

USA Vietnam Policies 1940-54

Source document

THE HISTORY OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM, HISTORY OF THE INDOCHINA INCIDENT 1940-1954, 1 February 1955, reprinted 20 August 1971

Notes:

1. Notes and comments are my comments and not from the primary source material.
2. **French Indochina** was part of the French colonial empire in southeast Asia. A federation of the three Vietnamese regions, Tonkin (North), Annam (Central), and Cochinchina (South), as well as Cambodia, was formed in 1887. Laos was added in 1893. The capital was moved from Saigon (in Cochinchina) to Hanoi (Tonkin) in 1902.

From chapter 1 - THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF FRENCH RULE IN INDOCHINA

Viet Nam had once been a single, sovereign Annamese state under its own Emperor. Beginning with Cochinchina, which she turned into a colony, France gradually extended her sway over the rest of the country, and reduced the other two Kys of Annam and Tonkin to the status of protectorates. During the same period, Cambodia was drawn into the French sphere and, by the end of the century, Laos had been added to what was now known as the Indochinese Union. By 1938, less than 40,000 Frenchmen were dominating 24 million subjects, in a land approximately one-third larger than France itself.

Many factors contributed to the French loss of Indochina. They can be traced back to three fundamental causes: the abuses of the French regime, inflamed Indochinese nationalism, and France's ill-conceived attempt after World War II to reassert the hegemony she had enjoyed in that part of the world since the 1860's.

The story of the early development of the Communist Party in Indochina is inseparably connected with the life and activity of Nguyen ai Quoc, now known as Ho Chi Minh. Descendant of an Annamese mandarin family, Ho left home at the age of 19 and worked his way around the world on a French ship. He finally established residence in Paris, where he became interested in Communist teachings. During the Versailles Conference in 1919, he drew up, and introduced, a memorandum of Annamite desiderata.

Ho then went to Canton, ostensibly as a Chinese translator in the Soviet Consulate. His primary mission, however, was evident in his founding, in China, of the first Communist cell for Annamites. He also instructed in the politico-military school of Whampoa, originally established to prepare leaders for a world Communist revolution.

When the Kuomintang turned on the Communists in 1927, Ho fled with Borodin to the Soviet Union, where he was officially given the mission of founding Indochinese Communism. By that time, 250 Annamites had received revolutionary training, and over 200 had returned to Indochina to assume key positions in the Communist movement.

By 1929, dissident groups led to competition among three separate factions for recognition by the Third Internationale. Moscow understandably showed great reluctance to select any one group for official investiture. Instead, the Soviets called upon Ho Chi Minh, as the only personality capable of the task, to unite the three parties. In this he was successful.

The Party reportedly had over 1,000 members in 1930, but the true index of its strength lay in the estimated 100,000 peasants who followed its leadership. In 1930, Ho Chi Minh was arrested by the British in Hongkong. Following his release, in 1933, the Communist Party slowly began to revive in Indochina.

When the Popular Front collapsed in France in 1938, its Indochinese counterpart, the Democratic Front, did likewise, and the Communist Party went underground. This time, however, the Communists fared better than in 1930-1931. Although the Party was outlawed, and some of its leaders were temporarily in jail, party organization remained intact, the secret cells were undisturbed and the network of party workers and sympathizers continued loyal.

Summary: From 1887 thru just prior to WWII, U.S. policy towards Vietnam was that Indochina was part of the French colonial empire.

From chapter 2 - ESTABLISHMENT OF JAPANESE DOMINATION IN INDOCHINA, 1940-1941

Japanese plans for the creation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere relied heavily on possession of Indochina. Rich in rice and raw materials, it was also the natural gateway to all Southeast Asia. In addition, by 1940 the strategic location of Indochina had assumed increasing importance for Japan's prosecution of the long and costly war against China.

By the summer of that year, Japanese forces had driven the armies of Chiang Kai-shek into the interior of south China. Cut off from his coastal ports, Chiang depended for a large part of his supplies upon the Yunnan Railroad and the port of Haiphong. Denial of this supply route was, therefore, an early and important Japanese objective.

Japanese Pressure on the French With the collapse of the French armies in Europe in the spring of 1940, Japan decided to delay no longer. In April, Japanese aircraft bombarded the Yunnan Railroad, and a strong press and radio campaign was initiated against the "provocations" of French Indochina.

Though isolated from France, virtually defenseless, and subjected to strong Japanese pressure, the French in Indochina still hoped to protect their sovereignty from Japanese encroachment. They embarked on a desperate and dangerous game of delay and compromise.

On 19 June, two days after Petain had asked Germany for an armistice, Japan demanded of General Georges Catroux, Governor-General of Indochina, that the Yunnan Railroad be closed to shipments of war materials for China. To guarantee that the blockade would be effective, Japan also demanded the right to set up a control commission in Tonkin. Catroux was given 24 hours to reply, or suffer Japanese attack. Although he knew acquiescence would probably result in new demands, Catroux felt he had no choice but to yield.

In early August, the Japanese asked for transit rights through Indochina for Japanese troops, the right to build airfields, and an economic accord that would tie Indochina's resources to Japan. The Vichy Government tried to bargain for time. The French were hoping to strengthen their hand enough to reject Japanese demands. The British were in no position, in the summer of 1940, to support French Indochina, which left the United States as the best remaining potential source of aid against Japan.

Even as Vichy was dispatching its conciliatory reply to Japan, another message was on its way to the French Ambassador in Washington, instructing him to inform the United States Government of Tokyo's demands. He was also directed to indicate that "the resistance of the French Government to the Japanese demands would necessarily depend to a large extent on the nature and

effectiveness of the support which the American Government would be disposed to give it."

The Ambassador cabled his government that there was "no prospect of active American aid against Japan. The United States would not use military force in support of any position which might be taken to resist the Japanese attempted aggression on Indochina."

Japan's threats of military action were becoming stronger, and France could find no outside solution to her predicament. Therefore, on the night of 16 August, the French Cabinet decided to make concessions, hoping in this way to avoid losing all of Indochina at once. In the absence of any material support from Great Britain and the United States, France must yield.

As the result of negotiations carried on in Tokyo, a Franco-Japanese political accord was signed on 29 August. Under the terms of this agreement, Japan recognized the "permanent French interest in Indo-China" and France recognized the "preponderance of Japanese interest in that area."

the French sought frantically to escape the closing trap while there was yet time. They approached British, American, and German representatives in turn, seeking material support from Britain and America and, from Germany, permission to send Vichy owned military equipment to Indochina.

Great Britain and the United States contented themselves with remonstrating in Tokyo against any change in the status quo, and Germany refused to release the equipment.

On 22 September, a military agreement was signed, granting the Japanese use of three airfields in Tonkin and permission to station 6,000 troops there. The French also agreed to permit the eventual passage of Japanese forces through Tonkin to Yunnan, and consented, subject to further negotiation, to allow a division of the Kwantung Army to be evacuated through Tonkin. But there was no further negotiation.

Elements of the Kwantung Army began to move across the frontier on 23 September and were immediately fired upon by the French. Outnumbered and outgunned, the French were badly beaten; by the twenty-fifth, all resistance ceased. The Japanese proceeded to consolidate their hold by taking over strategic points in the north, but they seemed quite content to leave a framework of French control.

U.S. Policy toward France and Japan Concerning Indochina

The Vichy-Japanese accord of 29 August 1940 brought about a change of attitude in American relations with both signatories. It also set in motion the series of events that led inexorably to Pearl Harbor.

When the United States learned of the accord, and the extent of French concessions to Japanese military demands, patience wore thin. Ambassador Grew in Tokyo had been instructed to protest to the Japanese Government. The thinly veiled insult he received in reply convinced him of the hopelessness of further temporizing and inspired his now famous "green light" message, advocating much stronger measures. The Administration had had such measures under consideration for some time; it only remained to apply them. On 25 September a loan of 25 million dollars to China was announced and, on the following day, the President brought the export of iron and steel scrap under the licensing system in such a way as to exclude Japan.

The extent to which American policy really acted as a deterrent is debatable. Japan was not ready for southward expansion until she had secured herself against attack by the Soviet Union in the north, and until she was sure that seizure of the Far Eastern possessions of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands would not be challenged by a presumably victorious Germany. The answer to both problems lay in the Tripartite Pact, signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on 27 September 1940. Germany, in turn, was allied with the Soviet Union, and Japan relied upon this roundabout relationship to keep the Soviets in check.

