There is consequently not the slightest possibility at the present time or in the foreseeable future that France will volunteer to place Indo-China under an international trusteeship, or will consent to any program of international accountability which is not applied to the colonial possessions of other powers. If an effort were made to exert pressure on the French Government, such action would have to be taken by the United States alone for France could rely upon the support of other

⁵⁶Extract of minutes of the April 13 meeting in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-67*, book 8, V. B. 2., pp. 1-2. This is the Defense Department's public edition of the *Pentagon Papers*, (hereafter cited as *PP*, DOD ed. [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1971], or Gravel ed., after the edition published by the Beacon Press [Boston: 1971] based on material from Senator Mike Gravel [D/Alaska]). The DOD edition contains in book 8 a collection of documents from 1945-52 that was not printed in the Gravel edition, but most of this material was also printed in *FRUS*.

colonial powers, notably, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Such actions would likewise run counter to the established American policy of aiding France to regain her strength in order that she may be better fitted to share responsibility in maintaining the peace of Europe and the world.

Accordingly, EUR recommended that the U.S. "neither oppose the restoration of Indo-China to France, with or without a program of accountability, nor take any action toward French overseas possessions which it is not prepared to take or suggest with regard to the colonial possessions of our other Allies."

It recommended, further, that the U.S. consider French offers of military assistance in the Pacific "on their merits," and that if these actions had the effect of strengthening French claims of sovereignty over Indochina, that this should not bar the acceptance of such assistance.

In its memorandum, EUR also recommended that the U.S. continue efforts to get the French to liberalize "their past policy of limited opportunities for native participation in government and administration," as well as modifying "colonial preference" economic policies.

FE responded on April 21 with suggested changes in and additions to EUR's draft memorandum to the President. Prepared by Abbot Low Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, these emphasized the need to recognize the "independence sentiment" in Indochina, and the adverse effect on U.S. interests which could result from a failure to recognize legitimate demands for self-government. "If really liberal policies toward Indochina are not adopted by the French—policies which recognize the paramount interest of the native people and guarantee within the foreseeable future a genuine opportunity for true, autonomous self-government—there will be substantial bloodshed and unrest for many years, threatening the economic and social progress and the peace and stability of Southeast Asia."

James C. Dunn, Assistant Secretary of State (whose jurisdiction covered EUR), objected strenuously to the changes proposed by FE, and argued that it would be preferable to "let the matter drift." The U.S., he said, needed to strengthen its relationship with France, particularly in light of the new threat to the West posed by the Russians.

Dunn was overruled, and EUR and FE were told by Under Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew, who favored FE's position, to work out a compromise memorandum. During the following month they did so, but Dunn, then at the San Francisco Conference, sent back a "scorching wire" opposing the proposed compromise.⁵⁷

The issue became moot, however, and the memorandum was never sent to the President, as a result of a meeting between Truman and M. Georges Bidault on May 19. Acting on the basis of advice from the State Department, Truman told Bidault that the U.S. would welcome French assistance in the war in the Pacific, but that, because it was a military matter, decisions would have to

⁵⁷Testimony of Abbot Low Moffat in *Causes, Origins and Lessons of the Vietnam War*, p. 168. For the EUR and FE memoranda see PP, DOD ed., book 8, V. B. 2., vol. 1, pp. 5-21. These documents were not included in *FRUS*.

be made by U.S. military authorities in the field based on military needs and capabilities.⁵⁸

Thus, on May 23 the answer went back to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee from H. Freeman Matthews for the State Department. Repeating the President's statements to Bidault, Matthews suggested that "while avoiding so far as practicable unnecessary or long-term commitments with regard to the amount or character of any assistance which the United States may give to French resistance forces in Indochina, this Government should continue to afford such assistance as does not interfere with the requirements of other planned operations."⁵⁹

On June 2, 1945, U.S. hands-off policy toward Indochina was cemented further by Secretary of State Stettinius in a meeting in San Francisco with Bidault and Henri Bonnet, French Ambassador to the United States. Stettinius "made it clear to Bidault that the record was entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indochina."⁶⁰

On June 22, 1945, the position of the State Department on U.S. policy toward Indochina was finally hammered out in a policy paper prepared for the use of the War Department, entitled, "An Estimate of Conditions in Asia and the Pacific at the Close of the War in the Far East and the Objectives and Policies of the United States."⁶¹ The U.S., it said, had two objectives: peace and security in the Far East, which required "increased political freedom" in colonial areas; and the maintenance of world peace and security, which required the cooperation of colonial powers with the United States. Faced with the need to "harmonize" policy in relation to these objectives, "The United States Government," the paper concluded, "may properly continue to state the political principle which it has frequently announced, that independent peoples should be given the opportunity, if necessary after an adequate period of preparation, to achieve an increased measure of self-government, but it should avoid any course of action which would seriously impair the unity of the major United Nations."

In discussing Indochina specifically, the paper stated that there was a strong independence movement, and that the French would "encounter serious difficulty" in reestablishing control over the country. "An increased measure of self-government would seem essential if the Indochinese are to be reconciled to continued French control," the paper added, but such action appeared unlikely. As far as U.S. policy was concerned, the conclusion of the paper was as follows:

The United States recognizes French sovereignty over Indochina. It is, however, the general policy of the United States to favor a policy which would allow colonial peoples an opportunity to prepare themselves for increased participation in their own government with eventual self-government as the goal.

⁵⁸See Grew's memorandum to Truman, May 16, 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, vol. VI, pp. 307-308.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, pp. 556-580.

The position of the Europeanists, as they were called by some, was generally sustained in the June policy paper, and was reinforced as the cordial relations of wartime grew cool. By August 1945, as has been noted, it was the announced policy of the U.S. to support French repossession of Indochina. Truman even denied that trusteeship was an option. In a conversation with Madame Chiang Kai-shek on August 29, he was asked by Madame Chiang about Roosevelt's proposal for a trusteeship for Indochina. His reply was that "there had been no discussion of a trusteeship for Indo China as far as he was concerned."⁶²

In September 1945, as violence broke out when the French began reoccupying Vietnam, the Office of Far Eastern Affairs recommended that a commission of the war-time allies be sent to Vietnam to investigate the situation and to seek a compromise solution. The Office of European Affairs and others in the State Department objected, however, and George Kennan cabled from his post in Moscow that although the Russians probably would not intervene directly in Indochina, they were seeking to have the French and other Western powers removed from the area so as to leave it "completely open to communist penetration." Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson approved the recommendation of the Office of European Affairs that the proposal not be acted upon unless the situation worsened markedly.⁶³

Beginning in September 1945, and continuing until March 1946, Ho Chi Minh made a number of efforts to bring the Vietnamese cause to the attention of the U.S. Government, but his letters to Truman and to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, as well as conversations with U.S. diplomats, were officially ignored on the grounds that the U.S. could not become directly involved in the French-Vietnamese situation.⁶⁴

Until the publication of the memoirs of Archimedes L. A. Patti, there was no indication, nor was there any reason to believe, that any Member of Congress had been the intended recipient of a communication from Ho Chi Minh concerning the efforts being made by the Vietnamese to solicit U.S. assistance. Patti, however, has revealed that Ho Chi Minh also attempted to contact Congress through a letter addressed to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which, Patti says, "reached my desk" in the State Department sometime between mid-November 1945 and March 1946.⁶⁵ It is doubtful whether the letter was ever transmitted by the Department of State to the Foreign Relations Committee, but there is no available evidence one way or the other.

There is also no record that at this stage any Member of Congress questioned the policy of the executive branch toward Indochina, despite strong and continuing congressional opposition to colonialism.

⁶²*Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 541.

⁶³Herring, pp. 114-115.

⁶⁴See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The United States and Vietnam, 1944-1947*. Staff Study (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1972), pp. 9-14. PP, DOD ed., book 1, I. C., pp. 66-104, contains the texts of some if not most of these communications. This material is missing from the Gravel edition.

⁶⁵Patti, p. 380.

Congress Begins Debate on U.S. Policy in Asia

Questions were being raised in Congress in late 1945, however, about U.S. policy in Asia, and about China in particular. The U.S. Ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley, had resigned, charging that U.S. efforts to support the Nationalist government were being undercut by Foreign Service officers who favored the Chinese Communists. He was strongly supported by several Members of Congress led by Senator Styles Bridges (R/N.H.), and at Bridges' instigation the Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on the matter in December 1945 with Hurley as a leading witness.⁶⁶

The issue was ripe for investigation. U.S. policy had been to support the Nationalists while encouraging them to work with the Communists in the war against the Japanese, to be followed by a negotiated political settlement between the Nationalists and the Communists to achieve postwar stability. In October 1945, when it began to appear that the Communists would occupy key parts of North China being vacated by the Japanese, the U.S. sent 50,000 Marines to the area to hold it pending the arrival of Nationalist troops. Despite orders not to become involved in the conflict between the opposing sides, U.S. forces became engaged in hostile action against Communist troops, and the U.S. commander in China, Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, recommended that the troops either be strengthened or withdrawn.⁶⁷ Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal argued that the U.S. had to take steps to prevent the Russians from controlling Manchuria and North China, and urged the State Department to clarify U.S. policy in this respect, and to take up the matter with the Russians and, if necessary, with the U.N. Meanwhile, they said, U.S. forces should not be withdrawn, but a clearer directive should be given to General Wedemeyer.⁶⁸

There were objections to the deployment of U.S. forces in China from some Members of Congress, primarily Democrats of liberal persuasion. Chairman Connally advised against U.S. military intervention on behalf of what he considered a "corrupt and reactionary" government. Representative Mike Mansfield (D/Mont.) warned a State Department representative that deployment of the Marines could be used by the Russians as an excuse to continue their occupation of Manchuria.⁶⁹ Others argued that the U.S. should not become involved in a civil war, and that the public would not support another war in the Far East.

The hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were inconclusive, and the committee dropped the issue without coming to a formal decision and without writing a report.⁷⁰ In part, this resulted from Truman's appointment on December 15, 1945, of Gen. George C. Marshall as his personal representative to China. Marshall was a man of outstanding reputation and ability, and his

⁶⁶See Bridges' statement, *CR*, vol. 91, pp. 11109-11118.

⁶⁷*FRUS*, 1945, vol. VII, pp. 650-660, 662-665, 679-684.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 670-678, 684-686. A new directive was issued in December 1945. See pp. 698-699.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 580-581.

⁷⁰The unpublished transcript of the hearings, "Investigation of the Situation in the Far East," is in the papers of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the National Archives, Record Group (hereafter cited as RG) 48.

appointment had the desired effect of suppressing, for the moment, the partisan political debate over China.

In a broader sense, however, the abortive inquiry into U.S. Far Eastern policy was indicative of the state of affairs in 1945 with respect to Congress' role in foreign policy. Although Members of Congress had been actively involved in the establishment of the U.N., they had not participated as actively in the making of other major foreign policy decisions affecting the postwar world. As H. Bradford Westerfield has noted, "As an issue in American politics international relations came to be nearly synonymous with international organization, and as the months went by public figures and political leaders of both parties reached extraordinary consensus on that subject—while the decisions which really did most to shape the postwar world were made largely in private by the military, the President, and a few advisers who, for the most part, were leaders of neither political party."⁷¹

This preoccupation with the establishment of the U.N. also tended to result in a corresponding orientation in public and congressional attitudes, which, in turn, reinforced the inaction of Congress in other foreign policy areas and the making of other decisions.

The continuing struggle to exclude "politics" from foreign policy, and to develop a bipartisan or nonpartisan approach to foreign policymaking, also had the effect of inhibiting congressional inquiry. This was particularly true in the case of a subject, such as China, which lent itself to partisan exploitation. When it became apparent that conservative Republicans, led by Senator Bridges, were attempting to make a partisan issue out of Hurley's charges, there was strong bipartisan support from members of the committee for Chairman Connally's efforts to shorten the hearings, as well as not issuing a report on the hearings. In so doing, of course, the committee was continuing its war-time collaboration with the Executive, but the effect, as Connally knew full well, was also to protect the new Democratic President, as well as to help congressional Democrats in the upcoming 1946 election.

In addition, of course, few Members of Congress, even on the foreign policy committees, had much background or experience in international relations. Congressional foreign policy committees were still staffed by only a few persons, none of whom had specialized training in the field. Only after passage in 1946 of the Legislative Reorganization Act did the committees begin to get "professional" staff and to develop a more active role.

In light of these and other factors it is not surprising that the 1945 Foreign Relations Committee inquiry on the Far East died aborning. But the effect, as one scholar has suggested, was to deprive the country of a public examination of key questions facing the United States in Asia at a time when such an inquiry could have been beneficial.⁷² As Westerfield has also noted, partisan divisions over China policy in the following years were attributable,

⁷¹H. Bradford Westerfield, *Foreign Policy and Party Politics: Pearl Harbor to Korea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 144.

⁷²Kenneth S. Chern, "Politics of American China Policy, 1945: Roots of the Cold War in Asia," *Political Science Quarterly*, 91 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 631-645.

at least in part, to congressional avoidance of the China issue in 1945-47.⁷³

U.S. forces were withdrawn from China in 1946, and Marshall continued his efforts to bring peace and stability to the country.⁷⁴ By the end of 1946, however, he concluded that his mission would not succeed and he returned home. In 1947, Congress began actively debating U.S. policy toward China.

Before turning to this next phase it would be well to summarize developments to this point. By the time the Second World War ended, a way appeared to have been found by which to achieve a foreign policy consensus between the legislative and the executive branches, thus overcoming the policy differences that could result from the separation of powers. But this, in turn, contained the seeds of its own contradiction. While these efforts to correct the consequences of the failure to establish the League of Nations proved to be successful in the case of the U.N., in the end they had unforeseen consequences of an opposite kind in the postwar period.

Similarly, the decisions on trusteeships and the acquisition of U.S. bases in the Pacific had an adverse effect on U.S. leadership on the colonial issue and helped to set the stage for future events in Asia, even though they may also have helped to establish stronger international and regional security arrangements.

The War Begins in Vietnam, 1946-48

By late 1945, storm signals were flying in Asia. The Communists were exerting pressure on several countries, and in China the United States was being asked to provide assistance, including military training and advice, to the government in power to assist it in fighting Communist insurgents.

Although the United States was not directly involved in Vietnam, developments there during 1946-48 were also of concern to the U.S. Government, particularly to the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs. But as Abbot Low Moffat said subsequently, "With French forces back in Indochina and with all potential leverage gone, there was little that the United States could do to alter the outcome."⁷⁵ Thus, the United States did little more than to observe while the French reoccupied the country. Fighting continued in the south, but on March 6, 1946, an agreement was signed by which the Vietnamese consented to "welcome amicably" the return of the French Army to the northern part of Vietnam, and the French to recognize the existence of the Vietnamese Republic (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or DRV, which then claimed to represent all of Vietnam), as a "free state" with its own government and army, as a part of the French Union. Further negotiations failed to produce results, however, and the French announced that the southern part of Vietnam—Cochin China, where their economic in-

⁷³Westerfield, pp. 245, 249.

⁷⁴Herbert Feis, in *The China Triangle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953; reprint ed., New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 423, concluded that U.S. demobilization had rendered the U.S. incapable of effective military action in China: "In this ebb tide of our military effort it seemed unreal to consider any course of action in China which might require the active employment of substantial American forces for an indefinite period of time. There were few then who would have spoken up for a prolongation of military service in order to affect the outcome of the struggle in China, or even to prevent the extension of Soviet control over Manchuria."

⁷⁵*Causes, Origins and Lessons of the Vietnam War*, p. 168.

terests were concentrated—was being established as a “free republic,” obviously to protect their most important holdings and to thwart the reunification of the north and the south. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam objected, and additional negotiations were postponed.

In late 1946, the “First Indochina War” began as fighting broke out between French and DRV forces in the northern part of Vietnam. On November 26, the French shelled Haiphong, which was under the control of the DRV, killing 6,000 or more Vietnamese. On December 19, the Vietnamese attacked French forces in Hanoi and the French then occupied the city. Ho Chi Minh and other DRV leaders fled, and the war began. In 1947, as the war continued, the French turned to Bao Dai, but for months he resisted their entreaties while urging greater concessions to Vietnamese nationalism.

Reactions in the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs were that the U.S. was being put in an increasingly difficult situation by the French. On January 7, 1947, Moffat cabled from Bangkok during a trip to the region: “. . . feel impelled as chief SEA [Southeast Asia] urge prompt US action aimed terminate war Vietnam not only save countless lives but protect position US and other democracies SEA. Hands-off policy seems here based European considerations and temporary French political situation and appears as US approval French military reconquest Vietnam although in fact Vietnam record no worse than French.” “Soviets not directly active SEA,” he added, “and need not be as democracies performing most effectively their behalf. Moral leadership by US essential this area, hundred million people increasing nationalist.” He concluded that “Because of recent French action believe permanent political solution can now be based only on independent Vietnam (alternative is gigantic armed colonial camp). . . .”⁷⁶

Moffat and his associates, however, were rowing against the tide. In late 1946, as he said subsequently, “a concern about Communist expansion began to be evident in the Department.” This led to a “fixation on the theory of monolithic, aggressive communism that began to develop at this time and to affect our objective analyses of certain problems.”⁷⁷

On May 13, 1947, Secretary of State Marshall cabled the U.S. Ambassador in France expressing concern about the lack of progress in settling the “Indochina dispute,” and concluding by warning: “Vietnam cause proving rallying-cry for all anti-Western forces and playing into hands Communists all areas. We fear continuation conflict may jeopardize position all Western democratic powers in southern Asia and lead to very eventualities of which we most apprehensive.”⁷⁸

The Commitment is Made to “Containment” and to the Defense of “Free Peoples”

As the situation in Vietnam continued to worsen, so did the situation in Europe. Early in 1947 the U.S. was officially informed that

⁷⁶FRUS, 1947, vol. VI, pp. 54–55.

⁷⁷*Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War*, p. 169.

⁷⁸FRUS, 1947, vol. VI, pp. 95–97.

the British were withdrawing from the area of Greece and Turkey. This led to the making of a commitment by the United States—the Greek-Turkish aid program—through which the U.S., in effect, assumed Britain's role in the area. But the commitment was not just to Greece and Turkey. Rhetorically, at least, it was, in the words of what became known as the "Truman doctrine," to defend "free peoples" everywhere.⁷⁹

In his address to Congress on March 12, 1947 on the new aid program, President Truman depicted the world situation as one involving a choice between democracy and communism, and declared that "totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States." "I believe," he said, "that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." The U.S. had the responsibility to keep alive the "hope of people for a better life." "The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own Nation." Failure to aid Greece, which was threatened by Communist insurgents, and to preserve the national integrity of Turkey, would have a profound effect on Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and ultimately on the United States.⁸⁰

This concept is of fundamental importance in the search for the tributaries of public policy which, when joined, formed the stream of policy that carried the U.S. toward involvement in Vietnam. Prior to the Truman doctrine there was no "doctrine" of intervention, no assertion of a universal commitment to the defense of freedom. The Truman doctrine—though this was not the intention of at least some of those involved in its conception—provided a generalized philosophy of intervention, however, that was as broad in its potential application as the concept of the United Nations had been in relation to maintaining peace throughout the world.

One indication of the broad applicability of the Truman doctrine, and the endurance of the philosophy of intervention which it represented, was the speech by President Ronald Reagan to a joint session of Congress on April 27, 1983, on the situation in Central America, in which Reagan said, quoting the above passages from Truman's speech (but without identifying these passages as the Truman doctrine): "President Truman's words are as apt today as they were in 1947. . . . The countries of Central America are smaller than the nations that prompted President Truman's message. But the political and strategic stakes are the same."⁸¹

The Truman doctrine was based on the policy of "containment" formulated by George Kennan, a Foreign Service officer and Rus-

⁷⁹It is interesting to note that "helping others to help themselves"—one of the stock phrases of that period—included in the case of Greece, as it did subsequently in Vietnam, helping others to ask for help. Thus, the message from the Greek Government on March 3, 1947, requesting U.S. assistance, was "drafted in the State Department and suggested to the Greek Government." Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 77.

⁸⁰For the text of the speech see U.S., President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service), Harry S. Truman, 1948, pp. 176-180.

⁸¹From the text of Reagan's speech in the *Washington Post*, Apr. 28, 1983.

sian expert, in early 1946, and made public in Kennan's anonymous article in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," (signed simply by the letter "X"). According to Kennan, "... the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. . . . Soviet pressure can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of shifting geographical and political points. . . ."

Kennan suggested "containment" as a response to Russian expansionism, and not as general policy for all situations involving a perceived Communist threat. Although he supported aid to Greece, he objected strenuously to the "sweeping nature of the commitments" implied by the language in President Truman's speech on Greek-Turkish aid in which he referred to the defense of "free peoples." Kennan urged that this phrase be removed from the speech, and in his memoirs he said he regretted its effect on subsequent policymaking, culminating in the Vietnam war:⁸²

Throughout the ensuing two decades the conduct of our foreign policy would continue to be bedeviled by people in our own government as well as in other governments who could not free themselves from the belief that all another country had to do, in order to qualify for American aid, was to demonstrate the existence of a Communist threat. Since almost no country was without a Communist minority, this assumption carried very far. And as time went on, the firmness of understanding for these distinctions on the part of our own public and governmental establishment appeared to grow weaker rather than stronger. In the 1960s so absolute would be the value attached, even by people within the government, to the mere existence of a Communist threat, that such a threat would be viewed as calling, in the case of Southeast Asia, for an American response on a tremendous scale, without serious regard even to those main criteria that most of us in 1947 would have thought it natural and essential to apply.

Kennan and some of his associates did succeed in getting Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who testified before Congress on the Greek-Turkish aid request, to state that the Truman doctrine was not applicable to every situation involving a Communist threat, but Acheson also acknowledged, in response to questions from Senator Connally, that although each case would have to be handled individually, "the principle is clear . . . we are concerned where a people already enjoying free institutions are being coerced to give them up." And he agreed with Connally that although the U.S. might react differently in different cases, it would react.⁸³

Moreover, as pointed out by Louis J. Halle, an associate of Kennan's on the Policy Planning Staff, Truman's rhetoric was not the source of the problem. The commitment to provide aid to Greece and Turkey, he said, "made sense only as part of a larger commit-

⁸²George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 322.

⁸³U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings on S. 338 to Provide for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1947), p. 30.

ment, which was therefore implicit in it. There is no such thing as filling only one corner of a power vacuum. It follows that the Truman doctrine was implicit in aid to Greece and Turkey, rather than being merely the independent consequence of a statement in President Truman's message of March 12. Nothing essential would have been altered by leaving the statement out."⁸⁴

Both Halle and Kennan take exception to what Halle calls the "universalistic disposition of American thinking," which they feel was responsible, at least in part, for the tendency to make general policy out of the Greek-Turkish situation, and to apply the Truman doctrine to situations where it is not relevant or efficacious. Halle cites one episode which he says illustrates this kind of thinking, and which, for present purposes, also bears on the origin of support for anti-Communist regional security pacts such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). At some point in 1948, according to Halle, and he is apparently the only source for this, Dean Rusk, Director of the Office of U.N. Affairs, called a meeting at the request of Secretary Marshall to consider preparing a treaty to include any and all non-Communist countries in the world "disposed to resist the expansion of the Soviet Union." Halle says that this was the first meeting in the chain of events that ultimately produced NATO, but that the original conception was "one arrangement that would embrace, alike, the defense of Japan, of South Asia, of West Europe, and of any other threatened areas of the world."⁸⁵

Some writers have argued that the Truman doctrine was couched in broad terms to ensure public and congressional support; that it was not intended to be "universal doctrine"; and that between 1947 and 1950 the Truman administration continued to make choices, to define the national interest selectively, and to recognize the limits of American interest and power. They conclude, therefore, that it was not a "turning point"; rather, that the fall of China and its effects on American politics, followed by the Korean war, forced the U.S. to take a more general anti-Communist stand, thus universalizing the Truman doctrine.⁸⁶ This analysis, while useful in explaining the disjunction between the development of public support for policy and the carrying out of that policy, is quite wide of the mark in other respects. Although the Truman administration limited U.S. involvement in China, it never retreated from the concept of defending free peoples everywhere. Moreover, the selective application of a general principle does not necessarily vitiate that principle; thus, in 1950, after the Communists became more aggressive, but prior to the Korean war, the Truman administration developed a comprehensive plan—NSC 68—for implementing the containment policy and the Truman doctrine. The application of the Truman doctrine in 1947–50 may not have been a "turning point,"

⁸⁴Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 123.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 184–185.

⁸⁶See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, "Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?" *Foreign Affairs*, 52 (January 1974), pp. 386–402, and "Containment: A Reassessment," *Foreign Affairs*, 55 (July 1977), pp. 873–887, as well as Gaddis' excellent book, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). For a contrary view see Eduard M. Mark, "The Question of Containment," *Foreign Affairs*, 56 (January 1978), pp. 430–441.

but its formulation and enunciation surely were, as its subsequent application suggests.

This interpretation is supported by the most authoritative account of the development of the Truman doctrine, *The Fifteen Weeks*, by Joseph M. Jones, who was then a public affairs officer in the State Department. As Jones amply demonstrates, those who were involved in the momentous events of that 15-week period were convinced that they were participating in a historic moment; one which would, indeed, be considered a "turning point." Moreover, there was general if not unanimous agreement that, as Jones said, "Greece and Turkey were only the crux of a world problem, and that, although they were in the most urgent need, they were only two of many countries that might require United States support in one form or another."⁸⁷

Dean Rusk, who was made Director of the Office of U.N. Affairs on March 5, 1947, the day after the first draft of Truman's message to Congress had been prepared, and who objected to the lack of reference in the speech to U.S. confidence in the United Nations and the reasons for unilateral action outside the U.N., agrees with those who argue that the language which became known as the Truman doctrine was included in the speech for political reasons: ". . . my own recollection is very clear that what has been called the Truman Doctrine was never intended to be of universal applicability and that the language Mr. Truman used was a part of the rhetoric in getting aid for Greece and Turkey."⁸⁸ Yet, in 1966, in one of his most notable appearances before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the Vietnam war, Rusk began his testimony by quoting the Truman doctrine, saying, "That is the policy we are applying in Vietnam in connection with specific commitments which we have taken in regard to that country."⁸⁹

Although the Greek-Turkish aid bill was presented in response to an alleged "crisis," the executive branch had, indeed, been planning for some months to take such steps, and, as in the case of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, used a dramatic event as the occasion for action. As early as September of 1946, the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy had agreed that the U.S. should assist other friendly nations "in every way" with economic and military aid.⁹⁰ In February 1947, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Chief of Staff of the Army, sent a memorandum to the Secretary of War suggesting a study of all other countries in addition to Greece and Turkey that were in need of assistance, "with a view to asking for an appropriation to cover the whole."⁹¹ A week before Truman proposed the Greek-Turkish aid program to Congress, Under Secretary of State Acheson ordered similar studies, but decided that future plans should not be made public. "If F.D.R. were alive," he said, "I think I know what he'd do. He would make a statement of

⁸⁷Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, p. 158.

⁸⁸Letter to CRS, Apr. 1, 1983. For Rusk's role in the drafting of the speech in 1947 see Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, in Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, vol. XIX (Totowa, N.J.: Cooper Square, 1980), p. 10.

⁸⁹U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal year 1966—Vietnam*, 89th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1966), p. 2.

⁹⁰See Walter Millis (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 210.

⁹¹Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, p. 137.

global policy but confine his request for money right now to Greece and Turkey."⁹²

In its action on the Greek-Turkish aid request, Congress generally endorsed both the request and the broad commitments contained in the Truman doctrine, although both foreign policy committees, especially the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, cautioned against the general application of the Truman doctrine.

In his opening statement in the Senate's debate on the Greek-Turkish aid bill, Senator Vandenberg, then chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, followed Truman's lead and took a similar position on the responsibility of the United States to assist "free peoples," saying, "... we Americans have an inescapable stake in all human rights and fundamental freedoms." The support of "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation," he said, was not something new, but "a principle long ingrained in the American character." He denied that it represented "a new doctrine," or that the U.S. "... had suddenly resolved to underwrite the earth," but he added that although it might not be new doctrine, "... we must frankly and honestly assess the fact that it has new and broad implications. . . . The truth is . . . that Greece and Turkey are not isolated phenomena. . . . We must face the fact that other situations may arise which clearly involve our own national welfare in their lengthened shadows."

It was "necessary," Vandenberg said, for the U.S. to aid Greece and Turkey. Otherwise there could be a "chain reaction which would threaten peace and security around the globe," and "we would give the green light to aggression everywhere."⁹³

In its report on the Greek-Turkish aid bill, the Foreign Relations Committee, which approved the bill 13-0, took a somewhat more careful stance.⁹⁴ It quoted but did not endorse the President's comments about the responsibility of the United States to assist "free peoples," adding that "... it is not to be assumed that this Government will be called upon, or will attempt, to furnish to other countries assistance identical with or closely similar to that proposed for Turkey and Greece in the present bill. If similar situations should arise in the future they will have to be examined in the light of conditions existing at the time." In the event of future situations in which the U.S. might be faced with such a decision, the report stated, "A number of factors must enter into any particular decision in this regard, among them the question of whether a given country is in really serious straits, whether it genuinely deserves American support, and whether as a practical matter the United States would be able to provide it effective assistance and support."⁹⁵ These, it might be noted, are interesting and significant criteria when viewed against subsequent U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

⁹²Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 159. See also pp. 199-200.

⁹³CR, vol. 93, p. 3195.

⁹⁴For the vote, see the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations *Historical Series*, "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1973), p. 200 (hereafter this series will be cited as *SFRC His. Ser.*, and the historical series of the House Foreign Affairs Committee as *HFAC His. Ser.*).

⁹⁵S. Rept. 80-90, reprinted in "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine," pp. 204-224

By contrast, the House Foreign Affairs Committee in its endorsement of the bill reiterated the President's position, declaring that "... the foundations of international peace and the security of the United States are jeopardized whenever totalitarian regimes are imposed on free peoples, whether by direct or indirect aggression." There was, however, the caveat that "Any similar situations that may arise in the future must be considered in the light of conditions existing at the time, and would, necessarily, require consideration and study by the Congress."⁹⁶

The Greek-Turkish aid bill, which was approved by Congress in less than 60 days, was passed by the Senate 67-23 and by the House 287-107. (Voting for it in the House were future presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.) The opposition consisted largely of conservative Democrats and Republicans with a sprinkling of liberal Democrats.

The opposition of liberals to the bill was perhaps best expressed by Senator Edwin C. Johnson (D/Colo.), who said that the U.S. should not intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, especially in a situation involving a civil war in which the existing government did not have public support. He drew up but did not offer an amendment to the bill stating in part that "Nothing in this act shall be construed to imply that the government of the United States has adopted as its policy in international affairs . . . intervention in civil strife, civil war, or political conflict in foreign countries. . . ."⁹⁷ "Mr. Truman's policy," he said, "if adopted, will lead to American intervention in every country in the world which is in the process of social change either because of political unrest or of actual revolution . . . if the Truman doctrine is adopted by the Congress without corrective and clarifying amendments, we will have radically altered American traditional foreign policy. We will have adopted a policy of aggressive unilateral imperial action in behalf of reactionary governments throughout the world."⁹⁸

Johnson also stressed that the commitment to provide assistance to countries such as Greece and Turkey could lead to additional commitments to the governments being supported, and to increasing U.S. involvement in the conflict, which in turn could prevent Congress from exercising any control over the situation. In a statement that presaged later events in the Vietnam war he said:⁹⁹

Suppose we get our flag over there, and establish our troops over there, and the war clouds begin to roll closer and the threat becomes greater. What can we do? We shall have to go on. Congress will be helpless. Congress cannot do anything about it.

During the last war we voted appropriation after appropriation. We never batted an eye. We voted whatever was asked for. We never turned down any requests. We never restricted those in authority to the extent of a single dollar on any occasion. We never questioned the amount of money asked for. We could not. American youth was in uniform. American youth

⁹⁶H. Rept. 80-314, reprinted in *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 421-438.

⁹⁷CR, vol. 93, p. 3752.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 3498.

was facing gunfire. It was no time for us to be quibbling over appropriations. We shall be facing exactly the same situation in this case.¹⁰⁰

Conservative opposition to the bill was probably best represented by Senator Harry F. Byrd (D/Va.), who said that the U.S. was "not only taking over the burdens of the British Empire," but was "extending its commitments." "Approval by Congress of this bill," he said, "will be approval of this new world-wide policy as American doctrine. . . ." and was "certain to open a new, costly, long-range policy with war implications, and later embrace areas of the world far beyond the borders of Greece and Turkey." "I do not say that this expansion will come overnight," he added, "but I do say with all confidence that our foreign commitments and expenditures will grow and grow under this policy, because it is certain that once we begin giving aid to a country we will not dare to withdraw, for then we will admit failure and encourage our enemies."¹⁰¹

Byrd, among many others, including Senator Walter F. George (D/Ga.), the powerful second-ranking Democrat on Foreign Relations, and Vandenberg himself, objected to the "crisis" atmosphere in which the bill was being considered. ". . . the effort to dramatize this as an imminent crisis has been over-emphasized and exaggerated," Byrd said, and he warned that "In the end, this haste and lack of complete candor may defeat its own purpose, for here in America, under our democratic processes of government, a foreign policy is only as strong as an enlightened and supporting public opinion. A policy approved without due consideration by Congress under the stress of emotion and high-powered propaganda may become very distasteful when the financial impact of these new foreign burdens is reflected in increased taxation on an already overburdened people."¹⁰²

In one particularly revealing executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee the members discussed the dilemma of maintaining the legislative-executive consensus needed in foreign affairs while upholding the role of Congress in a time of "crisis." The discussion was touched off by Senator George, who thought that the Greek-Turkish "crisis" had been manufactured, and that the effective date of the legislation should be postponed for 60 days after enactment to give the United Nations time to study the situation. "I do not see any emergency in the Greco-Turkish situation," he said, "except such as Great Britain herself is voluntarily bringing about." Chairman Vandenberg replied, "I totally agree with that statement." Yet, Vandenberg said, "Here we sit, not as free agents, because we have no power to initiate foreign policy. It is like, or almost like a Presidential request for a declaration of war. When that reaches us there is precious little we can do except say 'Yes.'"

¹⁰⁰For a complete statement of Johnson's position see his testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee, *SFRS His. Ser.*, "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine," pp. 101-105, and *CR*, vol. 93, pp. 3760-3762.

¹⁰¹For Byrd's speech, see *CR*, vol. 93, pp. 3773-3775.

¹⁰²For descriptions of the way in which the Greek-Turkish "crisis" was deliberately dramatized by the Truman administration see Truman and Acheson's memoirs, as well as Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, pp. 139, 143, and Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 282-283. Also useful is Thomas G. Paterson, "Presidential Foreign Policy, Public Opinion, and Congress: The Truman Years," *Diplomatic History*, 3 (Winter 1979), pp. 1-18.

In that situation, he added, division between Congress and the President would be very dangerous because of the possibility that the Communists might take it as a sign of weakness and disunity. George agreed, as did the ranking Democrat, Senator Connally, and Senators Alben W. Barkley (D/Ky.) and Wallace H. White (R/Maine). White said, "... we are facing a situation, a situation created in part by our own Government. . . . I do not see how we, without any original sin in connection with the matter, can leave the President in this situation."¹⁰³

Congress Also Approves the Use of Military Advisers

In approving the Greek-Turkish aid program, Congress not only sanctioned the general principle of assisting "free peoples" threatened by communism; it also agreed to the establishment of defense pacts with such countries, and to the dispatch of U.S. military missions and American military personnel as military advisers. This, too, was something that had been requested before. In 1926, an act¹⁰⁴ was passed permitting U.S. military missions to be sent to Latin America, and in 1946 and again in 1947 the Executive, at the urging of the Pentagon, requested general authority to establish such missions in any country. The House passed the legislation both times, but it was not accepted by the Senate. Separate legislation was passed by both Houses in 1946 authorizing a military mission in the Philippines, but the Senate declined to approve continuation of a mission in China that had been established on February 25, 1946, by the President under war powers authority which was claimed to be still in effect. A bill reported by the Naval Affairs Committee was passed, however, which authorized the continuation of the naval advisory unit in China,¹⁰⁵ and the army and air force units were continued under Presidential order without statutory authorization.¹⁰⁶

In the 1946 statute authorizing the naval advisory unit in China, Congress added this proviso: "United States naval or Marine Corps personnel shall not accompany Chinese troops, aircraft, or ships on other than training maneuvers or cruises."¹⁰⁷

In its request for authority to send U.S. military advisers to Greece and Turkey, the executive branch, sensing the mood of Congress, included in its draft of the bill a proviso that these military personnel, "limited in number," would serve "in an advisory capacity only." The reaction of many Members of Congress was very skeptical. Some questioned how "limited" the number would be, and seemed to have their fears confirmed when the administration backed away from an earlier acceptance of a numerical limit and opposed any limitation on numbers. Others doubted whether the advisers would refrain from becoming involved in combat, and were concerned that once the U.S. became involved in the war, and

¹⁰³For the committee's discussion see *SFRC His. Ser.*, "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine," pp. 128 ff.

