

**A STUDY OF UNITED STATES
POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND
DIPLOMATIC INVOLVEMENT
WITH VIET-NAM DURING THE
EISENHOWER ERA 1953 - 1961**

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A STUDY OF UNITED STATES POLITICAL, MILITARY,
AND DIPLOMATIC INVOLVEMENT WITH VIET-NAM
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by
Wayne C. Hall, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Viet-Nam has haunted the peace-makers for over twenty years. It was in the beginning an expression of a captive people who desired a loosening of the shackles of colonialism. During the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, the United States State Department began to see the conflict in Indo-China as a part of the larger international Communist conspiracy for domination of the world.

Chief proponent of the conspiracy theory was John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State for President Eisenhower. Secretary Dulles feared the Communists in Indo-China, particularly after the invasion of South Korea in 1950 by the North Korean Communists. He immediately set about to create a policy that would contain the Reds within their present boundaries and deter them from further encroachment in Southeast Asia.

The Secretary of State's first Indo-China policy encouraged the French to fight on in Indo-China, with massive United States military aid, until the forces of Ho Chi Minh were either deterred or contained. With the fall of the French fortress at Dien Bien Phu, the first phase of Dulles' diplomacy came to a conclusion.

The next step in Mr. Dulles' numerous strategies was the proposed military intervention by United States air, naval, and combat troops in defense of democracy in Indo-China. This particular proposal in early 1954 has since become the most controversial portion of Dulles' diplomacy. Because of domestic politics as well as allied reluctance to enter into a new hot war in South Asia, Secretary Dulles was stymied once again.

The final phase of Secretary Dulles' Indo-China policy found the State Department actively supporting the autocratic regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem's refusal to institute domestic reforms and his failure to carry out provisions of the Geneva Agreements for free general elections in Viet-Nam were symbolic of his quest for a permanent division of that troubled country.

The autocratic practices of Diem's government soon proved to be an embarrassment to the United States in many ways, but the State Department had painted itself into a corner where honorable and reasonable escape was virtually impossible without the loss of Southeast Asia to either Communism or nationalism.

This choice of ideologies presented no conflict to the mind of Secretary Dulles. Despite neutralist pleas to leave Asia to the Asians, he chartered a course oblivious

to Asiatic desires for self-determination. The Manila Pact, signed in September 1954, was notable for the absence of signatories who were most able to lead Southeast Asia away from Communism to a troubled but hopefully successful marriage with nationalism.

In historical perspective, some authorities have found the origins of the massive United States military involvement in Viet-Nam under Kennedy and Johnson in the original Indo-China policy of Dulles. The Secretary of State feared the Communists and many of his decisions were colored by this unabated anxiety. The product was a series of decisions characterized by contradiction, reaction, and idealism.

Underlying the product of his diplomacy was the inflexible ideology that the United States must do everything within her power to circumvent the Communist strategy. In this process, the Secretary of State alienated United States allies, confused the American electorate, created a credibility gap between himself and Congress, and committed the nation to a massively wasteful military aid program in South Viet-Nam.

A STUDY OF UNITED STATES POLITICAL, MILITARY,
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A Thesis
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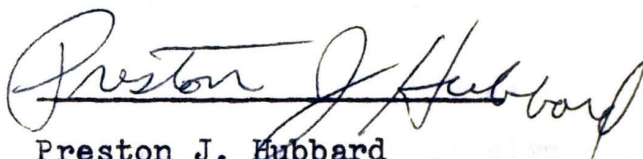
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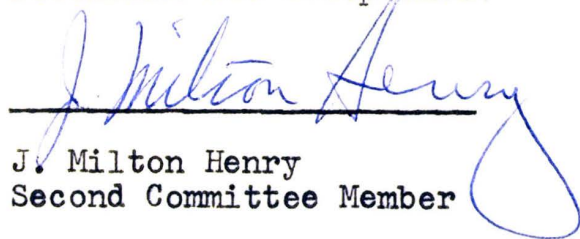
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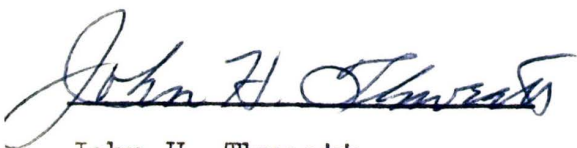


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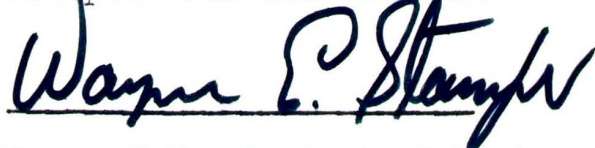


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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT 1945-1952

The Potsdam Agreements of July 1945 stipulated that the portion of Indo-China now known as Viet-Nam would be occupied in the north by Chiang Kai-shek of China and in the south by Great Britain. "A precise line of demarcation was defined: south of latitude sixteen degrees North, South-East Asia Command was responsible, and north of that line the Chinese. Thus a precedent for the partitioning of Indo-China was established."¹

As agreed at Potsdam, British action was confined to the south of Indo-China. In the north, the Chinese were in occupation and under their patronage, the Viet-Minh and Ho Chi Minh established a firm grip on much of the countryside.² The assigned mission was to round up Japanese troops and release Allied war prisoners. Free France, still reorganizing after the collapse of the collaborationist Vichy government, was temporarily bypassed in the Potsdam Agreements. The British, however, short of sufficient troops to carry out

¹Documents Relating to British Involvement in the Indo-China Conflict, 1945-1965, Cmd. 2834, Miscellaneous No. 25, Her Majesty's Stationery Office; 1965, p. 6, cited by Elaine Burnell, Mission to Hanoi (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1968), p. 203.

²Ibid., p. 205.

their mission, used both Japanese and Vichy French troops in pursuing their duties. This action led General Douglas MacArthur to comment: "If there is anything that makes my blood boil, it is to see our Allies in Indo-China... deploying Japanese troops to reconquer the little people we promised to liberate. It is the most ignoble kind of betrayal."³

The commanding officer of British Occupation Forces chose to ignore limitations imposed by the Potsdam mandate, allowing the French to reinstate themselves around Saigon. With British and Chinese Nationalist departure, the remaining French troops reestablished their previous power structure in northern and southern portions of the countryside. American diplomatic reaction to the slowly evolving situation was of a negative nature as early as 1945 if the following letter is a true indication of American diplomatic sentiment.