The stage was now set for the next move, and it was not long in coming. On 12 July 1941, Baron Kato "regretfully" informed the French Government that Japan felt obliged to send land, sea, and air forces into southern Indochina. He demanded eight air and two naval bases, the withdrawal of French garrisons from places to be occupied by the Japanese, and freedom of movement in southern Indochina for Japanese forces. If a favorable answer were not forthcoming by 20 July, the Baron explained that the use of force would become necessary.

When Washington learned of the Japanese demands, it instructed Ambassador Leahy to use all his influence to delay a decision as long as possible. Leahy bluntly informed French Admiral Darlan that "if Japan was the winner, the Japanese would take over French Indochina; and if the Allies won, we would take it." However, since neither the Americans nor the British held out any prospect of aid, Vichy was helpless. Accession at least meant that French sovereignty would be respected on paper.

Japanese troops occupied the southern portions of Indochina on 21 September and by the twenty-ninth Vichy had formally acquiesced to the use of eight airfields and the naval bases at Saigon and Camranh. No limit was placed on the number of troops to be stationed in the area, and the first contingent consisted of 50,000.

As President Roosevelt expressed it, Japan's daring move posed for the United States an "exceedingly serious problem." The President suggested to Ambassador Nomura that, if the Japanese would withdraw their troops, he would try to obtain a solemn declaration by the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Netherlands to regard Indochina as a "neutralized" country, much like Switzerland, provided Japan made a similar commitment. The alternative, he hinted, might be economic sanctions. Nomura unfortunately transmitted this message to his government in garbled form, stressing the sanctions and almost entirely ignoring the constructive offer. As a consequence, the Japanese continued pouring troops into Indochina.

An executive order freezing all Japanese funds and assets in the United States was issued on 26 July. On the same day, Great Britain denounced their trade treaties with Japan and imposed various financial restrictions. The Netherlands followed suit on 28 July. As one American observer commented: "Japan must move quickly to consummate her conquests in Asia or face economic ruin and defeat."

The Japanese intended to move quickly. A message from Matsuoka to Nomura on 2 July read in part: "Preparations for southward advance shall be reenforced and the policy already decided upon with reference to French Indo-China and Thailand shall be executed. Therefore, when Nomura and Kurusu handed Japan's last-word version of a *modus vivendi* to Secretary Hull on 20 November, it was, in effect, an ultimatum. It was clear to all that Japan's steadily expanding control over Indochina would cease only at the price of "clearly unacceptable . . . conditions that would have assured Japan domination of the Pacific.

On the eve of Pearl Harbor (7 December, Asian time), Japanese troops infiltrated Hanoi and took up key positions throughout the city. The next day the French Governor-General Decoux was presented with a new ultimatum: do nothing to hinder the activities of the Japanese forces, or else Japan would take over Indochina. Decoux bowed to the inevitable. In recompense, French sovereignty was reconfirmed--for what it was worth--and the French were left in control of their own army and of the administration of the country. As Ellen Hammer observes: "Defeated in Europe in 1940, France was defeated in Asia in 1941.

Chapter 3

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD INDOCHINA 1942-1946

Roosevelt Policy

For both military and political reasons, the United States did not challenge Japanese control of Indochina during World War II. Allied strategy called for crushing Germany first, then defeating Japan, and the road to victory over the Japanese did not lead through Indochina. Politically, the President made it clear that he did not intend "to get mixed up in any Indochina decision. Indochina, the President insisted, was a matter for post-war.

Nevertheless, Indochina was a frequent topic of study and discussion by the President, the State Department, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the war. Sometimes this topic arose from French requests for permission to participate in the war against Japan - a euphemism for a French campaign to regain control of Indochina. The President himself, held strong views regarding the disposition of Indochina after the war and did not hesitate to express them.

At first, the President's view was that all French territory should be restored to France after the war. Twice in November 1942 the French were assured that America would see that their colonies were returned after the war. This pledge was given when American troops were preparing to land in North Africa and the President was seeking to enlist French support, or, at least, to ensure that the French would not oppose the American landings. Then just as American troops hit the beaches, the President himself sent a message to Petain that "the ultimate and greater aim of the American armies is the liberation of France and its Empire from the Axis yoke. Unfortunately, these pledges did not dissuade the French from resisting the American landings. Instead, Petain replied: We are attacked; we shall defend ourselves; this is the order I am giving.

After this, the President made no further pledges to restore French sovereignty throughout the Empire, and by the time of the Casablanca Conference of January 1943 he had changed his original view. Whether his change of mind stemmed from anger over French resistance to the American landings in North Africa or from his own strong anti-colonialism is not clear. Whatever the cause, at Casablanca he confided to his son Elliott that he was not sure "we'd be right to return France her colonies at all, ever, without first obtaining in the case of each individual colony some sort of pledge, some sort of statement of just exactly what was planned, in terms of each colony's administration." "The native Indo-Chinese," the President asserted, "have been so flagrantly downtrodden that they thought to themselves: Anything must be better, than to live under French colonial rule!"

At subsequent wartime conferences the President made it clear that he did not want Indochina returned to France. Instead, he favored placing it under an international trusteeship for twenty to twenty-five years to prepare the native population for eventual independence. At Cairo he found the Generalissimo receptive to this idea. At Tehran and Yalta Marshal Stalin was enthusiastic about it. But Churchill was dead set against any action that infringed upon French sovereignty over their colonial empire. As the President explained matters to Stalin, the British opposed establishing an international trusteeship over Indochina because of the implications of such an arrangement to the British Empire.

But, while he lived, the President's attitude toward Indochina constituted American policy. And in the fall of 1943 that policy began to collide with French colonial interests in Indochina. Roosevelt supported his position with the Joint Chiefs with a political reason the Chiefs had not taken into account: "we should not commit ourselves to the French to give back to France all her colonies. . . ." And in listing the territories he felt should not be restored to France, he placed Indochina first.

In July 1944, Major General M. E. Bethouart, who was visiting Washington on a mission with General de Gaulle, discussed with Admiral Leahy the intention of France to recover Indochina from the Japanese. General Bethouart, of course, asked for American equipment for this purpose. He got nowhere. Instead, Admiral Leahy informed him that "Indo-China could not at that time be included within the sphere of interest of the American Chiefs of Staff."

The President had made his policy clear, and, until it was slightly relaxed, in March 1945, the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff rigidly adhered to it. Nothing was done during this period that could be interpreted as an American commitment to aid the French regain Indochina.

On 9 March 1945 the Japanese overthrew the French administration in Indochina, interning many French officials and waging ruthless warfare against those members of the underground who resisted. This dramatic turn of events spurred the French to an all-out effort to obtain immediate American aid.

In these circumstances, the President began to relax his policy somewhat. The new policy of the US Government is to help French provided such aid does not interfere with planned operations. As to military operations in support of French resistance forces, the only Americans entering Indochina under this policy were members of the OSS, whose mission was to gather intelligence and furnish arms to those fighting the Japanese. This deviation in the President's policy did not mean a return to his original view that all French possessions should be restored after the war. On 12 April 1945, President Roosevelt died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage (stroke).

Truman Policy

The day after President Roosevelt died, members of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee began to challenge his policy toward Indochina. They were clearly dissatisfied with it. It was decided that the State Department should seek to obtain from President Truman a precise definition of American policy toward Indochina. The French government informed Truman that they were prepared to provide troops to assist in the invasion of Japan. The president thanked the French for their offer but he stressed that it would be up to General MacArthur to decide how the French military contribution could best be utilized. Clearly, the President's acceptance of French participation in the war against Japan was not a commitment to revise American strategy to help the French regain Indochina. But operations in the Pacific were racing to a climax and the war ended on 15 August; before any decision was reached on utilization of French forces.

Immediate Postwar Policy

When Japan surrendered, whatever hopes the French may have had for American aid in regaining Indochina were soon dispelled. At Potsdam the United States had turned its back on that area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff to extend Admiral Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command to include that part of Indochina south of the 16th parallel. Northern Indochina remained in the China Theater, under the responsibility of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Subsequently, General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, directed all Japanese forces in those two areas of Indochina to surrender to Admiral Mountbatten and the Generalissimo respectively. Thus official responsibility for disarming the Japanese in Indochina fell to the British and the Chinese.