¹⁰⁴Public Law 69-247.

¹⁰⁵Public Law 79-512.

¹⁰⁶All U.S. military advisers were withdrawn from China in early 1949.

¹⁰⁷Public Law 79-512, the text of which is included in *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. VII, pt. 1, p. 151. See also the explanation on pp. 106-108, and see pp. 109-149 for the transcript of the 1946 HFAC hearing and the report on the request for military missions for China.

its prestige was on the line, withdrawal might prove difficult if not impossible.

Opposition to the proposal for military advisers was particularly strong in the House. In the Foreign Affairs Committee's public hearing on the bill, Representative Karl E. Mundt (R/S.D.) asked Secretary of War Patterson whether he would object to having a numerical limit on military advisers. He said he would not object. In a subsequent executive session of the committee, Mundt then proposed limiting the number to 100 in either Greece or Turkey. (Patterson had said that there would be a maximum of 40 in either country.) Supported by Acheson, Patterson objected, saying that he did not think a numerical limit was wise. Representative Jacob K. Javits (R/N.Y.) suggested that instead of a numerical limit the words "in an advisory capacity only" be replaced by the words "in the instruction and training of military personnel, and in the procurement of military equipment and supplies only." "We are worried," he said, "about the undertaking of tactical aid, that is, aid to tactical operations. We are worried that one day an American captain will be found in the mountains advising a Greek officer how to fire on a guerrilla."

Mundt said he could understand why the executive branch wanted maximum administrative flexibility, but that the bill involved a "new type of foreign policy . . . which may have to be extended down through a great many countries," and that Congress had the constitutional responsibility to control the war power. ". . . if we delegate the congressional power of authority over the sword," he said, "we have done something which is precedent-shattering in this country, and then we have vacated, in the final analysis, the authority to declare war."¹⁰⁸

The Foreign Affairs Committee declined, however, to change the proviso on military advisers contained in the administration's bill, and stated in its report:¹⁰⁹

Combat forces are not to be sent to Greece and Turkey. The military assistance provided in the bill is to consist only of arms and other supplies for the armed forces of Greece and Turkey. These supplies are to be provided on the basis of investigations and recommendations by small military missions sent out by the United States in an advisory capacity only.

During House debate on the bill, Mundt offered his amendment to limit military advisers to 100 each in Greece and Turkey. Agreeing with Mundt on the need for congressional control, Representative Walter H. Judd (R/Minn.) said, "I cannot for a moment support the bill if perchance by any stretch of interpretation of language it could permit an expeditionary force, or even a battalion of our armed forces, to go into these countries either in addition to British troops or in substitution for British troops."

After criticism from some Members that the number in Mundt's amendment was too low, Judd offered an amendment raising it to 200. This, too, was said by some to be arbitrary and unnecessary, so Judd and Mundt offered a substitute. They dropped the numerical limitation, and instead proposed adding after the words "in an ad-

¹⁰⁸For the discussion in the committee see *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 403-410.

¹⁰⁹H Rept. 80-314, contained in *ibid.*, pp. 421-438.

visory capacity only" the words "and not to include armed organized military units to serve as occupational or combat troops." There was considerable support for this amendment, especially among Republicans. Representative Kenneth B. Keating (R/N.Y.) said, for example, "We must permit no loophole whereby the military minded might, under any circumstances, take a step to involve this Nation so deeply that it could not, with honor, extricate itself short of war."

Among those who supported the Judd-Mundt amendment was Toby Morris (D/Okla.), who said, "... if we send them over there, with unlimited power, and do not reserve the constitutional right to declare war, we do not know what kind of an incident is going to happen, and they could send an army over there and we would be helpless, and we may be catapulted into a war. . . ." Minority Whip John W. McCormack (D/Mass.) replied that the language in the bill was already restrictive enough, and that the remarks of Representative Morris ignored the practical realities of the Communist challenge. "I say it is in our national interest," McCormack declared, "not to let this wave envelop country after country until it envelops all of Europe. If it ever reaches that point, it will overrun all of Asia and thus actually reach our shores."

The Judd-Mundt amendment was defeated on a teller vote, 70-122, but judging by the large number of Members voting for the amendment there was considerable support for the proposal to restrict the role of military advisers.¹¹⁰

In the Senate, the Foreign Relations Committee approved the executive branch language for military advisers, even though some of the members were obviously concerned about the implications of the proposal. Chairman Vandenberg said that this particular provision "is going to raise the most serious questions of all. . . . The 'detailing of officers and enlisted men of the Armed Forces of the United States' seems pretty close to a blank check that comes pretty close to a potential act of war; does it not?" Acheson disagreed.¹¹¹

In testimony in an executive session of the committee, Senator Claude Pepper (D/Fla.) questioned the provisions for military advisers, and pointed out that a Gallup poll published on March 28, 1947, had indicated strong public preference for aid to Greece and Turkey, but also strong opposition to sending military advisers.¹¹² Senator Edwin Johnson (D/Colo.) also testified against the proposal for military advisers, and recommended stripping the bill of all provisions for military assistance. This suggestion was defeated by a voice vote in the committee, and by a vote of 22-68 in action by the Senate on the bill.¹¹³

During Senate debate on the bill there was also considerable criticism of the military advisers provision, but also strong support from senior Members of the Senate, including the Democratic mi-

¹¹⁰For the debate and vote see *CR*, vol. 93, pp. 4816-4822, 4910-4921. In the House of Representatives there are three types of votes in addition to the roll call. These are the voice vote, the division (Members standing and being counted by the Chair), and the teller vote (Members being counted by two other members—tellers—representing each party, as they go up the center aisle).

¹¹¹*SFRC Hrs. Ser.*, "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine," p. 10.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 191, and *CR*, vol. 93, p. 3792.

nority leader, Scott W. Lucas (D/Ill.).¹¹⁴ The Senate joined the House in approving the provision without change, and it became law as it had been drafted by the executive branch.

Before leaving the Greek-Turkish aid bill, one further observation is in order as part of the background for congressional action on Vietnam. This concerns the tendency, as represented by amendments offered in the Senate and the House, to apply American standards to countries being considered for aid, and to propose conditioning such aid on reforms in the direction of greater democracy and more efficient government. These were offered, as they tended also to be in the case of Vietnam, by Members of Congress known for their internationalist viewpoint and for their attachment to the ideals of a democratic social order, predominately liberal Democrats. It should also be noted, however, that there was strong opposition, particularly in the House, to such political conditions, at least in the case of Greece and Turkey, as demonstrated by the votes by which the various amendments were defeated.

One such reform amendment was offered in the House by Representative Mike Mansfield (D/Mont.), a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, expressing support for "the political cooperation of all loyal Greek parties for a dynamic program in Greece of amnesty coupled with the disarming of illegal bands, just and vigorous tax forms, modernization of the civil service, realistic financial controls, and even-handed disposition of justice." This was defeated on division, 18-128.¹¹⁵

Another reform amendment was offered by Representative Jacob Javits (R/N.Y.), a liberal internationalist and a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to provide that as a condition for aid the government of the recipient country should have majority support of its public. In his minority report on the bill when it was reported from committee, Javits said, among other things, "If we are seeking to help democracy as contrasted with communism then we must strive for democratic and representative governments in the countries which we assist, and if it is impractical to obtain immediately the reform of existing regimes, at least we must be trying to do so."¹¹⁶ Javits' amendment was defeated by the House on division, 6-104.¹¹⁷

Although the Far East was mentioned in congressional debate on the Greek-Turkish aid bill—Judd, for example, said that although aid for Greece and Turkey was essential for the defense of Europe, the struggle for China was also "crucial," because "As China goes so will go Asia"¹¹⁸—the logical extension of the Truman doctrine to the situation in Asia was argued much more strenuously in conjunction with the proposed Marshall plan.

¹¹⁴See *CR*, vol. 93, pp. 3281, 3337, 3591, 3689, 3761.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 4968-4969. For another good example see the amendment offered in the Senate by Edwin Johnson, *SFRC His. Ser.*, "Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine", pp. 103, 190, and in the House by Representative George H. Bender (R/Ohio), in *CR*, vol. 93, p. 4975.

¹¹⁶*HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pt. 2, p. 436.

¹¹⁷*CR*, vol. 93, p. 4944.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 4705.

The Debate Over Intervening in China

It was the "loss" of China to the Communists that helped to precipitate the U.S. commitment to defend Indochina. It was also the presence of China, and the experience of Chinese intervention in the Korean war, that had a strong effect on the making of subsequent decisions about the Vietnam war.

China is also interesting as a case in which both the Executive and Congress had to decide what the role of the U.S. should be toward the revolutionary situation prevailing in that country, and the extent to which the U.S. should intervene and involve itself in efforts to suppress the Communist insurgency. In that sense, besides its relevance in other respects, it was a case that bears on subsequent U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and on the making of the commitment or commitments to defend Indochina.

It is useful to look back briefly at the period immediately before and during World War II when the U.S. was heavily involved in China, where there are direct parallels to the later role of the U.S. in Vietnam.

The parallel to Vietnam began in 1940-41, when the U.S. developed an elaborate covert plan to provide China with American planes and pilots (volunteers, who had been permitted to resign from the military for this purpose) through a dummy private corporation for the purpose of conducting air raids over Japan in order to deter the Japanese from further aggression.¹¹⁹ There were vigorous objections to this plan from Secretary of War Stimson and Chief of Staff Gen. George Marshall, as a result of which it was decided that the U.S. would provide fighter planes and pilots rather than bombers. This modified plan, which was being implemented at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, was subsequently carried out by the "Flying Tigers." After World War II, some of those involved in the original scheme, most notably Gen. Clair Chennault, worked with the U.S. Government in establishing the Civil Air Transport (CAT), the parent company for Air America, which operated in Southeast Asia throughout the Vietnam war as an arm of the CIA. Thus, as one scholar suggests, the clandestine operation developed in 1940-41 became a precedent for subsequent operations and "... foreshadowed the style, if not substance, of future policies in Asia and is an important link with policies the United States pursued during the later Indochina War."¹²⁰

U.S. involvement in China during 1943-44 also led to efforts by Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, Commander of the CBI (China-Burma-India) Theater to "modernize" China along Western, and especially American lines. "Could 'China be the leader in East Asia after the war and through its influence and the threat of its army control the western Pacific,' Stilwell asked himself. 'The answer is an overwhelming YES!' It was imperative, a 'matter of duty,' for America to create the proper kind of postwar China, even if America (or Stilwell himself) had to guide the hand of destiny 'through the fierce use of power politics and a ruthless progressive program.'"¹²¹

¹¹⁹Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), ch. 4.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 130.

Stilwell's zeal for reforming China took a bizarre turn in 1944 when, after he returned to China from a trip to Washington and a meeting with President Roosevelt, plans reportedly were made by some U.S. Government personnel to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek and his wife. Here, too, there may be a possible parallel in the 1963 assassination of Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem, in which the United States, having decided that Vietnam needed new leadership, gave its approval and assistance to a coup d'etat.

This is the account of the 1944 episode by Stilwell's aide, Col. Frank Dorn:¹²²

When Stilwell returned to China he visited Dorn at Y-Force headquarters in Kunming and delivered a top-secret verbal order which he said came from Roosevelt. The order was to prepare a plan to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek. The President, according to Stilwell, was "fed up with Chiang and his tantrums," and said so. In fact, he told me in that olympian manner of his "if you can't get along with Chiang, and can't replace him, get rid of him once and for all. You know what I mean, put in someone you can manage."

Dorn dutifully devised a plan to sabotage Chiang's aircraft while he flew over the Hump to make an inspection tour of Chinese forces in India. When the passengers were forced to bail out, both the generalissimo and Madame Chiang would be given faulty parachutes. According to Dorn, the President never gave final authorization for Stilwell to carry out this assassination. But the very planning for such a contingency, assuming both Stilwell and Dorn had told the truth, revealed that the White House no longer saw China and Chiang as co-terminous.

This is the conclusion of one historian, based on a study of the "American crusade" in China in the period 1938-45, as to the parallel between U.S. policy in China and the subsequent role of the United States in Vietnam:¹²³

In a haunting way Vietnam became the macabre fulfillment of Joseph Stilwell's reform strategy. Advisors attached to the White House, State Department, Pentagon, and CIA did all that was humanly possible to create a pliable government and army in South Vietnam which would form the core of a bona fide nationalist regime. The level of overt and covert manipulation of the client in Saigon surpassed even Stilwell's imagination. When the approach failed, massive and direct applications of American power were rushed into the battle. And in the end, it all went the same way as China for almost the same variety of reasons.

In 1947, there was considerable debate in Congress about the question of intervening in the conflict between the Nationalist government, still led by Chiang Kai-shek, and Communist forces that had steadily increased in size and strength. In May 1947, concurrently with passage of the Greek-Turkish aid program, Congress approved an aid bill¹²⁴ for humanitarian relief to several countries

¹²²Quoted from Schaller, p. 153, based on Dorn's book, *Walkout with Stilwell in Burma* (New York: Crowell, 1971), and comments by Dorn to Schaller.

¹²³Schaller, p. 304.

¹²⁴Public Law 80-84.

devastated by the war—Austria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and, at the insistence of Members of Congress, China. In November 1947 this was augmented and extended by an interim or emergency aid act¹²⁵ for all of Europe, designed to provide assistance until Congress could act on the Marshall plan legislation in 1948. Again, China was added as a recipient by Congress when the Senate yielded in conference to a House amendment making this addition.¹²⁶

These efforts by Congress, led by Representatives Judd and John M. Vorys (R/Ohio), to push the administration toward providing assistance to China, were resisted by the executive branch. Secretary of State Marshall, after his unsuccessful mission in China in 1946–47, was convinced that the only solution to the China problem was, as he stated in a meeting with the Secretaries of War (Patterson) and Navy (Forrestal) on February 12, 1947, “. . . to oust the reactionary clique within the Central Government and replace them by liberals from both the Kuomintang [Nationalist] and Communist parties.”¹²⁷ On February 27, Marshall was asked by President Truman whether the time had come to provide some ammunition to China (military supplies had been banned at Marshall's insistence since the summer of 1946), and Marshall replied that if this were done, “. . . we certainly would be charged with assisting in the civil war.” Such assistance could also “stabilize the Kuomintang Party in its present personnel,” i.e., prevent the formation of the coalition he thought was necessary and had been directed to seek.¹²⁸ In a letter to Secretary of War Patterson, who took the position that the Chinese Government was as liberal as it was going to be in the near future, and that withholding aid would not serve our interests,¹²⁹ Marshall reiterated his position, and said that before giving military aid it would be better “. . . to let the opposing Chinese military forces reach some degree of equilibrium or stalemate without outside interference.”¹³⁰

U.S. officials in Washington, as well as American civilian and military representatives in China, kept pressing, however, for assistance to China, as numerous documents in the State Department's historical series attest. For example, in a major policy memorandum prepared in June 1947 the JCS concluded that “. . . the only Asiatic government at present capable of even a show of resistance to Communist expansion in Asia is the Chinese National Government,” and that it would collapse unless it received military assistance. If the Nationalists were to fall, “the United States must be prepared to accept eventual Soviet hegemony over Asia.” Referring to the Truman doctrine by name, the memorandum stated, “From the military point of view it is believed important that if this policy is to be effective it must be applied with consistency in

¹²⁵Public Law 80–389.

¹²⁶For a good discussion of the role of Congress in the inclusion of China in these transitional aid measures see Charles Wolf, Jr., *Foreign Aid: Theory and Practice in Southern Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 14–26. For Congress' action on China generally, especially the role of party politics, see Westerfield, *Foreign Policy and Party Politics*, chs. 12 and 16. For an analysis of the question of applying containment to China see Thomas G. Patterson, “If Europe, Why Not China? The Containment Doctrine, 1947–49,” *Prologue*, 13 (Spring 1981), pp. 19–38.

¹²⁷*FRUS*, 1947, vol. VII, p. 796.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 804.

¹²⁹See Robert P. Patterson's letter to George C. Marshall in *ibid.*, pp. 799–802.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 806.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 911.

¹³³Public Law 80-472.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 136.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 391, 406.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 459.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 463.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁹See *CR*, vol. 94, pp. 3669-3672.

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

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 208-211.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1949, vol. IX, p. 474.

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

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

Our greatest difficulty in talking with the French and in stressing what should and what should not be done has been our inability to suggest any practicable solution of the Indochina problem, as we are all too well aware of the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution which excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome. We are naturally hesitant to press the French too strongly or to become deeply involved as long as we are not in a position to suggest a solution or until we are prepared to accept the onus of intervention. The above considerations are further complicated by the fact that we have an immediate interest in maintaining in power a friendly French Government, to assist in the furtherance of our aims in Europe. This immediate and vital interest has in consequence taken precedence over active steps looking toward the realization of our objectives in Indochina.

China Falls to the Communists and Debate Begins on Defending Vietnam

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

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

¹⁵⁸FRUS, 1948, vol. VI, pp. 43-49

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶¹*FRUS*, vol. VII, pt. 1, p. 1137.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶³HFAC *Hia. Ser.*, vol. IV, pp. 41-42.

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

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

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 27.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 38, 45, 65.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 65.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Approval of Funds for the "General Area of China"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 51.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸⁰HFAC *Hrs. Ser.*, vol. V, p. 357.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 243.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 235.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸⁸*SFRS His. Ser.*, "Military Assistance Program: 1949," p. 186.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 527-528.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹⁵Public Law 81-329, sec. 406b1.

¹⁹⁶CR, vol. 93, pp. 11802-11803.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹⁷PP. Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 40.

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

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

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, pt. I, p. 113.

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

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

CHAPTER 2

THE U.S. JOINS THE WAR

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

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

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

¹FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, p. 812.

²*New York Times*, May 9, 1950.

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

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

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

The Decision to Become Involved in the War in Indochina

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 711-715.

⁹PP. Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 194-195.

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

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

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

The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Congress Passes Legislation to Provide New Aid for Indochina

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4552.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 4545.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 6481.

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

²⁴CR, vol. 96, p. 4536.

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

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

The Anti-Communist Offensive and NSC 68

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

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

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

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

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 4056.

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

²⁷H. Rept. 81-2117, p. 28

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³¹*FRUS*, 1951, vol. I, p. 37.

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

The Effects of the Korean War

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁵*CR*, vol. 96, p. 9233.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9322.

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

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

As Seyom Brown has pointed out:³⁸

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁸Brown, p. 59

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁶*Present at the Creation*, p. 414.

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

Continued

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Question of Using American Forces in Indochina

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵¹FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 857-858.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 862-864.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁶FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 888-890.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"i. Eliminate its policy of 'colonialism.'

"ii. Provide proper tutelage to the Associated States.

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

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

This was Ohly's conclusion:

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

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

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

⁶⁴*Present at the Creation*, p. 674.

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

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

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

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

Congress Provides Additional Aid for Indochina

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

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

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

⁶⁵FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, p. 957

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 959.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷³FRUS, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 20–22.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 377.

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

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 830-831.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 884-886

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 348

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

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

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

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

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

⁸²*Ibid.*, pp. 359-361.

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

⁸⁴*FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 332-338.

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

plained by Blum, who left Vietnam in late 1951 after the U.S. acceded to French objections about his activities, as follows:⁸⁶

Because of the prevailing anti-French feeling, we knew that any bolstering by us of the French position would be resented by the local people. And because of the traditional French position, and French sensitivity at seeing any increase of American influence, we knew they would look with suspicion upon the development of direct American relations with local administrations and peoples. Nevertheless, we were determined that our aid program would not be used as a means of forcing co-ordination upon unwilling governments, and we were equally determined that our emphasis would be on types of aid that would appeal to the masses of the population and not on aid that, while economically more sophisticated, would be less readily understood.

"Ours was a political program," he added, "that worked with the people and it would obviously have lost most of its effectiveness if it had been reduced to the role of French-protected anonymity."

After he returned from Vietnam, Blum took the position that, while U.S. aid had helped to strengthen the French military position, "Our direct influence on political and economic matters has not been great. We have been reluctant to become directly embroiled and, though the degree of our contribution has been steadily increasing, we have been content, if not eager, to have the French continue to have primary responsibility, and to give little, if any, advice."⁸⁷ His conclusion was that "the situation in Indochina is not satisfactory and shows no substantial prospect of improving, that no decisive military victory can be achieved, that the Bao Dai government gives little promise of developing competence and winning the loyalty of the population, that French policy is uncertain and often ill-advised, and that the attainment of American objectives is remote."

It is of interest to note that among the experiments being attempted by the French as part of their "pacification" campaign was one that was to be repeated on a much larger scale during the Kennedy administration. This was the establishment of "agro-villes"—"strategic hamlets" under Kennedy—in which villagers would be relocated from less-pacified areas. The "agroville," protected by French Union forces, offered various amenities calculated to attract peasant settlers, and, through such "pacification by prosperity," to deprive Viet Minh guerrillas of their local support. This program was one of the first to receive U.S. assistance after May 1950.⁸⁸ But like the strategic hamlet of later years, it had only a limited success, in part because of the effectiveness of Viet Minh guerrilla warfare, and was soon abandoned.

During 1951, many, if not most U.S. Government officials involved in Vietnam policymaking became convinced that the Bao Dai government would have to be replaced by a government with stronger public support, and had begun to work toward that goal.

⁸⁶Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 88

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 87, 91.

⁸⁸Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 186.

This, it may be argued, marked the beginning of the active intervention of the United States in the manipulation of the politics of Vietnam. At that stage, however, the French were still officially in control, and the U.S. was in the position of having to deal with the French while also attempting to work directly with the Vietnamese.

Washington was the scene of one aspect of the maneuvering then taking place, namely, the development of domestic U.S. political pressure for replacing Bao Dai. Although the sequence of events is not entirely clear, it would appear that in 1952 Diem was introduced to Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas during a trip Douglas made to Vietnam. Douglas then introduced him to Senator Mike Mansfield and Senator John F. Kennedy at a meeting in Washington in May 1953, and subsequently to other key figures in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, including John McCormack, then the Democratic whip, and later majority leader and speaker, and Clement J. Zablocki (D/Wis.), a leading member and later chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.⁸⁹

It is possible, however, that Kennedy, for one, may have met Diem prior to the introduction by Douglas. In November 1951, Kennedy (then a Member of the House) had visited Vietnam, and on his return had declared, "In Indochina we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of a French regime to hang on to the remnants of empire. There is no broad, general support of the native Vietnam Government among the people of that area. To check the southern drive of communism makes sense but not only through reliance on the force of arms. The task is rather to build strong native non-Communist sentiment within these areas and rely on that as a spearhead of defense rather than upon the legions of General de Tassigny. To do this apart from and in defiance of innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure."

Kennedy, whose perceptions were undoubtedly influenced by Gullion, whom he had known earlier in Washington, created a stir in Saigon when he "... bridled under the routine embassy briefing and asked sharply why the Vietnamese should be expected to fight to keep their country part of France. This viewpoint irritated the American Minister [Heath], and, when they met, it irritated General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, the war hero in command of the French forces, even more. After an animated argument de Lattre sent the Minister a formal letter of complaint about the young Congressman."⁹⁰

Kennedy's statement in 1951 has usually been interpreted as an early indication of his opposition to colonialism and his skepticism about official U.S. claims of the progress being made in Vietnam. Without detracting from this interpretation, it may also have been part of the campaign being undertaken by elements of the U.S. Government, with the collaboration of various individuals and groups, for replacement of Bao Dai by Ngo Dinh Diem.⁹¹

⁸⁹See below for discussion of the 1953 meeting.

⁹⁰Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 320-321. For Kennedy's statement see John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 60.

⁹¹Another indication of the existence of this campaign is the memorandum of a conversation on August 8, 1951, between Livingston Merchant, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far

Congress Approves 1951 Legislation for Aid to Indochina

During 1951, with the exception of this incipient support for Diem, Congress generally followed the lead of the executive branch with respect to Indochina policy. The overriding concern of most Members was with the situation in Korea and with the need to rearm in order to forestall Communist aggression in other places. This attitude was particularly apparent in the Foreign Relations Committee, which did not avail itself of various opportunities to discuss U.S. policy in Indochina, even in closed sessions with administration officials. On January 26, for example, Secretary of State Acheson met with the committee expressly for the purpose of consultation prior to the visit to Washington on January 29 of French Premier René Pleven for talks with President Truman.⁹² Acheson told the committee that he thought it was "important that the committee should know what is going on and have a chance to give us any guidance that it wishes to give us." After he had briefly summarized the agenda for the talks, including Pleven's intention "to consider with us what the position of the French forces will be if the worst came to the worst in Indochina"—a clear hint to the committee that the question of possible use of U.S. forces would be raised (he also specified, however, that "American forces would not be put in," although he did not specify what he meant by "put in")—there were questions and discussion. But except for three minor questions, there was no consideration of Indochina, and no one on the committee offered any "guidance." The ranking Republican, Senator Alexander Wiley (R/Wis.), seemed to be uncertain about the role of the U.S. He asked Acheson, "Do I understand, Mr. Secretary, that we have air forces in Indochina?" Acheson responded that the U.S. did not, but that the French had been given some American planes for use in Indochina. Senator Green said he understood that the U.S. had given the French some planes, and Acheson replied, "Those were the B26s that I have just been talking about." Senator Fulbright wanted to know whether Acheson was "encouraged about the situation in Indochina," and the Secretary replied, "It looks better than the very black picture that was around a little while ago, but I do not mean to say it is a very encouraging picture." Senator Fulbright: "Progress is being made?" Secretary Acheson: "We thought a little while ago that it was very bad indeed. General de Lattre has taken hold of the thing and some new vigor has been put into it. Unless the Chinese Communists really want to go in with some force, it looks as though he can handle it. If they do, probably he can't."

Although Indochina was considered to be one area in which the Communists were a threat, there was no open support in Congress, even from Members like Judd who wanted the U.S. to play a stronger role in defending Asia, for becoming involved in another war on the Asian mainland. When Secretary of Defense George

Eastern Affairs, and Representative Edna F. Kelly (D/N.Y.), also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Mrs. Kelly was concerned about the continued presence of the French in Indochina. According to Merchant, "She has been sold on the idea that Bao Dai is worthless and that the French must get out completely at once. . . . Among other sources of information, Mrs. Kelly has been talking to and impressed by Ngo Dinh Diem." *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 479-480.

⁹²*SFRC His. Ser.*, 1951, vol. III, pt. 1, pp. 11-26. For the Truman-Pleven talks see *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 366-369, as well as the relevant memoirs.

Marshall testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on July 2, 1951, on the new mutual security bill of 1951 he stated that he opposed becoming involved in "fighting on the mainland of Asia," as did "practically everybody in the Armed Forces, who has studied the question of availability and the spread of effort." Judd agreed. Marshall added that the question then was, "how do you manage to prevent the subversion of all Asia in its conversion to communism?" Judd's response was, "... if we do not succeed in getting the people of Asia to resist Communist expansion effectively, then we either have to intervene ourselves or let it go. Since we don't want to intervene and cannot afford to let Asia go, there is only one conclusion: We must more resolutely and successfully and resourcefully find means by which we can help these people themselves to resist it. Is that not right?" Marshall agreed, but suggested that from a military point of view the U.S. position on the islands off the coast of Asia was "a very important factor in the strength of our position in the Pacific. . . ."⁹³

Judd's position reinforced the presentation by the executive branch of the proposed economic assistance program for fiscal year 1952. William C. Foster, the administrator of the Economic Cooperation Administration, which was responsible for economic aid, testified that in order to carry out a "real counter-thrust against expanding communism in southeast Asia" the U.S. needed to recognize the "plain fact" that "these governments cannot, without our help, provide the advances and services needed by their people—or rather, cannot provide them quickly enough to offset and defeat the inroads of communism. The security of free Asia depends fundamentally, therefore, on how effectively America and the West can help the governments of free Asia meet the elementary needs of their peoples."⁹⁴

These points were elaborated by Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk. "... communism is now waging war in Asia," he said. "We must stop this aggression by peaceful means, if we can, but stop it we must." He, too, stressed the need to provide economic and technical assistance by which to meet the needs of the people, while recognizing the sensitivities resulting from nationalist feelings. "... we must . . . contest in every possible way the Communist effort to capture nationalist sentiment for the purpose of using this national desire as a means for enslaving the people under Communist domination."⁹⁵

The Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees strongly supported the administration's request for military and economic assistance for Asia for fiscal year 1952, and Congress authorized virtually the full amount requested.⁹⁶ More important, for this study, is the fact that both committees strongly endorsed the rationale of the executive branch in using U.S. aid to assist these countries to resist Communist subversion, and the use of these pro-

⁹³U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program*, Hearings, 82d Cong., 1st sess (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951), pp. 118-119.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 890-893.

⁹⁶The administration requested \$555 million military and \$262.5 million economic for Asia, excluding \$112.5 million of economic aid for Korea, a total of \$817.5 million. The final congressional authorization for Asia was \$772.75 million, of which \$535.25 million was military and \$237.5 million economic. The act was Public Law 82-165.

grams, together with the advisory activities of U.S. military assistance missions, as the wedge by which to intervene in order to perform that role. At the same time, it seemed not only plausible and proper, but necessary. As the Foreign Affairs Committee said in its report⁹⁷ on the bill, "The issue of the costs of security is clear. If we do not go ahead with the program, we face two alternatives, either (1) we abandon the rest of the world to communism, or (2) we will be compelled to defend it by our own efforts, alone. That is the challenge which the Mutual Security Program presents to this House. In the words of General Eisenhower to members of our committee in Paris in June, 'Gentlemen, it is this or else.'"

House and Senate debate during August 1951 on the mutual security authorization bill was brief and perfunctory, with most Members emphasizing the Communist threat and the need to rearm. There was very little discussion of Asia, and almost no discussion of Indochina. Given the prevailing consensus about the world situation, however, most Members doubtless would have agreed with Senator Humphrey's characterization of the importance of preventing Communist control of the area:⁹⁸

We cannot afford to see southeast Asia fall prey to the Communist onslaught. Today there is a great struggle in southeast Asia, and once in a while I think it would be well for the Congress to pay tribute to the valuable defense of freedom which the French troops and their loyal allies of Viet Nam are making in Indochina. If Indochina were lost, it would be as severe a blow as if we were to lose Korea. The loss of Indochina would mean the loss of Malaya, the loss of Burma and Thailand, and ultimately the conquest of all the south and southeast Asiatic area.

The full amounts of military and economic assistance authorized by Congress for mutual security, including Asia, were then appropriated by Congress.⁹⁹ There was little discussion or debate of any particular significance, but some very informed and important questions were asked during the hearings by one member of the House Appropriations Committee. In the prevailing legislative-executive harmony of interests, Representative Frederic R. Coudert, Jr. (R/N.Y.), who, at the beginning of the Great Debate earlier in the year had offered a resolution questioning the President's unilateral deployment of ground forces to NATO, was the exception.

The witness at the time was Dean Rusk, who testified that the principal problem in Indochina was Communist aggression, that the three Associated States had a relationship with France comparable to similar relationships in the British Commonwealth, and that the delays in granting full independence resulted from the security situation and the "inability of the new governments immediately to step in and take over all of the responsibility which under existing agreements is there for them." He added, "The battle in Indochina is only in a formal sense a civil war, because consider-

⁹⁷H. Rept. 82-872, p. 72. Similar sentiments were expressed by the Foreign Relations Committee in its report, S. Rept. 82-703.

⁹⁸CR, vol. 97, p. 10840.

⁹⁹The Senate Appropriations Committee recommended and the Senate approved a small cut in each category for the entire mutual security program, including Asia, but the full amounts were restored in conference.

able assistance is coming across the northern frontier from Red China as a part of the general pattern of Communist aggression in Asia."

Representative Coudert was not satisfied with this explanation. He said that the conflict had begun as an effort by the French to restore their colonial position, and that the war was a civil war which was "to a very large degree inspired by nationalism" in the beginning. And when Rusk contended that the Vietnamese Communists were "strongly directed from Moscow and could be counted upon . . . to tie Indochina into the world communist program," Coudert wanted to know what evidence Rusk had that this was the case.¹⁰⁰

Coudert's questions were a singular event, however. If other members doubted the course of U.S. policy toward Indochina they did not voice them, with the exception, as indicated earlier, of comments by a couple of members about the need for new leadership in Vietnam.¹⁰¹ But even those who questioned U.S. support for Bao Dai agreed fully with the U.S. commitment to defend Indochina. The congressional consensus that this commitment was vital to the interests of the United States was resounding; resounding, that is, as long as French forces were doing the fighting. Whether the defense of Indochina was vital enough to justify the use of U.S. forces was a question that remained to be answered.

Renewed Concern About Indochina

By July 1951, U.N. forces had recaptured most of Korea south of the 38th parallel, and on July 8 cease-fire talks began. Although a cease-fire was not agreed upon until 1953, the improved situation in Korea made it possible for the U.S. Government to give greater attention to Indochina. This renewed concern was also prompted by the situation in Indochina, where, after a successful campaign by French forces in Vietnam, the war was again stalemated.

Congress, however, appeared to be preoccupied with ending the fighting in Korea and avoiding similar commitments in other parts of Asia. Thus, when Rusk testified before an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on July 2, 1951, he got no takers when he suggested that the committee might want to consider the situation in Indochina. ". . . any ceasefire in Korea," he said, "will in no sense reduce the danger in other places . . . in Indochina the situation is ominous at the present time. There is now evidence of

¹⁰⁰U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, *Mutual Security Program Appropriations for 1952*, Hearings, 82d Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951), pp. 585-588.

¹⁰¹The only other exception was Senator George W. Malone (R/Nev.), called "Molly" by his friends. Although he was not considered a foreign policy "influential," and did not sit on any of the relevant committees, Malone actively expressed his views on world affairs in long, strong speeches. Though these tended to be disregarded at the time, it is particularly interesting in retrospect to note what he had to say about Indochina at a time when the more influential Members of Congress, especially the Democrats, were supporting the administration's policy of humoring the French. On April 9, 1951, Malone said that Indochina might be the next "trouble spot" because of indigenous resistance to French rule. The French, he said, with U.S. financing, were "dominating, through colonial slavery, the Indochinese as they have done for 100 years." He added that he had been in Vietnam, and that the Vietnamese "know how to run a country if they are allowed to do it." "We are now making enemies," he concluded, "faster than any nation can make friends in the Far East, in the Mediterranean area, in Egypt, and in Africa, through the system of fostering colonial slavery under the guise of keeping down communism." *CR*, vol. 97, p. 3524.

a degree of Chinese Communist activity there which is not reassuring. General de Lattre has been doing a good job, but the threat is building up."¹⁰²

Meanwhile, the executive branch debate over the U.S. role in Indochina was intensifying. Blum and the ECA, supported by Gullion, were pushing for greater involvement, while Minister Heath, supported by David K. E. Bruce, U.S. Ambassador to France, argued that the U.S. was not in a position to replace the French. The issue was brought to a head when Heath recommended changes in the handling of economic aid that would attempt to meet some of the objections of the French, especially those of General de Lattre, that the U.S. aid program was undercutting their role. In a cable on June 29, 1951, proposing these changes, Heath said that when he was sent to Saigon in 1950 he had been instructed that the U.S. was "to supplement but not to supplant" the French. This policy, he said, continued to be valid. Without the French, Vietnam would not survive for six weeks, and, he added, after summarizing the Blum-Gullion argument:

... it is childish to think of ousting the Fr from IC [Indochina] and stemming Communism in SEA with the means now at hand. Militarily, I take it no other non-Commie power or combination of powers is today prepared take over from the Fr expeditionary corps. Politically, whatever might have been situation 2 years ago, no party, no newspaper, no group, no individual in Vietnam today publicly espouses the elimination of Fr except the VM. There is literally no place behind which such Amer influence cld be exerted, and none is likely be permitted arise. Nor cld such a party or such a pro-Amer movement be built overnight out of mil and econ aid programs of the size available for IC. Economically, present ECA and MAAG budgets are minor compared with Fr expenditures. They are sufficient if wrongly applied to embitter Franco-Amer relations; they are not enough replace the Fr contribution.¹⁰³

Ambassador Bruce said that Heath's position was correct, "... unless, of course, US is willing to contemplate affirmatively major shift in responsibility for keeping this area out of Commie hands."¹⁰⁴ Washington also agreed, and the State Department cabled Heath instructions to make most of the proposed changes that the French had requested in the procedure for handling economic aid.