In my last conference with President Roosevelt... I told him that the French, British and Dutch were cooperating to prevent the establishment of a United Nations trusteeship for Indo-China.... The President said that in the coming San Francisco Conference there would be set up a United Nations Trusteeship that would make effective the right of colonial people to choose the form of government under which they will live as soon as in the opinion of the United Nations they are qualified for independence.⁴

³Edgar Snow, The Other Side of the River: Red China Today (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 686.

⁴Letter from Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley to President Harry S. Truman, May 28, 1945, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin, 1945. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 917, cited by Burnell, op. cit., p. 204.

On September 2, 1945, the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam issued its Declaration of Independence. Encouraged by support received during World War II from the American Office of Strategic Services and by President Roosevelt's interest in the self-determination of colonial peoples, Ho Chi Minh anticipated some measure of support for the Viet-Minh independence movement.⁵

Relations between the French and the Viet-Minh deteriorated into open conflict by the end of 1946. In order to attract Vietnamese nationalist support away from the Viet-Minh, France in 1949 set up an ostensibly autonomous regime with the former Annamese emperor Bao Dai as its executive; but real power was vested in French military and political leadership.

Bao Dai failed in his attempt to rally moderate nationalist support; it was felt in Vietnamese political circles that the country lacked true independence, and even though many ardent nationalists, including one Ngo Dinh Diem, had abandoned the Viet-Minh because of excessive dependence upon the Communist-led faction, there were others who regarded Ho Chi Minh, despite professed Communist principles, as the true representative of the nationalist movement in Viet-Nam.

⁵George McT. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1967), Appendix 1, p. 345.

It was evident from the beginning that there was no basis for an agreement between the Viet-Minh, intent on complete independence for all of Viet-Nam under a Communist regime, and the French, equally determined to retrieve something of their former colonial grandeur. A peace conference at Fontainebleau in July-August 1946 led to no positive results. On September 13, however, Ho Chi Minh signed a modus vivendi relating mainly to economic and cultural matters but including an undertaking by both parties to put an end to acts of hostility. Despite the agreement, sporadic clashes between French and Viet-Minh elements continued throughout Viet-Nam, and on November 23 a French bombardment of Haiphong, from whence Viet-Minh forces had refused to withdraw, inflicted heavy casualties on the civilian population. On the night of December 19 the Viet-Minh retaliated with a general attack against French posts and French-occupied houses in Hanoi, the capital of northern Viet-Nam, and a state of general civil war was inaugurated.⁶

Meanwhile by 1951, in response to Cold War events elsewhere, and particularly in Korea, the United States had developed a policy of hostility and opposition to new Communist regimes. This reformulation of American policy led eventually to an alignment with the French in their effort to

⁶Burnell, op. cit., p. 206.

reassert control over Indo-China. In relation to this matter President Harry Truman made the following comment.

The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war... Accordingly,... I have... directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indo-China and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces.⁷

For a multitude of reasons the United States had chosen to support a French colonial war in Indo-China. A partial explanation lies in the fact that there was no real alternative at the time; the U. S. chose to support those right-wing governments in France (those pursuing the Indo-Chinese War) because they in turn supported American policies directed toward the containment of Communism in Europe through the maintenance of a European Defense Community.⁸

During the final two years of the Truman Administration, 1951-1952, American military, economic, and technical aid increased at a rapid pace. The military aid program began in 1950 in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars

⁷Statement by President Truman on the situation in Korea, Presidential Papers of the United States: 1950 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 492.

⁸"Decision to Win in Indo-China," New Republic, April 12, 1954, p. 3.

worth of planes, tanks, guns, and munitions intended to save the French.⁹ This move seems to have been necessitated by a French tendency to threaten to quit the war unilaterally unless the United States increased its military aid.¹⁰

A partial answer as to why the United States bowed to this virtual blackmail effort by the French lies in the fact that Truman policy toward Indo-China was based upon several practical considerations. Prior to the Communist attack in Korea, the impression in world diplomatic circles was that the United States would not intervene--Korea was supposedly outside the American sphere of influence. Truman apparently wished to avoid this particular misunderstanding in the case of Indo-China, and at the same time avoid a possible miscalculation by the Red Chinese which might bring their forces into the conflict. In addition, the United States was still tied down militarily in Korea. It was to the Truman Administration's advantage to keep the French in Indo-China in order to avoid a Communist takeover.¹¹

President Truman did not have to bear his cross alone during this period of diplomatic trauma. By January 1952 there was vocal bipartisan support in Congress for continued

⁹"If Indo-China is Invaded--United States to Aid by Air and Sea," U. S. News, April 4, 1952, p. 34.

¹⁰New York Times, July 31, 1952, p. 1.

¹¹Louis L. Gerson, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), pp. 153-155.

American military aid to the French. Senator Robert Taft of Ohio voiced his support of the administration's aid programs.¹² In a Presidential pre-campaign speech during June 1952, General Eisenhower himself advocated continued American military and technical aid, but foresaw no need to send United States combat troops into Indo-China.¹³

Military aid to French Union forces between August 1950 and December 1951 totaled some one-hundred thousand tons at a cost of thirty million dollars.¹⁴ The New York Times of March 28, 1952, reported that the Mutual Security Administration had requested sixty-five million dollars for fiscal year 1953. The MSA request submitted by Eisenhower appointee Harold Stassen totaled four-hundred million for fiscal 1954.¹⁵

This tremendous financial aid program did not go completely unchallenged by Congressional figures. In a May 1952 broadcast of the popular television series "Youth Wants to Know," Senator Saltonstall of Massachusetts quipped, "We can't spread our butter too thin."¹⁶ His statement was indicative of a deeper unrest voiced by other Congressional figures. Senator John F. Kennedy,

¹²New York Times, January 20, 1952, p. 41.

¹³Ibid., June 8, 1952, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., January 29, 1952, p. 5; February 6, p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., May 4, 1953, p. 6.

¹⁶Ibid.

Democrat from Massachusetts, agreed with his colleague in principle in these words:

Although the Associated States are said to be independent within the French Union, the French always have a permanent control in the high council and in the Assembly of the Union and the Government of France guides its actions.... Militarily, French control is nearly complete.... Economically, French control of the country's basic resources, transportation, trade, and economic life in general is extensive. In Vietnam, estimated French control is nearly one-hundred per cent in the field of foreign commerce, international and coastal shipping, and rubber and other export products.... All of this flies in the face of repeated assurances to the American people by our own officials that complete independence has been or will be granted.¹⁷

¹⁷Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, April 6, 1954, p. 4673.