Both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department were pleased with this arrangement. Engrossed as they were with the problems of Japan and Germany, with events in China, and with "bringing the boys home," the Chiefs did not look for additional responsibility in Indochina. American policy toward Indochina was neither to oppose the restoration of French control nor to assist it by force. Moreover American willingness to see French control reestablished assumed that French claims to the support of the people of Indochina were "borne out by events."

The French soon learned that the United States would not be a party to those events. When Admiral Fenard asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff about arrangements for the Japanese surrender in Indochina, he was referred to Admiral Mountbatten and to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. He was told, however, that "the United States supports French presence in connection with Japanese surrenders" in both northern and southern Indochina.

When the French Military Mission to the United States asked the Combined Chiefs of Staff to transport by plane from China to Indochina General Alessandri and his detachment of 5,000 men, it was the American Chiefs who drafted the memo denying this request. "The movement of French forces from China into French Indo-China," the Chiefs asserted, "is a matter for consideration by the Chinese and French governments."

Special precautions were taken to avoid American involvement in either British or Chinese occupation policy. In the Chinese zone, American liaison teams were attached to Chinese forces, but their role was to assist in the supply and movement of Chinese troops. But during the occupation they were under strict orders to disassociate themselves from the French and to remain aloof from Sino-French-American relations, lest they place the United States "right in the middle." Their role during the occupation was limited to aiding prisoners of war and internees.

Even before Japan surrendered, the United States had begun to consider how to avoid involvement in British occupation policies. The United States observed a strict "hands off" attitude toward British and Chinese occupation policies until late December 1945, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff served notice that British forces would be withdrawn from Indochina. They informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the British withdrawal would be substantially completed by the end of January 1946, at which time most of the Japanese would have been disarmed. The British did not specify who would finish repatriating the Japanese, but, by references to the buildup of French forces in Indochina, they left the impression that the French would assume that responsibility.

From the attitude taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee toward this proposal, it would seem that the United States had not decided whether it wanted French sovereignty restored to Indochina.

In March 1946, the British informed the U.S. that they were transferring control of their zone in Vietnam to the French. They said: "On the British side at any rate, it has always been the intention that the French and the Dutch should resume responsibility for their own territories as soon as they are in a position to do so and it is felt that the resumption of this control cannot possibly await the repatriation of all the Japanese, which may take some three years to complete."

Note: In April 1946, the U.S. agreed that the French could assume responsibilities in both the British and Chinese zones in Vietnam. We had little choice with both the British and Chinese informing us that they were departing Vietnam.

On 8 May the British Chiefs informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Lord Mountbatten had arranged for the French to assume the task of disarming and evacuating the Japanese from southern Indochina. The time set for this official transfer of responsibility was 13 May 1946.

Thus did the British and the American Governments come to recognize French authority over all Indochina. Whether the French could persuade the natives to accept it remained to be seen.

When Japan surrendered, there were three obvious policies the United States might have pursued toward Indochina:

- (1) help restore it to the French
- (2) help the Indochinese toward eventual independence by establishing a trusteeship
- (3) observe a "hands-off" attitude.

Accepting the first would have entailed the use of American troops or resources. And the American public undoubtedly would have complained about aiding French imperialism and delaying the demobilization of American servicemen. The second policy had virtually been precluded by a provision of the United Nations Charter that would have required French consent to the establishment of a trusteeship. The United States chose the third course, and left the solution to the Indochina problem to the French, Indochinese, British, and Chinese.

Chapter V

SIXTEEN MONTHS OF CRISIS; SEPTEMBER 1945-DECEMBER 1946

The months from September 1945 to December 1946 were a period of increasing turmoil in Indochina. The occupation forces of Great Britain and China came and went. The Viet Minh became the spokesman and principal force of the Vietnamese nationalist movement. The French returned to Indochina in force, and clearly indicated their intention to remain. The French and Viet Minh alternated negotiations with charges and counter charges of bad faith. They spilled each other's blood, and it was often impossible to distinguish the victim from the aggressor. By the end of 1946 one thing, at least, was clear -- Vietnamese were prepared to fight and die to assure the independence of Viet Nam. But it soon became equally clear that Frenchmen were prepared to fight and die to preserve the French Empire.

The year 1946 was one of political maneuvering between the French and Viet Minh. Moderate elements of both sides wished to compromise, but their differences were so pronounced that compromise proved a virtual impossibility. Divergent views appeared on the point of reconciliation as conference followed conference, but extremist elements on both sides blocked more than an illusory settlement. The negotiations of 1946 appeared promising on the surface, but actually they were merely agreements to agree. Although seeming harmony prevailed on the diplomatic front, there was vicious guerrilla fighting in the back country. More ominous yet, both France and the Viet Minh embarked upon a program of military expansion. Should a decision by force become necessary, both intended to be ready. By the end of the year, all negotiations having failed, the future of Indochina was entrusted to the French and Viet Minh armies.

Two clashes occurred between French and Viet Minh troops on 20 November. A French War Crimes investigating team journeyed to Lang Son to disinter the remains of some French officers allegedly killed by the Japanese the preceding year. On its return trip to Hanoi the team was fired upon by Viet Minh troops and nine Frenchmen were killed. Each side accused the other of provoking the skirmish. This incident was of minor significance compared with the armed encounter in Haiphong the same day. The Haiphong incident was the culmination of a lengthy customs dispute. A French patrol craft seized a Chinese junk running contraband and was fired upon by DRV troops on the shore. Fighting spread to the city of Haiphong. General Morliere, commanding the French troops in northern Indochina, and Hoang Huu Nam, the DRV Under Secretary of State, immediately intervened and by 22 November had restored peace to the city. Upon learning of the situation in Haiphong, Admiral d'Argenlieu, who was then in Paris, cabled General Valluy in Saigon to instruct General Morliere to reply with force. Morliere protested that order had been restored and the situation was under control. General Valluy then bypassed Morliere and wired Colonel Debes, commanding the French garrison in Haiphong, to "make yourself completely

master of Haiphong by all means at your disposal and bring the Vietnamese Army to surrender." On 23 November Colonel Debes moved to carry out these instructions. Encountering resistance, he called upon the French fleet in Haiphong Harbor for naval and air support. The resulting bombardment killed an estimated six thousand residents of Haiphong. After five days of street fighting, French troops established absolute supremacy in the city. The Haiphong incident dealt a mortal blow to any hope of settling the differences between France and the DRV. The eight year war had begun.

Chapter VI -- MILITARY AND POLITICAL STALEMATE: GROWING U.S. CONCERN, JANUARY 1947-JUNE 1949

In Indochina, the two and one-half years between January 1947 and June 1949 formed a pattern of guerrilla war and diplomatic maneuver. On the military front France fought an indecisive war of attrition with the Viet Minh, while on the political front the French Government struggled to create a central Indochinese government that would capture the imagination and loyalty of the Vietnamese. The vital first step in the creation of this new regime was to persuade Bao Dai to return to his homeland at the head of an anti-Viet Minh government. Unfortunately, negotiations with Bao Dai dragged on for almost two years before a formula acceptable to both the ex-Emperor and France was found. All the while the war continued; the Viet Minh held its own, but France slowly expended more men, money, and materiel than she could afford.

At the start of the period United States policymakers, preoccupied by the growing threat of the Soviet Union, paid little more than routine attention to the problem of Indochina. Gradually, however, United States interest increased until in the summer of 1948 the United States adopted a position of tentative support of the Bao Dai solution. As French reluctance to make real concessions to Vietnamese nationalist aspirations became manifest, United States interest grew into concern. And with this concern came the first United States consideration of more active support of the Bao Dai restoration movement, and of the general French position in Indochina.

American Policy toward Indochina, 1947-1949

The war in Indochina posed a dilemma for the makers of American foreign policy. To aid the French might alienate the peoples of Southeast Asia from the Western Powers. To support complete independence for the Vietnamese might lead to a Communist state in Indochina. In these circumstances, the State Department sought to steer a middle course. While recognizing French sovereignty the United States refused to supply the French with arms or ammunition to help them assert it.