Blum's response on July 12, however, was that Heath's analysis of the situation overlooked the fact that the U.S. and the French were approaching the problem from different premises, and that "Increased consultation wld be profitable only within a framework of agreed premises that does not now exist." "We must do everything we can avoid undermining the Fr position," he said, adding, in language suggesting that the U.S. should put itself in a position to supplant or take over from the French, "but we must recognize that this undermining is the work of the Viets themselves, brought on in part by Fr mistakes, and has been going on for many years.

¹⁰²*SFRCS His. Ser.*, 1951, vol. III, pt. 1, p. 547.

¹⁰³*FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, pp. 432-438.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 443.

Perhaps the best we can hope for is to conduct here a kind of uneasy holding operation until something else happens in another place. If and when this happens the Fr may have to withdraw entirely, and unless we are willing to abandon this area indefinitely we should try to maintain position of influence in this part of world where only break with past offers a firm foundation for the future."¹⁰⁵

On July 20, Heath sent a long cable to Washington explaining his position, in which he very prophetically said, among other things, "... pressures will mount in Fr and IC for negotiated settlement in Vietnam with forthcoming negots on post armistice political settlement in Korea. Problem may soon become one not of attempting persuade Fr to intervene less in IC but to continue their exertions beyond politically popular level."¹⁰⁶

In a memorandum to Secretary Acheson on the Heath-Blum dispute, Livingston T. Merchant, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, said he thought that both men were correct, and that it was necessary to contain the Communists militarily as well as to respond to the legitimate demands of the people. "I suppose, in a word," he concluded, "I would summarize my feeling by saying that whereas the answer to the problem is to a considerable extent military, for the obvious reason that a full-scale war is being conducted, nevertheless the political is the more important component." Interestingly enough, in view of the efforts made during and after 1968 to get the Vietnamese to defend themselves ("Vietnamization"), Merchant said that he approved of channeling U.S. military aid to the newly-established national army, and that "the prompt creation of an effective National Army is our best if not our only hope in Indochina."¹⁰⁷

While resisting U.S. intervention, the French were continuing to solicit U.S. support for the war in Indochina. In September 1951, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, accompanied by General de Lattre, came to Washington for meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the U.S., France, and Britain. Among the topics discussed at these meetings, as well as in separate discussions between U.S. and French officials, was the situation in Indochina. Schuman said that France could not continue defending Indochina, as well as meeting its obligations in Europe, without increased help from the United States.

General de Lattre also conferred with U.S. officials, including President Truman, who, he said, assured him that the United States "*would not let Indochina fall into enemy hands.*"¹⁰⁸

In a meeting with Defense officials, de Lattre took the position that the U.S. shared with France the responsibility for defending Indochina: "Do not say *my* theatre. It is not *my* theatre; it is *our* theatre." The U.S. had to decide, he said, "... if it is necessary to hold Asia. If the answer is yes, then it must give him the material he needs for the defense of Indochina." At another point, according to the record of the meeting, he said that Gen. J. Lawton Collins,

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 450-451.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 459.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 462-464 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 502. (emphasis in original).

then the Chief of Staff of the Army, had "agreed with him that 'if you lose Korea, Asia is not lost; but if I lose Indochina, Asia is lost.' Tonkin is the key to Southeast Asia, if Southeast Asia is lost, India will burn like a match and there will be no barrier to the advance of Communism before Suez and Africa. If the Moslem world were thus engulfed, the Moslems in North Africa would soon fall in line and Europe itself would be outflanked."¹⁰⁹

General de Lattre said that the military situation in Indochina was stalemated, and would continue to be unless the U.S. promptly delivered the military assistance items already programmed, as well as increasing such assistance. If he had more adequate supplies he could defeat the Viet Minh within 1-2 years unless the Chinese directly intervened.¹¹⁰

In discussions at the State Department, General de Lattre said that the problems arising from the U.S. aid program had been "caused by the fact that a number of young men with a 'missionary zeal' were dispensing economic aid with the result that there was a feeling on the part of some that they were using this aid to extend American influence." He said that the situation had improved, however, after discussions with the U.S., and that he had been informed that Mr. Blum was no longer in Indochina. Minister Heath and other State Department officials added that past misunderstandings had been cleared up.¹¹¹

It was apparent, however, judging by a cable from Gullion on October 16, 1951, that although the U.S. aid program was now less of an irritant, the impulse to intervene, as might be expected, was increasing as the amount of U.S. aid increased.¹¹² It was becoming obvious that the greater the dependency, the greater the involvement; the greater the U.S. stake in the outcome, the greater the desire to influence events. Thus, as Gullion explained at length, because the creation of the new Vietnamese National Army was essential "if fighting in IC is to be ended in our lifetimes," and because the United States was providing most of the funds and supplies for this army, the U.S. was thereby "more directly involved" in its creation, and should have more direct contact "with the client army as we have under MDAP programs other countries." But he argued that U.S. assistance should not be limited to military matters. The United States should, he said, "use our aid as level to insure better probity and performance by Vietnam officials, and to insure realistic budgeting." And he ended the cable with this strikingly broad assertion:

Way must be found in the present transitional stage of IC independence to make the future real. As our own contribution in IC is indispensable and steadily increases, we are justified in concerning ourselves with the political base of military success; the prospects for democratic institutions, forms of suffrage, admin of justice, the economic and social improvement of the IC masses, the progressive relaxation of the police control over individual and civil liberties, the constitution of a govt more

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 517-521. (emphasis in original)

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 96. See also p. 544.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 513-514.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 534-538.

representative of the entire country, the definition on viable terms of Vietnam's place in French Union. These are also weapons in this war; their institution in Vietnam may also require close US concern.

These views were supported by R. Allen Griffin, who had headed the special study mission to Indochina in the spring of 1950, and in November was designated Special Far East Representative for the foreign aid program (ECA). While on a tour of ECA missions after his appointment he cabled a report to Washington in which he said that the U.S. "has paid for right to exercise stronger voice in determination of politics" in Indochina, and that although the aid program was correctly conceived, it could not function unless there was a "govt with some grass roots instincts, intentions and social purpose."¹¹³ He recommended that the U.S. and France collaborate to bring such a government into power, adding, "If we fail to secure their collaboration for setting up a govt fitted for the job by something better than obedience to Fr, then one day we will discover that the Fr in disgust and discouragement will abandon their attempt to defend this flank of sea."

In his cable, Griffin, whose experience included serving as deputy director of the aid mission in China during the demise of the Nationalists, made these very interesting comments on the situation under the government of Bao Dai and his Prime Minister, Tran Van Huu (a wealthy landowner and French citizen, who had been installed as the Governor of Cochin China under the French prior to the reunification under Bao Dai):

We are dealing with able land owners—mandarin type—functionaire govt. Its weakness is not that it is subordinate in many ways to Fr but that it is in no sense the servant of the people. It has no grass roots. It therefore has no appeal whatsoever to the masses. It evokes no popular support because it has no popular program. It has no popular program because nature of its leaders tends to an attitude that this wld be a "concession." This govt might reluctantly try to mollify public opinion, but it does not consist of men who wld lead public opinion. Therefore though France-Vietnam Armed Forces may cont to win small engagements for ltd [limited] objectives, no real progress is being made in winning war, which depends equally on polit solution. . . . Revolution will continue and Ho Chi-minh will remain popular hero, so long as "independence" leaders with Fr support are simply native mandarins who are succeeding foreign mandarins. The period of mandarin and functionaire govt in Asia is over. The present type of govt in Viet is a relic of the past as much as Fr colonialism. . . . The issue in my mind is more than nationalism and Francophobia. It is old Asian issue that destroyed the Kuomintang in Chi, Communist opportunity to exploit insecurity, and hunger and wretchedness of masses of people to whom their govt has failed to make an effective appeal.

What is particularly noteworthy about Griffin's comments is that, having demonstrated some insight and understanding in his analysis of the problem, he came to the conclusion that the United

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 548-550.

States could and should intervene in search of a national leader who would have broad public appeal, and, more remarkably, to the conclusion that this could be done successfully. But so did many others who followed him in positions of leadership in the U.S. Government in both the executive and the legislative branches.

The reaction of Minister Heath to Griffin's proposals was that there were no "grass roots" leaders who would join the government under the relationship existing between France and Vietnam. Moreover, the development of such a government, he said, would have to occur in an evolutionary fashion as conditions permitted. But he agreed that "our aid entitles us to special role in IC and govt performance can be improved by our representation to Viets and Fr. We can ask or require Viets to produce budget, increase govt revenues, curb graft, fol through on land reform, and display more energy."¹¹⁴ From Paris, Ambassador Bruce also agreed.¹¹⁵

Bao Dai, wanting the help of the U.S. in getting concessions from the French, as well as in dealing with his own Prime Minister, told Heath that "in view our massive support US not only had right but duty criticize and counsel with respect Viet Govt operations."¹¹⁶ He asked the U.S. to give him a copy of a State Department instruction on the issues under review so that he would have greater leverage with his Prime Minister. The French thought this would be useful, but warned against direct U.S. communication with Vietnamese officials. Heath said that "Bao Dai's approach somewhat inconvenient since it has appearance of asking us assume his responsibilities to assert auth by his own govt," but he asked Washington for instructions to be used for this purpose nevertheless.¹¹⁷

Fear of Chinese Intervention

By the end of 1951, de Lattre was gone and the U.S. was faced with an increasingly uncertain situation in Indochina. During a tour of the area in the middle of November, General Collins had reported that he was "impressed" by what he saw, even though "it will be some years before the Vietnamese will be competent to defend themselves." He added, however, that "this is largely a General de Lattre show. If anything should happen to him, there could well be a collapse in Indo-China."¹¹⁸ By early December, de Lattre, who was seriously ill, and who "now despaired of victory,"¹¹⁹ had returned to Paris, and the U.S. was confronted with the absence of effective French leadership as well as a growing concern that the Chinese were preparing to intervene directly in the war.

At this point, December 1951, serious consideration again was given by U.S. policymakers to military alternatives in Indochina should the Chinese intervene. The position that U.S. forces should be used only to assist the French in evacuating the country remained in effect, but, as Admiral Radford has noted, "Although official policy had not changed perceptibly during 1951, a stronger at-

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 558-559.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 560.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 553.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 557.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 545.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 556, from Heath's cable

titude toward the Indochina problem was in the Washington air."¹²⁰

The United States was still opposed to using American ground forces in the war, as well as opposing three-power military planning for the area as proposed by the British during the fall of 1951,¹²¹ but the Chinese Communist threat, together with the demise of de Lattre and the weariness of the French, forced the issue of possible military action onto the agenda of the Policy Circle.¹²² On December 19, 1951, the newly-appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, John M. Allison, sent a memo to Secretary of State Acheson on the "ominous character of intelligence reports concerning a Chinese preparation for massive intervention in Indochina," in which he said, "The consensus of intelligence reporting would indicate that action on a large scale against French Union and Vietnam forces in Tonkin may be expected on or about the 28th of December." He suggested, therefore, that the NSC in its scheduled meeting that day direct preparation of a staff study on possible U.S. responses. This was done.¹²³

That same day, there was a meeting in the regularly-scheduled series of discussions between State, Defense, and the JCS, at which the Indochina situation was discussed.¹²⁴ The record clearly indicates how serious the situation was considered to be, as well as the differences of opinion about what, if anything, the U.S. could and should do. Contrary to the usual stereotype, representatives from the military seemed less concerned about the possible "loss" of Indochina than those from the State Department. Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, said that "the question really is, are we or are we not prepared to let Southeast Asia go?" John M. Allison from State replied, "There would be a real danger of losing Southeast Asia if Indochina went Communist." General Collins, Army Chief of Staff, responded to Allison by saying that he thought "the assumption that all of Southeast Asia would be lost if Indochina goes Communist needs careful analysis." He said the British could hold Malaya, which, in terms of resources, was where most of the tin was located. He added that because of the problem of "getting able native leadership," combined with the fact that the efforts of the French seemed to be so dependent on de Lattre, "... I think we must face the probability that Indochina will be lost." Paul Nitze, Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, replied, "If we get an armistice in Korea and then quietly swallow the loss of Indochina, the adverse public relations consequences would be tremendous. We should consider very carefully what is involved." At this point Gen. Omar N. Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, commented: "Maybe we could use the 'larger sanction' in the Indochina situation as well as in Korea." But the difficulty with doing that, said Charles Bohlen from the State De-

¹²⁰*From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 348.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 345-346.

¹²²This term is borrowed from William P. Bundy, who uses it to include those at the Assistant Secretary level and above, as well as key White House and NSC Staff, involved in foreign policy-making. The composition of the group obviously would vary somewhat from issue to issue.

¹²³*FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, p. 563.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 568-570.

partment, was that "a Chinese increase in support will probably be gradual and covert rather than sudden and open."

The "larger sanction" was atomic weapons, which, even before the end of Truman's administration, were being considered for use against mass military movements by the Chinese in Korea.

As far as conventional forces were concerned, General Bradley commented, "I just don't think we could get our public to go along" with the use of U.S. ground troops in Indochina.

General Collins was asked whether the French "could hold on if the Chinese don't come in in force." He replied that they could, but that "there is no chance that they really can clean up the situation." "To clean up the situation," he added, "would require a general offensive."

As 1951 ended, Washington received a long, thoughtful, pessimistic cable from Ambassador Bruce in Paris.¹²⁵ "In light of domestic official and public opinion Fr policy in regard to Indochina war is rapidly moving toward a crisis," he reported. "Two years ago no Fr govt wld have survived a proposal that Indochina be voluntarily abandoned," but such a decision would now "be generally greeted by Fr public with a sense of emotional relief." Although he did not think the government would propose such a step, "I believe that the snowball has started to form, and public sentiment for withdrawal, in the absence of adoption of some course of action envisaging either internationalization of Indochina problem or Fr receipt of massive additional aid, will gain steadily and perhaps at accelerated rate."

Bruce cited the public and private position of various leaders, including Pierre Mendès-France (the leader of the Radical Socialists, who was to become Premier on June 17, 1954 in the middle of the Geneva Conference, with a promise that within 30 days he would negotiate peace in Indochina or resign). Mendès-France, who for some time had been urging a negotiated peace in Indochina, was gaining support.¹²⁶ Bruce said, as was Jean Monnet, a leading French architect of European economic union who was well-known and respected in Washington, and who took the position that the French could not continue the war in Indochina and make their proper contribution to European defense. Raymond Aron, a prominent French writer, was also in favor of withdrawal, but had refrained from publishing his views, said Bruce.

"We may soon be presented with a definite either/or situation," Bruce concluded. "Either we increase our present aid to Indochina to a very considerable extent and make certain definite commitments as to what we will do in the event of a Chi invasion, or the Fr will be compelled to reexamine their entire policy in the area."

Detering the Chinese

As 1952 began, the United States was faced with what was perceived to be a very serious situation in Asia. In Korea, the armistice

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 573-578.

¹²⁶In October 1950, Mendès-France first stated his position in a speech in the National Assembly. He said, among other things: "... it is the global concept of our action in Indochina which is false because it is based at once on a military effort which is insufficient and powerless to assure a solution of force and on a political policy which is insufficient and powerless to assure the support of the population." Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, p. 308.

talks, which had begun in July 1951, were not making significant progress, and although fighting had decreased, the Communists were reported to be in an increasingly stronger position to resume more active military operations. The prolongation of negotiations, together with the U.S. decision in 1950-51 not to attack China itself after the Chinese sent forces into Korea, also had helped to make it possible for the Chinese to shift more forces to the Indochina border toward the end of 1951, thereby increasing U.S. fear of Chinese intervention in Indochina. (The shift in Korea away from heavy fighting toward negotiations, however, had also enabled the U.S. to give more attention to the Indochina situation.) In addition, Communist insurgencies in other former colonial or colonial countries in Asia continued to be a source of concern, and large quantities of American aid were being given to the Philippines and Indonesia (Malaya was under British control and Burma was neutral) in an effort to prevent the Communists from gaining control of these areas.

During the first six months of 1952, the executive branch engaged in an intensive discussion of U.S. policy toward Indochina, especially the threat of Chinese intervention, and in June a new NSC policy position, NSC 124/2, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," was approved by the President. (It superceded the two previous directives, NSC 48, approved in December 1949, and NSC 64, approved in April 1950.) The importance of NSC 124/2, in terms of U.S. policy toward Indochina, is that it took an even stronger position on the question of U.S. interest in defending that area against the Communists than was taken in either NSC 48 or 64, and that it called for U.S. military action against China itself if necessary to save Southeast Asia. Moreover, it provided that such action could be taken unilaterally by the United States if need be.¹²⁷

NSC 124/2 was drafted in response to the need felt by both military and civilian authorities for a Presidential policy directive based on the conditions existing at that time. U.S. military authorities were concerned about the lack of a Presidential decision as to what military response should be made in the event of large-scale Chinese intervention. Such an eventuality, while no longer considered imminent, was still assumed to be possible, especially after settlement of the Korean war.

The State Department, for its part, while agreeing with the need for such a decision, took the position (as did some officials at the Pentagon) that it was equally if not more important to decide what to do if the Chinese did not intervene, but if the Viet Minh, with increased Chinese assistance, became even more of a threat. Civilian and military policymakers also agreed on the need for a current policy paper reflecting changes in the situation in Indochina in the 2 years since the approval of NSC 48 and 64, as well as updating the position of the U.S. toward Indochina in light of the Korean war.

An intelligence estimate on March 3, 1952 for the period through June 1952, concluded that there would probably be no Chinese invasion, but that the Chinese would increase their assistance to the

¹²⁷The text of NSC 124/2 is in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XII

Viet Minh. Intelligence experts also found continuing erosion in the position of French Union forces. "Through mid-1952," according to the estimate, "the probable outlook in Indochina is one of gradual deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position. . . . The longer term outlook is for continued improvement in the combat effectiveness of the Viet Minh and an increased Viet Minh pressure against the Franco-Vietnamese defenses. Unless present trends are reversed, this growing pressure, coupled with the difficulties which France may continue to face in supporting major military efforts in both Europe and Indochina, may lead to an eventual French withdrawal from Indochina."¹²⁸

On January 11, 1952, before discussions began on NSC 124/2, there was a tripartite military conference in Washington, as recommended at the Singapore military meeting in May 1951, to discuss U.S.-French-British cooperation in Southeast Asia. U.S. military authorities agreed to have the meeting, which had been requested by the French, provided there would be no U.S. commitments. According to General Collins, "The danger is that the French always say 'We can't do anything, you can, so if you don't do anything that's your responsibility.'"¹²⁹

The principal subject discussed at the January 11 conference, which was attended also by diplomatic representatives, was the action that should be taken to deter a Chinese invasion of Indochina, as well as the action that should be taken if such an invasion occurred. On the latter point, General Bradley said he could not commit the U.S. "as to extent and character of US Mil assistance in event of massive Chi intervention."¹³⁰ He added, however, that this question was "being considered at highest official level as matter of urgency." French Marshal Alphonse Pierre Juin said that in the event of such an invasion the French would fall back to Haiphong, where they would "fight to last man." But he appealed for U.S. and British "air and naval support if not ground forces" to help them repel a Chinese attack.

The allied military chiefs reached agreement on one very important point. They decided to recommend to their governments that the three powers should warn the Chinese that aggression against Southeast Asia would "bring certain retaliation from the three powers, not necessarily limited to the area of aggression." To implement this proposal they established a committee to consider specific retaliatory steps in the event the Chinese ignored the warning.

It is interesting to note that in an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee on January 14, 1952, Secretary of State Acheson was asked about the situation in Indochina. He called it "a very, very serious problem." Asked what courses of action were

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 54-55.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 1951, vol. VI, p. 570. In 1952, Admiral Radford said, "Washington was taking its place with Paris and Saigon as the center of political and military strategic planning for the war. Not only was the vital military aid program determined there; it was also the scene of increasingly numerous tripartite and bilateral conferences between American, British, and French officials concerning Southeast Asia. . . . the U.S. was being drawn into closer cooperation on a high military level with the British and French on the problems of the area." *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 351.

¹³⁰These quotations are from the January 15, 1952 cable to Saigon which is reprinted in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 14-16.

being considered, he replied, "I don't know in detail." He said that there had been a tripartite meeting of military chiefs but that he had not yet received a report on it.¹³¹ Technically this may have been true, but Acheson doubtless knew about the meeting, and especially about the proposal for warning China. He simply did not divulge it to the committee on that occasion.

In another executive session on February 8, Acheson alluded to a possible Chinese invasion, which he said "would have to be held off by some international action which said, 'If you fellows come in you will be pased.'" But he added that there had been no agreement on the actions required to back up such a warning. Once again he avoided any discussion of the proposal for a formal warning.¹³²

It is also of interest to note several of Acheson's interpretations during that same hearing. He was asked by Chairman Connally whether the Indochina war had begun as a "colonial dispute." His answer was that it began as a "dispute between two factions, one of which was led by Ho Chi Minh and the other by Bao Dai." He was then asked whether the Indochina war could be settled by action by the U.N., as in the case of Indonesia, to bring about its independence. He replied:¹³³

The problem in Indochina, Senator, is no longer any conflict between the French and the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese have got all the liberty and opportunity that they can possibly handle or want. In fact, they have got a lot more than they can either handle or want. Their difficulty now is in getting the people who can both carry on and administer the country which is turned over to them, and can raise this army and get the resources to maintain both. The level of personnel in the indigenous government, the Vietnamese Government, is not high enough or vigorous enough. Their financial resources are low. The French are subsidizing their treasury. The French are not only not getting anything out of Indochina, they are putting an awful lot in, and that burden is a very hard one.

The objective of the U.S., Acheson said, was "to keep them doing what they are doing, which is taking the primary responsibility for this fight in Indochina and not letting them in any way transfer it to us."

Chairman Connally added his own observation: "Ultimately, I think France is going to have to get out or acknowledge this anticolonialism, because they are not going to put up with this colonialism any longer. . . ." ¹³⁴

In both of these meetings the members of the committee seemed somewhat more concerned about the situation in Indochina than they had previously, but they continued to defer to the Executive, and to accept without serious challenge the Executive's explanations and interpretations. They also acquiesced in the reluctance of Executive witnesses to provide information on the situation or to

¹³¹*SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. IV, pp. 29-31

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 151. It is quite possible, of course, that on occasions such as this Acheson may have privately communicated information to one or more Senators that he was reluctant to discuss before the committee

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 149-151

discuss alternatives, even when asked to, as when Acheson was asked what courses of action were being considered by the military and he replied that he did not know "in detail." In another instance Senator Fulbright asked whether the situation was "better or worse" than it was a year earlier, and Acheson replied that it was better as a result of de Lattre's campaign.¹³⁵ This statement was made only a few weeks after the State Department had been told that de Lattre himself "despaired of victory."

On March 3, Acheson met again with the Foreign Relations Committee and Fulbright rephrased his question: "... it is worse, too, isn't it, this situation in Indochina?" Acheson replied, "I don't think it has changed," but he added, "You just cannot overstress the seriousness of that Indochinese situation."¹³⁶

In the same hearing, Senator Guy M. Gillette (D/Iowa) asked whether there was domestic political pressure on the French to withdraw from Indochina. Acheson replied that there was some talk in France to this effect, and that because of the "terrible drain" on the French the U.S. would have to watch the situation "very carefully." Again, however, he declined to discuss the situation with the committee. When Fulbright asked him what we would do if the French withdrew, Acheson replied, "Well, I just can't answer that. I don't know."¹³⁷

Fulbright's own response to the question of possible French withdrawal is an important indicator not only of his attitude at the time, but probably also of most of the internationalists in the Senate. "We have to do something," he said.

Approval of NSC 124/2

The development of NSC 124/2 began on February 13, 1952, with distribution of a draft of the proposed directive, to which was annexed a paper from the Senior Staff of the NSC which had been drafted, at least in part, by the State Department.¹³⁸ "Communist domination of Southeast Asia," the senior staff paper began, "whether by means of overt invasion, subversion, or accommodation on the part of the indigenous governments, would be critical to United States security interests." (Note that "accommodation on the part of the indigenous governments" was considered dangerous, in addition to possible overt invasion or subversion.) It went on to elaborate the danger of Communist control of Southeast Asia, and then declared, "The strategic importance of the countries in Southeast Asia, and the cumulative effect of a successful communist penetration in any one area, point to the importance of action designed to forestall any aggression by the Chinese Communists."

Picking up on the recommendation from the January 11 military conference, the paper stated that the "... most effective possible deterrent would be a joint warning by the United States and certain other governments regarding the grave consequences of Chinese aggression against Southeast Asia, and implying the threat of retaliation against Communist China itself."

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³⁸*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 375-381.

According to the paper, however, the real problem, assuming there was no Chinese invasion, was indigenous, and was political as well as military: "In the long run, the security of Indochina against communism will depend upon the development of native governments able to command the support of the masses of the people and national armed forces capable of relieving the French of the major burden of maintaining internal security."

With respect to the military situation the NSC paper concluded that it "continues to be one of stalemate," and that "The prospect is for a continuation of the present stalemate" in the absence of Chinese intervention.

This led to the further conclusion that the French might become inclined to settle with the Communists and to withdraw. This, the paper said, ". . . would be tantamount to handing over Indochina to communism. The United States should therefore continue to oppose any negotiated settlement with the Viet Minh." Moreover, if such a settlement appeared likely, the U.S. should oppose it and should consult with the French and British on possible additional steps to defend Indochina. The nature of those additional steps, it said, should be "urgently" reexamined by the U. S. Government in order to determine what the U.S. would be willing to do at that point.

In the event of an overt, large-scale Chinese invasion, or if Chinese forces were "covertly participating to such an extent as to jeopardize retention of the Tonkin Delta by the French forces," the U.S. should give maximum possible support to the French, preferably under the auspices of the U.N. If U.N. support was not obtained, the U.S. should seek the support of other countries. In the absence of the support of other countries, the paper concluded, it was unlikely that the U.S. would act unilaterally against China. (This was not the conclusion of NSC 124/2 itself, however.)

If other countries supported such an effort, the U.S. would contribute its own forces. The nature of this contribution could not be predicted, the paper said, but it added that "It would be desirable to avoid the use of major U.S. ground forces in Indochina." (Note the use of the word "major.") "Other effective means of opposing the aggression would include naval, air and logistical support of the French Union forces, naval blockade of Communist China, and attacks by land and carrier based aircraft on military targets in Communist China."

U.S. military attacks on China, the paper added, would have various consequences, one of which would be public opposition to "another Korea." But the paper suggested that "Informed public opinion might support use of U.S. forces in Indochina regardless of sentiment about 'another Korea' on the basis that: (a) Indochina is of greater strategic importance than Korea; (b) the confirmation of UN willingness to oppose aggression with force, demonstrated at such a high cost in Korea, might be nullified by the failure to commit UN forces in Indochina; and (c) a second instance of aggression by the Chinese Communists would justify measures not subject to the limitations imposed upon the UN action in Korea."

The NSC staff paper concluded that because U.S. military actions against China would constitute a *de facto*, undeclared war, it would be ". . . desirable to consult with key members of both par-

ties in Congress in order to obtain their prior concurrence in the course of action contemplated." (This was omitted from NSC 124/2.)

On February 11, 1952, the Far East Bureau of the State Department sent to the Secretary a memorandum on the major question that was not addressed in the NSC paper, namely, what were U.S. options if the Chinese did not intervene on a large scale, but gave increased assistance to the Viet Minh?¹³⁹ After a discussion along the same lines as the NSC paper (and in identical language at certain points) the State Department paper concluded that the U.S. "must keep on keeping on in Indochina, until the Viet Minh is liquidated and therefore, no longer an effective instrument of the Kremlin and Peiping, or until events elsewhere in the world relieve, in whole or in part, the burden now borne by anti-communist forces in this theater of action." Specifically, it recommended that the U.S. increase its financial and other forms of assistance to the French and the Indochinese, including paying all or most of the costs of the new Indochinese armies. "The formation and commitment to battle of the Indochinese National armies should be accelerated in every possible way. *In our opinion, this offers the most promising prospect of influencing the political complex in a positive way, and of providing additional assistance in an effective manner.*" (Emphasis in original)

The State Department paper also recommended that the U.S. "Press Bao Dai to take a more active and vigorous part in Vietnamese affairs. He should be pressed to:

"a. Broaden the representations in his Government of Vietnamese political groups such as the Cao Daists, Dai Viets, Catholics, etc.;

"b. make public a national budget;

"c. establish diplomatic missions abroad;

"d. devote particular energy to the national armies' project."

During the many weeks of deliberation on NSC 124 that followed, three dominant factors shaped the debate. The first was the situation in Europe, where every effort was being made to secure approval, especially by the French, of the European Defense Community. (The treaty establishing the EDC was signed by the respective Foreign Ministers, including the French, on May 27, 1952.) It was argued, and with considerable effectiveness apparently, that because of this situation NSC 124 should not prescribe undue additional U.S. pressure on the French. (In 1954, the French Parliament rejected the EDC treaty.) The second factor was the position of the Pentagon that the United States should not commit ground forces to Indochina, and that the primary U.S. military mission, if any, should be directed against the Chinese. The third, stemming from the second and reinforcing the first, was that because the U.S. was not in a position to assume the role of the French in Indochina, every effort should be made to keep France from withdrawing.

These three factors tended to reinforce the position taken in the NSC staff study that the posture and the role of the U.S. should be primarily to provide additional assistance to the French and the

¹³⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 28-34.

Indochinese, and to deter the Chinese, or to attack them by air and sea if they invaded Indochina.

In a meeting of the National Security Council on March 5, 1952, Secretary of State Acheson, according to the summary of the meeting, took the position that had been suggested in the February 11 State Department paper that NSC 124 should "... stress the contingency of a continued deterioration of the situation in Indochina in the absence of any identifiable Communist aggression, and should also take careful account of the possibility that the French might feel compelled to get out of French Indochina." The NSC, he said, should assess the relative importance of Indochina in relation to NATO with respect to the role of the French, and should also determine what the U.S. "is really prepared to do in order to keep the French in Indochina." It was agreed by the NSC that these matters would be studied.¹⁴⁰

On March 27, pursuant to the action of the NSC, the State Department prepared a draft paper on Indochina for consideration in the drafting of NSC 124. It analyzed what U.S. policy should be on the specific assumption "That identifiable Chinese Communist aggression against Southeast Asia does not take place."¹⁴¹ The first portion of the paper generally followed the lines of the earlier State Department and NSC drafts. There was a new section, however, dealing with "Considerations Affecting U.S. Assumption of Increased Responsibility for Indochina," followed by a section on "Possible U.S. Courses of Action," which represented an attempt to respond more definitively to the question of what the U.S. could and should do about Indochina, and in which the risks of assuming greater responsibility were clearly stated:

Important as the maintenance and development of an anti-communist position in Indochina is to the interests of the U.S., a U.S. decision to undertake greater responsibility in Indochina should be made only in the light of (a) the possibility that any U.S. course of action, short of actual employment of U.S. armed forces, may in the long run prove ineffectual; (b) the possibility that a marked improvement in the anti-communist position in Indochina which threatened to eliminate the Viet Minh might occasion Chinese Communist intervention; (c) the possibility that U.S. assumption of responsibility in Indochina might occasion a rapid and extensive loss of interest in the situation on the part of the French; and (d) U.S. ability to assume increased burdens in Indochina in view of its present world-wide commitments.

The situation in the Associated States, the paper said, illustrated the problem of creating stability in newly-established nations. With the help of the French and the Americans, the Associated States might succeed. On the other hand, "... there can be no guarantee that increased U.S. assistance to and responsibility for Indochina will necessarily stabilize the situation or prevent such deterioration as to eventually face the U.S. with a choice of either employing its own armed forces or accepting Communist domination of the area."

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 61-62. For the full text of the summary see vol. XII of *ibid.*

¹⁴¹The text of the memo is in *ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 82-89

In discussing possible courses of action, the State Department paper concluded that increased U.S. assistance for the new national armies might be popular with Congress, even though it would also lead to greater U.S. involvement: "Assumption of part or all of the costs of the national Indochinese armies would increase U.S. involvement in Indochina, and would undoubtedly to some degree increase U.S. responsibility for the area. This course of action might, however, be more attractive to the U.S. domestically and thus make U.S. appropriations more feasible."

On the question of using U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina the paper had this to say:

It must be estimated that the Chinese Communists have the same sensitivity about their southern border as they have demonstrated in the case of Manchuria and it is probable therefore that the intervention of U.S. armed forces in Indochina would occasion a full scale Chinese Communist military intervention. The employment of U.S. armed forces in Indochina, without a prior Chinese Communist intervention, would also have the disadvantage of tending to relieve the French of their basic military responsibility for Indochina and thus of providing the French with a possible means of exit from Indochina which might not too greatly involve French prestige. Aside from the dislocation which use of U.S. forces in Indochina would impose upon U.S. military dispositions elsewhere in the world, therefore, there is good reason to consider it inadvisable for the U.S. to employ its own armed forces in Indochina on the assumption, to which this paper is addressed, that Chinese Communist identifiable aggression does not take place.

With respect to further efforts to get the French to grant full independence, the paper concluded that while this might be popular in Indochina, additional U.S. pressure might also discourage the French, and, therefore, should be avoided.

Based on these considerations, the paper recommended the following steps for the U.S.:

1. Continue and increase its military and economic assistance programs for Indochina;
2. Continue to provide substantial financial assistance for the French effort in Indochina either through direct budgetary assistance to France or through assumption of financial responsibility for the Indochinese national armies, or a combination of both.
3. Continue to exert its influence to promote constructive political developments in Indochina, and in particular to promote a broadening of the base of the governments of the Associated States.
4. Continue to stress French responsibility for Indochina and oppose any decrease of French efforts in Indochina.
5. The U.S. should not employ U.S. armed forces in Indochina.
6. The U.S. should not exert its influence for the achievement of a truce in Indochina.

This State Department paper was sent to the Pentagon for comment, and on May 1, 1952, Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett replied by recommending further discussion between the two depart-

ments. He enclosed copies of memoranda from the JCS and the Joint Secretaries (the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force) commenting on State's paper.¹⁴²

The response of the JCS was that State's paper did not offer a "new approach," but that its recommendations were generally sound from a military standpoint. The Chiefs took issue with several points. While they accepted the possibility that the use of U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina might cause the Chinese to intervene, they said that this would not be apt to happen if ground forces were not used, and if only naval and air forces were "employed in the general vicinity" as a "show of force." Moreover, the JCS argued, the response of the Chinese to either the use of U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina or the defeat of the Viet Minh could not be analogized to China's intervention in Korea. Although it was possible that China would intervene in Indochina in either of these two circumstances, it was not, contrary to the State Department's position, probable.

The JCS also urged that, although such a step did not appear likely, consideration be given to "U.S. courses of action in the event of voluntary French withdrawal" from Indochina.