CHAPTER II

EARLY EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION DIPLOMACY 1953-1954

During 1953 the Eisenhower Administration was in the throes of an agonizing policy decision. On April 16 President Eisenhower had told an audience made up of the American Society of Newspaper Editors that, "The free world... knows that aggressions in Korea and Southeast Asia are threats to the whole free community to be met only through united action."¹⁸

The phrase "united action" bore significant meaning. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was at that very time involved in the process of creating a foreign policy based upon the premise that eventual allied intervention in Indo-China could be undertaken on the basis of "united action." Criticism of Dulles' efforts were directed toward United States support of French colonialism in an Asia where colonialism had become unpopular among the neutral nations.

There has been much speculation as to the motivating factors causing Dulles to pursue an unpopular course of action at such a critical juncture in history. Part of the answer lies in the fact that President Eisenhower was of the opinion that the loss of Viet-Nam, together with Laos

¹⁸New York Times, May 4, 1953, p. 4.

and Cambodia, would have meant the eventual enslavement of Southeast Asia's millions at the hands of international Communism.

You had a row of dominoes set up, and you knocked over the first one, and what would happen to the last one was the certainty that it would go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.¹⁹

As he formulated this position in the early months of his administration, the President was unaware that history would make much of the so-called "domino theory." Mr. Eisenhower further said, "The loss of Viet-Nam... effort, would have meant that Thailand... Burma and Malaya would in be threatened, with added risks to East Pakistan and South Asia as well as all Indochina."²⁰

While serving in Europe as North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Commanding General, Eisenhower had in 1951 voiced a position that was to become a hallmark of his foreign policy in 1953-1954. He commented in reference to 1951 losses in Indo-China which weakened France's contribution to NATO: "The losses... might be lessened... if allies could be brought in to carry part of the load in defending Indo-China... in order to insure such aid a public pledge by the French to grant independence to Indo-China would be in order."²¹

¹⁹New York Times, April 8, 1954, p. 1.

²⁰Dwight Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 333; New York Times, April 8, 1954, p. 1.

²¹Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 336.

By the end of 1953, the effect of the cessation of hostilities in Korea began to be felt in Indo-China. Red Chinese aggression was not anticipated by the administration because that government had been forewarned by both Truman and Eisenhower pronouncements that such overt aggression in Indo-China as had occurred in Korea would not be tolerated. However, the Chinese were able to expend large quantities of materials in Ho Chi Minh's favor that had previously been shipped to Korea.

To combat such escalation of the Viet-Minh war effort, General Navarre, French Commander in Indo-China, proposed in 1953 an over-all plan which was designed to end the war much more quickly. Under provisions of the Navarre Plan, the French were to increase their troop strength from two-hundred thousand to two-hundred and fifty thousand. They were also to train enough native troops to raise the Vietnamese Army to three-hundred thousand from two-hundred thousand by the end of 1954. In order to finance the Navarre Plan, the U. S. on September 30, 1953, agreed to grant French forces another three-hundred-eighty-five million dollars immediately.²²

Autumn 1953 found the French engaged in an apparently successful offensive in central Viet-Nam. On November 20 French Union forces moved west from the Red River Delta in

²²New York Times, October 1, 1953, p. 1.

Tonkin Province and occupied an area ten miles from the Laotian border. The area was known by the name Dien Bien Phu. Washington recognized the location of the French fortress as of minor military significance--the only real danger lay in the psychological effects of a loss of a garrison of then-thousand crack troops.

By this time United States' military aid had reached the saturation point. The real need of the moment was for skilled technicians to service equipment in the field and to train the French in maintenance and operation of the plentiful materials.

In August 1953 the three-hundreth shipload of American aid arrived in Saigon.²³ This followed Senate approval on July 30 of the loan of an American aircraft carrier to the French.²⁴ In addition, the New York Times of December 25, 1953, reported to the nation that the French were to receive seven U. S. naval landing craft. The carrier and landing craft were to prove very efficient in the evacuation of Dien Bien Phu. President Eisenhower defended these and other military aid measures as the cheapest form of insurance for American security.²⁵

²³Ibid., August 19, 1953, p. 2.

²⁴Ibid., July 30, 1953, p. 2.

²⁵Ibid., August 5, 1953, p. 1.

In support of Eisenhower aid policies, the Senate on September 16 had authorized a fact-finding jaunt to Saigon by Senator Mike Mansfield, Democrat from Montana. He returned home after a one month tour and urged increased American aid for Indo-China.²⁶

The end of 1953 found the Eisenhower Administration and Congress in a very agreeable position concerning events in Viet-Nam and Southeast Asia.

Diplomatic events of early 1954 were to prove less favorable to Eisenhower-Dulles policy toward Indo-China. In an interview of February 9, 1954, Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson made one of his infrequent pronouncements on the current situation. When asked if a military victory could be won in Indo-China or if peace would have to be negotiated there as in Korea, Secretary Wilson replied, "I would think that a military victory would be perhaps both possible and probable."²⁷

To add further fuel to the fire, Secretary of State Dulles, in his now-famous speech before the Overseas Press Club in New York City of March 29, declared:

Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally... would be a

²⁶Ibid., October 27, 1953, p. 5.

²⁷Ibid., May 4, 1954, p. 4.

grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted, but should be met by united action. This might have serious risks, but these risks are far less than would face us a few years from now.²⁸

The major shock for world opinion came on April 16, 1954, in Vice-President Nixon's address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Mr. Nixon said, in effect, that the United States as a world leader could not afford further retreat in Asia. It was further reported that Mr. Nixon hoped the United States would not have to send troops into Southeast Asia, but if the government could not avoid it, the administration would have to face up to the situation and dispatch forces to Indo-China.²⁹

These remarks by high administration spokesmen in early 1954 came as quite a shock to the Laniel government of France. The Geneva meeting for truce talks was scheduled to begin on April 26 and such hawk-like pronouncements by so prominent Americans brought the French government to the edge of collapse. To the Laniel government, Geneva represented a last ray of hope for ending the war honorably.³⁰ However, to the United States government, the Geneva meeting represented a diplomatic setback. This subject is treated at length in Chapter Four of the paper.

²⁸Ibid., March 30, 1954, p. 1. ²⁹Ibid., May 4, p. 4.

³⁰Alvarez Del Vayo, "On the Brink," Nation, April 17, 1954, p. 321.