By the summer of 1948 the State Department had decided to urge the French toward more decisive action to settle the Indochina conflict, but to avoid applying any pressure that might imperil the French Government. As Secretary of State Marshall viewed the situation, nothing should be left undone that would strengthen the hand of the "truly nationalist groups" in Indochina at the expense of the Communists. In July the French were informed that the United States believed they were faced with two alternatives: either they must promptly and unequivocally approve the union of Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam or risk the loss of Indochina.

As the war continued the United States drew closer to direct involvement. Alarmed by the Communist victory in China, the State Department looked for ways to avert a Communist Viet Nam. To Mr. Acheson there appeared no alternative to supporting Bao Dai, and in May 1949 he told the American Consul in Saigon that no effort should be spared by the Western Powers or by the non-Communist nations of Asia to assure the success of Bao Dai.

Chapter VII - ORIGINS OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA

The months between the summer of 1949 and the spring of 1950 marked the beginning and early growth of direct United States concern with the war in Indochina. Gradually, American policy planners realized that unless measures were taken to change the course of the conflict France was headed for almost certain defeat. This defeat in a sense would also represent a defeat for the United States, for Communist possession of Indochina would increase the power, prestige, and capabilities of the Soviet bloc. More immediately, the power represented by the men, materials, and resources of Indochina, if coupled with that of a Communist China, would gravely endanger the whole American security system in the Far East. Further, as the Japanese proved in World War II, Indochina was the natural gateway for the conquest of Southeast Asia. Obviously, therefore, Indochina was not a single problem that could be isolated and cured by itself; it was a vital part of the whole body politic of Asia. Thus, when early in 1950 the United States decided to help France achieve victory in Indochina, it did so within the framework of an over-all policy for Asia, and with specific objectives in mind.

Throughout the last six months of 1949, however, United States policy toward Asia was negative and vague. The defeat of the American-supported Nationalist Chinese armies caused a general United States withdrawal from involvement in the Far East, and until January 1950 no decisive, over-all policy toward Asia was developed.

There were, nonetheless, two general objectives apparent in American thinking as applied to all Asian nations. These goals were containment of Communism and encouragement of non-Communist nationalist movements. The former, actually world-wide in application, was dictated by the realities of the Cold War; the latter was in harmony with traditional American sympathy for subject peoples.

The dominant factor influencing the rebirth of a strong stand in Asia and leading to a paramount American interest in Indochina was the victory of the Communists in China. The triumph of Mao Tse-tung opened the way for Communist expansion into Southeast Asia. If Southeast Asia fell, the Communists would be in an excellent position to threaten the island chain stretching from Japan to the Philippines that United States military planners regarded as the bastion of American defensive strategy in the Far East.

The logical course for Mao Tse-tung to follow in any projected conquest of Southeast Asia lay through Indochina, where the situation was ideally suited to Communist penetration. China and Viet Nam possessed a common boundary over 500 miles long. Direct support of the Viet Minh war effort over this border was now anticipated, and the threat of overt Chinese intervention was an ever present possibility.

Thus the situation in Indochina, as it stood at the close of 1949, impelled the United States to adopt a positive stand. The Viet Minh was growing stronger; the French were growing weaker. Increasing Chinese activity promised to strengthen the Viet Minh even further, and the possibility of actual Chinese intervention made the future prospects dim indeed. The Bao Dai solution gave scant hope of unifying the Vietnamese in support of the war effort, and it was received with suspicion by most of the Asiatic nations. The French must obviously have help or be expelled from Indochina. Throughout the latter half of 1949, the United States had been reassessing its interests in the Far East, and, by January 1950, it had arrived at an appreciation of the vital role of the Indochinese war in the contest for Southeast Asia. On this appreciation, plus a realization of France's precarious position, the decision to assist the French was based.

Emergence of a Far Eastern and Indochinese Policy

The decision to help France combat the Viet Minh was the logical outgrowth of a reassessment of American interests in Asia as a whole. This process began in the summer of 1949 in the National Security Council but was given considerable impetus by a bitter dispute in Congress that served to focus public and official

attention on Asia. The result was the formulation of an Asian policy that emphasized the Indochinese problem and prescribed a program of assistance to bolster anti-Communist forces in Indochina.

In the summer of 1949, Section 303 of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act set aside 75 million dollars to be spent in the "general area of China." Congressional intent was to provide aid to Formosa. This money was eventually spent in a manner different than intended. On 17 December 1949 the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a plan for programming Section 303 funds. The Chiefs defined "the general area of China" as including "not only China proper, but also such areas as Hainan and Formosa, French Indo-China, Burma and Thailand." The Joint Chiefs of Staff thus took the first step in shifting the battle for Asia from China to Southeast Asia. The inclusion of Indochina in "the general area of China" provided the means for an early program of assistance in the French struggle against Ho Chi Minh.

The National Security Council on 29 December 1949 warned of the threat to United States security of Communist expansion in the Far East. It reaffirmed that the loss of Asia to Communism would secure for the USSR and deny to the United States a power potential of the first magnitude, a major source of raw materials, and control of coastal and overseas lines of communication. It would also seriously threaten America's defensive island chain. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, believed that the conclusions of the National Security Council report were too general. They desired an integrated policy toward Asia, embodying more concrete courses of action.

In accordance with the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council revised their report. The resulting policy declaration, NSC 48/2, established more clearly a course of active "support," as distinguished from "encouragement," of Asian countries threatened by Communism. The United States would provide political, economic, and military assistance and advice where clearly needed to supplement the resistance" of non-Communist governments in the Far East. NSC 48/2 was followed by NSC 64.

The United States officially sanctioned these convictions in late April 1950 when the President approved NSC 64. This paper noted the growing strength of the Viet Minh, the possibility of active Chinese Communist intervention, and the failure to date of French efforts to solve the political problem. The significance of Indochina in US eyes was concisely stated: "It is important to the United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is the key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat." The Departments of State and Defense were directed to prepare a program embracing "all practicable measures designed protect United States security interests in Indochina

Note: When President Harry Truman signed off on NSC 64, which held that if the French could not contain Viet Minh forces in Vietnam, the rest of Asia would go Communist. This was the birth of the "Domino Theory" in Southeast Asia.

By adopting NSC 64 the United States decided that the most direct means of attaining the over-all objective lay in concentrating American efforts on the battle for Indochina. The next step would be to inaugurate a program of assistance aimed at neutralizing the Viet Minh strength and stabilizing the Associated States economies.

Beginnings of American Aid

The principle of extending military and economic aid to threatened Asian countries had been agreed upon by February 1950, and Indochina had been determined the area in most immediate danger. The United States, however, had yet to make specific commitments or enter formal arrangements. It was during the spring of 1950 that the aid machinery was developed and the program of assistance to Indochina actually initiated.

Final decision was reached in March to undertake the Indochinese military assistance program. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 16 January, had proposed that 15 million dollars be set aside for Indochina and 10 million dollars for Thailand. The State and Defense Departments approved the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 6 March. Secretary of State Acheson advised the President that "The choice confronting the United States is to support the French in Indochina or to face the extension of communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly farther westward." Accordingly, he recommended that 15 million dollars be reserved from the Section 303 fund to finance the beginnings of a military aid program for Indochina, plus 10 million dollars for Thailand. President Truman approved on 10 March 1950.

In all discussions with France over the possibilities of American arms aid, the United States continued to emphasize the fact that a political solution was essential to military success. France was amazed that the United States insisted upon discussing future Vietnamese independence from France when Vietnamese independence from Communism was at stake.

In Washington, machinery was devised to handle a long term, coordinated aid program for Southeast Asia. On the policy level, the Southeast Asia Aid Committee, proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March, was established. In June its name was changed to the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee (SEAAPC). SEAAPC was charged with coordinating general policy for political, economic, and military assistance to Southeast Asian countries. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) attached to the American Legation in Saigon was to screen French requests and oversee distribution of the material once it

arrived. MAAG Indochina would work closely with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and use screening criteria drafted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, early in June, proposed that the 15 million dollars already earmarked for expenditure in Indochina be augmented by an additional 16 million dollars for equipment, supplies. They further advised that, of all Asian aid Indochina should have first priority.