The Joint Secretaries were much more critical. "We are not favorably impressed by the draft statement on Indochina. It is apparent that the recommendations offer little more than an expectation of preserving the status quo. It is our opinion that a continuation of the current program is an expression of a sit tight philosophy without definitive goals. The mere fact that the loss of Indochina is a bleak prospect does not justify the continual restatement of negative postulates which result in more and more dollars being poured into an uninspired program of wait and see." The U.S., they argued, needed a "dynamic program geared to produce positive improvements in the military and political situation." Although they agreed that an immediate French withdrawal would result either in a Communist victory or the need for new U.S. military commitments, they said that "... the problem for U.S. policy is not to keep the French indefinitely committed in Indochina, but to facilitate the inevitable transition from colonialism to independence in such a way that there is no opportunity for Communism to flow into an intervening power vacuum." They urged this three-step "dynamic program":

(1) A French commitment to give the three Associated States effective independence within a reasonable period in such form and with such guarantees as to carry full conviction.

(2) An international program, preferably under the United Nations, designed to put an end to the civil war, to protect the three states from Communist aggression and subversion, and to aid and support them during the transition period.

(3) A French commitment to continue to defend the area during the transition period.

In addition to assurances of "genuine independence," certain other steps could be taken, they said, to win the support of the people of Indochina for their new governments. These included greater freedom of speech, encouragement of the organization of

¹⁴²These documents are in *ibid.*, pp. 113-124.

political groups, establishment of a national assembly, broader representation of political groups in the government, and better government administration and programs.

The replacement of French troops by native armies, the Joint Secretaries said, would be the key measure of success of the program of French disengagement and of the development of indigenous strength. They added that since one of the handicaps in creating these armies was the animosity toward French training officers, the use of a U.S. training mission should be considered.

Within the State Department the reaction to the JCS position was generally favorable, but in a memorandum to Secretary Acheson, Assistant Secretary Allison argued that the U.S. military mission in Indochina must be strengthened, a position that had been taken in the original State paper, but which the JCS had rejected, saying that the mission should only be strengthened if necessary in connection with increased U.S. military assistance. (Note that it was the civilians who were, in this instance, urging a stronger military advisory group.) But FE's response to the views of the Joint Secretaries was quite another matter. Allison said that the three-step program proposed by the Secretaries "... is self-defeating and, for that matter, dangerous in the extreme. In our opinion, if it were suspected in French circles that such a consideration as that embodied in the Joint Secretaries' memorandum were even under consideration in the American Government it would have a disastrous effect on the French will to continue their present program in Indochina with the sacrifice which it entails. Moreover, if the program were known in Vietnamese circles, it would so undermine confidence that it might sway the great mass of undecided middle-ground opinion against the present Governments and France in favor of Ho Chi Minh."

"Without direct U.S. military participation," Allison said, "our objectives in Indochina can be achieved only through a continuation of the present scale of French effort," adding that U.S. pressure on the French and the Associated States could be effective only if they thought they had full support from the United States.

Allison concluded his memorandum by suggesting to Acheson:¹⁴³

Mr. Lovett can best further our common objective by continuing to cooperate with us in obtaining Congressional authorization for our aid programs and by endeavoring to assure that such unrealistic proposals as that presented in the Joint Secretaries' memorandum are no longer offered, if only because they represent a great potential danger in that they might, if their existence were ever to become known to the French and the States' Governments, result in the very situation which our past and present actions have been designed to avoid—an immediate choice between allowing Indochina, and possibly all of Southeast Asia, to fall into Communist hands or attempting to defend it ourselves with little or no assurances of outside help.

On May 12, 1952, there was a meeting of State and Defense officials, including all of those who had been involved in writing the various memos, to discuss NSC 124, especially U.S. policy toward

¹⁴³The full text is in *ibid.*, pp. 124-129

Indochina.¹⁴⁴ The conclusion of the group was that the U.S. should continue supporting the development of the Indochinese national armies. David Bruce, U.S. Ambassador to France, said that it was important to get the French out of Indochina, and wondered whether the U.S. could contribute directly to the native forces. "It might be doubtful," he said, "whether a native army could maintain itself alone, but this was our only hope." Secretary of Defense Lovett questioned whether it would be possible "... to get all of the French out of Indochina. He thought it would be better to leave a substantial number there. He thought that Congressional appropriations were an uncertain base on which a native army would have to depend."

Deputy Secretary of Defense William Foster commented that "one cannot omit the problem of colonialism," and that "The only hope is to change the political balance in Indochina." There had been no progress in two years, he said, and in addition to stronger military programs there needed to be stronger economic and social programs, with greater pressure on the French. (It should be recalled that Foster's previous post was administrator of the foreign aid program.) Allison disagreed; there had been progress, he asserted.

The group also agreed on the need for a warning to the Chinese, and on the need for additional planning for actions which the U.S. might agree to take if such a warning were not heeded.

Toward the end of May, Secretary Acheson went to Paris for tripartite Foreign Ministers talks, and before going he met, along with Secretary Lovett and General Bradley, with the President. Truman agreed with the recommendation for a warning to the Chinese, and with further discussion with the French and British on this subject. Although both Lovett and Bradley apparently stressed the need for a stronger government in each of the Associated States by which to attract greater public support, the State Department position prevailed, and it was agreed that Acheson would not discuss with the French any internal changes except for strengthening the national armies.¹⁴⁵

The discussion of Indochina at the Foreign Ministers meeting was rather inconclusive. The French argued that they needed more U.S. financial assistance for supporting the national armies, and both the French and the British again were hesitant about issuing a warning to the Chinese.¹⁴⁶

At another tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in late June 1952, the British sounded slightly more favorable to the idea of a joint warning to the Chinese, but they and the French were obviously not going to give the proposal strong support and it was not pursued by the U.S. Government after that time. (The warning was finally issued by the U.S. unilaterally in 1953 when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared that intervention by Chinese

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 141-143.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 144-145, and John M. Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 190-193. In preparing for the Foreign Ministers meeting the State Department drafted a background paper on Indochina for Acheson covering the points which the U.S. would make at the meeting. For the text see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 150-154.

¹⁴⁶*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 157-166.

troops in Indochina would have "grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina."¹⁴⁷

Generally, the U.S. appeared to be yielding to the French during these and other meetings in May-June 1952. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden said that at the Foreign Ministers meeting in May he had privately advised French Defense Minister Plevin that France's attitude concerning the need for greater assistance would "exasperate her best friends." Plevin did not agree. Eden said that at the June meeting he then discovered he had been "wrong in doubting the French method." The U.S., he said, had agreed before the meeting even began to increase aid to the French in Indochina by 40 percent. This, he said, was "generous by any standards."¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the final version of NSC 124/2, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," had been approved by the President on June 25, 1952. It stated:¹⁴⁹ "Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short run, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests." The "primary threat to Southeast Asia," it said, ". . . arises from the possibility that the situation in Indochina may deteriorate as a result of the weakening of the resolve of, or as a result of the inability of the governments of France and of the Associated States to continue to oppose the Viet Minh rebellion. . . ."

Although it found that the primary threat was in the deterioration of the situation in Indochina itself, rather than the possibility of a Chinese invasion, NSC 124/2, except for proposing increased assistance to the French and the Associated States, did not directly address what the U.S. should do to prevent the Communists from taking power internally. Rather, it addressed primarily the question of U.S. action in the event of a Chinese invasion. "Apparently," the *Pentagon Papers* narrative states, ". . . the NSC wanted to make clear that direct U.S. involvement in Indochina was to be limited to dealing with direct Chinese involvement."¹⁵⁰

There is an interesting unattributed document (possibly written by Deputy Secretary of Defense Foster) in the *Pentagon Papers* which, among other things, questioned the wisdom of avoiding the consideration of U.S. action in the event of a serious internal Communist threat.¹⁵¹ The document, a briefing paper for an NSC meeting, which appears to have been prepared for the Secretary of Defense, made this recommendation:

That you express the view that the present paper concentrates far too heavily on action to be taken against aggression; that by far the greater danger is that Southeast Asia will fall to subversive tactics; that in the absence of overt aggression it is probable that before long France will be unable or unwilling to continue to carry the burdens of the civil war; that the paper proposes no courses of action to meet these contingencies which are commensurate with the burdens and risks which it

¹⁴⁷For the text of his speech see *Department of State Bulletin*, Sept. 14, 1953, pp. 339-342.

¹⁴⁸Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 93-94.

¹⁴⁹For the text see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XII.

¹⁵⁰*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 85.

¹⁵¹*PP*, DOD ed., book 8, pp. 502-505. This document is not in the Gravel edition.

proposes we assume to deal with the lesser risk of aggression; and that you propose that this deficiency in the paper be remedied by the Senior Staff in the next draft.

This is a major deficiency in the proposed policy. If nothing is to be done beyond what is now being done to prevent Communist subversion in this area, there is grave doubt as to the wisdom of assuming very grave risks of general war in an attempt to save the area from further overt aggression.

This Pentagon document recommended further that "Most of the actions available to deal with the danger of subversion lie in the political and economic fields. One means of reducing this danger and of improving the situation would involve a greater degree of U.S. supervision over the use of U.S. military assistance in Indochina, particularly with respect to the development of the native army."

NSC 124/2 itself recommended that, in the absence of "large-scale Chinese Communist intervention," the U.S., in addition to assisting French forces, should oppose a French withdrawal, as well as seeking agreement with Britain and France for a "joint warning to Communist China regarding the grave consequences of Chinese aggression against Southeast Asia. . . ." Although the final version contained a more detailed listing of actions to be taken by the U.S. in the event of a serious internal Communist threat, it did not begin to meet the objections stated in the Pentagon briefing paper.

In the event that Chinese forces intervened overtly, or—and this was an important qualification—"are covertly participating to such an extent as to jeopardize retention of the Tonkin Delta area by French Union Forces," NSC 124/2 provided that the U.S. should take military action to prevent Indochina from falling to the Communists. While French Union forces would provide the ground troops, the U.S. would provide air and naval support, including a blockade of China and air attacks against military targets in China in addition to various other overt and covert forms of retaliation.

The approval of NSC 124/2 effectively concluded the Truman administration's formulation of U.S. policy toward Indochina, and during the remainder of 1952 there were very few significant developments, either in the evaluation of U.S. policy or in the situation in Indochina itself.

In the summer of 1952, Washington again became preoccupied with Presidential politics. Truman had announced in March that he would not run again, and in early June General Eisenhower had returned home from Europe to become the Republican nominee. In the campaign debate that followed, Eisenhower and the Democratic nominee, Adlai E. Stevenson, debated foreign policy, with Eisenhower particularly emphasizing the need to conclude the Korea cease-fire talks. Indochina was not an issue, however, except peripherally to the extent that the Republicans were generally critical of the Democrats for a weak foreign policy, and for being too soft on communism at home and abroad.

At that time there was, in fact, very little discernible difference between the Democrats and the Republicans with respect to U.S. policy toward Indochina. Republicans and Democrats alike agreed on the need to defend Southeast Asia, although both parties, and

Americans generally, were opposed to involving U.S. ground forces in "another Korea."

Based on this prevailing bipartisan consensus, there was a continuity of U.S.-Indochina policy between the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations. In NSC 124/2 the Truman administration had taken a strong position on the need to defend Indochina and Southeast Asia, (although not as strong or clear a position on how to defend the area as the U.S. military would have liked, particularly what the role of the U.S. should be if the threat of subversion increased and there was no overt external aggression by the Chinese.) After the 1952 election, the Eisenhower administration accepted the position taken in 124/2, and when it promulgated its own NSC directive on the subject it merely rewrote portions of 124/2 and reapproved other portions without change.¹⁵²

Congress Acts on 1952 Aid to Indochina

During the spring and summer of 1952, Congress acted on the aid request for Indochina. This process was about as perfunctory as in 1951. There were few questions and very little debate, and the requests generally were approved, including additional funds which the U.S. had promised to the French.

The mood of the hearings and debates was still very serious. There was considerable emphasis on the Communist threat, and on acting decisively and without delay to provide the required assistance. But Congress was also in a budget-cutting mood, and mutual security funds were among those cut. The military buildup resulting from NSC 68 and the Korean war had created a deficit which was of concern to many Members of Congress. This and other factors led to efforts to cut nonmilitary funds, primarily in Europe, but also in Asia. Yet, despite some reductions, there does not appear to have been a significant cutback in the economic and military funds that were made available for expenditure (appropriations plus carryover and reappropriated funds from the previous year or years).

Several Members of Congress expressed concern about U.S. support for the French in Indochina. In the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Javits asked Secretary Acheson about U.S. policy toward the future of Indochina. Acheson replied that the objective of the French was to turn over responsibility to the Indochinese, and that they had "done that to the fullest extent that the Indochinese are capable of assuming it. In fact, it may have gone further than the Indochinese were ready to meet." (It will be recalled that he said the same thing to the Foreign Relations Committee.) "I do not think," he added, "there is any thing that we are not doing that we should do in regard to the relations between the Indochinese and the French. On that I am quite clear."

Javits asked whether there was "any serious danger that we will be called upon to take part in the defense of Indochina." Acheson replied, as he had to Fulbright, "I am just not able to answer that question." Fulbright's question had been asked in executive ses-

¹⁵²NSC 5405, Jan. 14, 1954

sion; Javits' in public session. It did not seem to matter in terms of the responsiveness of the witness.¹⁵³

Representative Mansfield, however, told Acheson that he thought U.S. policy in Indochina "has been extremely sound," and that the French were to be congratulated for their contribution to the defense of the area.¹⁵⁴

In Senate hearings on the bill, Senator Green voiced concern, as he did frequently, about the direction of U.S. policy in Indochina. He said that the "principal ambition" of the Indochinese was to "get rid of the French." Harlan Cleveland, Assistant Director for Europe of the Mutual Security Administration, testifying for the administration, responded that in Indochina "... they have a degree of independence at least as great as they are in fact able to handle." Senator Green's rejoinder was, "A colonial power always says that, and it has no response in the native population. They have gone on for centuries saying that they would like to see them able to obtain their independence, but 'We must bear the white man's burden, and do for them what they cannot do for themselves,' and they have concluded that is bunkum, that they can do for themselves better. . . ." Cleveland agreed that this was the feeling of the Indochinese, but said that the dilemma was that if the French were to withdraw the Communists would take over. This was what was said when the U.S. withdrew from Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Philippines, Green declared. "It is always said; is it not?"

"The problem that faces us," Green added, "is can we, without the expenditure of an enormous military force of money and men ever subdue . . . this feeling of nationalism."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act Extension*, Hearings on H.R. 7005, 82d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1952), pp. 165-167.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁵⁵U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Mutual Security Act of 1952*, Hearings, 82d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1952), pp. 793-794.

CHAPTER 3

PRELUDE TO FRENCH WITHDRAWAL

On November 18, 1952, President Truman and several of his Cabinet officers met President-elect Eisenhower at the White House for a discussion of issues that would face the new administration. Among the topics covered by Secretary of State Acheson was the situation in Indochina. Despite France's lack of an "aggressive attitude from a military point of view in Indo-China," and "fence-sitting by the Population," which he said was the "central problem," Acheson stressed the importance of preventing Communist control of Indochina. He also reported that the U.S. had not been successful in getting the French and British to agree on military measures in the event the Chinese intervened in force in Indochina, and he added, "This is an urgent matter upon which the new administration must be prepared to act."

Truman himself stressed the need for continuity from one administration to the next, and for national unity in foreign policy.¹

Eisenhower soon made it clear that his administration not only would continue but would strengthen the Truman administration's opposition to communism in Indochina. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in his first appearances in late January-early February 1953 before the two foreign policy committees of Congress, emphasized the seriousness of the situation:² "In some ways it is more dangerous, I would think, than any other situation in the world," he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee, "because the loss of Indochina would probably have even more serious repercussions upon the Indian-Asian population than even the loss of South Korea and, also, because what is going on in Indochina has very serious repercussions in Europe and upon the mood of France, and the willingness of the French to move in partnership with Germany toward the creation of unity and security in Europe so we can have a western Europe which is of vital importance, if that area is to be made secure."³

¹Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, Memoirs, vol. 2 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 514, 519.

²*HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XIV, "U.S. Foreign Policy and the East-West Confrontation," p. 372. For his Senate testimony see *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. V, 1953, pp. 139-140.

³Also of interest is Dulles' comment about Indochina which he made a year earlier, January 18, 1952, in an executive session of the Foreign Affairs Committee, *HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XVII, p. 32.

"Then you go down to Indochina where the situation is extremely precarious. It is another peninsular position which from an economic standpoint is extremely vital. It means that whole rice bowl area of Burma and Siam, the Associated States of Indochina. It looks to me as if it would be extremely difficult to hold that area merely by a defensive operation.

"I do not think we can ourselves engage in that and make that another Korea and send 200,000 or 300,000 American troops to rot away there and be ambushed, diseased in the jungles of that land. I do not think the American people will stand for it, and I do not think they should stand for it.

Continued

This latter concern—the effect of Indochina on the security of Europe—became increasingly important during 1953–54 as the position of the French in Indochina weakened, and French participation in new moves to strengthen European defenses (especially the proposed rearmament of Germany and establishment of a European Defense Community), which was doubtful to begin with, became even more uncertain. (A major factor in this regard was the need to free the French Army from its heavy responsibilities in Indochina to enable it to play a stronger role in the defense of Europe.)

Faced with the separate but joint problems of security in Southeast Asia and in Europe, the response of the Eisenhower administration with respect to Southeast Asia, as will be seen, was to take steps to support the French in Indochina, while making preparations to shore up the anti-Communist position in the area in the event the French faltered or withdrew. The principal actions that followed, including support for the Navarre plan, acceptance of the inclusion of Indochina negotiations in the Geneva Conference, the proposed plan for “united action,” and acquiescence in the decisions on Indochina at the Geneva Conference, were based on this general strategy.

U.S. Increases Pressure on the French

At the time Eisenhower took office in January 1953, the prevailing attitude among U.S. Government officials dealing with Indochina was that the French were not making adequate progress in developing the national armies of the Associated States or in undertaking offensive military operations. There was also general agreement, however, that the Viet Minh could be defeated. Some military officials were particularly confident about such a possibility. Gen. Thomas J. H. Trapnell, chief of the U.S. military group (Military Assistance Advisory Group, or MAAG) in Vietnam, in a meeting on February 4, 1953, with State Department officers dealing with Indochina, said, “. . . Franco-Vietnamese forces, particularly if increased by new units now under consideration, would probably have the capability of breaking the back of the Viet Minh within about eighteen months.” (Ironically, eighteen months from that date the Geneva Conference was concluded and France withdrew from Indochina.) Trapnell added that the French tactics were “too conservative,” and he and the State Department officers who were present agreed that the “stalemate worked to the advantage of the enemy,” and that French Union forces should go on the offensive.⁴

On the same day, Adm. Arthur W. Radford, Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), met with Assistant Secretary of State Al-
lison to discuss the situation in the Far East. Radford also criticized the military tactics and strategy of the French, and said that “unless the French radically change their outlook and adopt a much more aggressive spirit” they would not be able to break the existing stalemate. Radford reported that he had sent a Marine

⁴“The only way to deal with the situation is in effect to say, ‘If you don’t lay off there, we will do something where we can do it to our advantage with sea and air power or whatever. We are not going to let you always pick the time, place, and weapons.’”

⁵“If we are not going to do that, the situation is going to be lost in Indochina.”

⁶*FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. XIII, pp. 382–384.

colonel to review the situation, and that the colonel reported that "... two good American divisions with the normal American aggressive spirit could clean up the situation in the Tonkin Delta in 10 months."⁵

In his meeting at the State Department, General Trapnell stated that although success in Indochina could not be attained solely by military means, "military successes would be a necessary prerequisite to political progress" by creating stronger popular support for the government.⁶ His position is interesting, in retrospect, as a signal of the change that was beginning to occur in certain quarters in the U.S. Government. Although the JCS continued to emphasize the importance of greater political independence and responsibility for self-government in Indochina, it appears that, in the face of increasing military pressure from the Communists, (as well as greater U.S. military capability to intervene in Indochina as a result of reduced demands in Korea), political considerations were beginning to be subordinated to military considerations. The previous JCS argument that Indochina could be successfully defended against the Communists only by indigenous strength, political and otherwise, was being replaced by the argument that military successes were the prerequisite for the achievement of indigenous support for a non-Communist system.

Frank G. Wisner (CIA Deputy Director for Plans), at the time the Acting Director, of the CIA, in the course of briefing the National Security Council on the military situation in Indochina on March 25, 1953, underscored the fact that the U.S. Government was not of one mind on the subject of U.S. policy in Indochina. There were, he said, "two schools of thought on the Indo-China problem within the United States Government. One school insisted that there could be no improvement in the situation until military success had been achieved against the Communists. The other insisted that it was impossible to make any significant military progress until political improvements and a greater degree of autonomy for the native government had been secured. The Central Intelligence Agency believed that the difference was sterile and missed the real point of the problem, which was that military and political progress must go along hand in hand."⁷

During discussions of Indochina in the executive branch, a reinforcing argument was also being made, and made effectively, namely, that if, at some point, there was to be a settlement with the Communists, this could be done safely only from a "position of strength." Thus, military successes were also the prerequisite for effective diplomatic negotiations.

As far as the involvement of the United States in Indochina was concerned, U.S. officials continued to take the position that the American role was ancillary to that of the French, as the JCS again concluded on March 13, 1953, in a memorandum on "Broadening the Participation of the United States in the Indochina Operation": "Active combat participation of the United States in the Indochina operation is not favored in view of the capability of

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 382-383.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 428.

France and the Associated States to provide adequate forces therefor, and present United States world-wide military commitments."⁸

Pressure was growing for greater U.S. military involvement, however, especially in advising the French on military operations and on the training of the Indochinese forces, in order to defeat the Communists as quickly as possible, and to do so without using U.S. military forces. Throughout the first several months of the Eisenhower administration a very strong effort was made in this direction, with the result that the United States became progressively more involved in Indochinese affairs, especially military matters, during 1953.

One aspect of U.S. involvement was the improvement of military facilities in Indochina. The same March 13 JCS memorandum proposed that the U.S. assist in developing port and air facilities in the delta area, but in order to avoid antagonizing the Chinese this should be done with a minimum of American personnel.⁹ Interestingly enough, the air base particularly in need of development was at Bien Hoa. This is the base which was attacked by Viet Minh guerrillas in November 1964, in one of the incidents that appears to have contributed to the decision by the U.S. to enter the war in force a few months later.

In late March 1953, President Eisenhower met in Washington with French Premier René Mayer and Foreign Minister Georges Bidault. Indochina was one of the leading subjects on their agenda. In advance of the meeting, Secretary of State Dulles cabled the U.S. Ambassador in Paris concerning preliminary conversations prior to the official visit, stating, "... we envisage Indochina situation with real sense of urgency. We believe continued military stalemate will produce most undesirable political consequences in Indochina, France and U.S. Therefore, we heartily agree that considerable increased effort having as its aim liquidation of principal regular enemy forces within period of say, twenty-four months is essential."¹⁰

Two important meetings were held prior to the arrival of the French delegation. One was a breakfast meeting at the White House on March 24, attended by the President, Secretary Dulles, Secretaries George M. Humphrey (Treasury) and Charles E. Wilson (Defense), and Harold E. Stassen, Director of Mutual Security.¹¹ On the subject of the impending conference, Dulles said, "Mayer was a real friend," and that the U.S. could work with him in achieving our "common purpose." He added, "If we could not do that with Mayer, it was doubtful it could be done at all in the predictable future and grave consequences would result."

"There was discussion of the Indochina situation," according to the notes on the March 24 meeting, "and recognition that it had probably the top priority in foreign policy, being in some ways more important than Korea because the consequences of loss there

⁸PP, DOD ed., book 9, p. 14

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 416-417. This same point was repeated in a "discussion paper" prepared for the talks. See *ibid.*, pp. 423-426

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 419-420. It will be recalled that Stassen played a key role in the handling of the trusteeship question during the 1945 U.N. Conference. See chapter 1 of this study for details

could not be localized, but would spread throughout Asia and Europe."

The group agreed on increased aid to the French "if there was a plan that promised real success." They also discussed the need, if the Viet Minh were put on the defensive, of deterring the Chinese from sending in troops as they had done in Korea "after the North Koreans were defeated."

The second meeting the following day, March 25, was of the full National Security Council.¹² After making some of the same points about the importance of Indochina, Dulles reported that he had just met with 14 Members of Congress, and that "He gained the impression from this meeting that these Congressmen felt that if the American people could be given reason to believe that the difficulties in Indo-China will end by the French according Indo-China a real autonomy, and if a program could be devised giving real promise of military and political success in Indo-China, the Congress would at least be open-minded in its consideration of continued United States assistance to the French in Indo-China."

The results of the meetings between U.S. and French officials left most U.S. policymakers more pessimistic about the ability and desire of the French to do anything substantial to improve the situation in Indochina. President Eisenhower, having raised the question of obtaining the "confidence of the local peoples," (which he said was not an "idle question" in view of the fact that unless the American public could be convinced that this was happening it could be "extremely difficult" to increase U.S. aid), said in his memoirs that he had been rebuffed by Bidault, who "evaded, refusing to commit himself to an out-and-out renunciation of any French colonial purpose."¹³

The most concrete result of the meetings was the very sketchy military plan presented to U.S. military officials by Jean Letourneau, French Minister for the Associated States. The object of the plan was to defeat the regular Viet Minh forces by early 1955, based on a series of offensives by French Union troops (including Vietnamese regulars), beginning in the south and moving north, after which Vietnamese "commando" forces would occupy each area and maintain security. The plan called for a large increase in the national army of Vietnam, to be paid for by the United States.¹⁴

U.S. reaction to the Letourneau plan was that it was not a plan, but, in the words of General Collins, "an operational program," which had only a small chance of succeeding. Some felt that the addition of two more French Union divisions would be more effective than relying on newly-trained Vietnamese forces. Others, including General Collins and General Trapnell, questioned whether the Vietnamese commandos could hold the area in the south in which Viet Minh guerrillas were so well-entrenched, and preferred for the French to establish a defensive link that would cut the Chinese-Viet Minh supply route rather than attempting to clear each

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 426-428

¹³Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), p. 168.

¹⁴For a good official description of the plan see *FRUS*, 1951-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 458-464.

area of the country.¹⁵ But there seemed to be little choice, and the plan was endorsed reluctantly by the JCS and both Ambassador Heath and General Trapnell.¹⁶ Trapnell said that the plan was "slow and expensive," but that it would succeed, and that "the other course of action is to accept a stalemate which is also not only expensive but in the long run favors the Viet Minh and offers no solution."

On April 18, General Collins met with Secretary Dulles and others at the State Department to discuss the Pentagon's appraisal of the Letourneau plan, and in addition to his other comments, discussed above, he said he was very concerned about the "totally negative French attitude" toward adopting training procedures used by the U.S. in Korea. Dulles asked Collins "whether, if the French would not do what the U.S. wished, we should stop all aid for Indochina. He pointed out the implications of the fall of Indochina to the whole Southeast Asian picture. General Collins replied that we should not cut off aid to the French in Indochina if they did not do everything we thought they should, but that we should use maximum effort and persuasion to get them to adopt a more sensible program."¹⁷

At the regularly scheduled State-JCS meeting on April 24, 1953, attended also by the CIA, there was a long discussion of the Letourneau plan in which it became clear that the JCS had serious reservations about the proposal.¹⁸ Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff, was particularly critical of the French. "The JCS," he said, "have the feeling on the Letourneau plan and on the situation in Indochina that the French have not really been taking the native people into their confidence. They don't seem to trust the native forces enough to want to use them in large units and they only plan on using the native forces in very small units." "The whole French position," he added, "seems to be a defensive one and one of not really wanting to fight the war to a conclusion. I feel that if the French keep up in this manner, we will be pouring money down a rathole." He urged additional pressure on the French, to which Walter S. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, replied that, as Secretary Dulles had emphasized, "... it is very difficult to apply effective pressure on a government which is in as weak a political situation as the French Government is." Vandenberg answered that it would not be necessary to apply pressure on the whole government, and that selective pressure, especially on the French military, might achieve results.

Paul Nitze, then the Director of Policy Planning for the State Department, commented on the dilemma facing the U.S.:

In looking at the Letourneau Plan we had the feeling for our part that with what we considered to be politically feasible both in Indochina and in France, there really weren't too great prospects that this plan would achieve complete success, even in the limited objectives which it lays out. But then if you look at the alternative of what would happen if we should cut down

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 452, 473

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 450-452, 493-495

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 473-474.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 496-503

on assistance to the French and at the various things that might happen, then it shapes up like a real defeat in Indochina. So we lean to the view that since the alternative is so bleak, we probably should go along and give this plan a try even though it may not achieve what the French are saying it might.

General Collins responded that the JCS was willing to support the Letourneau plan, "... but we think we should first put the squeeze on the French to get them off their fannies."

As a result of this meeting, State cabled Dulles, who was in Paris for a tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting, that because of the attitudes of the JCS, the U.S. should hedge on approving French military plans for Indochina.¹⁹

In bilateral discussions with the French, Dulles emphasized the points made by the JCS: taking the offensive, especially against supply lines and main forces, and developing local armies on a larger scale (larger than battalions) and with native officers, and he used the threat of Congress' role to drive home the position of the U.S. "We must demonstrate to Congress this year," he said, that "the things the French are doing are important to the whole free world and the American people. The program is an act of faith. Whether we can communicate this to the Congress and people depends in part on the French—on French plans and especially on the spirit shown in Indochina. A more positive and more dynamic effort in Indochina would be helpful. The Secretary said that Congress supports those who are accomplishing things."²⁰

At a National Security Council meeting on May 6, 1953, President Eisenhower "expressed the firm belief" that unless the French made it clear to the people of Indochina that they were serious about giving them independence, and at the same time appointed an effective military commander, "nothing could possibly save Indochina, and that continued United States assistance would amount to pouring our money down a rathole."²¹ Vice President Richard M. Nixon agreed.

Eisenhower said he understood the sensitivity of the subject as far as the world prestige of the French was concerned, but he believed "... that if the French really desired to cut the best figure before the world, the obvious course to pursue was first to defeat the Vietminh forces and then magnanimously to offer independence to the Associated States." "The great question," he added,

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 504.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 510. Shortly after this meeting, the Mayer government fell, and was replaced in late June 1953 by the government of Joseph Laniel, who defeated Mendès-France by only a few votes. Laniel immediately replaced Letourneau, and offered to "perfect" the independence of the Associated States. See Hammer, pp. 301-302. See also pp. 293-297 for discussion of the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and Prince Norodom Sihanouk's efforts to get the French to give the Cambodians greater independence. There are also various documents pertaining to these events in *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, *passim*. See also the comprehensive cable on May 20, 1953, from the U.S. Chargé in Saigon, Robert McClintock, proposing military, political and economic steps for the U.S. to take in Indochina.

Another basic source is the executive hearing on April 24, 1953 of the House Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific on the question of the Viet Minh invasion of Laos, published in *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 23-58. There was no comparable Senate hearing on this subject.

²¹*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 547-548.

"was how we can make the French see the wisdom of such a course of action."²²

In a meeting the next day (May 7) with Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, Eisenhower again declared, "... the only chance of preserving South East Asia lay in making sure of the support of the native peoples. He went on to say that regulars can't win against guerrillas who have indigenous support and added that many years ago that fact was proved in the case of General Braddock."²³

Confirming the President's fears, a CIA intelligence estimate on June 4, 1953, predicted that during the following year the situation in Indochina, both political and military, would continue to deteriorate.²⁴

In May 1953, the French appointed General Henri-Eugène Navarre as their new commander in Indochina, and in June the U.S. sent a high-level military mission to Indochina to confer with the French about the situation. It was led by Lt. Gen. John W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Army in the Pacific. O'Daniel had been to Indochina earlier that year, and according to a State Department cable summarizing that visit, he "... conceives of the war in Indochina largely in terms of the war in Korea."²⁵ On that earlier visit, O'Daniel appeared to have difficulty understanding the nature of warfare in Indochina, where, as the French explained to him "... the enemy was able to blend in with the local population and exact from them by terrorism a large measure of cooperation. In the face of superior forces the enemy faded away only to return when such forces were no longer present."

The O'Daniel mission arrived in Saigon on June 20, 1953.²⁶ O'Daniel, as he had been instructed, told General Navarre and other French and Indochinese officials that French Union forces should take the initiative, "including the early initiative of aggressive guerrilla warfare," and that there should be "more rapid development of loyal, aggressive, and capable indigenous forces." For this purpose, as instructed, he also emphasized the development of indigenous military leaders, and the advantage of a French "enunciation, at the appropriate time, of the future position of the French in that country."²⁷

In return, General Navarre gave the mission a written statement of what O'Daniel called a "new aggressive concept" for conducting the war, which appeared to meet some of the concerns of the U.S., and, indeed, seemed to mirror American objectives. (This, which

²²The NSC then acted on the points made by the President, and formally "Agreed that it was essential that the French make clear that they intend to give the people of the Associated States maximum freedom to choose their own form of government as soon as internal security can be established in Indochina." See *ibid.*, p. 549. On May 7, Eisenhower sent a letter to this effect to Mayer. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 172.

²³*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 552.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 592-602.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 465-468.

²⁶According to *ibid.*, p. 617, the mission consisted of 12 military officers and Philip W. Bonsal, Director of State's Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs as "political consultant." Although there is no mention of this in *FRUS*, one of the military officers on the mission was Air Force Col. Edward Geary Lansdale, also a CIA agent, then stationed in the Philippines. See below for further discussion.

²⁷*PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 61-65. This statement of the "terms of reference" of the O'Daniel mission, as well as the report of the mission on pp. 69-96, are not in the Gravel edition.

became known as the Navarre plan, included a new military offensive with emphasis on guerrilla warfare, the development of local armies with greater leadership responsibility, and the organization of army units with larger components.) But O'Daniel, while he said in his report on July 14 that he was impressed with the "new, aggressive psychology" of the Navarre command, and with its "sincerity . . . to see this war through to success at an early date," and although convinced that, if properly organized, French forces could win, nevertheless expressed considerable ambivalence about the prospects for success. In order to be successful, he said, the Navarre plan ". . . would require a complete change in French military psychology associated with Indochina and would entail some risk, both military and political, in the redistribution of forces, which the French are unwilling to take." He doubted whether Navarre could or would undertake successful offensive operations with the forces at hand. "Consequently," he said in his report, "complete military victory will await the further development of the military forces of the Associated States or the addition of French divisions from outside Indochina."²⁸

While O'Daniel was in Indochina, the JCS received from its Joint Strategic Survey Committee a report on "Possible Military Courses of Action in Indochina" that discussed the use of U.S. forces in Indochina, including the possible use of ground forces, if the French made a political decision to withdraw. These are pertinent excerpts from that report:²⁹

8. In the event the French are forced to withdraw as a result of a political decision, the United States might undertake the following courses of action.

a. *Course A—Support and intensify the development of native forces and deploy U.S. and allied forces to the area to undertake operations with the objective of reducing Communist activity to the status of scattered guerrilla bands.*

b. *Course B—Support and intensify the development of native forces, deploy sufficient ground to hold critical strong points vacated by the French and provide air and naval support for such operations as may be undertaken until such time as indigenous forces can undertake the objective in "a" above.*

9. If current French plans for the expansion of native forces have reached an advanced stage of completion the United States might undertake the following courses of action:

a. *Course C—Support and intensify the development of native forces and provide air and naval support for such operations as can be conducted by indigenous ground forces.*

b. *Course D—Support and intensify the development of native forces by supervising training and providing the nec-*

²⁸These quotes are from PP, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 74-75 and 96. On July 17, 1953, at the regular State-JCS meeting, General O'Daniel gave a briefing on his trip. See FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 683-689. He reported, (p. 684), that in describing the situation in Indochina the French had used the word "difficult" so many times that he finally made it a rule for the American group that anyone using the word would be fined a dollar each time.

²⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 615-616. (emphasis in original) The Joint Strategic Survey Committee (later Council), which was discontinued in 1964, consisted of three high-level military officers who provided long-range planning and strategic advice to the JCS.

essary logistic support for such operations as can be conducted by the indigenous forces.

11. The United States might undertake the following implementing political actions prior to or in conjunction with any one or a combination of the foregoing military courses of action:

a. Obtain a commitment from the French to effect an orderly transfer of responsibilities in Indochina by extending the period of withdrawal as long as practicable.

b. Seek to obtain U.N. action in Indochina similar to that taken with regard to Korea, with the provision that the United States be designated as executive agent.

c. Because of their immediate interest in the area, obtain significant forces contributions from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, France and the National Government of the Republic of China (NGRC).

d. Call for the immediate formation of an Asiatic League which would include the NGRC and would provide forces to combat Communism in the Far East.