What diplomatic occurrence brought about the incredible series of events and public statements that threatened to bring a French government to its knees? A partial answer lies in the secret mission to Washington in March of 1954 by French Chief-of-Staff, General Paul Ely. The results of that meeting shook the United States State Department. Ely said that France was exhausted after eight years of fighting; she would negotiate a settlement at Geneva and pull out of Indo-China. The results of the furor aroused in the State Department by this incident make the ensuing developments easier to comprehend.³¹

Congressional support for Eisenhower-Dulles policy in Southeast Asia began to show signs of disintegration by early 1954. Debate in the Senate indicated the apparent existence of a "credibility gap" between Congress and the Secretary of State. There was still considerable support for a positive American policy built around the concept of united action, but little enthusiasm for a unilateral American involvement.

Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts demonstrated vacillating support for American policy in this statement:

³¹"Decision to Win in Indo-China," New Republic, April 12, 1954, p. 3; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Presidential Papers of the United States: 1954 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 366.

I think it is important that the Senate and the American people demonstrate their endorsement of Mr. Dulles' objectives, despite our difficulty in ascertaining the full significance of its key phrases.

... I for one favor a policy of a 'united action' by many nations wherever necessary to achieve a military and political victory for the free world... but to pour money, material, and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile....³²

Senator Mansfield expressed his skepticism in the form of a series of questions for Senator Kennedy. "I wonder if the Senator can tell the Senate what he thinks Secretary Dulles had in mind when he was making his speech before the Overseas Press Club in New York recently?"

Mr. Kennedy: "There is every indication that what he meant was that the United States will take the ultimate step."

Mr. Mansfield: "And that is what?"

Mr. Kennedy: "It is war."³³

In early 1954 it was revealed by Senator Mansfield that President Eisenhower had authorized the shipment of additional B-26 bombers to Indo-China and that France had requested four-hundred American technicians to service these and previously supplied "flying boxcars." The United States

³²Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, April 6, 1954, p. 4672.

³³Ibid.

had responded to the request for technicians by sending two-hundred United States Air Force technicians to Indo-China.³⁴ This action sparked a lively debate in the Senate.

Senator Mansfield asked some thought-provoking questions about the extent and purpose of military aid to the French Union forces in Indo-China.

Does the sending of technicians... mean that additional American military personnel will be sent? Does it mean... we will send in naval and air support? Does it mean... American combat troops will be sent...? Does it mean that action has been taken or will be taken without notifying the proper committees of Congress...?³⁵

Senator Stennis, Democrat from Mississippi, voiced his reservations about American action, echoing Mansfield's doubts. In essence he felt that since the technicians were not volunteers but had been assigned to such duty, the United States was actually participating in the war in a very direct manner. In reference to the French request for American pilots for the B-26 bombers, Stennis said, "[This] ... proves my contention that step by step, we are moving into this war in Indo-China."³⁶

President Eisenhower had told members of the Cabinet in January 1954 that he could not at that time see the value of putting American ground forces in Southeast Asia. He

³⁴Ibid., February 8, 1954, p. 1504. ³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., February 9, 1954, p. 1550.

did feel, however, that one possible course of action was in United States air support of French forces. He said, "I had no intention of using United States forces in any limited action when the force employed would probably not be decisively effective."³⁷ This very important statement bore a significant relationship to Eisenhower's eventual veto of the National Security Council's apparent decision to intervene militarily in Viet-Nam in the spring of 1954 in an effort to save Dien Bien Phu. This issue is discussed at length in Chapter Three.

In a press conference of March 10, 1954, President Eisenhower further clarified his policy. "I will say this: There is going to be no involvement of America in war unless it is a result of the constitutional process that is placed upon Congress to declare it...."³⁸

The President further elaborated upon the subject in his book, Mandate for Change by stating that there were three basic requirements that of necessity must have been fulfilled prior to actual U. S. military involvement in Indo-China. First, a legal right under international law; second, a favorable climate of Free World opinion; and finally, favorable action by the United States Congress.³⁹

³⁷Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 341.

³⁸New York Times, May 11, 1954, p. 4.

³⁹Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 340.

In regard to the question of legality, any intervention by the United States would have to have been requested by the French government and have reflected the desire of local Indochinese governments.

The requirement for favorable Free World opinion could have been met through the three Associated States (Laos, Cambodia, and Viet-Nam) appealing to the United Nations for help. An alternate plan would have had the United States participating in a coalition with Britain, New Zealand, Australia and other Southeast Asian nations. The intervention could then have been primarily an Asian matter with the United States furnishing only a token force.⁴⁰

The President's conditions for intervention on the French side in the war were generally acceptable to certain Congressional figures of importance. On April 6, 1954, Senator Henry Jackson of Washington stated his support for an American policy that would preserve Indo-China's independence. He was supported by Senators William Knowland of California, Mike Mansfield of Montana, John Kennedy of Massachusetts, Stuart Symington of Missouri, and Clinton Anderson of New Mexico.

Some degree of reluctance was demonstrated by Senators Dirksen of Illinois and Stennis of Mississippi. Support and opposition were generally bipartisan.⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid ⁴¹Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, April 6, 1954, pp. 4672-4681.

CHAPTER III

THE WASHINGTON CRISIS OF APRIL 1954

In April 1954 the Eisenhower Administration considered and then rejected a plan for immediate military intervention to support failing French forces at Dien Bien Phu. As a result, the French sustained a decisive defeat at that fortress on May 8, 1954.

The crisis began on Saturday morning, April 3, when eight members of Congress, five Senators and three representatives, were summoned to a secret meeting at the State Department. They had been summoned to the conference by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and each got the scare of his life as the meeting progressed.

What was wanted, Dulles said, was a joint resolution from Congress permitting the President to use air and naval power in Indo-China.⁴²

Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, proceeded to outline the plan of military assistance to the besieged French forces at Dien Bien Phu once Congress had acted positively on the necessary joint resolution. In essence the following was Radford's plan.

⁴²Chambers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go To War," The Reporter, September 14, 1954, p. 31.

Some two-hundred planes from the thirty-one thousand ton United States Navy carriers Essex and Boxer, then in the South China Sea ostensibly for 'training,' plus land-based U. S. Air Force planes from bases a thousand miles away in the Philippines, would be used for a single strike to save Dien Bien Phu.⁴³

Subsequent questioning by Congressional leaders present, i. e., Senate Majority Leader William Knowland, Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson, Senators Richard Russell and Earle Clements, GOP House Speaker Joseph Martin, and Representatives John McCormack and Percy Priest revealed that they were in accord on one central issue: Secretary of State Dulles had better first produce some allied support for United States action before the proposed intervention could take place.