During the first half of 1950, the decisions reached and actions taken by the Western Powers and the Soviet bloc with regard to Indochina lent an international significance to the Indochinese war. The American-led coalition was arrayed behind France to free Indochina, and thereby Southeast Asia, from the threat of Communist subversion and eventual domination. The recognition of Bao Dai's government by the United States and other powers of the free world cleared the way for the American decision to grant military assistance to France and the Associated States. Recognition of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam by the Communist world presaged similar aid agreements with the Viet Minh. When, in June 1950, the Korean Conflict put a new complexion on the Cold War, a world power alignment had already congealed in Indochina.

Although the prospect of large quantities of American arms encouraged a new determination and hope of success among French and Vietnamese forces, the introduction of Soviet and Chinese Communist equipment to Viet Minh troops vastly improved Ho Chi Minh's ability to wage modern war. By June 1950, intelligence estimates indicated that Communist China and the DRV had agreed upon a general plan for Chinese aid. Reinforcing this fact, the intelligence sources discovered that during March 1950 alone Viet Minh forces received from China 52,000 rifles, together with a quantity of automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery pieces. The makings of a major buildup were perceived in the development of a supply corridor from China through northern Tonkin to central Annam.

The arms shipments already reaching the Viet Minh and soon to reach the French would transform the struggle from a war against guerrilla bands into a modern war of considerable proportions, and make settlement in the near future a virtual impossibility. By their acceptance of external assistance, both France and the Viet Minh were committed to a war without compromise for some time to come. By June 1950 Indochina had become a battleground in world politics.

CHAPTER VIII FROM THE START OF THE KOREAN CONFLICT TO 1 JANUARY 1951

The outbreak of the Korean Conflict on 24 June 1950 was an event of profound significance for the Indochina problem. Since 1947 the importance of the struggle for Southeast Asia had been largely obscured in the eyes of the United States Government by the overriding necessity to meet the Communist threat in Western Europe. Now, just when the outlines of that struggle were becoming clear they were again overshadowed by a major armed clash in the Far East. From the day that the Communist armies burst across the 38th parallel till the hour of the Armistice, more than three years later, the attention of the American people was focused on Korea. To the American Government, and especially to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the demands of the Korean battle were more immediately important than those of the war in Indochina.

On 27 June 1950 President Truman, in announcing the intervention of American armed forces in Korea, also announced that he had "directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces." The first result of this policy was the approval of the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to increase the MDAP aid programmed for Indochina by 16 million dollars, bringing the total military aid for Indochina from Fiscal Year 1950 funds to 31 million dollars.

Although the aid program was somewhat slow at the start, supplies soon began to make their way, by sea and air, to Saigon. On 30 June eight C-47 1 s, loaded with spare parts, arrived in the Indochinese capital. The Director, Office of Military Assistance (OMA), reported that on 31 July Army equipment for twelve Indochinese battalions was afloat, consigned to the High Military Committee of the Army of the French Union. A French aircraft carrier was scheduled to take on forty F6F aircraft in California in September while another French ship was expected to depart the United States in the near future with eighteen LCVP's, six LSSLIs and other mixed cargo. The first shipment of infantry equipment arrived in Saigon on 10 August.

During the latter half of 1950 the military position of the French forces in Indochina was growing constantly worse. The estimates of the Survey Mission and the Joint Intelligence Committee concerning the dangerous increase in Viet Minh offensive capabilities and intentions were borne out in a dramatic fashion in actions along the northeast Tonkin border.

Development of U.S. Policy toward Indochina, July-December 1950

At the time of the outbreak of the Korean Conflict American policy toward Indochina was that set forth in NSC 64 and NSC 48/2. There was general agreement among the governmental agencies concerned that the peninsula, and especially Tonkin, provided the keystone of the Southeast Asian arch without which the free nations in that area would crumble. There was also a general agreement that everything possible must be done to maintain Indochina, although with its forces tied down in Korea the United States would have to confine itself to providing military aid in the form of munitions and equipment.

CHAPTER IX - FROM 1 JANUARY 1951 TO 11 JANUARY 1952

During 1951 the French military position in Indochina showed a definite, but not constant, improvement. In November the French Commander undertook a limited, though not particularly well-considered, offensive southwest of Hanoi.

Political Situation in Viet Nam during 1951 The general improvement in the military situation in Indochina during 1951 brought no corresponding development in Vietnamese internal political affairs. The basic problem continued to be lack of public support for the Bao Dai government and for the struggle against Ho Chi Minh. Behind the antipathy and indifference of the natives lay their unabated dislike of the French colonial officials, who seldom relaxed their resistance to the reforms dictated from Paris, or ceased to interfere in the internal affairs of Viet Nam. Bao Dai could not shake off the label that identified his regime with French policies and his new army with the French High Command. It is not inexplicable, therefore, that the Vietnamese National Army failed to capture the imagination and loyalty of the people.

Although in 1951 the French thought that they discerned an important change in the United States Government's attitude toward the Indochina War, there was actually little modification of the basic policies laid down in the preceding year.

CHAPTER X -- FROM JANUARY 1952 TO THE END OF THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION

The year 1952 saw little progress in the struggle in Indochina. On neither the political front, nor on the military, did the French and Vietnamese achieve an important victory. On neither did they suffer an important defeat. At the end of the year the situation in Viet Nam was a little better in some respects, a little worse in others. Yet, although the anti-Communist forces had been able to "hold their own," the free world's prospects of victory in that area actually declined. The French and the loyal Vietnamese were in a position where, if they did not go forward, they had to slide backward.

Time was on the side of the Communists. This is not to say that the Viet Minh forces were growing so fast that they would soon be able to crush the French. They were not. The French and Vietnamese regular troops constantly outnumbered the Viet Minh regulars. They had superior equipment. They were supported by air and naval forces to which the rebels could offer little active opposition. In addition, they held well-fortified positions that could not be easily overrun. But in France itself the people and the government were becoming more and more weary of a war that seemed to drag on without end. There were increasingly numerous indications that if the war could not be won quickly in Indochina it might be lost in France. And the war was not being won.

Development of American Policy toward Indochina

This period witnessed the development of four important trends in the Indochinese war as it affected United States policy.

Firstly, Washington was taking its place with Paris and Saigon as a center of political and military strategic planning for the war. For not only was the vital military aid program determined in the United States capital; increasingly numerous conferences between American, British, and French officials concerning the situation in Southeast Asia were held there.

Secondly, the United States Government was being drawn into closer and closer cooperation, on a high military level, with the British and French on the problems of the area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, fearing that this tendency might lead to a combined command of some sort, or to increased American responsibility in the Indochinese conflict, sometimes protested against it, though with little success.

Thirdly, the threat of Chinese Communist intervention was beginning to dwarf other factors in the Southeast Asian picture, especially for the French, who seemed obsessed with this danger.

Finally, France itself was beginning to crack under the triple burden of the Indochinese war, European rearmament, and the chronic instability of its own government. Although this trend was by no means ignored in United States planning, its rapid progress leading to the Geneva settlement was not generally foreseen.

Progress of the Fighting in Spring and Summer, 1952

The Viet Minh attacks against the French position at Hoa Binh had been accompanied by extensive infiltration of the Tonkin Delta area. In February, when the French evacuated Hoa Binh, this infiltration grew to serious proportions and occasioned the heaviest fighting since 1950. With considerable success the

French employed mobile units against the Viet Minh forces within the delta perimeter and by July had restored the area to a relatively calm condition. In the process they reportedly crippled one Viet Minh division and inflicted severe losses on some other units, thus reducing the capabilities of the rebels, and also their morale, for several months.

The Development of NSC 124/2

The initial draft of the new policy toward Southeast Asia, NSC 124, was submitted by the NSC staff on 13 February 1952. Insofar as it applied to Indochina, it was directed more toward countering a possible invasion by the Chinese Communists than toward helping the French and Vietnamese to win their struggle in Tonkin. Furthermore, the measures recommended for use in the event of overt Communist aggression were tied either to the framework of the United Nations or to joint action with the British and French.

In their official comments on the NSC draft the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that in recent conferences the British and French had shown themselves opposed to even the concept of military action against China other than in an area of aggression. But without military measures directed against China itself the local defense of Indochina would have, in the Chiefs opinion, no reasonable chance of success. Therefore, unless the National Security Council could give assurance that at least the British and French would agree to such measures, the new policy should provide for unilateral action by the United States to save Southeast Asia.