Similarly, in the State Department, the Policy Planning Staff urged the Secretary to consider discussing, both in the executive branch and with Congress, whether Indochina was "... so important to our security that American forces should be used there even in the absence of Chinese Communist intervention."³⁰

In its regular meeting with the State Department on July 10, 1953, the JCS again took the position that U.S. ground forces should not be used to defend Indochina, despite the importance of Indochina for U.S. security. General Collins, JCS Chairman, said, "If our political leaders want to put troops there we will of course do it, but we would have to have revision upward of our force ceilings." "If we go into Indochina with American forces," he added, "we will be there for the long pull. Militarily and politically we would be in up to our necks. . . . It seems to me that if we went into Indochina with U.S. forces, we would be in for a major and protracted war."³¹

Congressional Dissatisfaction with the French

The President's 1953 request to Congress for additional mutual security funds for Indochina (\$400 million more in military aid, to be given directly to the Associated States), while approved almost routinely by the House, prompted considerable criticism of the French in the Senate.

In the House Foreign Affairs Committee there were only two actions of note. Representative Javits offered a statement of congressional policy re-endorsing a Pacific pact, which was approved by the committee and by the House, but was dropped in conference.³²

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 640-641. On May 18, 1953, Robert R. Bowie replaced Paul Nitze as Director of the Policy Planning Staff.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 649-650.

³²Javits proposal was also identical to the language approved earlier by Congress in the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, which still stood, except that the Javits amendment specifically provided for participation by the U.S. See *HFAC His Ser.*, vol. X, "Mutual Security Program, Part Two," pp. 213-215, and statements in the committee and conference reports, pp. 339 and 392.

The other House committee action presaged the concerns subsequently expressed on the Senate floor. This was the decision to put language in the committee report, rather than as an amendment to the bill, concerning the need for greater progress toward independence in Indochina. The amendment was originally suggested by Representatives Zablocki and by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. (D/N.Y.)—another bit of irony, considering his father's position on the matter.³³

This was the concluding portion of the statement in the Foreign Affairs Committee report on the mutual security bill.³⁴

The testimony before the committee indicates that until the peoples of the Associated States are assured of receiving their ultimate independence, success in driving out the Communist invaders will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

... it is the hope of the committee that more aid will go directly to the forces of the Associated States rather than funneling all the aid through the French, and that the training of the Vietnamese will be intensified. . . .

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee also approved the request for funds for Indochina with almost no significant discussion, and in its report the committee made a strong statement underscoring the urgency of the situation and supporting stated U.S. policy.³⁵

The free world cannot afford to lose the war in Indochina.

But so far, neither has the free world been able to win it. It is of the utmost importance that this stalemate be ended. Pacification of the country must be the first objective of our policy.

When the bill reached the Senate floor, however, there occurred, for the first time since the Indochina war began in 1945, a very frank and realistic debate about the situation, and about the dilemma facing the United States.³⁶ The debate revolved around an amendment requiring the French to set a target date for the complete independence of the Associated States which was offered by Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R/Ariz.).³⁷ (There is some irony in the fact that in 1964 Senator Barry Goldwater was defeated for President by Lyndon Johnson in a campaign dominated by the Vietnam war, in which Johnson portrayed Goldwater as "trigger happy," and that in 1953 Senator Lyndon Johnson was among those who voted against Goldwater's amendment.) This was the text of the amendment:

"Provided, That no such expenditure shall be made until the Government of France gives satisfactory assurance to the President of the United States that an immediate declaration will be made to the people of the Associated States setting a

³³*Ibid.*, p. 250.

³⁴From H. Rept. 83-569, June 16, 1953, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 325. This recommendation had been made by a group of four members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Republicans Chester E. Merrow (N.H.) and Judd, and Democrats A. S. J. Carnahan (Mo.) and Zablocki after their "special study mission" to several countries in Asia in April 1953. See H. Rept. 83-412, p. 58.

³⁵S. Rept. 83-403, June 13, 1953, p. 43.

³⁶The debate is in CR, vol. 99, pp. 7570-7789. There is no mention of the debate in any of the State Department materials published in vol. XIII of FRUS, for 1952-54.

³⁷The Goldwater amendment to the section of the bill providing new military assistance was as follows. CR, vol. 99, p. 7779.

target date for the adoption of a constitution for such States, and for the establishment of their complete independence."

Senator Goldwater was convinced that the war could be won by France and the governments of the Associated States only if the people of the area were given their freedom. He quoted from the U.S. Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths . . .," (perhaps without realizing that the Vietnamese themselves had used the same passage in their declaration of independence in 1945.) The people of Indochina, he said, ". . . have been fighting for the same thing for which 177 years ago, the people of the American Colonies fought. The Associated States of Cambodia, Laos, and Viet-Nam are fighting for freedom." "Yet here today," he added, "on the floor of the United States Senate, we are proposing to support a country, France, that has colonial intentions; we are going against the wonderful second paragraph of our Declaration of Independence. . . . We are saying to the great men who penned that document and whose ghosts must haunt these walls, that we do not believe entirely in the Declaration of Independence, that perhaps all men are not created equal, that perhaps they are not endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that perhaps we have a right to support countries which wish to enslave other peoples."

Of particular interest is Goldwater's position that unless the legitimate aspirations of the people of Indochina were met, the United States would inevitably become involved militarily in Indochina. He said he had thought long and hard about the amendment; that he understood the sensitivities of the situation; that he knew the U.S. had made repeated attempts to persuade the French to take such a step. But he said he had also heard repeated but unkept promises from the French, and that the only way to "prevent many of our boys from ending up in the jungles of southeastern Asia" was "to ask France, in the decency the French possess, to grant independence and the right of freedom to these people who have fought so long for their independence and freedom." Otherwise, "as surely as day follows night our boys will follow this \$400 million." (This was the amount in the mutual security bill for new military assistance for the Indochina war.)

There was very strong support for Goldwater's point of view, especially among conservative Republicans. One of the leading supporters was Everett McKinley Dirksen (R/Ill.) who, along with Warren G. Magnuson (D/Wash.), had recently returned from a visit to Vietnam. This, too, is notable. As minority leader during the 1960s, Dirksen gave both President Kennedy and Johnson solid support on the war, even as his own candidate for President in 1964, Barry Goldwater, was being defeated on the issue of the war.

In 1953, Dirksen, like Goldwater, was convinced that unless the people of Indochina obtained their independence the war could go on "endlessly," and, like Goldwater, he was concerned about possible U.S. armed involvement. "There is danger," he said, "that Indochina may become another Korea—God forbid." "Will the situation not ultimately call for invasion by American troops?" he said a short while later in the debate. "That will be disaster; that will be tragedy." If enough progress could be made toward independence, and toward developing the ability of the Vietnamese to defend

themselves, Dirksen said, the problem could be solved. "But if it spoils too long, look out. Then we shall indeed have a potential and a problem which can harass and embarrass this country as nothing else could do."

At another point Dirksen made a very interesting observation on the failure of U.S. policymakers to appreciate the motivation of the Viet Minh:

What makes them so tough? What is the force that makes them resist? It is an ideological force. It is the nationalism which they preach. They do not preach communism. They preach nationalism and freedom. If they can do that, does anyone believe that sending additional planes, or \$400 million worth of equipment there, is likely to do the job, when there are still so many official fence-sitters who believe that Ho Chi-minh will win, and who are waiting for that day?

Dirksen also said that during his trip he asked U.S. military men "what would constitute a victory in Indochina?" The result, he said, was that "we cannot even get a definition of a victory, because no one seems to know at the moment." "If that is the case," he asked, "how long will the warfare go on?"

Other Republicans, including Ralph E. Flanders (Vt.), Francis Case (S. Dak.), and Robert C. Hendrickson (N.J.), joined Goldwater and Dirksen, as did Democrats Russell B. Long (La.), A. Willis Robertson (Va.), Guy M. Gillette (Iowa), and Dennis Chavez (N. Mex.). So did Senator John F. Kennedy. But the Senate Republican leadership, as well as Republicans and Democrats on the Foreign Relations Committee, led by the powerful ranking Democrat, Senator George, sought to avoid an action that would significantly interfere with the executive branch and with diplomatic efforts to influence the French on the issue of independence while also preventing their withdrawal. Majority Leader Knowland, a strong exponent of U.S. interests in Asia, and a leading critic of U.S. China policy under Truman, as well as Homer Ferguson (Mich.), another Republican leader, said that passage of the amendment would endanger U.S. relations with France, and could lead to a French withdrawal from Indochina and a Communist victory. Knowland urged Goldwater to withdraw the amendment, saying that even if it were defeated it could adversely affect the situation by giving "an indication to the people of the Associated States that we did not hope that ultimately they might gain their freedom."

Ferguson said, "A very delicate situation is involved, and negotiations should be conducted by the President of the United States, who is in charge of our foreign activities concerning the French and the Indochinese, so far as the war there is concerned. I feel that Congress should not be legislating foreign policy when a war is now actually in progress."

Knowland and Ferguson were joined by Senator John Sherman Cooper (R/Ky.), a highly respected Member who later became the principal Republican proponent of legislation to control the war. Cooper, like Knowland, said that passage of such an amendment might cause the French to withdraw from Indochina, and that this could lead to a Communist victory, thus preventing the achievement of the independence that Goldwater and Dirksen considered necessary.

Faced with the dilemma of wanting to spur the French to grant independence, while preventing their withdrawal from Indochina until the area was more secure, Cooper said he favored a suggestion made by Flanders that the Senate pass a resolution stating its position on the subject, rather than an amendment requiring the French to act.

Senator Magnuson said he agreed with Dirksen's conclusions, based on their trip. "... I think we came to the conclusion after all our conferences and after seeing all the things that came to our attention, that sooner or later France must assure the people in question that they are going to have an independent status." But he, too, was concerned about the possibility that the French would withdraw and would be replaced by the Communists.

Magnuson added that although he questioned whether the Senate should pass an amendment, he and Dirksen had met with President Eisenhower after returning from Indochina, and had emphasized the seriousness of the situation and the need to urge the French to move toward greater independence for the Associated States.

Senator Kennedy took a similar but different approach, one that reflected, in fact, differences between the liberal, internationalist, interventionist perspective, and the more conservative, nationalist point of view. (It should be noted, however, that the only Senator who took the traditional noninterventionist position on the amendment was Senator George, who said that the United States should avoid becoming involved in the internal affairs of another country.) Kennedy said, "... the war can never be successful unless large numbers of the people of Viet-Nam are won over from their sullen neutrality and open hostility to it and fully support its successful conclusion. This can never be done unless they are assured beyond doubt that complete independence will be theirs at the conclusion of the war." "... French grants of limited independence to the people of Viet-Nam," he added, "have always been too little and too late." Kennedy, too, was concerned about a possible French withdrawal, followed by a Communist takeover, but he also felt that unless there was greater progress toward independence, the war effort would fail, and the French would then withdraw in any event.

To avoid "an ultimatum" to the French, Kennedy suggested a substitute for Goldwater's amendment. He proposed that, "to the extent that it is feasible and does not interfere with the purposes set forth in this act," all mutual security funds spent in Indochina "shall be administered in such a way as to encourage through all available means the freedom and independence desired by the peoples of the Associated States, including the intensification of the military training of the Vietnamese."

Dirksen, saying he recognized the "force" of Kennedy's argument, although he disagreed with it, replied that it was "on the soft and gentle side, which actually, in the distribution of the supplies, would not mean a thing." But Goldwater, saying that he, too, recognized the danger of an ultimatum, accepted Kennedy's substitute in place of his own amendment. Even the Kennedy version was too drastic for many Members, however, and it was defeated 17-64. According to Kennedy, "The amendment was defeated upon

the assurance of the Administration that we would work toward Indochinese freedom."³⁸

There was an interesting mixture of liberal and moderate Democrats and conservative Republicans among those who voted for it. The Democrats were Kennedy and Paul H. Douglas (Ill.), considered liberals, Henry M. Jackson (Wash.), Magnuson (Wash.) and Earle C. Clements (Ky.), considered moderates, and Russell Long, a moderate-conservative. The others were all conservative Republicans, including William Langer (N. Dak.), who was considered a maverick, and who was the only member of the Foreign Relations Committee to support the amendment. Clements, the Democratic whip, was the only Senate leader of either party to vote for the amendment.³⁹

Although the Goldwater-Kennedy amendment failed, it was clear from the debate that there was strong support in the Senate for exerting pressure on the French to satisfy the nationalist demands of the people of Indochina, but there were few Senators who wanted to risk the possibility that the French would withdraw if American criticism and pressure became too intense. Like those in the executive branch who were grappling with the problem, most Members of the Senate, when faced with this dilemma, chose to avoid a course of action that might adversely affect the defense of Indochina and of Europe, as well as creating new responsibilities for the United States in Asia at a time when the U.S. was trying to extricate itself from a very costly and unpopular war in Korea.

Prevailing opposition of the public to becoming involved in "another Korea" was so strong that according to Admiral Radford, when he became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in August 1953, "officials of State and Defense estimated that there was no indication that public opinion would support a contribution to the Indochina war other than the current aid program. American military participation, they said, would not be acceptable to the public."⁴⁰

Although not demonstrably related to the debate in the Senate, which occurred on June 29 and 30 and July 1, 1953, the new Laniel government announced on July 3 that the French wanted to "perfect" the independence of the Associated States, and were ready to discuss this with representatives of the three countries. In a cable to Washington, C. Douglas Dillon, U.S. Ambassador to France, reported that the French Government "recognized wave of nationalism sweeping Asia could not be opposed and that independence was question of all or nothing."⁴¹

What prompted Senators Goldwater and Kennedy to propose legislative pressures on the French? In Goldwater's case, this is his explanation for offering the amendment:⁴²

It stemmed from a basic concept of mine that I have held all of my life. I believe firmly in our Declaration of Independence. The first few sentences say more about our way of life and the

³⁸Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, p. 57.

³⁹For the vote, see CR, vol. 99, p. 7789.

⁴⁰From *Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 356.

⁴¹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 631. For the text of the announcement see p. 634. For Indochinese reactions see Hammer, pp. 301 ff.

⁴²Letter to CRS from Senator Goldwater, Dec. 21, 1982.

way of life that people all over this world want to pursue than any document that has ever been written. Freedom is the driving desire of every animal, whether he be man, beast or bird and we don't seem to get that through our heads. What those people wanted was freedom, and if the French had been smart enough to grant it to them, what a difference there would have been in the history of our world.

In Kennedy's case, his own trip to Vietnam in 1951 and his contacts with Diem were probably influential. Incidentally, in this connection, some details are now available on the luncheon at the Supreme Court on May 7, 1953, which was mentioned earlier, hosted for Diem by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and attended by Kennedy and Mansfield.⁴³ According to the summary of the meeting, Diem and "... [name deleted] believe that the French are now showing a tendency to grant more concessions but that these are 'too little and too late.'" Diem said that the problem in Vietnam was that there was no "rallying point in between the Communists and the French." More French troops were needed, and French withdrawal would result in a Communist victory. But he also insisted that the French could not win the war; only the Vietnamese could do that and they would fight only if they had "more freedom."

The U.S. Increases Its Commitment

In September 1953, the United States increased its commitment to the defense of Indochina (an additional \$385 million for the following year on top of the \$400 million already approved) after the French warned that otherwise they might have to withdraw.

Another influential factor in increasing the U.S. commitment was the possibility that the French would insist on including Indochina in the forthcoming international conference to negotiate an end to the Korean war. (A Korean armistice had been signed on July 27, 1953.) Washington wanted to prevent this from happening, or at least to help the French gain a military advantage in Indochina in order to negotiate from a position of greater strength.⁴⁴

Although General O'Daniel displayed considerable professional optimism about the Navarre plan, on which this enlarged commitment was based, Navarre himself was less than sanguine. In a secret report to Paris he concluded that the war could not be won militarily, and that a stalemate, a draw, was the best that could be expected.⁴⁵

⁴³FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 553-554. Also in attendance were Edmund Gullion and Gene Gregory from the State Department, a Mr. Newton from the American Friends Service Committee and a Mr. Costello from CBS. In addition to Diem, there was another Vietnamese present whose name has been deleted from the published memorandum. In all probability that person was Diem's brother, Bishop Ngo Dinh Thuc.

⁴⁴In discussions at the tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in Washington on July 12-13, 1953, the French made quite an issue of the problem of continuing to fight in Indochina after the Korean war ended, and of the need to broaden the Korean peace talks to include Indochina. Dulles replied that the U.S. would not necessarily oppose a second or separate conference to discuss Indochina, but said that it would be a sign of weakness to make such a proposal at that time. He added, "... a negotiation conducted under circumstances where our side would have no alternative, and would be 'bankrupt' could only end in complete disaster ... if we can work out the Navarre plan and make progress demonstrating that we have the will and capability to sustain that plan, there might then be a prospect of success in negotiations." *Ibid.*, pp. 664-666.

⁴⁵From Navarre's memoirs, quoted by Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams* (New York: Praeger, rev. ed., 1964), p. 122.

Most policymakers in Washington were also skeptical, but there appeared, once again, to be little choice. The State Department advised that "The Laniel government is almost surely the last French government which would undertake to continue the war in Indo-China. If it fails, it will almost certainly be succeeded by a government committed to seek a settlement on terms dangerous to the security of the U.S. and the Free World."⁴⁶

The Director of State's Policy Planning Staff, Robert R. Bowie, put the matter this way: "The issues for the NSC are in essence whether the United States should grasp a promising opportunity to further a satisfactory conclusion of the war in Indochina within the next two fighting years; or whether it is prepared to substitute its own forces for the French in the defense of Indochina; or whether it is prepared to accept the loss of Indochina and possibly other areas of South East Asia." "Confronted with these alternatives," Bowie said, "it seems clear that the United States should grant the French request."⁴⁷

At a meeting of the NSC on August 6, 1953, it was agreed that the French request should be granted, provided that the State Department, the JCS and the Foreign Operations Administration (successor to the Mutual Security Agency) "find that the proposed French program holds promise of success and can be implemented effectively. . . ."⁴⁸

On August 11, the JCS recommended approval of the French request, but cautioned that previous experience with the performance of the French suggested that all aid should be conditioned on adherence to the Navarre plan and on "continued French willingness to receive and act upon U.S. military advice."⁴⁹

On August 28, however, the JCS, to which new members had been appointed during August, voiced concern about the ability of the French to carry out the Navarre plan, and repeated the condition stated in the August 11 memorandum.⁵⁰ They also emphasized that ". . . a basic requirement for military success in Indochina is one of creating a political climate in that country which will provide the incentive for natives to support the French and supply them with adequate intelligence which is vital to the successful conduct of operations in Indochina."

⁴⁶State Department paper prepared for the August 6, 1953 meeting of the NSC, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 714-717.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 713-714. It should not be assumed, by the way, that a Democratic administration under Adlai E. Stevenson, who had been defeated for the Presidency by Eisenhower, would have come to a different conclusion. On July 17, 1953, C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* had a "good chat" with Stevenson in which Stevenson said that "He was surprised at the extent of French disillusionment on Indochina and their desire to get out of that situation. He is trying to point out to the French that now particularly they must keep containing Soviet dynamism in that quarter. We have neutralized Russian pressure in Europe. We must prevent the Sino-Soviet bloc from outflanking India." C. L. Sulzberger, *Seven Continents and Forty Years* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book, 1977), p. 160.

⁴⁸*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 718, from the record of action of the meeting. Unfortunately, the summary of the discussion has not been published. For material on the NSC contained in its historical series the State Department is drawing on a set of NSC memoranda of discussions located in the Eisenhower Library, and the memorandum for this meeting is not in that set. Presumably it is still in NSC records, however.

⁴⁹PP. DOD ed., book 9, pp. 134-135. This document is not in the Gravel edition.

⁵⁰*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 744-746.

Despite their reservations, the new JCS also supported the proposed additional assistance.⁵¹ According to Admiral Radford, its new Chairman: "... the Laniel-Navarre program offered a chance—and a last chance at that—of putting the Indochina War on the right track."⁵²

On September 4, 1953, the French request was discussed at the regular State-JCS meeting.⁵³ The State Department position, as stated by Douglas MacArthur II (Counselor of the Department) and Livingston T. Merchant (Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs), was along the lines of State's earlier memo for the NSC. MacArthur concluded, "For our own part we feel that there is no real alternative to giving the French the help which they are asking for unless it is that of accepting gradual French withdrawal from Indochina." Admiral Radford said that the "basic difficulty was political rather than military and the political difficulties centered in Paris." "I personally think," he added, "that the French, if they really put their heart into it, could win a military victory in Indochina in two years and with true aggressive leadership they might do it in one year." "A change of concept on the part of the French could do a lot," Radford declared. "I think if we can send O'Daniel out to ride the herd on them, he might be able to talk Navarre into really pushing forward."

Adm. Robert B. Carney, the new Chief of Naval Operations, agreed. "I think we should go along with their request," he said, "on the condition that we have a chance to needle them into taking aggressive action. I think we want to be in a position to give the high command direct advice and to expand the possibilities of the MAAG influencing French action."

Gen. Charles P. Cabell, Director of the CIA, commented, "from the point of view of the CIA we think that the French have set their sights too low on what might be done in guerrilla warfare." Radford agreed, adding that "... up to now they have been afraid to trust the native people."

On September 8, 1953, in preparation for the NSC meeting the next day, MacArthur forwarded to Dulles a memorandum prepared by the Policy Planning Staff for the NSC in which the State Department, as requested in the August 6 NSC meeting, reported its position on the French request.⁵⁴ This was the conclusion stated in the memorandum:

A prompt decision by the United States Government in support of the French plan is of the highest importance. Early strong affirmative action by the United States will strengthen the hand of the French Government in seeking from the

⁵¹ A briefing memo for the Secretary of Defense in advance of the September 9 meeting explained why the U.S. Government moved so quickly to a decision on the aid request. (PP, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 144-149; this document is not in the Gravel edition).

"This very important and complex matter is being rushed to such an extent that there remain a number of questions which are not completely answered at this time. However, a successful termination to the Indochina problem is so desirable with respect to all our Far Eastern policies, and the pressure of time so great due to the approaching end of the rainy season there (about October 1—after which major operations by the Viet Minh may recommence), that action in principle is felt to be essential by the Secretary of State is warranted at this time."

⁵² *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*, p. 365.

⁵³ *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 751-757. See also pp. 750-751 for notes on a State Department meeting earlier that day.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 767-770.

French Assembly the credits necessary for prosecution of the war, and in convincing the public of the prospects of success. It would also have a most helpful impact upon General Navarre and his command in encouraging them to move forward rapidly and vigorously in the implementation of their plan. Failure by the United States Government to act rapidly will most probably result in decisions by the French Government entailing a withdrawal from Indochina and the probable loss of Southeast Asia to the Communists.

The NSC met on September 9, 1953, to act on the French request.⁵⁵ Dulles led off the discussion. Referring to the government of Joseph Laniel, he said, "... for the first time we have a French Government which sees the necessity of building strength in Indochina. Likewise for the first time, we have a French commanding General, Navarre, with a dynamic approach to the military problem in Indochina." French Union forces were being increased, he added, and "Equally important . . . was the fact that the French Government have recently given promises of political independence to the Associated States, which the United States Government thinks is essential for the success of the total program. In the long run . . . the Indochina area cannot be held except by the people of the Associated States."

President Eisenhower (on vacation at the time of the meeting) had indicated, Dulles said, "... that the solution of the Indochina problem was the first priority, coming after Korea if not now actually before it. The President had stated his belief that the loss of Indochina could not be insulated, and that that loss would, shortly after, cost us the rest of Southeast Asia. Korea, on the other hand, might be an insulated loss."

Dulles said it would probably take two or three years to "achieve a real decision" in the Indochina war, but that evidence of success against the Communists resulting from U.S. assistance "might very well induce the Chinese Communists to renounce their aid to the Vietminh." It was also with this in mind—both encouraging the French and discouraging the Chinese—that he said he had made his statement on September 2, in which he declared that the Chinese could not send their forces into Indochina "... without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina."⁵⁶

Dulles also reported that President Eisenhower wanted "... careful consultation with members of the appropriate Congressional committees, so that they would not be taken by surprise or feel that they had been presented with an accomplished fact."

Subsequently in the meeting there was further discussion of consulting Members of Congress:

Secretary [of Defense] Wilson stated his understanding that the program of assistance to the French Government for Indochina was something that we would go ahead with regardless of the conferences with the Congressmen.

Mr. Stassen replied that the objective of the conferences was to inform the members of Congress fully as to our proposal, but not actually to ask their permission to carry it out.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 780-789.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 747.

Secretary Dulles concurred in Mr. Stassen's view that the President had the legal right to invoke his transfer powers, adding, however, that it was vastly important to assure ourselves of the good will and understanding of the Congressional leaders and not to take them by surprise.⁵⁷

The NSC approved the new program of aid on condition that there be:

(1) A public French commitment to a "program which will ensure the support and cooperation of the native Indochina [sic]";

(2) A French initiative for "close [U.S.] military advice";

(3) Renewed assurances on the passage of the EDC.⁵⁸

After the NSC acted, Members of Congress were informed of the decision. Thruston B. Morton, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (a former Republican Member of the House of Representatives from Kentucky, who subsequently was elected to the Senate and was one of the key Members of Congress to announce his opposition to the war in 1967), personally saw two of the most important Members of the Senate, Walter George and Richard Russell, ranking Democratic members of Foreign Relations and Armed Services.

This is Morton's account of what he was told:⁵⁹

... George just accepted it and never asked a question and was very gracious. ... Dick Russell said, "You are pouring it down a rathole; the worst mess we ever got into, this Vietnam. The President has decided it. I'm not going to say a word of criticism. I'll keep my mouth shut, but I'll tell you right now we are in for something that is going to be one of the worst things this country ever got into."⁶⁰

During the 1960s, Russell referred frequently to the position he took in 1953, and expressed regret that he had not taken a stronger stand against U.S. involvement.

In a memorandum to the White House on September 15, 1953, reporting on congressional attitudes about the additional Indochina commitment, Morton said merely, "Senator George felt that the decision was a proper one. Senator Russell felt that the French had out-traded us and that they could probably carry more of the burden if forced to. In the end, he seemed fairly satisfied but it is recommended that Admiral Radford or General O'Daniel, or both, should arrange to have a talk with him the next time Senator Rus-

⁵⁷In a memorandum prepared in the State Department on the funding procedure to be followed it was recommended that there be consultation with the foreign policy, armed services, and appropriations committees of both Houses. In addition to being given a general briefing on the proposal, members "should be advised" on two specific points that ran counter to the position taken by the foreign policy committees; namely, that U.S. funds should not be used directly for paying Indochinese troops, and, (by the Foreign Affairs Committee), that more aid should go directly to the forces of the Associated States. Under the proposal, the new aid would be used for the cost of paying Indochinese forces, and it would go to France directly. *Ibid.*, p. 779.

⁵⁸PP, Gravel ed., vol. 1, p. 77, from "Summary and Comments," NSC 161st Meeting, Sept. 9, 1953.

⁵⁹CRS Interview with Thruston Morton, Jan. 29, 1979.

⁶⁰Judging by George's rather detached and unresponsive reaction, he may have been contacted personally by the Secretary of State. As ranking Democrat on the committee he also tended to take bipartisanship very seriously, and during the Eisenhower administration he tended to be less outspoken than previously. Dulles also consulted him frequently, and this may have contributed to his cooperative attitude. There is no record, however, in Dulles' telephone calls memoranda or his appointments calendar of such a conversation with George on this subject at that time.

sell is in the city."⁶¹ The memorandum also reported approval by Representative James P. Richards (D/S.C.), ranking Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and, with reservations, by Representative Vorys, the ranking Republican on the committee. (Robert B. Chipfield of Illinois was chairman, but was rather inactive at that stage.)

Judging by Morton's memorandum, the deep misgivings of Russell were not transmitted to the Secretary of State or the White House, unless this was done orally. But in view of the fact that the decision had already been made, and that there was such a strong legislative-executive consensus on the need to take such a step, combined with Russell's own reluctance to express a dissenting opinion, Morton undoubtedly concluded that he had reported all that should be or needed to be reported.

Other key Members of Congress were told about the decision by John Ohly, a senior official of the foreign aid program.⁶² Included were Senator Leverett Saltonstall (R/Mass.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and majority (Republican) whip of the Senate, and Representative John W. McCormack (D/Mass.), minority (Democratic) whip of the House. According to Ohly's report to Stassen, although both men asked a number of questions and expressed various reservations about the impact of the decision, especially the effect on NATO funding, both also supported the President's action. It was a calculated risk, they said, but one that had to be taken.

Saltonstall questioned whether Congress would be prepared to make a commitment in the following two or three years comparable to that in the current year after the new commitment was added—about \$1-1.5 billion per year. By making the commitment without Congress' approval, he said, the President would put Congress in the position of having to provide the amounts needed in future years in order to implement the Navarre plan. (Ohly said in his report that in his discussions with Members of Congress he "gathered the general impression a consultation in advance of decision and action would make a better impression and be more useful than consultation after the fact.") For this reason, Saltonstall suggested that the French be given a qualified commitment, and that the question be submitted to Congress when it reconvened in January 1954. Ohly said he would report this suggestion, but he told Saltonstall that a qualified commitment "would not result in the necessary actions by the French government and that in any event we had already gone too far with the French government to make our commitment to it of as qualified a character as he recommended."

Representative McCormack wanted to know what would happen if the Navarre plan failed, especially whether the U.S. would then deploy American forces to Indochina. He said he fully agreed with the President's action, and would support increased appropriations

⁶¹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 806-807.

⁶²Memorandum from John C. Ohly to Director of Foreign Operations (Stassen), "Congressional Reaction to Indochina Program," Sept. 17, 1953, in National Archives, RG 330, cited in Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 180, and declassified in 1984 at the request of CRS. Quotations are from the memorandum. (In September 1953, Ohly was Assistant to the Director for Program and Coordination of the Foreign Operations Administration.)

for Indochina for at least two more years, adding that this should not be construed as either support for or opposition to the deployment of U.S. forces. He said "that he would wish to look at an issue of such character in the light of the facts existing at the time that a decision was needed."

Some Members of Congress may have had misgivings, but an article in *Time Magazine* in September 1953 reflected the official optimism of the time. It quoted an unidentified American official in Saigon as saying, "We know what we're doing. It took us long enough, but we're not kidding ourselves anymore." He added, in a statement that was to become a mocking epitaph for the war:⁶³

A year ago none of us could see victory. There wasn't a prayer. Now we can see it clearly—like light at the end of a tunnel.

Further U.S. Efforts to Support French Forces

During the final months of 1953, the United States Government was faced with a further deterioration in the military situation in Indochina, and increasing political pressures in France to negotiate a settlement of the war. The response of the U.S. was to seek to strengthen the resolve and effectiveness of the French while working to increase the U.S. program in Indochina in an effort to foster indigenous resistance to the Communists. The latter position, of course, tended to work against the former, as exemplified earlier by the Blum controversy.

At the same time, the announcement by the new Laniel government in early July 1953 that France was ready to "perfect" relationships with the Associated States, and would begin to negotiate such arrangements with representatives of the Associated States, appears to have ignited nationalist feelings in Indochina. In Vietnam it was announced that the Bao Dai government would convene an official "Congress" early in October for the purpose of selecting representatives to meet with the French. U.S. Ambassador Heath was assured by Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Tam, however, that "... if Congress got out of hand, attempted to become constitutional convention or agitated against government he would not hesitate to use military and police power to dissolve it."⁶⁴

Although the available evidence is not sufficient to confirm this assertion, it would appear that, as a part of its increasing intervention in Indochina, the U.S. was actively seeking to manipulate Vietnamese political forces through techniques similar to those being successfully employed in the Philippines. One of the members of General O'Daniel's party during the June-July 1953 trip to Indochina was Col. Edward Geary Lansdale, U.S. Air Force, a CIA officer with a considerable reputation for his role in the campaign against the Communists in the Philippines. Lansdale, the model for the "Quiet American" in Graham Greene's novel of that title, said he found during his visit to Indochina with General O'Daniel that "French paternalism was turning over the controls of self-rule too

⁶³*Time Magazine*, Sept. 28, 1953, p. 22. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1963), page 169, incorrectly attributes this statement to General Navarre.

⁶⁴*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 795-796.

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

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

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

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

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

The National Congress, considering that:

In this historic circumstance, all free and independent countries have the tendency to cooperate closely with each other, in order to maintain their independence and liberty mutually and to promote world peace;

Considering that alliance between people can be durable and useful only if the two countries can cooperate on an entirely free and equal basis and respect rights of each other;

Considering that French Union, built on French Constitution of 1946, was quite contrary to sovereignty of an independent nation;

Considering the first right of a people is its own interest;
Decides:

1. Not to join French Union;

2. After having recovered all rights still held by France and after clarification of matters concerning old institute of emission, which is Bank of Indochina, Vietnam will sign with France treaties of alliance on an equal basis, according to demands of France and Vietnam during any given

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

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

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

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 826-827.

period and under circumstances which will be clearly determined;

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

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

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

It is a matter of extraordinary difficulty to convey degree of naiveté and childlike belief that no matter what defamatory language they use, the Vietnamese will still be safeguarded from lethal Communist enemy by France and U.S.

Objectives of our diplomacy at this critical juncture should, in our belief, be directed in Vietnam to bringing these people to sober realization of where they stand, dancing on brink of destruction; and in France to enlist those capacities of clear-sightedness and of true French greatness as world power to overlook this present irritant and to keep the national sights on the main issues at stake.

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

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

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

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 829.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 836.

⁷¹See *ibid.*, pp. 828 ff., *passim* for French and American actions and reactions, as well as additional details on the National Congress. See also Hammer, pp. 304-307.

⁷²FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 798.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷³*Ibid.*, pp. 799-800.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 806.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 808.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 810.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 825.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁰*SFRCS His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 47 ff.

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

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

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

Another Reevaluation of U.S. Policy in Indochina

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

The beginning step in this review was NSC 162/2, "Basic National Security Policy," approved by the President on October 30, 1953.⁸⁴ NSC 162/2 was the Eisenhower administration's charter for what was called the "New Look" in national security policy. Lam-pooned at the time as a "bigger bang for the buck," this policy called for meeting the "Soviet threat" without "seriously weakening the U.S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions." One basic aspect of the "New Look" was increased reliance on nuclear weapons, which, the document stated, would be considered "as available as other munitions" in the event of hostilities.⁸⁵

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

... should the French decide to withdraw their forces from Indochina, it would take seven U.S. Army divisions plus a Marine division [a total of approximately 375,000 men, including support personnel] to replace them. . . . [and] would entail an extension within the U.S. Army of all terms of service by at least one year, a recall of individual reserve officers and technicians, an increase in the size of monthly draft calls, and a net increase of 500,000 in the size of the Army.

The planners estimated that U.S. forces could establish a secure base in the Red River Delta region in a few months, but cautioned that successful military operations alone would not destroy the Viet Minh political organization. To accomplish this goal five to eight years of effective political and psychological measures like those being carried out by the British in Malaya would be required.

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

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

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

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

⁸⁷Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 195

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁹*Ibid.* p. 872 fn

⁹⁰*Ibid.* p. 926

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

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

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

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

During early January 1954, the NSC endeavored to agree on an interpretation of the U.S. commitment to Indochina that would respond to the questions raised by the Army and establish new guidelines for U.S. policy. The result was NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," which was approved by the President on January 16, 1954.⁹³

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

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

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

⁹¹*Ibid.* pp. 930-931

⁹²See *ibid.* pp. 914, 917, 937

⁹³For the text see *ibid.* pp. 971-976

⁹⁴For the text of the Special Annex see *ibid.* pp. 1183-1186

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵PP. Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 29 (emphasis in original). Bonesteel's position was Assistant for National Security Council Affairs in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

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

⁹⁷FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 948.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 944-945.

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

(b) Any commitment of US forces in Indochina may lead to the eventual necessity for making progressively larger commitments.

