

THE CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF THE GENEVA ARMISTICE

The direct cause of the Geneva armistice was the fall of Dien Bien Phu.

It may be said that the Indochinese war in general, and the entrenched camp of Dien Bien Phu were lost because the French Expeditionary Corps had too great a superiority of material strength over the Viet Minh and had too much confidence in it.

Had they not possessed such powerful means, they could not have entrenched and trapped themselves in Dien Bien Phu!

First, how did they come there?

Six battalions of parachutists were dropped there by plane on November 20, 1953. They entrenched themselves in this remote village of Dien Bien Phu where they could be supplied with food and ammunition only by plane. They were the first nucleus of a garrison of 12,000 men.

Why such an operation?

First, because the French wanted to have a foothold in the Thai region even if it could only be a precarious one.

Second, they wanted it to be bait for attracting and destroying the Viet Minh who were too often an invisible enemy.

Third, they did not think that such an operation could become dangerous for themselves because they believed that they alone had an air force and a powerful artillery. Never before had the Viet Minh been able to concentrate enough artillery because they had no planes to protect it.

And so, the French trapped themselves in Dien Bien Phu because they were over-confident in their superior material strength. Every day more than a hundred tons of supplies were dropped to the voluntarily isolated garrison!

This time, however, the Russians and the Chinese gave the Viet Minh enough artillery, and the jungle around Dien Bien Phu allowed it to be carried and installed near enough to shell the air strip.

After March 27th, this air strip could no longer be used and Dien Bien Phu was lost on May 7th. The Viet Minh stormed it in the Kamikaze manner by launching wave after wave of suicide fighters who blew up the barbed wire fences by throwing themselves against the wire with bombs tied to their waists.

Dien Bien Phu was the victory of superior determination over superior material strength.

The fall of Dien Bien Phu, however, could not bring about a military collapse in the defense of North Viet Nam because Dien Bien Phu had never been necessary to that defense. But this reverse brought a great number of French politicians to want peace at any price and a still greater number to prefer to stop the war by partitioning Viet Nam between France and the Viet Minh rather than go on fighting for a Viet Nam that would be free from them both...

Therefore the fate of Viet Nam was sealed and an international conference was convened in Geneva to look for a peaceful solution of the conflict.

It was decided before the fall of Dien Bien Phu that the first meeting was to take place on May 8th.

Nine countries were invited to take part in that conference: the three Indochinese States: Viet Nam (called the State of Viet Nam) Cambodia, and Laos, France, the Viet Minh or the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the United Kingdom, the U. S. S. R., Communist China, and the United States of America.

But the State of Viet Nam, or the non-Communist Viet Nam, was treated as a patient who was to undergo a surgical operation: everyone, except the communists, kindly said to her: "of course, we are not going to harm you, above all we are not going to cut you to pieces..." And then the kind doctors, that is, the Big Powers, laid her on the surgical table, refused to listen to any of her protests or proposals, firmly put an anaesthetic mask on her face, and allowed her to be cut into two pieces, to be partitioned between the two surgeons, the French and the Viet Minh.

The operation was performed by an armistice agreement which was signed by these two surgeons only: the French High Command of the French Union forces in Indochina and the Viet Minh High Command. The doctors gave their blessing in a final declaration to which the American delegation did not join. The American delegation merely promised (in a separate statement) that the United States will refrain from the threat or the use of force to oppose it and "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreement with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security."

*

As a matter of fact, article 14a of this Armistice Agreement provided that pending the general elections, to be held within two years, before July 21, 1956, the conduct of civil administration in each zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there, that is, the Viet Minh north of the 17th parallel, and the French south of it.

And articles 16 and 20 stripped Viet Nam of her right to contract any military alliance or to organize her defense by any other means than through the French Expeditionary Corps.

Thus the Northern half of Viet Nam was given away to the Communists with a little more than half the territory and the population, and the rest, south of the 17th parallel, given the choice between French protection and comparative disarmament and isolation.

Article 14d of this Armistice agreement, however, provided that "from the date of entry into force of the agreement until the movement of troops is completed(that is until May 18, 1955) any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district."

*

The Delegation of the State of Viet Nam strongly, formally and solemnly protested against this Armistice agreement and proposed instead an armistice without provisional partition of Viet Nam, through disarmament of the belligerent forces, and through the establishment of provisional United Nations control over the entire territory.

But this proposal was rejected without discussion, precisely because no one in the Geneva Conference wanted the responsibility of rejecting the only proposal that answered the wishes of the Vietnamese people for an armistice without partition; and also because everyone was eager to allow the French Premier, M. Mendes-France, to fulfill his pledge to the French National Assembly of a truce before July 20, 1954... The Conference showed the kindest consideration for everyone, except for the 23 million Vietnamese concerned."

Concluded in such a way, in such a hurry, this Armistice agreement was the worst possible error. It is a violation of the principle of self-determination of peoples, recognized by articles 1 and 55 of the United Nations Charter, and also a violation of article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." The Viet Minh and the French High Command had no right to decide the fate and dispose of the freedom of 23 million Vietnamese. They had no right to agree on behalf of the Vietnamese to general elections after having given away to the communists more than half of the voters. Nor had they the right to strip Viet Nam of her right to organize her own defense as she judges best and to choose her military alliances.