What the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted was a political decision by the National Security Council on whether or not the United States Government, in order to save Southeast Asia from Communism, was willing to take military actions that would, in effect, constitute war against Communist China.

There ensued several months of discussion and negotiations between the Departments of State and Defense and the NSC staff. Finally, on 25 June, President Truman approved a revision of NSC 124 - which, as NSC 124/2, included the first comprehensive United States policy toward Indochina. In NSC 124/2 the United States Government recognized that the primary threat to Southeast Asia lay in the possible deterioration of the situation in Indochina as a result of the French and Associated States Governments weakening in their resolve to continue, or becoming unable to continue opposing the Viet. Minh rebellion. It also recognized that the successful defense of Tonkin was "critical" to the retention in non-Communist hands of mainland Southeast Asia. For the purpose of holding the entire area, NSC 124/2 provided that: With respect to Southeast Asia, the United States should:

- a. Strengthen propaganda and cultural activities, as appropriate, in relation to the area to foster increased alignment of the people with the free world.

- b. Continue, as appropriate, programs of economic and technical assistance designed to strengthen the indigenous noncommunist governments of the area.
- c. Encourage the countries of Southeast Asia to restore and expand their commerce with each other and with the rest of the *free* world, and stimulate the flow of the raw material resources of the area to the free world.
- d. Seek agreement with other nations, including at least France, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, for a joint warning to Communist China regarding the grave consequences of Chinese aggression against Southeast Asia.
- e. Seek UK and French agreement in principle that a naval blockade of Communist China should be included in the minimum courses of action
- f. Continue to encourage and support closer cooperation among the countries of Southeast Asia, and between those countries and the United States, Great Britain, France, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia and Japan.
- g. Strengthen, as appropriate, covert operations designed to assist in the achievement of U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia.
- h. Continue activities and operations designed to encourage the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia to organize and activate anti-communist groups and activities within their own communities.
- i. Take measures to promote the coordinated defense of the area, and encourage and support the spirit of resistance among the peoples of Southeast Asia to Chinese Communist aggression and to the encroachments of local communists.
- j. Make clear to the American people the importance of Southeast Asia to the security of the United States so that they may be prepared for any of the courses of action proposed herein.

With respect to Indochina the United States should:

- a. Continue to promote international support for the three Associated States.
- b. Continue to assure the French that the regards the French effort in Indochina as one of great strategic importance in the general international interest rather than in the purely French interest, and as essential to the security of the free world, not only in the Far East but in the Middle East and Europe as well.
- c. Continue to assure the French that we are cognizant of the sacrifices entailed for France in carrying out her effort in Indochina and that, without overlooking the principle that France has the primary responsibility in Indochina, we will recommend to the Congress appropriate military, economic and financial aid to France and the Associated States.
- d. Continue to cultivate friendly and increasingly cooperative relations with the Governments of France and the Associated States at all levels with a

view to maintaining and, if possible, increasing the degree of influence the U.S. can bring to bear on the policies and actions of the French and Indochinese authorities to the end of directing the course of events toward the objectives we seek. Our influence with the French and Associated States should be designed to further those constructive political, economic and social measures which will tend to increase the stability of the Associated States and thus make it possible for the French to reduce the degree of their participation in the military, economic and political affairs of the Associated States.

e. Specifically we should use our influence with France and the Associated States to promote positive political, military, economic and social policies.

In the absence of large scale Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina, the United States should:

- a. Provide increased aid on a high priority basis for the French Union forces without relieving French authorities of their basic military responsibility for the defense of the Associated States in order to:
 - (1) Assist in developing indigenous armed forces which will eventually be capable of maintaining internal security without assistance from French units.
 - (2) Assist the French Union forces to maintain progress in the restoration of internal security against the Viet Minh.
 - (3) Assist the forces of France and the Associated States to defend Indochina against Chinese Communist aggression.
- b. In view of the immediate urgency of the situation, involving possible large-scale Chinese Communist intervention, and in order that the United States may be prepared to take whatever action may be appropriate in such circumstances, make the necessary plans.
- c. In the event that information and circumstances point to the conclusion that France is no longer prepared to carry the burden in Indochina, or if France presses for an increased sharing of the responsibility for Indochina, whether in the UN or directly with the U.S. Government, oppose a French withdrawal and consult with the French and British concerning further measures to be taken to safeguard the area from communist domination.

Undoubtedly the promulgation of NSC 124/2 was the most important development in United States policy toward Indochina in 1952.

Development of the Aid Program during 1952

Throughout 1952 United States equipment supplied under MDAP passed in a steady stream over the docks of Saigon and Haiphong. A monthly average of approximately 21,300 measurement tons of end items were shipped, exclusive of aircraft and vessels delivered under their own power. The monetary value of this materiel was approximately \$171,100,000. These deliveries brought the total of end items shipped to Indochina between June 1950 and 31 December 1952 to 539,847 measurement tons with a value of \$334,700,000. As of the end of 1952 the total value of MDAP material programmed under the budgets for Fiscal Years 1950-1953 had risen to \$775,700,000.

Assessment of MDAP in 1952

Although the handling of the MDA Program still left something to be desired, the United States, by the end of 1952, had given the French in Indochina equipment for ground, naval, and air forces far superior to that in the hands of the Viet Minh. Despite the hampering of air operations by shortages of planes and spare parts it would be difficult to support a contention that French forces would have done much better had those shortages not existed. What seemed to be needed most in Indochina, and what the United States did not offer under MDAP, was guts. This is not to say that the French were cowards on the battlefield. On the contrary, their officers and men conducted themselves bravely in action. But they were not so brave at the planning board, partly, perhaps, because they felt they were not being well-supported at home.

The French Home Front Begins to Crack

Throughout 1952 France's allies were disturbed by symptoms of weakening in her determination to carry on the war. These symptoms were appearing not only in expressions of public opinion, but in parliamentary debates and even in statements by government officials. The number of Frenchmen, including politicians, who opposed the war seemed to be growing constantly. They based their position chiefly on four arguments.

Firstly, they pointed to the drain on the French treasury and the resultant effect on France's economic condition in general.

Secondly, they held that France could not afford any longer the losses of manpower represented by the casualties in her armed forces (the French claimed 90,000 excluding Vietnamese, between 1945 and 1 October 1952).

Thirdly, maintaining the bulk of the French Army in Indochina was holding up the development of French forces for NATO and delaying the establishment of an adequate defense organization in Europe.

Finally, they argued that the prospect of German rearmament demanded the recall to France of the forces in Indochina. Otherwise, Germany would become militarily strong while France remained weak in Europe.

CHAPTER XI - THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

During 1953, while America's material support for the Indochinese war reached ever higher levels, the United States took on a large new commitment for financial aid to the French cause. It did so to give every advantage and encouragement to a program of French military operations that seemed to offer real hope of bringing the Indochina affair to a decisive conclusion. American officials acted also in awareness that the present opportunity was probably their last chance to sustain a positive French effort. The resolute support given by the incumbent French Government contrasted disturbingly with the steadily declining willingness of the French public to make further sacrifices.

Main Features of the U.S. Aid Program

During 1953 the United States continued and enlarged its deliveries of arms, ammunition, and equipment to the French and native forces in Indochina, on a first priority basis. Scheduled deliveries of ground force and naval materials were met with increasing regularity, and as the Air Force supply pipeline filled, even the persistent shortages of aircraft spare parts and maintenance equipment began to yield before the massive American effort. In January 1953 the French themselves were willing to state that no ground unit had failed to meet its activation date because of lack of MDAP equipment. By that date, too, the U.S. material aid program had worked a transformation of the French Air Force in Indochina from a conglomerate assortment of German, French and American aircraft, generally of World War II models, into a reasonably standardized organization with modern equipment of propeller-driven types.

No lessening of the momentum of the American aid program was in sight. The appropriations made by Congress in 1953 exceeded the previous year and allowed the assignment of 312.3 million dollars for end-item assistance to Indochina during Fiscal Year 1954, plus 30 million dollars to be expended under the Military Support Program. In addition, Congress appropriated an unprecedented 400 million dollars for direct financial assistance to France. the American aid program appeared in good order. By 31 October 1953 obligation of the funds provided for Fiscal Year 1954 had begun and just short of 75 per cent of the material programmed under the MDAP budgets for Fiscal Years 1950-1953 had been shipped. The monetary value of all items delivered to Indochina

stood at 674 million dollars; deliveries during the first ten months of 1953 had accounted for nearly 44 per cent of the cumulative total.