(c) Such commitment would require drastic revisions upward in US budgetary, mobilization and manpower plans and appropriations, since existing plans and appropriations probably preclude the engagement of US forces in operations of the Indochina type.

(d) Public opinion in the US is not now ready for a decision to send US troops to Indochina and in all probability will not support such a decision unless convinced that such action is necessary to save Southeast Asia from Communist domination.

(e) Withdrawal of the French forces plus refusal to commit US forces would weaken the free-world position throughout Asia and probably influence the neutralist nations toward the Communist bloc.

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

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

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

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 939-940.

¹⁰⁰*SFRH Hist. Ser.*, vol. VI, p. 21.

¹⁰¹*HFAC Hist. Ser.*, vol. XV, pp. 423-426.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰²FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 947-953

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁴*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. 1, pp. 89-90.

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

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

The NSC met again on January 14, 1954, to discuss NSC 177.¹⁰⁵ Secretary Dulles said that if the French were forced to withdraw from Indochina, and the Viet Minh took control of the country, the U.S. should then seek to "carry on effective guerrilla operations" against the Communists. "We can raise hell and the Communists will find it just as expensive to resist as we are now finding it." The President remarked that "... he wished we could have done something like this after the victory of the Communists in China. Secretary Dulles answered that of course it was a grave mistake to have allowed the Communists the opportunity to consolidate their position in China. If we had made our plans in advance we might well have succeeded in keeping Communist China in a turmoil."

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

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

NSC 177 was then approved by the Council and renumbered NSC 5405. In its final form¹⁰⁶ NSC 5405 was basically a rewrite of the Truman administration's NSC 124/2, of June 1952, with much of the same language and provisions and no significant changes. As it had in 1952, the NSC, Admiral Radford said, "sidestepped the question, raised by the JCS, of what the United States would do if France gave up the struggle."¹⁰⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the committee were probably not aware of the significance of what he was saying—nor could they be, not being privy to the extremely sensitive, high-level executive branch deliberations on this subject¹¹⁰—Smith signaled this shift of emphasis when he told the committee:¹¹¹

Of course, the loss of Indochina to the Communists would set off political repercussions throughout Southeast Asia and elsewhere in Asia which, in my opinion, would be extremely dangerous to our national security interests.

I have said to this committee, and I want now to retract the statement, that I thought of Southeast Asia as like one of those houses of cards that children build, and if you knock one of them out, the whole structure collapses. Well, I do not believe that now, that is, I am not prepared to and I would not say that now.

I think that, even at the worst, part of Indochina might be lost without losing the rest of Southeast Asia. . . .

One can think of the possibility of an area defense pact which might include Thailand as the bastion, Burma and, possibly Cambodia. . . .

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

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

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

¹¹¹*SFRC Hist. Ser.*, vol. VI, p. 113.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 116.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁸FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1023

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁹Note the parallel between this position and that of the "Nixon Doctrine" in 1969.

¹²⁰*The Eisenhower Diaries*, p. 275

¹²¹CR, vol 100, pp 1503-1506

¹²²*Ibid.*, pp 1550-1552

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

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

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

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

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

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

In April there is to be a conference at Geneva, in which the Communists undoubtedly will present to the French an attractive plan for the total withdrawal of French forces from Indochina, and a partition which I believe, would be the first step toward the seizure of complete control in that area by Communist forces.

The position of the United States at Geneva should be that such an agreement should not be made, but that the war should be continued and brought to a successful conclusion.¹²³

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

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

¹²³For the remarks of Stennis and Kennedy see *ibid.* pp. 2902-2904

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

¹²⁵*Washington Post*, Mar. 12, 1954

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

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

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

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

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

¹²⁶ *SFRF His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 107-146.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³¹ *HFAC Hqs. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 95-160.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹³³ *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1079-1081.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, pp. 417-424.

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

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

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

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

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

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 441.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹³⁷*Public Papers of the Presidents*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, pp. 250, 253

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

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

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

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

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

¹³⁸FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1036, 1038.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 1042.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 1062, 1120, 1145.

¹⁴¹Ibid., pp. 1065-1066.

¹⁴²SFRC *Hrs. Ser.* vol. VI, pp. 153-184. For Dulles' report on February 23 to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, see HFAC *Hrs. Ser.* vol. XV, pp. 429-479.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁴FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1093.

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1096.

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

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

These recommendations by the Special Committee followed closely the position taken by the JCS in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Wilson on March 12.¹⁴⁸ The proposals of the Special Committee and the JCS were then discussed at an NSC meeting on March 25, as will be seen.

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

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

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, vol. XVI, pp. 475-479. This report is also reprinted in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 451-454.

¹⁴⁸*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 472-475.

¹⁴⁹*Spector, Advice and Support*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*

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

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

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu Begins

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

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

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 201

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

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

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1132

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

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

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

I did, however, think it appropriate to remind our French friends that if the United States sent its flag and its own military establishment—land, sea or air—into the Indochina war, then the prestige of the United States would be engaged to a point where we would want to have a success. We could not afford thus to engage the prestige of the United States and suffer a defeat which would have worldwide repercussions.

I said that if the French wanted our open participation in the Indochina war, I thought that they ought also to consider that this might involve a greater degree of partnership than had prevailed up to the present time, notably in relation to independence for the Associated States and the training of indigenous forces.

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

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

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 1137-1140.

¹⁵⁶Quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 193-194. See also *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1140.

¹⁵⁷*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1141-1144.

¹⁵⁸For the text see *ibid.*, pp. 1141-1142.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 1150.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1151.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶⁴Gurtov, pp. 80, 188.

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

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 373a.

CHAPTER 4

RATTLING THE SABER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The U.S. Announces the United Action Concept

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

proved by Eisenhower and by congressional leaders of both parties. The memo was then submitted to ambassadors of allied countries, and was incorporated in Dulles' speech on March 29.⁶

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

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

During this time, the question of U.S. military intervention, raised by the Special Committee on Indochina and by the JCS a few days previously, was discussed at some length at the regular NSC meeting on March 25.⁸ Although the President continued to criticize the military judgment and decisions of the French relative to the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and appears to have rejected any thought of using U.S. forces in that battle, he also seems to have been increasingly more determined to prevent the fall of Indochina, and to use U.S. forces, if necessary, in order to do so. In response to a suggestion from Secretary of Defense Wilson that the U.S. "forget about Indochina for a while" and concentrate on establishing a Pacific pact, "The President expressed great doubt as to the feasibility of such a proposal, since he believed that the collapse of Indochina would produce a chain reaction which would result in the fall of all of Southeast Asia to the Communists."

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

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

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

⁸*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1163-1166.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1168.

¹¹Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

¹²Richard Nixon, *R.N.: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), p. 151.

¹³Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

¹⁴For the text of the speech see *Department of State Bulletin*, Apr. 12, 1954.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²²FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1201-1202.

²³Ibid., p. 1202, fn. 3.

²⁴Ibid. The Eisenhower Library has not located any additional information on the Dulles-Brownell conversation. Letter to CRS from John Wickman, Aug. 11, 1982.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1204

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 1210.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1212

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

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

By contrast, the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin (Southeast Asia) Resolution²⁸ passed by Congress at the request of President Johnson, did not "authorize" action by the President. Its language was very carefully drafted to avoid any suggestion that the President needed Congress to authorize his use of the armed forces, and, in fact, the wording was intended to put Congress on record as agreeing that he had that power as Commander in Chief. Accordingly, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution stated that Congress "approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The 1964 resolution went on to declare that, consistent with its international commitments, the U.S. would, "as the President determines, . . . take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force," to assist Vietnam (or any other members or "protocol state" of SEATO).

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

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

²⁸Public Law 88-408.

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

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

From the military viewpoint, the United States capability for effective intervention in the Dien Bien Phu operation was altogether disproportionate to the liability it would incur.

From the military viewpoint, the outcome of the Dien Bien Phu operation, which ever way it might go, would not in itself decisively affect the military situation there.

If recommended and executed, intervention by United States armed forces would greatly increase the risk of general war. If the United States, by its own act, were deliberately to risk promoting such possible reaction, it must first materially increase its readiness to accept the consequences.

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

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

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

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

²⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1220-1223.

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

The essentials of the problem appear to be these:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another example of this sensitivity was the consensus of a number of Senators, primarily the "constitutionalists" among Southern Democrats like Stennis and conservative Republicans like Arthur V. Watkins (R/Utah), over a provision in the mutual defense treaty with Korea approved by the Senate on January 26, 1954.³² This was the provision, which appeared again in 1955 in the SEATO Treaty, that in the event of an attack on either party, each would act "to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes." Stennis and Watkins, as well as A. Willis Robertson (D/Va.), tried unsuccessfully to get Alexander Wiley (R/Wis.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to define what was meant by "constitutional processes" in terms of the role of Congress. They wanted assurance that the language would not permit the President, as in the case of the Korean war, to commit the country to war without the approval of Congress. As Stennis said, "we are treading on dangerous ground when we commit ourselves to take action thousands of miles from home without giving Congress an opportunity to participate in the decision." Wiley, carrying the case for the administration, replied that the term did not detract from the power of either Congress or the President, but he and others among the "internationalists," including Senator Hubert Humphrey (D/Minn.), took the position that Congress should not "tie the President's hands," and argued that the term "constitutional processes" included both the power of Congress to declare war and the President's power as Commander in Chief.

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

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

³²For the debate see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 782-818.

³³*CR*, vol. 116, p. 40441

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

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

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

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

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

Admiral Radford gave a very comprehensive briefing on the military situation in Indochina. He went into particular detail in connection with the battle now raging at Dien Bien Phu.

The Secretary [Dulles] explained the significance of Indochina, pointing out that it was the key to Southeast Asia, that if the Communists gained Indochina and nothing was done about it, it was only a question of time until all of Southeast

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Secretary said that he had already initiated talks to secure unity of action. He had spoken with the British Ambassador yesterday and was meeting with Bonnet in a few minutes. He had talked with Romulo³⁷ but he could not go further without knowing that he could expect U.S. action if the others responded.

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

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

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

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

³⁸FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1230

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The legislators stirred, and the questions began.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No," replied Radford.

"How many of the three agree with you?"

"None."

"How do you account for that?"

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

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

Dulles said he had not.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁶ *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1230, fn. 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1238.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, fn. 2.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 1236 For Operation VAUTOUR, see p. 172, fn. 162 above.

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

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

Dulles immediately cabled Dillon in Paris:⁵⁴

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

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

The NSC Postpones Action on Direct Intervention

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

⁵²FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1241.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 1242, fn. 3.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1242.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1243.

⁵⁶For the text of the Planning Board report see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 462-471. For the "missing material" noted on p. 471, see the DOD ed., book 9, pp. 320-324. For the report of the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁷ *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 471-472.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁸For the summary of the meeting see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1250-1265

⁵⁹Dulles Telephone Calls Series

⁶⁰*Ibid*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Congress Debates Intervention

The rumors of possible U.S. military action in Indochina had a predictable impact on Capitol Hill. The general reaction was that the U.S. should help to defend Southeast Asia against the Communists, but should be very wary about becoming involved in an anti-colonialist struggle in Indochina. There was support for united action because it offered a way of responding to the situation multilaterally rather than through unilateral U.S. action. Most Members also seemed to be aware that implicit in Dulles' March 29 speech was the willingness of the U.S. to enter the Indochina war through the united action framework, and there was general support for going to war, if necessary to save Southeast Asia, provided that other nations carried their share of the burden. There was

⁶¹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1270-1272.

⁶²According to *ibid.*, p. 1271, fn. 1, the pertinent records of the Joint Advanced Study Committee of the JCS have not been found.

⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 1269-1270.

⁶⁴Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 209.

even support, and fairly substantial support, for using U.S. ground forces, if need be, as part of a multilateral force. In other words, most Members of Congress seemed to accept the policy premises and the operational assumptions of the President and the executive branch. They may have been even more inclined than the President to consider using U.S. ground forces in Southeast Asia if that became necessary to stop the Communists, although they, too, wanted to avoid "another Korea."⁶⁵

Senator Guy Gillette (D/Iowa) continued to be one of the few dissenters. In a speech on April 5 he warned that "... America is deeply, dangerously, and perhaps inextricably involved in this area." The U.S. approach to the problem, he said, was based on the misconception that it was a military problem, rather than primarily a political problem: "The root of it is nationalism—the demand of the people for freedom and independence." He urged that the U.S. declare its support for complete independence, and couple this with taking the issue to the U.N.⁶⁶

On April 6, the day the NSC met to confirm the decision to seek support for united action, there was a very significant prearranged colloquy in the Senate.⁶⁷ The lead speaker was Senator John F. Kennedy, who argued that in order for united action—which he supported—to be effective, the people of Indochina and the peoples of Asia had to be committed to opposing the Communists, which in turn required action by the French granting the Indochinese complete independence. Without such indigenous and regional support, he said, "the 'united action' which is said to be so desperately needed for victory in that area is likely to end up as unilateral action by our own country."

These are some of the major points made by Kennedy:

Certainly I, for one, favor a policy of a "united action" by many nations whenever necessary to achieve a military and political victory for the free world in that area, realizing full well that it may eventually require some commitment of our manpower.

But to pour money, materiel, and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive.

* * * * *

I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, "an enemy of the people" which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.

* * * * *

The hard truth of the matter is, first that without the wholehearted support of the peoples of the Associated States, without a reliable and crusading native army with a dependable officer corps, a military victory, even with American support, in

⁶⁵For confirmation of the existence of this attitude, see the article by William S. White, *New York Times*, Apr. 5, 1954.

⁶⁶CR, vol. 100, pp. 4577-4578.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 4671-4681.

that area is difficult, if not impossible, of achievement; and, second, that the support of the people of that area cannot be obtained without a change in the contractual relationships which presently exist between the Associated States and the French Union.

Kennedy pointed out that since the defeat of the Goldwater/Kennedy amendment on July 1, 1953, and the announcement by the French on July 3, 1953 that they wanted to "perfect" the sovereignty of the Associated States, 9 months had elapsed, during which there had been almost no progress toward negotiating such changes.⁶⁸ "... if the French persist in their refusal to grant the legitimate independence and freedom desired by the peoples of the Associated States," Kennedy said, "and if those people and the other peoples of Asia remain aloof from the conflict, as they have in the past, then it is my hope that Secretary Dulles, before pledging our assistance at Geneva, will recognize the futility of channeling American men and machines into that hopeless internecine struggle."

Kennedy was congratulated on his speech by a number of Senators, Republicans as well as Democrats, including Majority Leader Knowland. (Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson did not make any public comments.) Knowland said that he agreed with most of what Kennedy had said, especially the need for indigenous support and for the French to act on granting complete independence. Warren Magnuson (D/Wash.), who, it will be recalled, had been to Indochina in 1953, agreed that independence was important, but he warned that if the French were to declare independence and to withdraw, the Indochinese could not defend themselves and the area would go Communist. Dirksen, who had been on the trip with Magnuson, opposed sending U.S. troops, and agreed with the need for indigenous support. But he urged restraint, and the setting of a target date for independence—he used five years as an illustration—rather than abrupt action which might cause the French to leave, thereby depriving the Indochinese of administrative cadres that would be needed until they could develop their own.

Senator Stennis also emphasized the importance of united action, which he said must be based on the Indochinese and Asian "will to fight":

While there are conditions on which Congress would vote to support united action, and I believe the people would back it up, I do not believe that Congress would ever vote, or should vote, to have the United States go in on a unilateral basis. It would have to be a united effort; not a token effort, but a real united effort.

In other words, if there is not sufficient power and strength in Asia, or in some Asiatic country which is willing to take the chance, to stop communism, as we say, or give freedom, with some support from the other free nations of the world, then it is a lost cause, as I see it. Unless these conditions are brought

⁶⁸ For the State Department position on this situation see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1155-1156, 1212-1214, 1298-1299. It should be noted that on April 28, 1954, the French finally agreed to sign two treaties with Vietnam, as the Vietnamese had requested, one providing for total independence and the other defining the terms for Vietnamese association with the French Union. These treaties were never ratified.

about we should not go in. To go in on a unilateral basis would be to go into a trap. It would be to send our men into a trap from which there could be no reasonable recovery and no chance for victory.

Only one Senator, Henry Jackson (D/Wash.), mentioned the need for a congressional resolution:

I think the people should be told in no uncertain terms that we cannot allow Indochina to fall into Communist hands. To do so would mean that we will lose Southeast Asia. . . . In my opinion, the Congress of the United States, Democrats and Republicans, have a responsibility to support the administration in trying to save southeast Asia. I think the administration should come to Congress with a resolution stating in no uncertain terms our wishes and aspirations for the people of Indochina and for all Asia and to outline the policy to be pursued . . . I do not believe we can wait much longer lest we lose southeast Asia to the Communist forces which are about to take over.

Kennedy replied that the U.S. should not adopt a policy of intervention "unless minimum guarantees for real independence have been made." Jackson agreed that it was essential to support indigenous desires for independence and freedom, but he thought that it was time for the President to present his proposals to Congress, and for Congress to act to support him.

In addition to this kind of public debate, the issue of what the U.S. should do in Indochina was also being debated privately on Capitol Hill, and, as is often the case, the private debate may have been more important in shaping public policy. The most significant instance of this of which there is any knowledge may have been the discussion at the regular weekly meeting of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, a group of about 12 of the more senior and influential Democrats from the various regions of the country, of which the Democratic leader, then Lyndon Johnson, was chairman. This occurred on April 6, three days after the meeting of congressional leaders with Dulles and Radford. George E. Reedy, Jr., an assistant to Johnson, who was one of only two non-Senators present, has given this account:⁶⁹

It was a fascinating meeting. Walter George was there, and very obviously there to play the devil's advocate, and to argue that we should go into Indochina. Of course, Walter George was a very commanding personality in the Senate. Nobody liked to be disrespectful to him. And I have never seen a group of men explode like that, especially Bob Kerr [Oklahoma]. George said something like, "If we don't go in we will lose face," and Bob Kerr slammed that big fist of his down on the table saying, "I'm not worried about losing my face; I'm worried about losing my ass."

⁶⁹CRS Interview with George E. Reedy, Jr. Mar. 29, 1979. The other non-Senator participant in the meeting was Felton M. "Skeeter" Johnston, then Secretary to the Minority, and later Secretary of the Senate. There were nine Senators present. (This information was provided to CRS by the staff of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee.)

Reedy added that "When the thing was over, there was no doubt whatsoever where the Democratic Policy Committee stood. They were against it. And Johnson so reported back to Eisenhower."

The British Oppose Intervention

Meanwhile, Dulles began the process of consulting the British and others about united action. In a meeting in Washington on April 8, he told French Ambassador Henri Bonnet that it was "... 'crazy' to think that the US would be drawn into a war without any political prearrangements of any kind or description in order to save one outpost such as Dien Bien Phu and when we were not attacked and were without Allies. He pointed out that we did not have an alliance with France in regard to Indochina. M. Bonnet concluded by saying that he knew our country and Congress well enough to know our position in this regard."⁷⁰

From both Ambassador Dillon in Paris and his own assistant, Douglas MacArthur, Dulles also received advice concerning the attitude of the French toward united action, namely, that if the French could not negotiate an acceptable settlement in Geneva, they would try to "internationalize" the war, thus confronting the U.S. with the alternative of intervening or having to accept a French deal with the Viet Minh. MacArthur said that the French assumed the U.S. had already decided to intervene, and he advised Dulles to make it clear that the U.S. would intervene only through united action.⁷¹

On April 10, 1954, Dulles, Robertson, Bowie and MacArthur flew to London to try to persuade the British to become a united action partner.

Dulles told British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that "if some new element were not injected into the situation, he feared French might be disposed at Geneva to reach an agreement which would have the effect of turning Indochina over to the Communists." The "new element," of course, was to be united action. During the discussion, according to a cable from Dulles to Under Secretary Smith, Eden "indicated a real willingness to consider defense arrangements in SE Asia on the basis of united action but he is obviously against implementation of any coalition prior to Geneva." Eden was not certain that Indochina could be successfully defended, however, and doubted whether additional sea and air support could turn the tide.⁷²

The U.S. delegation gave the British a draft declaration for a united action arrangement, by which the signatories would agree "That if the lands of any of them in the Southeast Asia and Western Pacific area fell under the domination of international Communism that would be a threat to the peace and security of them all," and they would agree to create a collective defense arrangement "to prevent such threat," and to "maintain peace and security" in the region.⁷³

⁷⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1292.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 1294-1295.

⁷²*Ibid.*, pp. 1307-1308.

⁷³For the text, see *ibid.*, pp. 1314-1315.

A British Foreign Office spokesman (Denis Allen, Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs) "... expressed great reserve and doubted that the UK would wish at this stage to issue such a declaration. He said that for UK internal political reasons as well as for general world opinion it was important not to take any definitive action prior to Geneva which would give the impression that decisions had been made with respect to Southeast Asia which foreclosed the possibility of a successful negotiation on Indochina at Geneva." He also said that the U.S. draft "appeared to him a commitment to clean up the Communists in Indochina, and if the UK and others undertook such a commitment they would have to see it through successfully." He said that the British Joint Chiefs were less optimistic than some U.S. military leaders, such as Admiral Radford. They thought that additional ground forces would be required to defend Indochina, and that this might precipitate a war with China, possibly involving atomic weapons, which could lead to a world war if the U.S.S.R. fulfilled its defense treaty with China.⁷⁴

In the final joint communiqué the U.S. and Britain agreed on "an examination of the possibility of establishing a collective defense, within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, to assure the peace, security and freedom of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific." Dulles cabled Eisenhower, "Believe accomplished considerable in moving the British away from their original position that nothing should be said or done before Geneva. . . . However, obviously, the British are extremely fearful of becoming involved with ground forces in Indochina, and they do not share the view of our military that loss of northern Vietnam would automatically carry with it the loss of the entire area. They think more in terms of letting a buffer state be created in the north; then attempting to hold the rest of the area by a south Asia NATO. This would give Churchill the enlarged ANZUS which he has always sought." Dulles also reported that the British had agreed on establishing an informal working group in Washington to prepare for such a collective defense arrangement.⁷⁵

On April 13, 1954, Dulles and his party flew to Paris for two days of talks with the French, after which a similar communiqué was issued.⁷⁶

On April 14, there was another colloquy on Indochina in the Senate. Mansfield made the opening statement, which he titled

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 1311-1312.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1322, fn. 1. For the British position see Eden's memoirs, *Full Circle*, pp. 104-110.

⁷⁶See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1327-1338. During Dulles' meeting with French President Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault on April 14, Bidault suggested that Laniel and Dulles should talk privately, whereupon everyone else left the room for a brief period, leaving only Laniel, Dulles, and Lt. Col. Vernon A. Walters. There is no official record of what they discussed, but Bernard Fall suggests that at some point during the meeting with the French, Dulles said to Bidault, in French, "And if we gave you two atomic bombs to save Dien Bien Phu?" Bidault is said to have rejected the alleged proposal, saying that this would cause as many casualties among French forces as among the Communists. *Hell in a Very Small Place*, pp. 307, 475 fn. 12. There is no reference to this matter in the summary of the April 14 meeting which was prepared after the meeting by one of the participants. (There is no indication of its authorship.) The only reference to the private conversation of Laniel and Dulles is that they discussed the European Defense Community (EDC). The memorandum of conversation is in the Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda Series.

Dulles later denied that he made this statement. See below, p. 213, fn. 92. For Radford's suggestion to Dulles that a small number of tactical atomic bombs could be used at Dien Bien Phu, see p. 203 above.

"Last Chance in Indochina." He argued that the non-Communist countries had to establish, prior to the Geneva Conference, "the minimum conditions to prevent Communist seizure of Indochina without full-scale war." The U.S. had this "last chance" to keep the Conference from "ending in disaster." Criticizing the French for not giving complete independence to the Associated States (and the executive branch for not taking a stronger position on this point), as well as leaders such as Bao Dai for not providing adequate leadership, Mansfield proposed action to grant full independence to the Associated States and to permit the Indochinese to remain in the French Union only if they chose to do so. The "failure," he said, "lies not in the military but in the political realm . . . failure to understand fully the power of nationalism in this struggle against communism." A number of other Senators agreed. Humphrey said it was important for Dulles to be aware of the strong support among Members of the Senate for Indochinese independence. John F. Kennedy said that united action was not the answer; that it was dubious whether guarantees to counter the Chinese would even be needed. The principal problem was indigenous—"an effective native army to meet other native armies."

Mansfield's position was also strongly supported by Knowland, the Republican's own leader, and supposedly, therefore, the administration's leader in the Senate, who again declared that the Indochinese should be given their freedom, including the right to decide whether or not to remain in the French Union. "No matter how powerful their friends abroad may be," Knowland said, "unless people desire freedom and have the will to resist, their resistance will not be effective. . . ."⁷⁷

During the colloquy, Mansfield stated that he thought Dulles was aware of the importance of satisfying nationalist political demands, and he believed that Dulles was doing something about the problem. Dulles was, in fact, meeting that day with French leaders in Paris, and during these talks he strongly emphasized the need for independence, including freedom of choice about belonging to the French Union. The reaction of the French was, in the words of Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, ". . . French public and parliamentary opinion would not support the continuation of the war in Indochina if the concept of the French Union were placed in any doubt whatsoever."⁷⁸

Vice President Nixon Says Troops Might Be Sent

A few days later it was revealed that Vice President Nixon had suggested possible U.S. intervention in Indochina, and Congress reacted sharply. Nixon's remark, for attribution only to a "high Administration source," was made during a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors on Friday, April 16, where he said that the U.S. might have to send in troops if the French with-

⁷⁷For the colloquy see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 5111-5120. Except for Mansfield and Knowland, as well as Humphrey, no one on the Foreign Relations Committee joined in the discussion. Only that morning the committee had received a military briefing from Admiral Radford, which continued the following day (April 15), when it dealt specifically with Indochina. Both meetings were in executive session, but unfortunately the meeting of April 15 was totally off the record, and there is no known record of its contents. See *SFRC Hist. Ser.*, vol. VI., pp. 211-218.

⁷⁸*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1335

drew.⁷⁹ Senator Edwin ("Big Ed") Johnson (D/Colo.), calling it "Mr. Nixon's War," said that "... as a guest at a private party in the company of a large number of Democratic Senators some weeks ago, I heard the Vice President, Mr. Nixon, 'whooping it up for war' in Indochina." He said he thought Nixon had been expressing a private opinion, but that he felt free to speak now that the news of Nixon's remarks had been made public. "I am against sending American GI's into the mud and muck of Indochina," he said, "on a blood-letting spree to perpetuate colonialism and white man's exploitation in Asia."⁸⁰

Humphrey and Morse called on the administration to consult with Congress. This was particularly important, Morse said, in view of the fact that "the present times are such that if we ever get into another war it will be without a declaration of war. . . ." Leverett Saltonstall, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, replied that there had been no change in the administration's position with respect to the U.S. role in Indochina, and that there would be appropriate consultation if a change were made. Senator Gillette offered a resolution providing for Senate endorsement of a request to the U.N. to consider the Indochina situation as a threat to peace.⁸¹

Other Senators, including Knowland and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Wiley, remarked to reporters that while they agreed with Nixon, they did not think the U.S. would have to send its forces, and that any action by Congress, would, in Knowland's words, "be influenced by what other nations would contribute to collective action."⁸² Eisenhower himself did not take the incident too seriously. Sherman Adams said that "Nixon was mortified by the confusion he had caused, but Eisenhower, who was in Augusta [Georgia] at the time, called the Vice President on the telephone and told him not to be upset. Trying to cheer up Nixon, the President reassured him that the uproar over his comment had been all to the good because it awakened the country to the seriousness of the situation in Indochina."⁸³ This was also Dulles' reaction, as he told Nixon in a telephone conversation. In another telephone conversation, Dulles told Senator H. Alexander Smith that he was strongly opposed to using U.S. ground forces in Asia, and that "Other things we can do are better." He added, "it was unfortunate, but it will blow over."⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, Apr. 17, 18, 20, 1954. According to *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1346, fn. 2, the text of the speech has never been found.

⁸⁰ *CR*, vol. 100, p. 5281. Several authors, including Alexander Kendrick, Robert Divine, and George Herring, have erroneously attributed this statement to Lyndon Johnson. For a full statement of Senator Edwin Johnson's views, see his speech in *ibid.*, pp. 5477-5480. The private party mentioned by Senator Johnson was held at the home of Senator Estes Kefauver. It was one of two or more meetings of Democratic Senators held at Nixon's request to discuss the Indochina situation.

⁸¹ Seventeen years later, in 1967, at the age of eighty-three, retired and living in Colorado, Big Ed spoke out again on Vietnam in a letter to his old colleague and close friend Lyndon Johnson. He urged an end to the bombing of the North, "that we go strictly on the defensive in Vietnam south of the demilitarized zone." He went on: "Frankly, it's a political war, pure and simple. And it can be ended only by statesmanship. You are the one man, in my humble opinion, who can successfully start that very involved movement to end it." Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *Advise and Obstruct, The Role of the United States Senate in Foreign Policy Decisions* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), p. 295.

⁸² For these various statements see *CR*, vol. 100, pp. 5289-5294, 5297-5298, 5309-5310.

⁸³ *New York Times*, Apr. 18, 1954.

⁸⁴ *Firsthand Report*, p. 122. See also *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1347, fn. 4.

⁸⁵ Dulles Telephone Calls Series, Apr. 19, 1954.

At the April 26 weekly meeting of Republican congressional leaders with the President, House Republican Leader Charles A. Halleck said, according to Nixon's memoirs, that Nixon's comments about sending troops "had really hurt," and that he hoped there would be no more talk of that type." Nixon said that the President "... immediately stepped in and said he felt it was important that we not show a weakness at this critical time and that we not let the Russians think that we might not resist in the event that the Communists attempted to step up their present tactics in Indochina and elsewhere."⁸⁵

On April 19, Dulles met with Eisenhower. Among the topics he discussed with the President was the Department of Justice paper on the President's war powers, which had been prepared in late March-early April in conjunction with the administration's consideration of using U.S. Armed Forces in Indochina. This is Dulles' memorandum of that part of their discussion:⁸⁶

I said I thought it [Justice's memo] was unduly legalistic. I thought that the heart of the matter was that the Government of the United States must have the power of self-preservation. If Congress was in session and in a position to act to save the Union, concurrent action would be the preferred procedure. If the danger was great and imminent and Congress unable to act quickly enough to avert the danger, the President would have to act alone.

The President agreed, stating that, in his judgment, the President would have to take the responsibility of carrying out the will of the people. If he made a mistake in this respect, then he was subject to impeachment, and repudiation by the Congress. The President thought, however, that it was unwise to ventilate this problem at the present time in view of Bricker Amendment problems. I said I wholly agreed. I had expressed my views merely as views which I thought should be in the background of the NSC thinking and planning.

On April 20, Dulles left again for Europe and a NATO session prior to the Geneva Conference after meeting that morning with congressional leaders for a briefing on Indochina, Geneva, and the status of united action. Those present were Republican Senators Knowland, Millikin, Saltonstall, Wiley, Bridges, and Bourke B. Hickenlooper (Iowa), and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, Russell, Green and Fulbright and, from the House, Republicans Chipperfield, Arends and James G. Fulton (Pa.) and Democrat Brooks Hays (Ark.). Unfortunately, there is apparently no record of that meeting.⁸⁷ It would be interesting to know what was said, particularly in view of the fact that on the previous day Dulles had complained privately to White House Press Secretary Hagerty about the lack of support from congressional leaders, especially Knowland and other Senators. According to Hagerty, Dulles said:

We have the greatest President since Washington—a military genius and a statesman who is trying to guide our country

⁸⁵RN, p. 153.

⁸⁶Eisenhower Library, "Memorandum of Conference with President Eisenhower, Augusta, Ga., Apr. 19, 1954," sent to Legal Adviser Phleger on April 21. Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda Series. The Justice Department memorandum has never been made public.

⁸⁷FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1351

through a very delicate situation with war on both sides of the road we are taking. We must not give in to Communists and we must keep our allies. That is a tough job. Why those people on the Hill cannot understand that and cannot back us up is more than I can understand. They are interested only in themselves and their own seat and apparently care nothing or less than nothing for our country.

On the day Dulles left, Hagerty talked privately to Eisenhower: "Told him I was getting fed up with leaders not supporting us; that Knowland was trying to cut Dulles' heart out every time he had a chance and that other leaders, with the exception of Halleck, didn't have the guts to come out of the rain." The President agreed with this, as well as Hagerty's complaint about lack of support from the leadership for the administration's legislative program, and authorized Hagerty to prepare and release "a series of magazine articles and other publicity on this whole question."⁸⁸

The French Again Request U.S. Airstrikes

On April 22, 1954, Dulles met in Paris with Eden and Bidault for a further discussion of united action and of the Geneva Conference, at which he emphasized that "... knowledge by the Russians that a common defense system was in prospect [united action] would strengthen our hand at Geneva and help convince the Soviets that they should come to a reasonable agreement."⁸⁹ A key member of the State Department team for the Geneva Conference, Philip Bonsal, who was traveling with Dulles, threw considerable cold water, however, on the practicality of united action except as a negotiating posture. In a memo prepared on the day of Dulles' meeting with Eden and Bidault, Bonsal said that the implication that the French had failed politically and militarily, and that American intervention was necessary in order to salvage the situation, would, if put into practice, have a devastating effect on the plans and efforts of the French. Thus, he concluded:⁹⁰

Every effort must be made to convince the French and the Vietnamese that a failure to achieve success within the present framework, a failure to furnish all the means necessary to that end (including French conscripts and a major stepping up of American aid) would be suicidal from the point of view of French interests generally, of the interests of the current Vietnamese regime and of free world interests in the Far East. The "united action" alternative, useful as it may be in improving the chances of a negotiated settlement, is a very poor second choice, if carried to the action stage. Its ultimate political success seems highly dubious both in terms of Indo-

⁸⁸Eisenhower Library, Hagerty Diary for Apr. 20, 1954. Hagerty's diary has now been published. See Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Mid-Course, 1954-1955* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983). Hagerty also noted, "Fred Seaton [then an Assistant Secretary of Defense] called in afternoon to inform me that Defense Department, with clearance by [Sherman] Adams, had prepared a statement on Indochina airlift to be used if story ever breaks. We have been carrying French personnel in American planes—more than has ever been reported. They do not land in war zones but airlift has been considerable, and sooner or later the Chinese Communists are going to break it."

⁸⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, p. 547.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 549.

china and in terms of South and Southeast Asia and the Far East generally.

As it happened, the U.S. was already confronted with the kind of problem Bonsal feared might develop later. At an earlier meeting that same day with Dulles (accompanied by Radford and Ambassador Dillon), Bidault (accompanied by General Ely) again requested U.S. military intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Such U.S. support, he said, was the only way to save the garrison, and if the garrison fell not only would the French reject united action, but "His impression was that if Dien Bien Phu fell, the French would want to pull out entirely from southeast Asia. . . ." ⁹¹ Dulles cabled the President a report on the meeting, and Eisenhower replied that he understood ". . . the feeling of frustration that must consume you. I refer particularly to our earlier efforts to get the French to ask for internationalization of the war, and to get the British to appreciate the seriousness of the situation of Dien Bien Phu and the probable result on the entire war of defeat at that place." He suggested that Dulles make the British fully aware of the situation, but in his reply he did not comment further on the French request.