With the Congressional rebuff in hand, Secretary Dulles set about the task of lining up an allied coalition. In the ensuing search, Dulles ran into one rock of opposition--Great Britain. Messages flashed back and forth between Washington and London but they did not crack the obstinate British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden.

Some of the Congressional leaders present at the April 3 meeting later confided that they came away from the State Department that Saturday morning with the feeling that if they had agreed in principle with the administration, planes would have been winging toward Dien Bien Phu without

⁴³Ibid., pp. 31-32; Washington Post and Times Herald, June 7, 1954.

waiting for the formality of a vote by Congress--or without a word in advance to the American people.⁴⁴

Senator Mansfield expounded upon the secret meeting in a Senate debate of July 9, 1954, when he participated in a dialogue with Senator Smith of New Jersey, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who was unaware of the meeting.

... [T]he administration asked a group of responsible congressional leaders what they thought of the idea of having a resolution passed, which would give the President... the discretion to use authority as he saw fit in the Southeast Asian area. Those proposals are a matter of record.

I also wish to make the observation that it will be noted on the list of those who were present that outside of the Senator from California (Mr. Knowland), who was there in his capacity as majority leader, I am sure there was no one present from the Foreign Relations Committee.⁴⁵

Senator Smith's remarks indicated his great surprise and overwhelming disbelief at the events of April 3.

I am amazed at the statement made by the Senator from Montana that there was apparently a secret meeting.... I am a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Far Eastern Affairs.... The Senator from New Jersey was not invited to be there. I think if the meeting concerned such an important problem, I probably would have been invited to it, because I am Chairman of the Subcommittee. I never understood an attempt was made to pass such a resolution as has been mentioned.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Roberts, op. cit., p. 32.

⁴⁵Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, July 9, 1954, p. 10140.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Representing the Eisenhower Administration at the secret meeting, in addition to Secretary of State Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Radford, were Under Secretary of Defense Roger Kyes, Navy Secretary Robert B. Anderson, and Defense Department Assistant for Congressional Relations Thruston B. Morton.

Admiral Radford conducted the meeting and explained how the administration was concerned about the rapidly deteriorating military situation at Dien Bien Phu. The French Union forces had been under siege for three weeks and the urgency of the situation demanded immediate action. Poor communications with the besieged fortress prevented an estimate of the exact time remaining before a total collapse of the French forces.

Dulles interrupted at several points to support Radford's position. If Indo-China fell and its fall led to the collapse of all Southeast Asia, then the United States might eventually be backed up all the way to Hawaii. Secretary Dulles also indicated that failure of the United States to intervene militarily might lead to a French withdrawal from the area under less than honorable conditions.⁴⁷

At the conclusion of Admiral Radford's presentation of the case for immediate intervention, certain specific questions were put to him by the Congressional leaders present.

⁴⁷Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 31; "Decision to Win in Indo-China?", New Republic, April 12, 1954, p. 3.

He was asked if such action as proposed would constitute a state of war. Radford replied in the affirmative. If the strike did not succeed in relieving the French Union forces at Dien Bien Phu, would other action be forthcoming? "Yes," replied the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Would land forces then also have to be dispatched to Indo-China? Radford skillfully evaded this question without giving a definite commitment.

Senator Knowland demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm for the venture, consistent with his prior public statements that some action must be taken or all of Southeast Asia would be lost.

Senator Clements of Kentucky asked the Admiral the first of several key questions. "Does this plan have the approval of the other members of the Joint Chiefs?" Admiral Radford's reply was in the negative. "How many of the three agree with you?" "None," replied Radford. "How do you account for that?" "I have spent more time in the Far East than any of them and I understand the situation better," said Admiral Radford.

Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas stated the second key question in the form of a statement. He noted that Senator Knowland had been saying publicly that in Korea up to ninety per cent of the men and money was supplied by the United States. The American people were convinced this was

a poor practice; therefore, in any operation in Viet-Nam we should know first who would put up the combat troops. And so Johnson put the question to Dulles: had he conducted prior consultations with potential U. S. allies? Secretary Dulles was embarrassed to admit that he had not yet consulted with potential allies.⁴⁸

The Secretary of State lost no time; within a week he personally talked with diplomatic representatives of France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and the three Associated States of Indo-China.

There was little doubt in these capitals that Dulles was seeking a statement of intent designed to be issued simultaneously by all the nations at the time of the contemplated American military intervention. This declaration was designed with a two-fold purpose: (1) to explain to the rest of the world the U. S. action, and (2) to serve as a deterrent against Chinese involvement.

It was at this critical point that Dulles locked horns with Anthony Eden, Foreign Minister of Great Britain. Secretary Dulles offered to go to London for personal conferences with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Eden. On April 10 the Secretary of State flew to London and from there on to Paris, France.

⁴⁸Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 32; "Did the United States Almost Get Into War?", U. S. News, June 18, 1954, pp. 35-39.

The British were fully aware of the secret Congressional meeting of April 3 and were conscious of the seriousness of Secretary Dulles' mission to Europe.

The London talks had two effects. Dulles was forced to shelve the concept of immediate intervention. He came up instead with a proposal for creating a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. The Secretary apparently thought this plan more nearly presented the "united front" he desired and that it would eventually lead to united or collective action by the allied powers.⁴⁹

What the British agreed to at the London meeting is not clear. Dulles apparently had no formal Southeast Asia Treaty proposal on paper, while the British had a few of their ideas outlined in writing.⁵⁰ Foreign Minister Anthony Eden felt that he made it clear that no action could be undertaken by the British until after the Geneva Conference, due to begin on April 26.⁵¹

On his return to Washington, Dulles called a SEATO drafting meeting for April 20. In the meantime, Vice-President Richard Nixon had made his now-famous statement of April 16. Speaking off-the-record before the American

⁴⁹Roberts, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵⁰Louis Gerson, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy: John Foster Dulles (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), pp. 193-195.

⁵¹Anthony Eden, Full Circle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960), pp. 107-108.

Society of Newspaper Editors on that date, he had expressed an opinion that American troops would possibly be used in Indo-China if needed to stop Communist aggression. The remark, from so well-informed a source, touched off world-wide repercussions. Mr. Nixon, after all, sat in on all meetings of the National Security Council, attended Cabinet meetings and knew the innermost secrets of the administration.⁵² In all likelihood the Vice-President in his statement was voicing the final decision of the National Security Council and President Eisenhower. Why this decision was later rescinded by the President, we shall consider at the conclusion of this chapter.