CHAPTER XII - 19 NOVEMBER 1953 - 14 JANUARY 1954

With the opening of the 1953-1954 fighting season French Union Forces in Indochina undertook to seize the initiative from the Viet Minh Army. Concurrently, the French were employing all available military and diplomatic channels to seek increased American material support. Washington, entirely aware that time was running out, was much occupied with satisfying the French needs, but also devoted attention to the problem of redrafting American policy toward Southeast Asia. The provision of material aid in 1953-1954 was conditioned by three requirements which the United States had placed on the French in the early fall. These were:

- (1) perfection of the political and economic independence of the Associated States
- (2) adoption of a plan for dynamic military action
- (3) expansion and training of indigenous armies

French Union Forces on 20 November 1953 launched operation CASTOR to seize control of the Dien Bien Phu basin in mountainous western Tonkin, near the Laotian border. Although the objective was to consolidate a strong position from which to interdict supply routes when the Viet Minh made its annual incursion into Laos, selection of the site was dictated by the need for an airstrip. Happily, the Japanese had established a pierced-steel planked runway at Dien Bien Phu during World War II.

15 JANUARY-15 MARCH 1954

The United States Government had to persuade France that it would be disastrous to open negotiations with the Communists before improving her military position in Indochina. Moreover, America had to provide the wherewithal for France to make such improvements. The new statement of policy toward Southeast Asia, NSC 5405, had reaffirmed that the United States would furnish the French all aid short of actual military participation and would even consider direct military support if the Chinese Communists intervened.

At a White House meeting on 16 January 1954, the President, Secretary of State Dulles and several Department of Defense generals discussed what the United States should do about Indochina. The group recognized that a major problem arose from French reluctance to accept American assistance in training native soldiers and in improving the conduct of operations. At the end of discussion, President Eisenhower appointed a Special Committee to develop a detailed

program for securing military and political victory without United States overt participation in the war.

On 21 January, the French command in Saigon was pleading for immediate help. Viet Minh forces surrounding Dien Bien Phu were expected to attack soon. To counter either course the High Command needed aircraft and personnel.

On 18 February 1954, it was announced that the five powers and other countries that had participated in Korean hostilities would meet in Geneva on 26 April for the purpose of reaching a peaceful settlement of the Korean question. The four Foreign Ministers further agreed "that the problem of restoring peace in Indochina will also be discussed at the conference, to which representatives of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Chinese People's Republic, and other interested states will be invited.

The prospects of going to Geneva to negotiate a settlement were indeed welcomed by the French National Assembly when it debated Indochina on 5 March 1954.

CHAPTER XIV - PRELUDE TO GENEVA 15 MARCH-7 MAY 1954

Against its best interests the United States had acceded at Berlin to French demands that the Geneva Conference discuss the Indochinese question. The problem then became one of preparing France for the diplomatic struggle awaiting her. The only method likely to bolster the French at the bargaining table was to concentrate on actions to strengthen the French Union's military position in Indochina.

The Americans made a concerted effort to convince the French that the highroad to victory would open before them if they would only allow the United States to increase its aid in training, planning, and unconventional warfare. Even while America was attempting to persuade the French to accept help, the political climate in France and the military situation in Indochina were deteriorating rapidly. The will to fight is a thing of the heart, and the French had no heart for the fight.

The United States, therefore, had to decide whether it should commit its own military forces and under what conditions intervention should take place. The agreement to discuss peace for Indochina at Geneva was a signal to the Viet Minh to improve its military position. General Giap directed his forces to strike vital communications lines between Hanoi and Haiphong, to attack the main French airfields in the Tonkin Delta, and to cut the Savannakhet-Quang Tri highway in Laos. At the same time, Viet Minh irregulars in southern Viet Nam stepped up guerrilla operations .

During the night of 13-14 March the Viet Minh launched the long-expected assault on Dien Bien Phu. Concentrating on one sector at a time, General Giap sent two regiments against the northern and northeastern French positions, each held by one French Union battalion. Employing horde tactics, the Viet Minh forces overran the first French battalion outpost shortly after midnight. Two days later the Viet Minh battle corps captured the second position. Although the French managed to drop two battalions of paratroops to replace personnel losses, they were not able to recover the two lost redoubts. With the capture of these positions the Viet Minh forces threatened directly the airfield upon which the entire isolated fortress depended.

At the end of March General Giap's troops assaulted the main bastions of the fortress. By 3 April they had reduced the French stronghold to a triangle with sides of about 2,500 yards, and had captured the northern side of the airfield, making it extremely difficult for the French command to reinforce and supply the fortress, even by parachute.

CHAPTER XV - THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

When the Indochinese phase of the Geneva Conference opened on 8 May 1954, the main outlines of America's task during the critical days to come were reasonably clear. The French had to be supported, as much as they themselves and harsh reality would permit. There were three areas in which United States support could be effective: at the conference table, in Indochina, and on the international scene.

The nature of the problem was such that support could not be unqualified. What was, in spite of its gravity, largely a matter of internal affairs to France, was to the United States a major move in its global strategy. There was the risk that in holding France's chin above the quicksand, America might become inextricably mired in a series of commitments inimical to her own national interests. The position of the United States at Geneva was, from the start, difficult and delicate.

The difficulty sprang from the magnitude of the material, psychological and moral changes the United States wished France and the Associated States to accomplish in order to meet its minimum conditions for really effective support and participation; the delicacy lay in convincing them without alienating them. On the eve of the conference, Ambassador Dillon cabled from Paris that, since the U.S. Government had been unable to respond to French requests for military assistance to save Dien Bien Phu, the only available course now was to support fully negotiation of the best possible settlement at Geneva.

French Armistice Proposal and U.S. Reaction

At its meeting of 8 May, the Security Council decided that the United States ought not to associate itself with any proposal, from any source, directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement under international controls.

The Security Council was also informed by the Secretary of State that he intended to indicate to the French Government the willingness of the United States to discuss at any time the conditions under which the Indochinese conflict might be internationalized. The French had already been advised that American intervention depended upon their fulfillment of three prerequisites: real independence for the Associated States, an aggressive military plan, and an effective program for the training of native troops. In explaining the Administration's position on intervention to leading members of Congress on 5 May, Mr. Dulles stated that the prerequisites had not been fulfilled and that, therefore, conditions did not exist for a successful conclusion of the war. Under these circumstances, intervention was not advisable and, in any event, the United States would not intervene unless other interested nations joined in.

The tentative French proposals, not yet authorized by their Cabinet, were better than had been expected. They took the line that the problem of Viet Nam was purely Vietnamese, with no question of partition, and that it was only a military struggle for control of the government. Laos and Cambodia were placed in a totally different category, as victims of external aggression. According to the Berlin Agreement, the purpose of the Geneva Conference was to establish peace in all three countries. To this end, there should be a cease-fire guaranteed by adequate military and administrative controls under supervision.

The comments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were even more somber. They thought the French proposal would be regarded by the people of Asia as a Communist victory, particularly in the light of the then-current military situation. In their opinion, an armistice under the proposed conditions would lead to a political stalemate attended by progressive deterioration of the French-Vietnamese military position, ultimately resulting in the loss of Indochina to the Communists.

The Joint Chiefs reasoned that even if the Communists were to agree to undertake negotiations pursuant to the French proposals, such negotiations could be expected to result either in rapid capitulation of the French to obtain a cease-fire, or in a protracted wrangle characterized by steadfast Communist adherence to an inflexible position on important issues and by concessions by the French. Judging from past performance, the Joint Chiefs were skeptical that the Communists would enter into a preliminary agreement to refrain from new military operations during the course of negotiations. It was more likely that they would intensify their operations to improve their bargaining position, whereas the French would be under a strong compulsion to avoid casualties.

Conditions for American Intervention

The obvious answer to Geneva was American military intervention, but the French seemed to dread the cure fully as much, if not more, than the complaint. Twice during April the French Government had sought American intervention to save Dien Bien Phu and twice had shown itself unwilling to pay the going price - independence for the Associated States and allied, rather than U.S. unilateral, participation in the war.