The next day (April 23), in the middle of an afternoon NATO meeting, Bidault gave Dulles a message which Prime Minister Laniel had just received from General Navarre, in which Navarre said that the only alternative to a cease-fire in Indochina was Operation VAUTOUR, using U.S. heavy bombers (B-29s). Dulles replied that he thought this was out of the question, but that he would report it urgently to Eisenhower. ⁹²

After conferring with Under Secretary Smith, the President reaffirmed the U.S. position, and rejected the French request. On the night of April 23, at an official dinner at the Quai d'Orsay (the French foreign office), Dulles drew Eden aside to tell him of Navarre's cable, and, according to Eden, the two of them, along with Gen. Alfred M. Gruenther (NATO Supreme Commander) had "a brief conversation amid the expectant diners," during which Eden told Dulles that he did not think an airstrike would change the situation, and that it might precipitate world war III. Dulles, according to Eden, agreed that an airstrike would not be decisive, but he and Gruenther argued that if the French collapsed in Indochina they might collapse as a world power. Dulles, Eden said, told him that if the British would support the U.S. on this issue he was prepared to recommend to the President that he ask Congress for authority to use U.S. air and naval forces in Indochina. As the conversation ended, Eden asked that the U.S. consult the British before taking any military action, and Dulles agreed. ⁹³

⁹¹*Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1362

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 1374. In August 1954, the U.S. asked the French to review a proposed statement on the history of the requests made by the French for U.S. assistance, and the U.S. response. A high-ranking French diplomat, Roland Jacquoin de Margerie, said that the document was accurate, but that it omitted Dulles' offer of atomic bombs to Bidault, which he said was made during their discussion of Navarre's cable on the afternoon of April 23. When Dillon reported this to Washington, Dulles denied that he had made such a statement, adding ". . . it is incredible that I should have made offer since the law categorically forbids it as was indeed well known not only to me but to Bidault because it had been discussed at NATO meetings." *Ibid.*, p. 1928. For Bidault's version see Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 196. De Margerie agreed with the U.S. suggestion that Bidault was "overwrought" at the time, and might have misunderstood. *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1933.

⁹³*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1375, and Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 113-114

Eden said in his memoirs, "I am fairly hardened to crises, but I went to bed that night a troubled man. I did not believe that anything less than intervention on a Korean scale, if that, would have any effect in Indo-China. If there were such intervention, I could not tell where its consequences would stop. We might well find ourselves involved in the wrong war against the wrong man in the wrong place."⁹⁴

The next day, Saturday, April 24, while the White House staff was on an hour's call to return to Washington, if need be,⁹⁵ Dulles and Eden talked again. They were joined by Admiral Radford, who had just flown in from the States. Dulles said that in order to keep the French fighting in Indochina it was essential for the British and the Americans to join them under a collective action plan.⁹⁶ But he did not propose an airstrike at Dien Bien Phu. This was "impossible constitutionally . . . under existing conditions."

Moreover, according to Admiral Radford, airstrikes at Dien Bien Phu would not, at that stage, save the garrison. He emphasized, however, that if the British and Americans announced their intention to join the French in defending Indochina, and began moving air units into the area, the French would have more of a will to continue fighting, and the French public would be less likely to demand a new government.⁹⁷ Eden's response was that "Politically, . . . intervention would be 'hell at home,' and that he could not imagine a worse issue with the public."

In order to clarify the French position, Eden and Dulles met that afternoon with Bidault, who hedged on whether or not the French would withdraw from Indochina if Dien Bien Phu fell, but said that the French would appreciate assistance from the British and the U.S.⁹⁸

Later that day Dulles met with Laniel for a further discussion of the French position. Laniel said that the French had asked the U.S. for military assistance because of their concern about the "psychological blow" if Dien Bien Phu fell. "He feared it would affect the morale of the Vietnamese army and if Vietnamese units began to desert it could upset the military equilibrium and lead rapidly to disaster. In France he was afraid that the loss of Dien Bien Phu would strengthen the hands of those who wished to end the war at all costs and he believes that his government . . . will probably be overthrown."⁹⁹

Dulles told Laniel that the U.S. was doing all it could, short of belligerency, and that ". . . under our Constitution the President did not have the authority to authorize acts of belligerency without the approval of the Congress except in the case of an attack on the U.S. Action in Indochina would definitely require Congressional approval." Dulles said that, if desired by the French, the President

⁹⁴*Full Circle*, p. 114

⁹⁵Hagerty Diary for Apr. 24, 1954

⁹⁶FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1386 For an excellent statement by Dulles of his position at the time see *ibid.*, p. 1404.

⁹⁷See *ibid.*, p. 1397 On April 27, on behalf of the JCS, Radford sent Secretary of Defense Wilson a memorandum concluding that the French request for an airstrike at Dien Bien Phu would be "of little value" in relieving the garrison, and could lead to US military involvement in Indochina. See PP. DOD ed. book 9, pp. 392-394

⁹⁸FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1391-1393.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* pp. 1394-1395

was prepared to ask for such authority on the condition that the British also join, and that Indochina be given complete independence. He added that he hoped that such an alliance could be formed, and that "in a few weeks" the U.S. and Britain would send military forces to help the French.¹⁰⁰ After the meeting with Dulles and Bidault, Eden flew to London to consult Churchill, and in his memoirs he said that he received late that evening a message from Denis Allen stating that "... Bidault was, on reflection, far from enthusiastic about the American proposals. If Dulles pressed the matter, it was probable that Bidault would advise Laniel not to accept American intervention."¹⁰¹

Later that evening (April 24), Eden conferred with Churchill, who agreed that it would be a mistake for the British to join the U.S. in sending forces to Indochina. "Sir Winston summed up the position by saying that what we were being asked to do was to assist in misleading Congress into approving a military operation, which would in itself be ineffective, and might well bring the world to the verge of a major war." Both men agreed that a partition of Indochina was the best that could be hoped for, but that once an agreement was reached in Geneva, the British would join in guaranteeing that settlement through a collective defense plan.

On Sunday morning, April 25, the British Cabinet approved this position unanimously. Several hours later, however, according to his memoirs, Eden says he received word from the French Ambassador that the U.S. now proposed that if the British could agree to a united action declaration, Eisenhower would ask Congress for authority to act, and U.S. planes would strike at Dien Bien Phu on April 28. The Ambassador said that the U.S. Government had urged the French to get the British to agree to this scheme. The Cabinet was called back into an emergency session, and rejected the proposal.¹⁰² Eden then flew to Geneva, where he met that night (April 25) with Dulles. He reported on the British position, and concluded by saying, "None of us in London believe that intervention in Indochina can do anything." Dulles replied that unless the French could be given some hope of help from the British and Americans they would be unwilling to continue after the loss of Dien Bien Phu.¹⁰³

The Geneva Conference opened the next day, April 26, 1954. (The first item on its agenda was the Korean settlement.) In Washington that same day, at the weekly meeting of Republican congressional leaders, Eisenhower discussed the situation in Indochina and U.S. efforts to get support for united action. He said he did not think U.S. ground forces would have to be used, but that if U.S. "allies go back on us, then we would have one terrible alternative—we would have to attack with everything we have." The U.S., he said, "... must keep up pressure for collective security and show determination of free world to oppose chipping away of any part of the free

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1395. Before leaving Paris for Geneva on the evening of the 24th, Dulles sent Bidault a letter replying to the request of the French for a U.S. airstrike in which he made some of the same points he had made in talking with Laniel. For the text of the letter see *ibid.*, pp. 1397-1398. Randle, p. 99, was incorrect in speculating that the letter was never sent.

¹⁰¹*Full Circle*, p. 116.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 116-119. This account has not been confirmed by U.S. sources.

¹⁰³*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 553-557. See also pp. 570-571 for another Dulles-Eden conversation on April 26.

world. . . . Where in the hell can you let the Communists chip away any more. We just can't stand it."¹⁰⁴

One of the congressional leaders at the meeting said that the administration would be criticized if it did not warn about the danger of "losing" Indochina. Eisenhower agreed, recalling what had been said about the Democrats in the case of China, and he "asserted our determination to lead the free world into a voluntary association which would make further Communist encroachment impossible."¹⁰⁵

That afternoon (April 26), Under Secretary Bedell Smith, at Dulles' suggestion, held an important briefing at the State Department for members of the Far East Subcommittees of the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees.¹⁰⁶ In a brief cable to Dulles, which is the only published record of the meeting, Smith reported: "I was actually surprised by the restrained gravity of all who participated. With no carping questions or criticisms, there appeared to be full realization of the seriousness of the situation, and among the Congressional group there was open discussion of the passage of resolution authorizing use of air and naval strength following a declaration of common interest, with, or possibly even without British participation."

It was apparent that these key members of the foreign policy committees were coming around to the point of view held, as will be seen, by Under Secretary Smith if not by Dulles or the President himself. Smith seems to have decided that the U.S. might have to intervene, or at least threaten to intervene, without British support, in order to bolster the French and to keep the Communists guessing as to what U.S. intentions might be.

Among other Members of Congress, however, especially the conservatives of both parties, there was a growing fear of U.S. military involvement, and of having Congress placed in the position of having to acquiesce in Executive action. This concern surfaced in a brief debate in the House of Representatives on April 28 on an amendment offered by a conservative Republican, Frederic R. Coudert, Jr. (N.Y.) to the defense appropriations bill for FY 1955.

Coudert spoke briefly on April 27, saying that he was going to offer the following amendment the next day:

None of the funds appropriated by this act shall be available for any of the expenses of maintaining uniformed personnel of the United States in armed conflict anywhere in the world: *Provided*, That this prohibition shall not be applicable with respect to armed conflict pursuant to a declaration of war or other express authorization of the Congress or with respect to armed conflict occasioned by an attack on the United States, its Territories, or possessions, or attack on any nation with which the United States has a mutual defense or security treaty.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1411 and vol. XVI, pp. 599-600

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 1413.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 574. From the Senate there were Republicans H. Alexander Smith, Hickel, and Langer, and Democrats Fulbright, Gillette and Mansfield. From the House there were Republicans Chipfield, Vorys, Fulton and Smith of Wisconsin, and Democrats A. S. J. Carnahan (Mo.), Zablocki, and Omar T. Bursleson (Tex.)

On April 28, Eisenhower again stated in a press conference that the United States would not go to war except through "the constitutional process which, of course, involves the declaration of war by Congress." But when asked about the Coudert amendment he said he opposed action by Congress that might interfere with his emergency powers: "... in this day and time when you put that kind of artificial restriction upon the Executive, you cannot fail to damage his flexibility in trying to sustain the interests of the United States wherever necessary."¹⁰⁷

When he offered his amendment during House debate that afternoon, Coudert expressed disappointment that the President had opposed it, noting that all he was proposing was that Congress "... take at face value the declaration of our great President, Mr. Eisenhower, that he will not and would not commit the United States to armed intervention in Indochina without the approval of Congress." He said, "All this amendment will do will be to prevent, by limiting the right to use the funds, any more Koreas entered into irresponsibly by any President without the participation of Congress and solely upon his own individual responsibility." He added that he had first introduced a similar amendment early in 1951 (his was the first proposal offered in what then became the "Great Debate" in the Senate), which "has been reposing quietly in a pigeonhole of the Committee on Armed Services for these 3½ long years," and that the only option he had was to offer it as a prohibition on an appropriations bill.

The proposal was very strongly attacked by many of the powerful Members of the House, and of the Foreign Affairs Committee, from both parties, and on division it was defeated 37-214. The Republican majority leader, Halleck, joined by John Taber (R/N.Y.), chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Clarence A. Cannon (D/Mo.), the ranking Democrat on Appropriations, as well as Republicans Vorys, Judd, and Javits from the Foreign Affairs Committee, were among those who assailed the amendment, calling it misleading, confusing, divisive, and dangerous. It is especially interesting that Javits should have taken this position, given his leadership in later years of the War Powers Resolution.

Vorys reported that the Foreign Affairs Committee had met briefly that morning to consider the amendment, and had voted unanimously to oppose the amendment, in part because it fell under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Affairs Committee which, he said, was considering legislation of that type.¹⁰⁸ (There is no indication that the committee was doing so.)

Coudert was supported by only a few Members, the most notable of whom was Graham A. Barden (D/N.C.), a senior Member of the House and a staunch conservative. Barden said that the amendment, while not "perfect," gave the House, for the first time, the opportunity to vote on a measure intended to insure that Congress, and only Congress, except in an emergency, could commit the nation to war. "It hurts me," he said, "to be asked a thousand

¹⁰⁷ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, pp. 427, 429.

¹⁰⁸ According to the records of the Foreign Affairs Committee, there was no verbatim transcript of this meeting of the committee on the morning of April 28, 1954.

questions about Indochina and about when our boys are going to war. . . ."

On the same day (April 28) as the House debate, the NSC held its weekly meeting, and there was a long discussion of what the U.S. should do in relation to Indochina.¹⁰⁹ Allen Dulles summarized a new national intelligence estimate on the consequences of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, in which the entire intelligence community concluded that it would be "very serious but not catastrophic." Admiral Radford said he thought the conclusions were too optimistic.

Under Secretary Smith then reported on the Geneva Conference, where Dulles had been continuing to confer, without much success, with the British and French, as well as the Russians. Smith read a cable he had just received from Dulles, who concluded by saying, "The decline of France, the great weakness of Italy, and the considerable weakness in England create a situation where I think that if we ourselves are clear as to what should be done, we must be prepared to take the leadership in what we think is the right course, having regard to long-range US interest which includes importance of Allies. I believe that our Allies will be inclined to follow, if not immediately, then ultimately, strong and sound leadership." But he added that he was not suggesting "that this is the moment for a bold or war-like course. I lack here the US political and NSC judgments needed for overall evaluation."¹¹⁰ Smith said that this position appealed to him.

The President disagreed with what seemed to be the implication of Dulles' statement: ". . . in spite of the views of the Secretary of State about the need of leadership to bring the French and British along, he did not see how the United States, together with the French, could intervene with armed forces in Indochina unless it did so in concert with some other nations and at the request of the Associated States themselves. This seemed quite beyond his comprehension."¹¹¹

Admiral Radford then reported to the NSC on his discussions in Europe, and on the desperate situation of the garrison at Dien Bien Phu. His report had an obvious impact on the members of the Council. The notes of the meeting state that after he spoke there was a "brief interval of silence." At that point, Harold Stassen (former member of the U.S. Delegation to the San Francisco Conference on the U.N., as well as former Republican Governor, then head of the Foreign Operations Administration) said he thought that ". . . if the French folded, and even if the British refused to go along with us, the United States should intervene alone in the southern areas of Indochina in order to save the situation." He recognized that Congress would have to approve, but he thought that if part of Indochina could be defended the U.S. would have a better chance of defending the rest of Southeast Asia.

¹⁰⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1431-1445.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 607.

¹¹¹Of related interest is the April 29 memorandum for Dulles from Livingston Merchant, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, then a special adviser to the U.S. delegation at Geneva, in which he concluded that the preconditions for U.S. military intervention in Indochina could not be met, and that "the odds are overwhelmingly in favor of the loss of Indochina to the Communists." He recommended that the U.S. work on establishing a coalition to save the rest of Southeast Asia. *Ibid.*, p. 620.

Again, Eisenhower disagreed. "It was all well and good," he said in part, "to state that if the French collapsed the United States must move in to save Southeast Asia, but if the French indeed collapsed and the United States moved in, we would in the eyes of many Asiatic peoples merely replace French colonialism with American colonialism." He also wondered where the U.S. would get the forces to replace those withdrawn by the French. Stassen replied that he thought the Indochinese would welcome U.S. assistance, and that the phased withdrawal of the French would enable the U.S. to replace them.

"The President remained skeptical in the face of Governor Stassen's argument, and pointed out our belief that a collective policy with our allies was the only posture which was consistent with U.S. national security policy as a whole. To go in unilaterally in Indochina or other areas of the world which were endangered, amounted to an attempt to police the entire world. If we attempted such a course of action, using our armed forces and going into areas whether we were wanted or not, we would soon lose all our significant support in the free world. We should be everywhere accused of imperialistic ambitions . . . to him the concept of leadership implied associates. Without allies and associates the leader is just an adventurer like Genghis Khan."

Later in the same exchange, Stassen said, ". . . it would be impossible to let the Communists take over Indochina and then try to save the rest of the world from a similar fate. This was the time and the place to take our stand and make our decision."¹¹² Eisenhower replied that before he made such a decision, and committed 6, 8, 10 or more U.S. divisions to Indochina, "he would want to ask himself and all his wisest advisers whether the right decision was not rather to launch a world war . . . he would earnestly put before the leaders of the Congress and the Administration the great question whether it would not be better to decide on general war and prepare for D-Day," rather than "frittering away our resources in local engagements." "If our allies were going to fall away in any case, it might be better for the United States to leap over the smaller obstacles and hit the biggest one with all the power we had. Otherwise we seemed to be merely playing the enemy's game—getting ourselves involved in brushfire wars in Burma, Afghanistan, and God knows where."

Under Secretary Smith, supported by Vice President Nixon, suggested that there was a way of becoming involved in Indochina that would avoid the extremes of doing nothing or doing too much. He proposed that the U.S. consider undertaking airstrikes to support the French, as they had requested, even if Dien Bien Phu should fall. This might encourage the French to keep fighting, and also enable the U.S. to assume more of the responsibility, such as training indigenous troops. "If it were possible to prevent a collapse of the French will, and to keep a training plan for the indigenous forces alive by means of a U.S. training mission and by U.S. airstrikes, we might ultimately save the situation in Indochina without being obliged to commit U.S. ground forces." Smith added

¹¹²For a full statement of Stassen's position see his letter to Dulles on May 3, 1954, in *ibid.*, vol. XIII, pp. 1463-1467.

that "General Navarre, however, would have to go. He had proved incompetent. We should also have to have absolute assurance from France for the complete independence of the Associated States."

Smith said that although the U.S. "could not go into Indochina alone," even in the absence of the British it might be possible to get enough allies in Asia to satisfy the "concerted action" principle.

The President agreed that this plan might be feasible, and said that if the French proved that they would be willing to stay and fight, even if they lost at Dien Bien Phu, he would agree to ask Congress to consider the idea. The Council then agreed that, despite the British position, the U.S. should continue seeking a basis for united action. The President ended the meeting with this warning: "If we wanted to win over the Congress and the people of the United States to an understanding of their stake in Southeast Asia, let us not talk of intervention with U.S. ground forces. People were frightened, and were opposed to this idea."

Eisenhower's position on the Indochina situation was candidly summarized in a letter on April 26, 1954, to his old friend Gen. Alfred Gruenther, NATO Supreme Commander, who had been his Chief of Staff when he was Supreme Commander. He said in part:¹¹³

... While I had practically abdicated, I had not before known of your personal views with respect to the astonishing proposal for unilateral American intervention in Indo-China. Your adverse opinion exactly parallels mine.

As you know, you and I started more than three years ago trying to convince the French that they could *not* win the Indo-China war and particularly could not get real American support in that region unless they would unequivocally pledge independence to the Associated States upon the achievement of military victory. Along with this—indeed as a corollary to it—this Administration has been arguing that no Western power can go to Asia militarily, except as one of a concert of powers, which concert must include local Asiatic peoples.

To contemplate anything else is to lay ourselves open to the charge of imperialism and colonialism or—at the very least—of objectionable paternalism. Even, therefore, if we could by some sudden stroke assure the saving of the Dien Bien Phu garrison, I think that under the conditions proposed by the French the free world would lose more than it would gain. Neither the British nor the French would now agree with the coalition idea—though for widely differing reasons. Consequently, we have had to stand by while the tactical situation has grown worse and worse. Now, unless there should be a sudden development of discouragement on the part of the enemy, it looks as if Dien Bien Phu could scarcely survive.

* * * * *

In any event, it is all very frustrating and discouraging, but I do believe as follows:

¹¹³*Ibid.*, pp 1419-1421

(a) That the loss of Dien Bien Phu does not necessarily mean the loss of the Indo-China war.

(b) The heroic exploits of the French garrison (which are all the more wonderful in view of the weak support they have had from Paris) should be glorified and extolled as indicative of the French character and determination.

(c) We should all (United States, France, Thailand, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, et al.) begin conferring at once on means of successfully stopping the Communist advances in Southeast Asia.

(d) The plan should include the use of the bulk of the French Army in Indo-China.

(e) The plan should assure freedom of political action to Indo-China promptly upon attainment of victory.

(f) Additional ground forces should come from Asiatic and European troops already in the region.

(g) The general security and peaceful purposes and aims of such a concert of nations should be announced publicly—as in NATO. Then we possibly wouldn't *have* to fight.

In its meeting later that day (April 28), the NSC Planning Board discussed the earlier NSC meeting, and, among other things, decided that ". . . it is impossible to meet the President's requirement that the indigenous peoples invite and actively desire U.S. intervention. (This has been told to President.)"

The Board also considered the question of atomic weapons, which the summary of the meeting referred to as "new weapons." Later, Cutler discussed this with Eisenhower and Nixon, who took the position that such weapons would not be effective in the area around Dien Bien Phu, but that the U.S. might consider offering some "new weapons" to the French. They also agreed that the key policy goal remained the development of a collective defense arrangement.¹¹⁴

The Final Decision Not to Intervene at Dien Bien Phu

By May 5, 1954, the size of the ground area still controlled by the French Union garrison at Dien Bien Phu had shrunk to the equivalent of a baseball field, within which 3,000 defenders who were able to fight (almost half of those still living had been wounded) continued fighting against what were by then overwhelming odds. "There was a clear realization that they, the last 3,000 men—the French and Vietnamese paratroopers, Foreign Legionnaires, and African cannoners—literally represented all that stood between defeat and stalemate in the Indochina war. The main theme repeated throughout the shrinking fortress was 'they simply can't let us lose the war.'"¹¹⁵

On the morning of May 5, Dulles, back from Geneva, joined the President for a meeting at the White House at which Dulles reviewed with Eisenhower the entire course of negotiations on united action since his speech of March 29.¹¹⁶ He blamed both the British

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 1447-1448.

¹¹⁵Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, p. 371.

¹¹⁶FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1466-1470.

and the French for undercutting the U.S. position, and said that Congress would be angry with both countries if it knew the truth about what had happened. He said that the British were motivated by reactions from their Commonwealth countries, particularly India, as well as by their fear of the consequences of U.S. military action. The French, he said, had resisted all U.S. efforts to "internationalize" the war, as well as U.S. efforts to encourage independence for Indochina. He added that the French had never formally asked for U.S. airstrikes at Dien Bien Phu—that there had been "one or two oral and informal requests." "What the French fear," he said, "is if the US is brought into the struggle, France will not have a free hand to 'sell out and get out.'"

The position of the British, Dulles said, was to divide Vietnam, and then to create a regional defense grouping that would attempt to defend the non-Communist position, together with Laos, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. He said he doubted whether the Communists would agree to such a division, however. Their strategy would be to have all foreign troops removed, followed by an election. "In such an event," Dulles added, "all of Vietnam would be lost, except perhaps some enclave."

Dulles concluded by saying, "... conditions did not justify the US entry into Indochina as a belligerent at this time." "The President firmly agreed." "The President commented that our allies were willing to let us pull their chestnuts out of the fire, but will let us be called imperialists and colonialists."

Dulles said he concurred with the action of the NSC at its April 28 meeting in continuing to organize the regional grouping as rapidly and with as many members as possible.

That afternoon (May 5), Dulles and several of his State Department associates held a 1½ hour briefing at the Department for congressional leaders and chairmen and ranking members of the foreign policy and armed services committees of both Houses of Congress.¹¹⁷ (It should be noted that in the series of congressional consultations on Indochina that began in March, this was the first meeting in which the committees as well as the leadership were included. The meeting of April 3 had consisted only of leaders, and representation at the meeting of April 26 was entirely from the foreign policy committees.)

Dulles repeated the general presentation he had made to the President, beginning with his speech of March 29 on united action. He also discussed the two "informal" requests for U.S. airstrikes, and the events that finally led to the failure to achieve agreement on united action prior to the Geneva Conference. He said he had reached three conclusions—first, that the United States should not intervene in Indochina unless U.S. preconditions had been met. Second, the U.S. should seek to establish a Southeast Asia defense arrangement as soon as possible. He added that partition of Viet-

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 1471-1477 and vol. XVI, pp. 706-708. Present were, from the Senate, Republicans Knowland, Ferguson, Millikin, Saltonstall, Wiley, H. Alexander Smith and Bridges, and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, George, Russell and Green, and from the House, Speaker Martin, and Republicans Halleck, Arends, Chipfield, Vorys, Judd and Dewey J. Short (Mo.), and Democrats McCormack, Thomas S. Gordon (Ill.), Henderson Lanham (Ga.), and Vinson. Short was chairman and Vinson was ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee.

nam did not appear likely, and that there would probably be a withdrawal of all foreign troops, followed by a coalition government and a general election, "all of which would probably result in the loss of Vietnam to the Communists." Third, the U.S. should not "write off" the British and French as allies.

The discussion was friendly. There were a number of critical comments about the British, in particular, but generally the Members of Congress who were present were in complete agreement with the administration's handling of the situation and plans for the future.

Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson asked one of the few questions that were raised during the course of the meeting. When Dulles said he thought the first request from the French for a U.S. airstrike had been based on General Ely's impression, after his trip to Washington, that the U.S. would intervene, Johnson asked whether Ely had gotten this impression from the Pentagon or from Dulles. "The Secretary replied that he had definitely not gotten it from him and that he didn't believe he could accurately say from whom he had gotten it."

Although Johnson was less active in the meeting of May 6 than in the meeting of April 3, he was continuing to show considerable interest in U.S. policy toward Indochina, and its ramifications for his position in the Senate and in national politics. This was not an easy task, however, caught as he was between political differences among Senate Democrats as well as among his friends and political supporters outside the Senate. He was being urged to resist intervention, but he was also being urged by some influential friends to take a stronger stand in defense of Indochina. On April 29, two of these close friends and advisers, James Rowe, Jr., a prominent Washington lawyer and former top Roosevelt staff member, and Philip Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*, sent Johnson a long letter about Indochina.¹¹⁸ The letter, signed by Rowe, said, "A couple of your admirers, one Philip Graham and I, have been discussing the fate of the world in open-mouthed despair. The only conclusion we were able to reach was that Lyndon Johnson might be able to do something about it. We do not regard that as a hopeful possibility but the alternatives are so despairing we think it is worth a try."

"It seems to us that Indochina is so desperate in terms of the future of the world, and particularly of the United States, that everything else should be put aside. At this point, it does no good to recount the abysmal performance of the Eisenhower Administration in the past few weeks. The only thing that is worthy of comment about all the incredible statements that have been made is that it is clear the Administration is in panic, very much like a neurotic personality when the pressures get too great and that that panic is slowly communicating itself to the American people."

Rowe said that there were three possibilities facing the U.S.:

1. Indochina will be lost to the Communists because the French and the British would accept terms favorable to the Communists, with the United States, in effect, not participat-

¹¹⁸Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Staff Files of Dorothy Territo, LBJ-A, Select Names. (emphasis in original)

ing at all. The United States cannot participate because the United States *Senate* has completely and effectively tied the hands of John Foster Dulles behind his back—and the world knows it.

2. If the United States determines not to accept this diplomatic defeat, which is now occurring at Geneva, the second possibility is war. Many Americans, for good reasons and for bad reasons, think that time has come. I personally am inclined to prefer this to the first possibility (only because I remember the road from Munich only too well). I would guess that Radford would prefer this and hopes that he could keep the war localized but is willing, as anyone who prefers this possibility must be, to accept the fact that it might be necessary to extend it to China and to Russia and ultimately to atomic and hydrogen war. But if there is any way to avoid this most frightful alternative—which undoubtedly means the end of civilization and you know it—it should be tried. That leads to:

3. Negotiations. The Senate must give the Secretary of State room to negotiate. While Graham may be chameleon in his political life, you know that I am an intense Democratic partisan on both domestic and foreign policy. If there is any man whom I have thoroughly despised in twenty years of observation in Washington it is John Foster Dulles. You may, therefore, measure my concern over the world when I try to convince you it is imperative that Dulles be given this necessary room for maneuver.

I would not be so brash as to suggest how much room to negotiate he should have. I know that today, due solely to the institution of which you are a member, he has none. And the United States, because of the Senate, is no more effective in the world than a fifth rate power like the Dominican Republic. The most, I suppose, that Dulles should ever be given (and I am not sure about that) is to trade out a UN seat for Red China for something substantial. He should also be given, with his bargaining power, the power to say to Russia and to China that this is their last best hope and that the next step means war.

This is tough talk, I know. But either of the other two possibilities are infinitely worse—the loss of Indochina, and therefore of all Asia, or total war.

There is no available information on Johnson's reaction to the letter, but several days later (May 6, 1954 the day after the State Department meeting), he made the following statement during the course of a speech to a Democratic fund-raising dinner in Washington:¹¹⁹

What is American policy on Indochina?

All of us have listened to the dismal series of reversals and confusions and alarms and excursions which have emerged from Washington over the past few weeks.

We have been caught bluffing by our enemies, our friends and Allies are frightened and wondering, as we do, where we are headed.

¹¹⁹New York Times, May 7, 1954.

We stand in clear danger of being left naked and alone in a hostile world.

Dien Bien Phu Falls and the U.S. Again Considers Intervening in Indochina

The NSC held its weekly meeting on May 6, and Dulles repeated for the Council the information he had given the President and congressional leaders. He also mentioned, among other things, that the French were preparing to propose a cease-fire in Indochina.

Robert Cutler brought up a related subject on which the OCB (Operations Coordinating Board) of the NSC had been working since January. This was a proposal for creating an "international volunteer air group" for combat in Southeast Asia. This group, which would consist of U.S. and other volunteers, would be equipped with three squadrons of F-86 fighters. "Secretary Dulles inquired whether the proposed air group would be under the ultimate control of the President. Mr. Cutler replied in the negative, indicating that we would have no responsibility for the group, which would be developed along the lines of General Chennault's 'Flying Tigers' in the second World War. This would mean, said Secretary Dulles, that our volunteers could join the air group without Congressional approval. The answer seemed to be in the affirmative."¹²⁰

The next morning, Dulles met with Eisenhower to go over the decisions of the May 6 NSC meeting and the views expressed at the meeting of the Planning Board which, as usual, followed the NSC meeting.¹²¹ Cutler reported that some members of the Board, principally military members, were opposed to the French proposal for a cease-fire. (The principal Defense member of the Planning Board was General Bonesteel, who, at that stage at least, believed that Asia might be "lost" to the Communists if the U.S. did not intervene in Indochina. He proposed two regional groupings, the smaller of which, composed of France, the U.S., the Associated States, Thailand and the Philippines, would be the instrumentality through which the U.S. would intervene while organizing the larger grouping.)¹²² These Board members argued that this would destroy the will to fight of the French and the Vietnamese, and that the Communists would "covertly evade cease-fire controls." Instead, they proposed that, "as a last act to save Indochina," Congress should be asked to approve U.S. military intervention if the French agreed to these five conditions:

- a. grant of genuine freedom for Associated States.
- b. US take major responsibility for training indigenous forces.
- c. US share responsibility for military planning.
- d. French forces to stay in the fight and no requirement of replacement by US forces.
- e. (Action under UN auspices?)

¹²⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1491. At least three of the actions taken by the NSC at that meeting have been deleted from the published text. Judging by a "note" in the portion of the text which was published, however, one of these would appear to have dealt with atomic weapons. See p. 1492 of *ibid.*

¹²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 1495-1498.

¹²²See his memoranda in *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 442, 460-461.

Cutler also summarized the objections to this plan that were raised by other members of the Board:

- a. No French Government is now competent to act in a lasting way.
- b. There is no indication France wants to "internationalize" the conflict.
- c. The US proposal would be made without the prior assurance of a regional grouping of SEA States, a precondition of Congress; although this point might be added as another condition to the proposal.
- d. US would be "bailing out colonial France" in the eyes of the world.
- e. US cannot undertake *alone* to save every situation of trouble.

Eisenhower did not disagree with the idea of presenting the proposal for U.S. intervention to the French as an alternative to a cease-fire, but he said that if this were done "... it should also be made clear to the French as an additional precondition that the US would never intervene alone, that there must be an invitation by the indigenous people, and that there must be some kind of regional and collective action."

Late on the morning of May 7, 1954, the news came that Dien Bien Phu had fallen, and its 8,000-10,000 living defenders, (of the original 15,000), 40 percent of them wounded, had been taken captive. Upon hearing this news, Members of Congress, especially in the Senate, expressed various sentiments, but they all agreed that the defenders had fought valiantly, and that Dien Bien Phu should not be considered as a defeat. Senator Mansfield said that it could serve as a symbol of hope for the future: "Together, against great odds and in the face of insurmountable obstacles, those soldiers made clear what free men can do and will do to stop the march of aggressive communism." He added, "To withdraw now, to negotiate a settlement which would lay open all of Indochina to the conqueror's heel, would be to break faith with those of Dien Bien Phu who gave so much." He called on France and the Associated States, with U.S. help, to continue the battle. Senator Humphrey agreed, as did most of the others who spoke.¹²³

Senator Morse, however, expressed concern about the possibility that the administration might get the U.S. involved in military action in Indochina, and said he was not reassured by statements from the President that the U.S. would not go to war without a declaration by Congress. "We shall never see the time," he said, "when we get into a war, first, by a declaration of war by Congress. The next time we go to war we will find that we were plunged into it by events and then the Congress will be called upon to draft a declaration of war, simply to make it legal."

Morse also continued to be critical of the French: "We must make clear to France we are not going to enter into any agreement which will result in shiploads of coffins draped in American flags being shipped from Indochina to the United States in any attempt to support colonialism in Indochina."¹²⁴

¹²³CR. vol. 100, pp 6227-6228

¹²⁴*Ibid.* p. 6249

That night (May 7), Secretary Dulles gave a nation-wide radio and television address on "The Issues at Geneva,"¹²⁵ in which he said of Dien Bien Phu, "An epic battle has ended. But great causes have, before now, been won out of lost battles." Using the Korean war as an example, he listed the preconditions that had been agreed upon for U.S. intervention in Indochina, and ended by saying, "... if an armistice or cease-fire were reached at Geneva which would provide a road to a Communist takeover and further aggression . . . or if hostilities continue, then the need will be even more urgent to create the conditions for united action in defense of the area."

The Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference began on May 8. The French offered their proposal for an immediate cease-fire, after which political arrangements would be negotiated.¹²⁶ That same day, the NSC met to consider the U.S. position, and agreed to oppose any cease-fire prior to an acceptable armistice agreement with international controls. According to the *Pentagon Papers*, the position of the Joint Chiefs (which was generally supported by the State Department), who opposed the French proposal, thus "... became U.S. policy with only minor emendation."¹²⁷

¹²⁵*Department of State Bulletin*, May 17, 1954.

¹²⁶On May 10, the Viet Minh offered their peace proposal at Geneva which, as anticipated, called for a cease-fire followed by the withdrawal of foreign troops and a general election. *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 753-755. The U.S. delegation at the Conference cabled that the proposal would "result in rapid turnover Indochina to Communists." *Ibid.*, p. 772.

¹²⁷*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 118, and *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1509. For the position of the Chiefs see *PP*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 430-434, and *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. 1, pp. 401-404. See also pp. 407-408 for the position of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. On May 12 a cable was sent to the U.S. delegation in Geneva with instructions on participation in the Indochina phase of the Conference. Dulles told Smith that these had been cleared with the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees. See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 778-779. These consultations took place on May 11-12 during unrecorded executive sessions of the two committees.

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW U.S. ROLE IN VIETNAM

The U.S. reacted to the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the opening of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference by taking the initiative with the French on the question of "internationalizing" the war. The issue was raised at NSC meetings on May 6 and 8, 1954. At the May 8 meeting Vice President Nixon took the position that it was important for the U.S. to indicate to the French its willingness to discuss intervention. They should know, he said, that there "is at least an alternative to a course of action involving negotiation." President Eisenhower, probably by prearrangement with Secretary Dulles, suggested that the best way to handle the matter was for Dulles to talk to French Ambassador Bonnet.¹

That night, Dulles called on Bonnet, who was ill, and told him that the U.S. continued to be "... prepared to sit down and talk with the French about what the French called 'internationalizing' the war and working out a real partnership basis. I said that as far as the immediate present was concerned, I assumed that the French Government would still not want this. However, they might change their mind after the full harshness of probable Communist terms was revealed. Then this might seem to them an alternative worth exploring."²

This initiative brought immediate results. A cable from Ambassador Dillon arrived on May 10 reporting a discussion he had just held with Laniel, in which the French President expressed concern about possible Viet Minh military moves, and said that he wanted U.S. military advice in making decisions about protecting the French Expeditionary Corps. He also wanted to know what military action the U.S. might be prepared to take in Indochina, and said that if there was no prospect of any direct assistance he would be forced to withdraw French Union forces from Laos and Cambodia.³

When Dulles received Dillon's cable, he immediately called Radford at 3 p.m. (May 10) to tell him about the message. "... it is of the utmost importance," he said, "... for the first time they want to sit down and discuss the military situation, regrouping of troops, etc. It is encouraging that they seem willing to do business with us so we can move and get Congressional support." Radford agreed. At 4:22 p.m., Radford called Dulles to say that he had read the Dillon cable and wondered what the next step would be. Dulles replied that he had been talking to MacArthur and Bowie about the request, and they agreed it was an encouraging development. Rad-

¹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1509.