There is evidence to support the belief that the National Security Council, sometime between March 20 and April 3, had met and taken a firm position that the United States could not afford the loss of Indo-China to the Communists, and if it were necessary to prevent such a loss, the United States would intervene in the war, provided the intervention was an allied venture and provided the French would give Indo-China a real measure of independence so as to eliminate the crucial issue of American colonialism.⁵³

⁵²"Will GI's Fight in Indo-China: Nixon Statement," U. S. News, April 30, 1954, p. 60.

⁵³Roberts, op. cit., p. 32; Senator Morse, Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, April 19, 1954, p. 5297; Dwight Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 373; "Did the United States Almost Get Into War?," loc. cit.

In a closed session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 12, 1954, Secretary Dulles testified that the United States government would not engage the nation in any belligerent action without prior approval of Congress. He also further stated at the time that unless the United Nations could be brought into the picture to clarify the moral issues, the situation would in no way warrant American troop commitments to Viet-Nam.⁵⁴

On Friday, April 23, Foreign Minister Bidault of France revealed to Secretary Dulles the news from General Navarre in Indo-China. In essence, the General declared that only a massive air attack could possibly save Dien Bien Phu. Secretary Dulles was forced by the chain of circumstances to inform those present that the United States could not intervene on France's behalf.

In the meantime, Admiral Radford had arrived and met with Dulles. The two immediately saw Anthony Eden and Dulles announced that the French were desperate for immediate military aid. An allied air strike was again discussed. The old argument advocating such action was spelled out in detail once more. Dulles concluded by assuring those present that if the allies agreed to the action, the President was

⁵⁴"What Could Get the United States into War in Asia?," U. S. News, May 21, 1954, pp. 83-86.

prepared to go before Congress on Monday, April 26, and ask for a joint resolution authorizing such action.⁵⁵ Dulles and Radford were later to deny that they ever sought such a resolution and that President Eisenhower was not at any time requesting such action on the part of Congress.⁵⁶

Whatever the truth may be, Anthony Eden later reported in his memoirs that Dulles' proposition, one virtually amounting to war, was considered most serious to his government. Eden told Dulles he wanted to hear the plea for help directly from the French government. Eden and Dulles thereupon conferred with Foreign Minister Bidault, who confirmed that France was indeed in desperate need of immediate help at Dien Bien Phu.⁵⁷

Foreign Minister Eden was now on the spot. Here, on the eve of the Geneva Conference that might lead to a negotiated end of the seven year old Indo-China War, the United States, at the request of a panicky French government, was about to venture forth with a military intervention that might well lead to a general Asian war. Eden's answer to Dulles was forceful and to the point.

We (Churchill and Eden) agreed that we must therefore decline to give any undertaking of military assistance to the French in Indo-China. It now seemed inevitable that large parts of the country would fall

⁵⁵Roberts, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵⁶"What Could Get the United States into War in Asia?," loc. cit.

⁵⁷Eden, op. cit., pp. 114-117.

under Communist control, and the best hope of a lasting solution lay in some form of partition.⁵⁸

Mr. Eden further added his conviction that within forty-eight hours of the contemplated air strike, ground troops would be called for, as had been the case in the Korean War.⁵⁹

The U. S. State Department found the British actions disturbing. It was difficult to understand why the British placed such heavy reliance upon negotiations with the Communists. President Eisenhower expressed his bewilderment in these words:

... in Washington we found it difficult to understand such a position, but finally concluded that the British conviction stemmed from several factors: British diplomacy had kept that small island a world power for a long time and, as they were always acutely aware that today's enemy may be tomorrow's friend, this awareness has caused them to put much faith in the process of negotiation.⁶⁰

On the other side of the ledger, it might be pointed out that Paris and London doubted the validity of the basic Dulles assumption--that is, that it was safe to get tough because neither China nor Russia was willing to risk an H-bomb war in pursuit of what would be a local victory.⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 348.

⁶¹Alvarez Del Vayo, "On the Brink," Nation, April 17, 1954, p. 321.

On Saturday morning, April 24, Secretary Dulles sat down in the American Embassy in Paris and composed a letter to Foreign Minister Bidault. The letter officially informed Mr. Bidault that the United States could not intervene on behalf of the French without Congressional action and that the American military leaders felt it was too late to save Dien Bien Phu. American attempts at direct intervention collapsed on that Saturday. Secretary Dulles had apparently taken a beating in international diplomacy.⁶²

It seems obvious that much confusion attended the Eisenhower Administration's Asian policies in 1954. Two outstanding characteristics of American policy were the periodic changes in objectives and the contradictory statements by administration leaders. The most puzzling question to date is why President Eisenhower apparently vetoed the final policy decision arrived at by a majority of administration leaders and the National Security Council?

General James M. Gavin, USA (Ret.), writing in Harpers, February 1966, shed some illuminating facts on this perplexing question. As a military planner of the American strategy in 1954, he felt that the force desired by Admiral Radford in aiding Dien Bien Phu would more than likely have

⁶²Roberts, op. cit., p. 35.

influenced the Chinese Communists to reopen hostilities in Korea. Gavin said:

At the time, General Ridgway thought it prudent to bring this situation directly to the attention of President Eisenhower, pointing out that we should be prepared for a large scale war if we were to make the initial large scale commitment....⁶³

In his consultation with the President, Army Chief of Staff Matthew B. Ridgway opposed the views of his superior, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Radford, and painted a bleak picture for Eisenhower far different from the picture presented by Radford. Ridgway rejected the theory that American air and naval power alone could end the war. If the U. S. actually intervened on the French side, Ridgway foresaw these potential military requirements: five combat divisions of U. S. troops to get started, ten to clear Indo-China; more if the French withdrew from the conflict. He also saw the possible need for mobilization of the United States to a greater degree than was necessary for the Korean War, including draft quotas of approximately one-hundred thousand men per month.

In addition, the war would of necessity have to be fought from bases one to six-thousand miles away from the scene of conflict. Furthermore, U. S. allies could not be counted on for support and jungle warfare would have nullified the big U. S. mobile, mechanized advantage. Supply of

⁶³James M. Gavin, "A Communication on Vietnam," Harpers Magazine, February 1966, pp. 16-21.