United States Strategy in the Far East

In the grand strategy of the United States for developing a position of military strength in the Far East, fostering the growth of the military forces of the Associated States and other non-Communist countries in the Orient was second in importance only to building up the war potential of Japan, Korea and Nationalist China. Indigenous military power was the heart of America's prime objective in the East: to develop the purpose and capability of the non-Communist countries to act collectively and effectively in opposing the threat of Communism.

The Viet Minh Terms

The Viet Minh's terms were victor's terms, and they were hard. Either openly or by implication they demanded every concession the United States had sworn was unacceptable. The Viet Minh presented its proposal for the re-establishment of peace in Indochina at the second plenary session of the Geneva Conference on 11 May. The rest of the conference consisted of the vain thrashings of the hooked victim as the Viet Minh steadily reeled in the line. The terms are sufficiently important to be set out in full:

1. Recognition by France of the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam and also of the sovereignty and independence of Khmer and Pathet Lao.
2. Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory of Vietnam, Khmer and Pathet Lao within the time-limits to be agreed upon between the belligerents.
3. Holding of free general elections in Vietnam, Khmer and Pathet Lao.
4. The belligerent sides undertake not to prosecute persons who collaborated with the other side during the war.
5. Carrying out mutual exchange of prisoners of war.

When asked by reporters whether the Viet Minh armistice proposal was acceptable to the United States, Mr. Dulles replied that it was certainly unacceptable in its totality. It followed the same pattern applied in the past to Germany, Austria, and Korea; namely, to compel withdrawal of the forces that sustain free society and to set up a system under which the Communists can grab the whole area.

When the diplomats at Geneva formally agreed on 21 July 1954 to partition Viet Nam, the Defense Department immediately suspended all shipments of materiel to Indochina, and diverted all shipments en route to Indochina to Japan and Title III countries.

The situation was serious, yet, in the words of the Department of Defense representative at Geneva, it was no better or no worse than could be expected "under existing circumstances wherein French unable and/or unwilling pursue war to military conclusion, and in light of United States decision apparently made some time ago that it would not intervene militarily to save Indochina from Communist encroachment.

CONCLUSIONS

Why was it that a small and seemingly insignificant insurgent movement was able to defeat a major power of Western Europe? One obvious reason was the formidable fighting qualities of the Viet Minh soldier, combined with the ability and ruthlessness of his leadership. But a number of other factors played equal or more important parts in thwarting France's postwar ambitions in Indochina.

For example, it would be fair to say that France's gross mishandling of the political side of the conflict played directly into the hands of the communists. The French Government and its representatives in Vietnam never conceded to that country the political sovereignty upon which a viable national government could be based. Had the French at any time between 1946 and 1951 conferred upon a noncommunist Vietnamese Government the degree of independence contemplated in the treaty negotiations of early 1954, the outcome might have been entirely different. But any Vietnamese regime depended upon the sufferance and support of French colonial administrators could not satisfy the aspirations of Vietnamese nationalism. Political concessions came "too little and too late," and leadership of the independence movement passed into the hands of Ho Chi Minh and his communist colleagues.

Another important factor in the Viet Minh victory in 1954 was the conquest of China by the communists under Mao Tse-Tung. The insurgents in Vietnam thus acquired a powerful base of support - an "inviolable sanctuary," such as has proved necessary for the success of most (though not all) guerrilla movements in modern times. Chinese assistance in materiel and training aided the conversion of guerrilla units into an army able to fight French regulars on equal terms. Moreover, the constant threat of overt Chinese intervention, though it never materialized, helped to paralyze the French high command.

Still another important element of defeat was the general weakness - political, economic, and military - of France after World War II. Unstable governments lacked the strength and self-confidence to make the concessions necessary to grant independence to the Associated States.

Beginning in 1950 the United States undertook to supply France with materiel resources that, it was hoped, would provide the margin of victory. The aid program for Indochina had to compete with those for other countries (especially Western Europe) and with the demands of the Korean War.

By the time the Eisenhower Administration came into office, the deterioration of the Indochina situation was obvious. Unless the military stalemate could be broken, growing French disgust for the war would force France to seek a settlement on almost any terms. For the first time, US intervention began to be seriously considered. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pressed for a decision on the matter, but for the moment, the Administration merely enlarged the scale of the aid program.

By the time of the Berlin Foreign Ministers' Conference in 1954, it was clear that the public demand for a peace settlement could no longer be resisted by the French Government. The United States still sought to induce France to carry the war to victory. But it was clear that undue pressure on France might alienate public opinion in that country and jeopardize the status of negotiations for the European Defense Community. Necessarily, therefore, the United States agreed to the convening of the Geneva Conference.

During the weeks that followed the Berlin meeting, the French political and military situation continued to deteriorate. Viet Minh forces, seeking to improve their bargaining position, opened an attack against the exposed French outpost of Dien Bien Phu, which had attained a symbolic importance out of all proportion to its military value. The fall of this bastion, on the eve of the discussion of Indochina at Geneva, was a shattering blow to France's diplomatic position.

The one remaining hope of retrieving the situation was through the use of US military forces in Indochina. This grave step was weighed both before the Geneva Conference and while it was in session, by the President and the National Security Council. President Eisenhower proceeded with great caution, making it clear that if any intervention were to take place, it must be based on a sound political foundation, including international support. When it became evident that this support would not be forthcoming, there was no choice for the United States but to acquiesce in the peace terms worked out at Geneva.

SUMMARY OF THE AID PROGRAM

Between the outbreak of the Indochinese war in 1946 and the close of the Geneva Conference in the summer of 1954 France spent a total of 7 billion dollars to prosecute the war. The American contribution to the French war effort, begun in the spring of 1950 with an allocation of 15 million dollars, had mounted to a total of 2.7 billion dollars by July 1954. Almost half of this amount was spent in Fiscal Year 1954 alone. Thus the financial cost of the Indochinese war from 1946 to 1954 amounted to almost 10 billion dollars.

Perhaps a better conception of the magnitude of American help to France and the Associated States can be obtained from a survey of equipment actually delivered in the four years during which MDAP operated in Indochina. When the United States entered the picture in 1950 French Union Forces were indifferently armed with largely obsolescent World War II equipment. Long and hard usage in the humid climate of Indochina, together with improper and inadequate maintenance, had made much of this equipment nearly unserviceable. Between 1950 and 1954 the French and native troops were almost completely re-equipped with modern weapons and vehicles.

During this period French Union ground troops received under MDAP 1,880 tanks and combat vehicles, 30,887 motor transport vehicles, 361,522 small arms and machine guns, and 5,045 artillery pieces. Spare parts and maintenance apparatus for these items were likewise supplied. The United States also furnished a continuing supply of ammunition, and during the four-year period shipped over 500 million rounds of small arms ammunition, and over 10 million artillery shells.

The French Navy received 438 vessels, mostly small patrol craft and landing ships, together with seventy naval aircraft. Two World War II aircraft carriers (CVL) were transferred to the French Navy for Indochina service.

The French Air Force, flying a few worn-out World War II planes in 1950, was developed into a comparatively strong, modern Air Force. A total of 394 Hellcat fighters, B-26 bombers, and C-47 cargo planes were transported to the French Air Force in Indochina.

The Fiscal Years 1950-1952 programs alone provided equipment for three French infantry divisions, six Vietnamese divisions, four Laotian and five Cambodian infantry battalions.

By the middle of 1952 the French Air Force had made important gains in the process of expansion and modernization. It already operated four fighter squadrons equipped with F8F and F6F naval fighter planes, two light bombardment squadrons flying B-26 bombers, and three squadrons of transport

planes. The latter as yet had not been completely modernized, and consisted of mixed C-47 and German JU-52 transports.

By the spring of 1954, however, the French Army in Indochina consisted of fifty infantry battalions, eighteen AAA battalions, and four armored battalions largely equipped by the United States. The new and growing Vietnamese native army had twenty-nine infantry battalions, twenty-seven light infantry battalions, and two AAA battalions almost entirely equipped through MDAP. The French Air Force now possessed 140 F8F fighters, fifty-five B-26 bombers, 106 C-47 cargo planes, and 164 M0500 light liaison planes for observation and medical evacuation, all furnished through American aid. The French naval air arm operated sixteen F8F fighters, twelve SB2C Helldivers, twenty-five Corsair fighters, eight Privateers for reconnaissance work, and nine Grumman Goose scout planes.