²Ibid., p. 1516. Gerson, *John Foster Dulles*, p. 173, incorrectly states that Bonnet called on Dulles.

³FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1524.

ford said it was "too bad it wasn't done two months ago." Dulles said the big hurdle would be acting without the British. He added that he would be lunching with Eisenhower the next day, and would discuss the cable with him. Radford replied that it was important to act more quickly, and Dulles said he would call the White House to try to arrange something.⁴ That call resulted in an immediately scheduled meeting at the White House at 4:30 p.m. attended by the President, Dulles, Radford, Robert Anderson (the newly-appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense), and others.

The President agreed with Dulles and Radford's position that the U.S. should respond favorably to Laniel's initiative.⁵ It was decided that General Trapnell, who had been the MAAG chief in Saigon, would be the best U.S. military representative to send to Paris. With respect to U.S. military intervention, Dulles had prepared a list of conditions for U.S. action which the group discussed and agreed upon. In the form they were cabled to Dillon later that day these seven conditions were as follows:⁶

(a) That US military participation had been formally requested by France and three Associated States;

(b) That Thailand, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom also had received similar invitations and that we were satisfied that first two would also accept at once; that next two would probably accept following Australian elections, if US invokes ANZUS Treaty; and the U.K. would either participate or be acquiescent;

(c) That some aspect of matter would be presented to UN promptly, such as by request from Laos, Cambodia or Thailand for peace observation commission;

(d) That France guarantees to Associated States complete independence, including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time;

(e) France would undertake not to withdraw its forces from Indochina during period of united action so that forces from U.S.—principally air and sea—and others would be supplementary and not in substitution;

(f) That agreement was reached on training of native troops and on command structure for united action.

During the group's discussion of the condition regarding participants, Eisenhower "... made it quite clear that he would *only* propose U.S. intervention on the basis of collective action." The group agreed that it would be sufficient to have, in addition to France and the U.S., the Associated States, Thailand and the Philippines, and "perhaps eventually the U.K. . . ." This, of course, was a marked change in the original concept of united action, and in the position that congressional leaders had taken on April 3 concerning British participation.

Moreover, the group then proceeded also to weaken the original condition with respect to Indochinese independence:

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1526, fn. 3.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 1526-1528.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1534-1535. It will be that this list is identical to that suggested by General Bonesteel. See above, p. 225.

Secretary Dulles said that we were on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, it was essential to eliminate from the minds of the Asians any belief that we were intervening in Indochina in support of colonialism. On the other hand, the truth of the matter was that the Associated States were not in a position to enjoy complete independence. They did not have the trained personnel necessary to administer their respective countries and the leadership was not good. In a sense if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured. After some discussion as to whether the French might specify that the Associated States could opt for withdrawal from the French Union either five or ten years after the cessation of hostilities, it was agreed that the exact period of time should not be fixed at this moment. There would, however, prior to action on the part of the U.S. have to be a satisfactory agreement on specific length of such a period and this agreement would have to be entirely satisfactory to the Associated States and could not be the result of French pressure.

This done, the President said that if the French agreed to these terms he would present the idea to Congress. The manner of his presentation to Congress and the public, he added, was "of great importance." He thought he should go before a joint session of Congress to explain the circumstances and to request a resolution "which would enable him to use the armed forces of the U.S. to support the free governments that we recognize in that area." He asked Dulles to have the State Department begin drafting the speech.

The President and Dulles then discussed the matter further over lunch the next day (May 11), and the President suggested adding the words "principally sea and air" to condition (e).⁷ They talked about going ahead without the British. Dulles said that while this had some disadvantages, "... there were perhaps greater disadvantages in a situation where we were obviously subject to UK veto, which in turn was in Asian matters largely subject to India veto, which in turn was largely subject to Chinese Communist veto. Thereby a chain was forged which tended to make us impotent, and to encourage Chinese Communist aggression to a point where the whole position in the Pacific would be endangered and the risk of general war increased." The President agreed.

That afternoon (May 11), the cable replying to Laniel's request was sent to Dillon. It has been argued by some writers that the seven conditions contained in this response were deliberately designed to be unattainable. Townsend Hoopes, for example, has said that the conditions were "... so formidable that they could be judged only as having been carefully calculated to impede, if not indeed to preclude, American military involvement. . . . Taken together, the seven conditions were a set of interlocking booby traps for the French, and, if by some miracle they had been able to render them harmless and unacceptable, it is likely that a now thoroughly disenchanted Eisenhower would have developed further obstacles."⁸ Hoopes quotes an interview statement of Robert Bowie,

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1533.

⁸*The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, p. 229.

Director of State's Policy Planning Staff at the time, that the conditions were "makeweights."

Randle has taken a similar position: "It appears the administration had again parried a 'request' for commitment from an importunate France; the American formulators of the seven conditions could not have believed France would be willing or able to fulfill them." Randle adds that although the conditions "were quite reasonable from an American point of view," each condition "... embodied a form of protection against results 'the party of caution' in Washington feared. The conditions, so imposed, would to a great extent allay the doubts and suspicions of 'hesitant' administration officials and congressmen. The activists must either have agreed with some of the conditions or realized that they could not fairly object to them. They had, in effect, been finessed."⁹

These points would appear to be well-taken with respect to the impossibility of French compliance with the U.S. conditions, given the realities of the situation in France. There is also reason to believe that the President and Secretary Dulles had concluded that the U.S. should not intervene militarily in Indochina on the side of the French, and that the chances of defending Indochina and the rest of Southeast Asia would be greatly improved after the French withdrew. For these reasons, it can be argued that the conditions were intended to be "makeweights." The U.S. wanted to keep the French from capitulating on the battlefield or in Geneva (as well as on EDC), and thus had to seem responsive. Yet the U.S. also wanted the French, after they had secured the best possible deal in Geneva, to remove themselves from the scene and leave Indochina to the Americans.

The administration also was trying to maintain its political position domestically and internationally, and in both respects it wanted to appear to be continuing to take a strong stand. Thus, news stories that appeared immediately after the U.S. reply to the French, reporting that the U.S. and France were discussing terms for U.S. intervention, were undoubtedly designed, as Townsend Hoopes suggests, "... to demonstrate forward movement and tough American resolve, thereby to disarm domestic critics of immobilism and to bolster the sagging French negotiating position at Geneva."¹⁰

These explanations omit one important additional factor, however. Based on documentation now available, it seems clear that the alternative of U.S. military intervention in Indochina was more of a consideration than it had been earlier, and that, in this sense, the response to Laniel was genuine and straight-forward. If the U.S. decided to intervene, it could reasonably and effectively do so only if the stated conditions had been met. And, indeed, the U.S., under Dulles' leadership, spent the next several weeks watering down the seven conditions in what was undoubtedly designed as a move to continue to show support for the French, but appears also to have been further preparation for the contingency of intervening with force.

⁹ *Geneva 1954*, pp. 224-225

¹⁰ Hoopes, p. 228.

On May 11, while working on the reply to Dillon, Dulles gave an executive session briefing on Geneva to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and on May 12 he held a similar session with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In both meetings he summarized U.S. efforts to form a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia, as well as the conditions for U.S. military involvement in Indochina. He stated that at that time these conditions had not been met, and that if they were met the President would request approval by Congress of any use of U.S. forces in hostilities.¹¹

Senator Fulbright, saying that "we are in a devil of a difficult situation" in Indochina because of the problem of colonialism, asked Dulles whether, if the French were to pull out of Indochina, thus freeing the Indochinese from their colonial rule, the U.S. would then consider intervening, even with troops, to defend the area. Dulles hedged in answering the question, but said that the U.S. "would be receptive to discussing the matter with them [the French], as we did in relation to the British with Greece."

After the Senate hearing, Senator Mansfield, at his own request, had lunch with Paul J. Sturm, a Foreign Service officer working on Indochina. Mansfield, saying that "... our most serious mistake ... has been to assume that a military victory was possible, in the absence of suitable political settlements," wanted to know Sturm's feelings about the importance of defending Indochina, and about possible U.S. military actions to this end. Sturm stressed the need to take action, saying, "To accept the writing-off of Southeast Asia or even of Indochina" would be a mistake. He thought that an "... initial limited intervention with ground forces, primarily in the Haiphong area, might enable us to hold the line until we could undertake serious training of a National Army and the construction of a regional defense organization. . . ." In his memorandum reporting the conversation, Sturm added: "On each previous occasion on which I have talked with Senator Mansfield, and as recently as April 21, he has been vehemently opposed to the use of American ground forces in Indochina. Today however he did not react adversely when I mentioned this possibility."¹²

Preparing to Intervene and to Take Over From the French

On May 13, the Laniel government survived a vote of confidence in the French General Assembly by two votes, 289-287.

On May 14, Ambassador Dillon talked to President Laniel about the terms proposed by the U.S. Laniel generally agreed, but said that the provision allowing the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union would not be accepted by the French. In his report to Washington, Dillon said, "I am certain that unless we can

¹¹*HFAC His. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pp. 129-160, and *SFRC His. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 257-281. It is of interest to note an expression used by Dulles in his meeting with the Foreign Relations Committee. Referring to the President's position that U.S. belligerency in Indochina would have to be authorized by Congress, he used the term "the equivalent of war authority" to describe such an authorization. The use of the expression "the functional equivalent of a declaration of war" by Under Secretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1967 to describe the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, produced an uproar among members of the committee. Yet Dulles took the same position in 1954 without even a murmur of disapproval from the committee.

¹²*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1538-1540.

find some way to get around this requirement, French will never ask for outside assistance."¹³

On Sunday, May 16, Secretary Dulles held a very high-level secret dinner meeting at his home to discuss the situation and to plan U.S. strategy. In attendance were, among others, his brother, Allen Dulles, and Douglas MacArthur II. Vice President Nixon was also there. He had been on a trip to the Greenbriar Hotel in West Virginia, but Dulles told him that the meeting was important, and that he would arrange to have an Army plane bring him back to Washington. The only "outsider" was Dean Rusk, formerly Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East under Truman, and at this point president of the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁴

There is no information available with respect to what was discussed except for Dulles' phone call to Rusk inviting him to attend, in which Dulles said "we will have to make critical decisions in relation to British and French—whether we go alone or allow ourselves to be bogged down."¹⁵

In another development, Senate Republican leaders met privately on May 14 for a luncheon in the office of the Secretary of the Senate, Mark Trice, to discuss how they could support the administration's position on Indochina and on the Geneva Conference. Present were Vice President Nixon and Senators Knowland, Bridges, Ferguson, Saltonstall, Hickenlooper, Edward J. Thye (R/ Minn.), and H. Alexander Smith.¹⁶

On May 17, Dulles sent an important cable to Dillon, which may well have been influenced by the discussion during the secret meeting the previous evening, in which he expressed doubts about the intentions of the French, and warned that the U.S. might have to reconsider its offer to intervene. He told Dillon:¹⁷

If the French want to use possibility of our intervention primarily as a card to play at Geneva, it would seem to follow that they would not want to make a decision inviting our intervention until the Geneva game is played out. However, this is likely to be a long game particularly as the Communists may well be deliberately dragging it out so as to permit their creating a *fait accompli* before Geneva ends. It should not be assumed that if this happens, the present US position regarding intervention would necessarily exist after the Communists have succeeded in this maneuver.

The NSC met on May 20, 1954, and Dulles, reacting to Dillon's advice, suggested modifying the U.S. position on independence.¹⁸ He said that the U.S. "... might be exaggerating the significance of the independence issue for the Associated States. The Associated States had already achieved in fact a very high degree of independence. Moreover, if we harped on the independence issue it might well rise to embarrass us when the scene shifted from Indochina to Malaya."

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 1567. For Washington's reply see pp. 1569-1571.

¹⁴Dulles Telephone Calls Series, May 14, 1954. Dulles and Rusk had been closely associated in the negotiation of the Japanese peace treaty, among other things.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Princeton University, H. Alexander Smith Papers, Diary, box 282.

¹⁷FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1576.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 1586-1590.

Dulles said that if the talks with the French were successful, which he doubted ("he did not believe that the French had really made up their minds whether or not they wanted to continue the war in Indochina with U.S. participation" and that the talks "were probably being used chiefly to strengthen the French bargaining position with the Communists at Geneva"), he did not think the French parliament would approve the U.S. plan. "He was therefore inclined to the view that in our conversations with the French on pre-conditions we were going through an academic exercise except in so far as these conversations affected the Geneva Conference. He did not exclude, however, all possibility that the French might ultimately agree to internationalize the conflict."

Vice President Nixon asked Dulles whether the situation could be summed up as follows: "The British and the French were dragging their feet until such time as the possibility for a settlement by the Geneva Conference appeared clearly hopeless. The Communists were well aware that the British and French were dragging their feet, and would protract the negotiations until they were sure they had won the war in Indochina."

Dulles said that this was "substantially correct," and that "The only ray of hope would be Communist fear of United States intervention in Indochina or of general war. This fear might conceivably induce the Communists to moderate their demands on the French at Geneva."

This comment was representative of the trend of thinking of Dulles, as well as Radford and others, in the face of a situation that was perceived as becoming increasingly more serious. The French Government, hanging by a parliamentary thread, appeared to be unwilling to fight, either in Indochina or in Geneva, but was also unwilling to internationalize the war. The Viet Minh were beginning to present a more serious threat in the Vietnamese delta (Tonkin). The Bao Dai government was disintegrating, and Bao Dai himself refused to return from the French Riviera. In Geneva, the Communists were taking a very hard line, and it had begun to look as if the Conference might end in failure unless the French capitulated to Viet Minh demands.¹⁹ Meanwhile, little progress was being made in organizing a regional defense pact for Southeast Asia.

The U.S. Government was faced, therefore, with the possibility of having to take additional steps to defend the rest of Southeast Asia, recognizing that the die might already be cast in Indochina.

On May 19, 1954, Dulles met privately with Eisenhower to discuss this general problem.²⁰ He told the President that the delay of the British in acting on the regional defense pact "... enabled the Communists by delaying tactics at Geneva to prevent any action on our part until they had in effect consolidated their position throughout Indochina." Eisenhower replied that the behavior of the British was "incomprehensible" to him, and that he might tell Churchill that the British were "promoting a second Munich."

¹⁹For good accounts of events in Geneva see Randle and vols. XIII and XVI of *FRUS*, 1952-1954. There is also a good discussion in the *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 122 ff. For an account by Chester Cooper, who was with the U.S. delegation, see chapter IV of *The Lost Crusade*.

²⁰For Dulles' memo of the conversation see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1584-1586.

Dulles then got to his main point: "... it might well be that the situation in Indochina itself would soon have deteriorated to a point where nothing effectual could be done to stop the tide of Chinese Communists overrunning Southeast Asia except perhaps diversionary activities along the China coast, which would be conducted primarily by the Nationalist forces, but would require sea and air support from the United States." Eisenhower agreed that such military moves might be required if the situation continued to deteriorate.

Dulles, it seems, had already taken some soundings on Capitol Hill about a possible congressional resolution on the subject. (This, too, was probably discussed at the secret meeting on May 16.) On May 17, he showed this draft to Senator Knowland:²¹

The President is authorized to employ Naval and Air Forces of the United States to assist friendly governments of Asia to maintain their authority as against subversive and revolutionary efforts fomented by Communist regimes, provided such aid is requested by the governments concerned. This shall not be deemed to be a declaration of war and the authority hereby given shall be terminated on June 30, 1955, unless extended.

In passing, note should be taken of the principal differences between this resolution and the April 1954 draft.²² Both drafts were limited to naval and airpower. The earlier draft resolution required the President, before providing such assistance, to make a finding that it was "required to protect and defend the safety and security of the United States." It did not, however, unlike the new draft, state that such aid could be provided only if requested. The earlier draft also specified that the goal was to stop Communist aggression "in Southeast Asia," and did not mention internal aggression. The new draft specifically directed action to help maintain governments threatened from within by Communist subversion and revolution.

It is also of interest that both of these draft resolutions provided that the President would be "authorized" to order military units into action. At least one government lawyer, Wilbur M. Brucker, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, argued that the resolution drafted for this purpose should not use the word "authorize." He said that "... as a matter of constitutional law, the President has authority to use the armed forces to repel aggression abroad without specific approval from the Congress where the circumstances of the situation require it." He added that the passage of a resolution containing the word "authorize" would establish a precedent "for the proposition that the President *must* under the Constitution have an authorization from the Congress before he can use the armed forces to repel aggression abroad in cases of this sort in the future where the time element may be even more critical than in the present case."²³ (As noted earlier, the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution did not contain the word "authorize." Instead, it provided that "the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President. . . ." and that "the United States is, there-

²¹According to *ibid.*, p. 1584, fn. 6, no record of this discussion has been found

²²For the text of the April resolution see p. 185 above.

²³PP, DOD ed., book 9, p. 520.

fore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps. . . .")

At their meeting on May 19, Dulles told Eisenhower that "we were hamstrung by the constitutional situation and the apparent reluctance of the Congress to give the President discretionary authority," but that Knowland had reacted strongly against the draft resolution, "saying it would amount to giving the President a blank check to commit the country to war." Eisenhower apparently agreed, however, with Dulles' decision to pursue the matter. His response, according to Dulles, was that the proposal might be "redrafted to define the area of operation more closely as being in and about the island and coastal areas of the Western Pacific."

There is no available information as to what happened after that conversation, but apparently Knowland's opposition, together with the changing situation in relation to Indochina, resulted in a change of direction. On June 8, 1954, Dulles announced that the administration did not intend to ask Congress for any additional authority for U.S. action in Indochina, and the President made a similar statement on June 10.²⁴

On May 20, as planning for possible intervention continued,²⁵ the JCS sent Secretary Wilson a memorandum²⁶ commenting on U.S. participation in the war in Indochina, in which the Chiefs took the position that it would be undesirable to base large numbers of U.S. forces in Indochina, and that the U.S. should commit only a carrier task force and air units operating from present bases outside Indochina. (Moreover, "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage.") "From the point of view of the United States," the Chiefs said in a memorable statement, "with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities."

The Chiefs also took the position that because Viet Minh military supplies came primarily from outside Vietnam (i.e., China), "The destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina."

²⁴See *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1670, 1684. In testimony on mutual security aid for Southeast Asia before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 26, 1954, Maj. Gen. George C. Stewart, U.S. Army, who was Director of the Office of Military Assistance in the International Security Affairs Office of the Pentagon, volunteered that "... there is nothing more tangible that this country can do at the present moment to reassure these peoples of our intentions than for the Congress to authorize and make possible such actions in this area as may be proper and as may be decided upon by the appropriate people of the Government, as the situation develops and changes." There was no comment on this statement from any member of the committee. See *HFAC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. X, p. 564.

²⁵Studies were prepared for the NSC by various departments and agencies, and after their submission toward the end of May one copy of each was circulated to each member of the NSC for review on an "absolute need-to-know basis." The transmittal memo stated that, should the conditions for U.S. intervention in Indochina be met, the studies would serve as the basis for considering such intervention. For the list by agency see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1651-1652. For the text of the JCS study and Cutler's response see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 511-516. For DOD comments about several of the papers see *ibid.*, DOD ed., book 9, pp. 514-529. The papers themselves, with the exception of the JCS paper, have not been declassified. These include the State Department draft of a Presidential message to Congress and a Justice Department study of the legal and constitutional aspects of a congressional resolution. On the draft message see the biting memo by Charlton Ogburn, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1620-1621.

²⁶*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1590-1592. See also *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, pp. 509-516.

The Chiefs also reiterated their position that "the best military course for eventual victory in Indochina is the development of effective native armed forces," and proposed that the U.S. take over this responsibility, and that the MAAG in Saigon, which then had a complement of less than 150, be increased to 2,250.

The State Department took issue with the JCS. Both FE and the Policy Planning Staff questioned whether the U.S. could accomplish its purposes by making such a limited military commitment.²⁷ They thought the situation required at least the commitment of some U.S. ground forces. They questioned the use of atomic weapons, however, both from the standpoint of military strategy and from the standpoint of the adverse reaction of other countries, especially in Asia, to such use. They also took issue with the proposed bombing of supply lines in China.

The Army Objects

Within the JCS, the Army continued to argue against U.S. military intervention in Indochina. On May 17, Army Chief of Staff Ridgway, accompanied by the Secretary of the Army, Robert T. Stevens, told Deputy Secretary Robert Anderson, (then Acting Secretary during Secretary Wilson's absence), "... that I felt in conscience bound to express my opinion as to the consequences involved in United States armed intervention in Indo-China. I pointed out that my opinion had not been asked. In substance I stated the following:

"a. The foregoing has highlighted the problems and difficulties which would be encountered by a large modern military force operating in Indo-China. The adverse conditions prevalent in this area combine all those which confronted U.S. forces in previous campaigns in the South and Southwest Pacific and Eastern Asia, with the additional grave complication of a large native population, in thousands of villages, most of which are about evenly divided between friendly and hostile.

"b. The complex nature of these problems would require a major U.S. logistical effort.

"c. They explode the myth that air and sea forces could solve the Indo-China problems. If U.S. shore-based forces are projected any appreciable distance inland, as would be essential, they will require constant local security at their every location, and for their every activity. The Army will have to provide these forces and their total will be very large."²⁸

Ridgway reported that Anderson "seemed receptive" to his statement.

After the meeting, Ridgway told Stevens that over the week-end he had told two military officers on the White House staff "... that the Army had a short, factual logistic briefing on Indo-China, highlighting the problems the U.S. would face if it intervened in that Theater, and that in the event the President should like to hear it, I thought it would be of great interest and perhaps helpful to him." Stevens agreed, and asked Ridgway to prepare for him a

²⁷FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1505-1607, 1624-1626.

²⁸From Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway's "Memorandum for Record," May 17, 1954, 2 pages. A copy of this memorandum was given to CRS by General Ridgway for use in this study.

memorandum that he could send to Secretary Wilson summarizing the Army's position. This was done.²⁹

At some point during this period, General Ridgway also briefed the President, who was accompanied by one aide. The meeting was held in the Cabinet Room of the White House. According to the only published account of this meeting, "Eisenhower did not say much at the time, Ridgway recalled, just listened and asked a few questions. But the impact was formidable."³⁰

Ridgway's views were subsequently confirmed by a report on July 12, 1954, from a team of seven Army officers, led by Col. David W. Heiman, who spent May 31-June 22 in Indochina on a secret mission (ostensibly inspecting the MAAG) to study the situation. Their conclusions were, in brief, that Indochina was "devoid of the logistical, geographic, and related resources necessary to a substantial American ground effort."³¹

"The land was a land of rice paddy and jungle—" General Ridgway said, in describing the report, "particularly adapted to the guerrilla-type warfare at which the Chinese soldier is a master. This meant that every little detachment, every individual, that tried to move about that country, would have to be protected by riflemen. Every telephone lineman, road repair party every ambulance and every near-area aid station would have to be under armed guard or they would be shot at around the clock."³²

This was Ridgway's conclusion in his memoirs published in 1956.³³

We could have fought in Indo-China. We could have won, if we had been willing to pay the tremendous cost in men and money that such intervention would have required—a cost that in my opinion would have eventually been as great as, or greater than, that we paid in Korea. In Korea we had learned that air and naval power alone cannot win a war and that inadequate ground forces cannot win one either. It was incredible to me that we had forgotten that bitter lesson so soon—that we were on the verge of making that same tragic error.

That error, thank God, was not repeated.

Eisenhower Continues to Insist on Conditions, and the U.S. Pulls Away from the French

Although President Eisenhower may have shared Dulles' conclusion that the U.S. might have to strike at China to prevent the loss of all of Southeast Asia, he continued to insist that this could be done only through united action, and he reacted very sharply to efforts by the French, as reported in cables from Ambassador Dillon on May 30-31, to extract a firm commitment from the U.S. to retaliate against China if the Chinese bombed French forces in Indochina. Cutler reported that when he briefed the President on these cables this was his reaction:³⁴

²⁹For a copy, see *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. 1, pp. 508-509.

³⁰David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 143 and letter to CRS from General Ridgway, May 25, 1982.

³¹*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. 1, p. 127. The report is in the National Archives, RG 319. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 213 for a full citation.

³²Matthew B. Ridgway, *Soldier* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1956), p. 277.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1648.

The President expressed himself very strongly in reaction to my remarks. He said the United States would not intervene in China [*sic*] on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China [*sic*] alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United States would in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia, but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese communist overt aggression.

According to Cutler, he reminded the President of the policy stated in NSC 5405 (January 16, 1954) that if the Chinese intervened in Southeast Asia, the U.S. would retaliate with, or, if necessary, without allies, as well as the fact that Dulles had stated that in the event such intervention occurred, the reaction of the U.S. would not necessarily be limited to the area of Indochina. Eisenhower replied that there was no difference in his and Dulles' position. "However, he expressed the strong view that there should be no failure to make the U.S. position absolutely clear to the French so that there would be no basis of misapprehension on the part of the French."³⁵

In a meeting the next day (June 2) with Dulles, Acting Secretary of Defense Anderson, Radford, and Douglas MacArthur II, Eisenhower "... said that since direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including 'new weapons') in reply, he would need to have much more than Congressional authorization. Thai, Filipino, French and Indochinese support would be important but not sufficient; other nations, such as Australia, would have to give their approval, for otherwise he could not be certain the public would back a war against China."³⁶ On June 3, the NSC supported this position.³⁷

In late May and early June 1954, U.S. military leaders conferred with their French counterparts, and at the NSC meeting on June 3 Radford reported that the French were demoralized, and did not think they could withstand an all-out attack on the Tonkin delta, expected within a few days. The loss of the delta, Radford said, would mean the rapid loss of the remainder of Indochina. "The Communists want all of Southeast Asia, and seem to be in a fair way to get it."³⁸

On June 8, as mentioned earlier, Dulles announced that the administration was not going to seek authority from Congress with respect to intervention in Indochina. On June 9, Dulles told Ambassador Bonnet that the U.S. had stipulated its conditions for intervention, and was "still in the dark as to what French intentions

³⁵For notes on a White House meeting on this subject on May 28 see *ibid.*, vol. XII.

³⁶*PP*, Gravel ed., vol. I, p. 129.

³⁷See *ibid.*

³⁸*FRUS*, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1660-1661. For a good discussion of the state of U.S. military planning and opinion at the time see *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. I, pp. 427 ff.

really were." He said that the U.S. was "not willing to make commitment ahead of time which French could use for internal political maneuvering or negotiating at Geneva and which would represent a kind of permanent option on US intervention if it suited their purposes."³⁹ In a telegram to Washington on June 10 (while on a speaking tour) Dulles said "As regards internationalization, it should be made clear to the French that our offer does not indefinitely lie on the table to be picked up by them one minute before midnight." ". . . I believe," he added, "we should begin to think of putting a time limit on our intervention offer."⁴⁰

On June 9, the U.S. also received a request from General Ely for further discussions of U.S. plans. At the regular State-JCS meeting that day it was agreed that until the French met the conditions stated by the U.S., further discussions of this type should not be held, even on the U.S. role in training national forces.⁴¹ Ambassador Dillon was then told: "With regard to US training Vietnamese troops, we feel that situation Viet Nam has degenerated to point where any commitment at this time to send over US instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider US training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for US participation war Indochina."⁴²

On June 12, 1954, the Laniel government fell in a 306-293 vote on the Indochina issue. On June 17, Pierre Mendès-France was elected Premier by a vote of 419-47. He promised that he would obtain a cease-fire in Indochina by July 20 or resign on that date.⁴³

In Washington, the reaction to these events was that the Geneva Conference was, to all intents and purposes, over, and that the U.S. would have to pursue an independent course in Indochina. In a cable to Smith on June 14, Dulles stated ". . . it is our view that final adjournment of Conference is in our best interest provided this can be done without creating an impression in France at this critical juncture that France has been deserted by the US and UK and therefore has no choice but capitulation on Indochina to Communists at Geneva and possibly accommodation with the Soviets in Europe." He added that he trusted "developments at Geneva will have been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known."⁴⁴

Dulles felt, as he said at an NSC meeting on June 17, that it might be "best to let the French get out of Indochina entirely and then to try to rebuild from the foundation."⁴⁵

³⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, p. 1100. See also vol. XIII, pp. 1710-1713 for a Dulles-Monnet discussion on June 16.

⁴⁰Ibid., vol. XVI, p. 1118. For Dillon's reaction see vol. XIII, p. 1689.

⁴¹Ibid., vol. XIII, p. 1677.

⁴²Ibid., p. 1678. For Dillon's response and State's subsequent cable on this subject see pp. 1681-1685.

⁴³For a brief but excellent account of "The Role of the French National Assembly in Ending the First Indochinese War (1947-1954)," prepared in 1971 by Pauline A. Mian, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, see CR, vol. 117, pp. 17625-17631.

⁴⁴FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XVI, pp. 1146-1147.

⁴⁵Ibid., vol. XIII, p. 1716

On June 21, Eisenhower received the following message from Prime Minister Churchill:⁴⁶

I have always thought that if the French meant to fight for their Empire in Indo-China instead of clearing out as we did of our far greater inheritance in India, they should at least have introduced two years' service which would have made it possible for them to use the military power of their nation. They did not do this but fought on for eight years with untrustworthy local troops, with French cadre elements important to the structure of their home army and with the Foreign Legion, a very large proportion of whom were Germans. The result has thus been inevitable and personally I think Mendès-France, whom I do not know, has made up his mind to clear out on the best terms available. If that is so, I think he is right.

I have thought continually about what we ought to do in the circumstances. Here it is. There is all the more need to discuss ways and means of establishing a firm front against Communism in the Pacific sphere. We should certainly have a S.E.A.T.O., corresponding to N.A.T.O. in the Atlantic and European sphere. In this it is important to have the support of the Asian countries. This raises the question of timing in relation to Geneva.

In no foreseeable circumstances, except possibly a local rescue, could British troops be used in Indo-China, and if we were asked our opinion we should advise against United States local intervention except for rescue.

During the latter part of June, Dulles and his associates debated what to do about the situation. In several memos and meetings Bowie expressed the feeling of the Policy Planning Staff that the U.S. should not withdraw from the Geneva Conference (at least one member of his staff, however, recommended that the U.S. "bust up" the Conference by persuading the Associated States to leave, and joining them in a walkout),⁴⁷ but should take a firmer and more open position, including threatening to use U.S. forces if the Communists did not agree to a reasonable settlement. At a meeting of Dulles with his executive staff on June 15, Bowie is reported to have said that if the U.S. withdrew from the Geneva Conference, this action, together with U.S. refusal to help the French, could lead to a Communist military victory in Indochina which could have a "tremendous and thus probably disastrous" effect on world opinion, and could even be the "straw which breaks the camel's back of resistance throughout the free world to Communist aggression."⁴⁸ Bowie suggested the possibility of offering four U.S. divisions to the French to be used in holding a defense line at about the 17th parallel. "In back of this line, we could perhaps build up a truly nationalist Vietnamese Government and a suitable national army." If necessary, he added, the U.S. should consider "full mobilization" in order to muster the four divisions, and should run the risk of precipitating Chinese intervention. "At least, it's worth

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1728-1729.

⁴⁷See *ibid.*, pp. 1741-1743.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 1693-1695.

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

⁵³CRS 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

⁵⁴CR, vol. 100, p. 8510.

⁵⁵Dulles Telephone Calls Series, June 16 and 18, 1954.

⁵⁶See HFAC Hts. Ser., vol. XI, pp. 746-749, and CR, vol. 100, pp. 12277, 14514.

⁵⁷CR, 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

⁵⁸In 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*SFRS Hist. 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 Chipfield (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.

⁶³Public 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 Chipfield 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 Chipfield'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 Chipfield, 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 co-partnership 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 Chipfield'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 Chipfield, 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.

⁷¹H. Rept. 83-1925, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 237 ff.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 434.

⁷³CR, vol. 100, pp. 9203, 9210

⁷⁴According 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

⁷⁵FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1754-1755.

⁷⁶Public Law 83-665, sec. 121. For House action see CR, vol. 100, pp. 9205-9206, 9352.

⁷⁷S. Rept. 83-1799, p. 45.

⁷⁸Present were Republican Senators Knowland, Bridges, Ferguson, Saltonstall, Wiley, and H. Alexander Smith, and Democrats Lyndon Johnson, Clements, George, Green, Russell, Harry F.

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.), Chipperfield, 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.)

⁷⁹This 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

⁸⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1758.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 1785.

⁸²Ibid., 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.

⁸⁴Dulles 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*SFRF Hist. Ser.*, vol. VI, pp. 621 ff.

⁸⁷For 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 Hqs. 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.

⁹¹For a detailed discussion of the accords see Randle, *Geneva 1954*.

⁹²For 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*.

⁹³FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1861

⁹⁴Letter 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

⁹⁵CR, vol. 100, p. 11372.

⁹⁶HFAC *Hus. 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

⁹⁷FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 1870.

⁹⁸CR, vol. 100, pp. 12277 ff.

⁹⁹Dulles Telephone Calls Series, May 19, 1954.

¹⁰⁰CR, vol. 100, p. 14517.

¹⁰¹CRS 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

¹⁰²FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 1867-1871.

¹⁰³Ibid., vol. XVI, p. 1503. For the reply of Herman Phleger, the State Department's Legal Adviser, see pp. 1552-1562.

¹⁰⁴It 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 counter-guerrilla 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

¹⁰⁵Lansdale 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.

¹¹³Buu 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

¹¹⁴Kennedy 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.

¹¹⁵The 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 Foster Dulles*, p. 251.

¹¹⁶Jean 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*.

¹¹⁷Lacoutre and Devillers, p. 224.

¹¹⁸For Lansdale's account of these events see *In the Midst of Wars*, pp. 154-159. See also Shaplen, *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.

¹²⁰CRS 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.

¹²¹Saigon 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.

¹²²Letter 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."

¹²³The 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

¹²⁴A 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.

¹²⁵For 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.

¹²⁷See 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.

¹²⁸CRS 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 sealoft. 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.

¹³²In 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.

¹³³For 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 superseded most of 5429, but was basically similar in tone and content, was approved. This was superseded in 1958 by NSC 5809, which was superseded 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

¹³⁴During 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. Cochinchina 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.

¹³⁹PP, 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

¹⁴⁵Dulles Telephone Calls Series.

¹⁴⁶Dulles 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 signatories.)

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

¹⁴⁷PP, DOD, ed., book 1, IV, A, 1., p. 3.

¹⁴⁸U.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

¹⁵¹S. Exec. Rept. 84-1, p. 12.

¹⁵²CR, 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 co-ordinated 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-

¹⁵⁴PP. 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 Quemoy, 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

¹⁵⁵See Eisenhower's memoirs for a discussion of these events.

¹⁵⁶Dulles 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

¹⁵⁸These 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 off-shore 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.

¹⁵⁹See the excellent discussion in *SFRC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. VII, pp. 256 ff.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁶²See *HFRC Hrs. Ser.*, vol. XVIII, pt. 2, pp. 371 ff.

¹⁶³*SFRC Hrs. 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

¹⁶⁵H. Rept. 84-4, and S. Rept. 84-13.

¹⁶⁶CR, 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 1974¹⁶⁸ 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.

¹⁶⁷The 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.).

¹⁶⁸Public 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-

¹See 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.

²See *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 huge 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.'"

⁷U.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

⁸FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, p. 2379. For the reaction in Paris and in Saigon to Mansfield's report see pp. 2141-2142, 2145.

⁹See, 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

¹⁴PP, DOD ed., book 10, pp. 756-760, 771-774

¹⁵Dulles 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 Vietnam 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

²¹See *ibid.*, pp. 2194, 2198, 2205. For the Collins' mission see also chapter 13 of Spector, *Advice and Support*.

²²Gen. 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.

²⁸For 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-

³⁰FRUS, 1952-1954, vol. XIII, pp. 2363-2364.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 2362-2366.

capacity 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.