American forces would have become an insurmountable problem and defense costs more than likely would have soared to some forty billions annually.⁶⁴

General Gavin, in a further comment on the tense situation, praised Ridgway's forthright conversation with President Eisenhower as a great act of moral courage. The act was a direct challenge to Ridgway's superior and a violation of the traditional military chain of command. According to Gavin, the President was impressed by both Ridgway's courage and his argument that the United States could not afford to carry out a threat of unilateral military intervention in Indo-China. In his book, Mandate for Change, President Eisenhower later commented that to have gone to war under the circumstances would have been "like hitting the tail of the snake rather than the head."⁶⁵

As to General Ridgway's own appraisal of his part in the Washington crisis of 1954, we have his testimony:

... when the day comes for me to face my Maker and account for my actions, the thing I would be most humbly proud of was the fact that I fought against, and perhaps contributed to preventing, the carrying out of harebrained tactical schemes which would have cost the lives of thousands of men. To that list of tragic accidents that fortunately never happened I would add the Indo-China intervention.⁶⁶

⁶⁴"What Ridgway Told Ike," U. S. News, June 25, 1954, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁵Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 350.

⁶⁶Matthew B. Ridgway, Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 278.

CHAPTER IV

GENEVA: DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a result of the United States' failure to win over her allies, the Geneva Conference was destined to open in a mood of deepest gloom for the State Department. The Communists, whatever they may have learned of the behind-the-scenes details of the diplomatic trauma experienced by the Americans, knew that Britain had turned down an American plan of intervention in Indo-China. With the military tide in that Southeast Asian nation turning so rapidly in their favor, the Communists seized the diplomatic initiative and proceeded to stall until conditions were ripe for their ambitions.⁶⁷

At the Berlin Conference in February of 1954, the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States worked out plans for a spring conference on Southeast Asia to include the People's Republic of China and other states of the region. This was the Geneva Conference, held from April 26 to July 21, which originally was intended to consider both a political settlement in Korea and a resolution of the Indo-China War. Korea presented insoluble difficulties for the time being, but the conference reached two conclusions concerning Viet-Nam.

⁶⁷Chambers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go to War," The Reporter, September 14, 1954, p. 35.

An early controversy over the presence of Red China at the proposed Geneva Conference was revealed by Foreign Minister Anthony Eden of Great Britain. Mr. Eden reported that Mr. Molotov of the Soviet Union had proposed the convening of a five-power conference, to include Red China, at the Berlin Conference. Mr. Eden reflected on the situation in his memoirs:

... I urged favorable reflection upon the possibility of a five-power conference, provided that the Americans could be brought to consider it.

[The Americans] are at present strongly opposed to the idea of a five-power conference with China, mainly, I understand, because they are not prepared to admit the right of Communist China to be one of the great powers dealing with world problems.⁶⁸

President Eisenhower was reluctant to commit the United States to any conference in which the Chinese Communists were seated. He often referred to Mr. Molotov's Berlin suggestion as his "pet proposal." A standard maneuver of the Soviets was to include Communist China in any proposed international deliberations. The traditional "one-China" policy of the United States prevented any acceptance of Communist China in traditional diplomatic channels, including international conferences. However, President Eisenhower eventually relented in this particular case with the February 9 news from Secretary Dulles in Berlin that French pressure

⁶⁸Anthony Eden, Full Circle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960), pp. 97-98.

for such a meeting was mounting. Dulles reported, "... that if the United States was held responsible for blocking such a conference, the moral obligation to carry on the war in Indo-China might be shifted from French shoulders to ours."⁶⁹

Few diplomats at Geneva, not even the British, would have suggested appeasement of Communist China, but many observers objected to the American position that negotiation and settlement were synonymous with appeasement, that diplomatic recognition implied moral approval of the Chinese.⁷⁰

The U. S. State Department reluctantly accepted a form of joint sponsorship of the Geneva Conference. The action was agreed to because of the American desire to maintain a united allied front. President Eisenhower stated the United States' position in a letter of April 4, 1954, to Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain. "Geneva is less than four weeks away. There the possibility of the Communists driving a wedge between us will, given the state of mind in France, be infinitely greater than at Berlin."⁷¹

President Eisenhower elaborated further on the subject in the following statement.

⁶⁹Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 343.

⁷⁰David Schoenbrun, "Time for Truth," Nation, June 5, 1954, p. 477.

⁷¹Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 346.

[Molotov] tabled down his demands to make the five-power meeting solely on the problems of Asia. This was still unacceptable to us.

Since the British and French both were seeking Far East talks, it would be less a sign of disunity if the United States proposed it formally, and carefully restricted it to that area. In addition, if discussion was inevitable, it was desirable to initiate it prior to any unfavorable developments in the Indochina fighting.⁷²

The first agreement formally reached, officially termed the Geneva Accords, were detailed cease-fire arrangements signed only by the two protagonists: the French and the People's Republic of Viet-Nam (Ho Chi Minh). This armistice accord attempted to establish the foundations for peaceful resolution of political problems in Indo-China through four sets of provisions: (1) a provisional, military demarcation line was to permit regrouping of forces; (2) each of the parties to the agreement would administer its respective zone pending general elections for all of Viet-Nam; (3) a ban was placed on new military personnel and material, new military bases, and the formation of military alliances; and (4) an International Control Commission was to ensure and supervise the execution of the agreements. Both signatories signed for themselves and their successors.

There was also a Final Declaration--representing the second area of agreement at Geneva. This was not signed by

⁷²Ibid., pp. 342-343.

anyone present but was instead endorsed by voice vote. All nations present indicated agreement, except the United States and the State of Viet-Nam (as the French-controlled Bao Dai government was called). Expressing the sense of the conference, the Declaration supported the cease-fire arrangements. It reiterated the temporary military character of the demarcation line as the seventeenth parallel and declared that democratic freedoms and institutions should come about in Viet-Nam as a result of free general election by secret ballot. In neither the Agreements nor the Final Declaration was it specified that democratic conditions must exist prior to elections.

The United States made a unilateral declaration in lieu of a direct endorsement of the Final Declaration, pledging to refrain from disturbing the Agreements by force and endorsing fair, free elections for all of Viet-Nam under United Nations supervision. The text of the declaration stated:

The government of the United States of America declares... with regard to the aforesaid Agreements and paragraphs that (i) it will refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb them... and (ii) it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.⁷³

⁷³Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, Unilateral Declaration; cited by Elaine Burnell, Mission to Hanoi (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1968), p. 218.