*

Headed by Dr. Tran van Do, the Vietnamese delegation protested against such an armistice and demanded that it be recorded officially that the government of the State of Viet Nam "protested against the way in which the Armistice was concluded and against the conditions of that Armistice which fail to take into account the profound aspirations of the Vietnamese people; and that it reserves for itself entire freedom of action to safeguard the sacred right of the

Vietnamese people to territorial unity, to national independence, to liberty."

Consequences of the Geneva Armistice

The first consequence is the abandonment to the Communist yoke of about twelve million Vietnamese who are not communist.

Only about 700,000 of them succeeded in fleeing south but most of the remaining eleven million are non-communist. They dislike the communist regime which is quite contrary to their confucian traditions and they would have chosen freedom if they had not been prevented from doing so by the Viet Minh authorities.

The second consequence of the Geneva armistice is to give the Viet Minh the victor's prestige which is very important in Asia, because Asian peoples have been completely disarmed for centuries, they have no means of armed resistance against the victor and they are used to keeping watch on the direction of the wind in order to sail with it...

*

This Armistice agreement however, has two good effects: by ending the bloodshed and the fighting, it allows the Vietnamese (who had been almost crushed by twelve years of two wars) to live and breathe and also to destroy the vicious circle which had been the main cause of the Viet Minh victory. For the French themselves recognized and proclaimed the impossibility of saving Viet Nam from Communism without granting it complete independence, but they claimed at the same time that, practically speaking, it was impossible because of the state of war which imposed on the population a number of restrictions, among them the presence of a strong foreign army. Thus the French and the Vietnamese found themselves caught up in a vicious circle which made victory impossible since the state of war prevented them from realizing a condition essential to victory. The first advantage of the Geneva Conference Armistice is to allow them at last to break out of that vicious circle. The second was to put pressure on France and oblige her to agree to the principle of full independence of the three Indochinese States.

What about the general elections to be held before July 21, 1956?

At the Bandung Conference, the Indian delegate proposed a resolution asking for full execution of the Geneva agreement, but had to withdraw it when the Vietnamese delegate, Minister Nguyen van Thoai, remarked that this agreement had no binding effect on the State of Viet Nam which was not party to it, and that the Viet Minh who signed it kept violating it!

Indeed, the Government of South Viet Nam is certainly not bound by the Geneva agreement but has willingly implemented it and would like to hold general elections to unite the country.

But it cannot be forced to accept faked elections and the big question is whether or not it can agree with the Viet Minh on conditions for really free elections. The answer is very doubtful because there have never been free elections in any communist controlled country.!

Then what will happen if an agreement cannot be reached in Viet Nam on this matter?

Will not the Viet Minh resume the war? And if so, can Free Viet Nam resist them?

Yes, certainly! Because what is strong in Viet Nam is nationalism, not communism, and we already have a true national government, a government headed by a great patriot, Premier Ngo dinh Diem.

This is most important because a puppet government would be the best means to throw the Vietnamese into the arms of the communists.

This government still has many problems to solve, among them, the integration of the armed sects into the national army and the national life, the resettlement of over seven hundred thousand refugees, the reorganization of the army and of the administration. It has everything needed to solve these problems: the support of the population; the great natural resources of a favored country where people have plenty of land and food and so are never cold or hungry; the protection of the Manila Pact; and direct American aid---an aid which is highly effective because its motive is not suspect.

In North Viet Nam, on the contrary, the communist leaders of the Viet Minh are facing insoluble problems.

Until Geneva, they had only to fight and to destroy. They fought well and destroyed even better. Outside Hanoi, Haiphong, and two or three more places occupied by the French or by Vietnamese catholics, they destroyed everything in their policy of the scorched earth: roads, railroads, bridges, telegraph poles, houses, all the houses which had more than one story!.... Now they have to keep their promise to rebuild in much greater beauty. They have to rebuild a country which they have themselves destroyed and which has always been much poorer than the South and dependent on the South for its food, for its rice supply. And to rebuild, they are not only asking for French cooperation, they must accept Chinese help, a meager help which the Chinese Communists cannot afford to give for nothing...

The Vietnamese in the North are now realizing with horror that the Viet Minh have imposed and are imposing on them incredible hardships and sacrifices only to replace French colonialism by a much harsher one: Communist Chinese Colonialism, which is the worst of all.

This, and all the odious and unbearable tyrannies of the communist regime, explain the exodus of over seven hundred thousand refugees abandoning everything and even risking their lives on frail rafts and small boats on

the rough sea, or fighting bare-handed against regular Viet Minh troops, in a desperate flight to freedom.

When hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese are showing such determination how can we hesitate to help them save their freedom which is our own freedom? How can we despair for the fate of mankind when they are giving such lessons of human courage?

And how can it be said that the Viet Minh are popular and gaining ground in Viet Nam when such heroism is shown by those who flee them, when such an enthusiastic welcome is given to President Ngo dinh Diem by the population who have just been liberated from them in South and Central Viet Nam?

Indeed, we still have many problems to solve, but with American help, we are sure to solve them. In fact, we are now on the right road to salvation and victory.