Reaction to the United States' unilateral declaration on the final Geneva Declaration was harsh in right-wing Congressional circles. Senator William Jenner of Indiana had some barbed comments to offer on the floor of the Senate on August 1, 1954. A portion of his statement follows:

I do not believe our people can ever find the answers to their present problems, if their officials feed them a diet of lies. I am talking about the so-called peace agreement in Indochina. I do not believe we should minimize the defeat which has been suffered by the United States.

The Geneva agreement is not a local defeat in Indochina. It is a defeat in grand strategy, in our ability to plan and execute a defense and counter-attack against the new barbarian invasions.

The United States has been outthought, outtraded, and outgeneraled....

The damage goes deeper... Under Secretary Bedell Smith says we have agreed not to upset the Geneva agreement by force... It means... that we have agreed to give no military help to the rest of Indochina.

That means the United States is guaranteeing Communist conquests....⁷⁴

There were contrasting opinions. General William J. Donovan, Former Director, Office of Strategic Services, in an address to the Manhattan College Alumni Association of New York on February 19, 1955, expressed the opinion that the Geneva Settlement certainly confirmed the fruits of Communist aggression in the traditional sense. His position was that the most serious problem created at Geneva was the splitting of the country at the seventeenth parallel--his

⁷⁴Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, August 13, 1954, p. 14368.

criticism of allied conduct was that we failed to realize the principal French weakness as political rather than military. The over-all allied purpose should have been to guarantee Vietnamese sovereignty, driving out the French and recognizing the nationalism present; yet at the same time minimizing the threat of Communism.⁷⁵

An editorial in the New Republic of May 3, 1954, stressed the fact that the Communist side was stronger at Geneva than at any previous time. According to the author, Secretary Dulles' position was built on fiction--he made Geneva a crusade against Communism rather than a mission for emerging nationalism. This fictional belief in mankind's eternal struggle as one between Communism and anti-Communism led Dulles into the deadend street of inflexibility--any deviation from his fixed goals was considered a defeat by those devotees of the same or similar policies.⁷⁶

William Ryan of Associated Press reported on Ho Chi Minh: "No matter what is said about Ho Chi Minh, the French and Viet-Nameese cannot dodge the fact that he is looked upon by a large section of the masses as the country's savior, a man who can drive out the foreigner...."⁷⁷

⁷⁵General William Donovan, "The Struggle in Asia," Vital Speeches, April 1, 1955, pp. 1135-1136.

⁷⁶Editorial, "Must We Fight in Indo-China?," New Republic, May 3, 1954, p. 8.

⁷⁷Ibid.

For the Viet-Minh forces under command of Ho Chi Minh, the Geneva Agreements represented major territorial concessions. Militarily superior, the Viet-Minh controlled most of Viet-Nam in the spring of 1954, with prospect of total control within the year.

Bernard Fall illustrated the facts vividly in his on-the-spot reporting from Viet-Nam. He described how Ho Chi Minh's forces had advanced greatly from the poorly armed guerilla bands of the mid-forties. The Viet-Nam People's Army was composed of seven hard-core divisions equipped with American weapons captured by the Chinese in Korea and passed along to their allies in Indo-China. The Communist forces, with fewer than one-hundred thousand regulars, fifty-thousand regional semi-regulars and about two-hundred-twenty-five thousand local guerillas, were numerically inferior to the French Union forces in 1954, but in a war where experts calculated that a defending force must hold a ten to one numerical superiority in order to win, the French 1.2 to one edge made the military contest all but hopeless.⁷⁸

There were several reasons why the State Department regarded the Geneva Conference as a strategic reversal of diplomacy. Communist China was accorded the status of a great power at the conference; the Democratic Republic of

⁷⁸Bernard B. Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam," The New York Times Magazine, May 2, 1965, p. 28.

Viet-Nam achieved recognition as the sole government in northern Viet-Nam; and the forthcoming elections were expected to give Ho Chi Minh political as well as military control of all Viet-Nam.

The United States was present at Geneva, but the series of humiliating setbacks for Secretary Dulles soon led to his departure for Washington. The Agreements reached at Geneva embodied both triumph and tragedy for the nations present. For France the agreement was only the symbol of a loss of colonial prestige suffered a decade earlier in World War II. For Britain the only tangible gain was solely in any benefits to be derived by a peaceful settlement. For Russia the gain was roundabout--through a new status for China. For China the gain was in a new prestige for the Communist government. For the United States there was only loss--loss in the measure of her position of leadership in NATO, her prestige in Asia, and her contact with Asian peoples looking to her for moral leadership in the fight against Communist imperialism.

Ho Chi Minh's regime eventually gained more from the truce than it had won on the battlefronts. The primary gain was the recognition of her legal status in an international agreement.⁷⁹

⁷⁹"The Truce and American Policy," Nation, July 31, 1954, pp. 81-83.

Leading members of both United States' political parties expressed pessimistic views about the outcome at Geneva. Senator Mansfield voiced his opinions thusly:

... in my opinion, the mere fact that the United States agreed with France, Britain, and other nations to attend the general conference at Geneva, Switzerland, to which Communist China was invited as an interested state, indicates that a degree of recognition was achieved.⁸⁰

President Eisenhower spoke for his administration in the following statement.

I have never talked with or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly eighty per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai.⁸¹

Secretary Dulles' problems on the domestic front were also complex. He had traditionally gone most of the way with the right-wing elements of the Republican Party out of necessity. Occasionally he had thoughts of a more moderate approach to the Asian impasse. One such occasion was a Washington dinner for newsmen in April 1953 when the Secretary had casually mentioned the possibility of a United Nations' trusteeship for Formosa as a possible eventual road to compromise with Red China.

⁸⁰ Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, July 9, 1954, p. 10136.

⁸¹ Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 372.

⁸² "The Dulles Record," Nation, August 24, 1954, p. 144.

This "liberal" indiscretion was to prove an embarrassment to the Secretary. The story found its way into the news media; William Knowland, GOP Senate leader and champion of the traditional one-China policy, demanded an explanation of President Eisenhower. Word was filtered down the chain of command; Secretary Dulles promptly wrote a disavowal of the remarks on Formosa.

The eagerness demonstrated in this incident to curry favor with Congressional rightists may be a partial explanation for the Secretary's historic fluff of March 29, 1954, in calling for united action--which "might involve serious risks" to repel the Communists in Southeast Asia. He may simply have been trying to atone for his earlier error.⁸³

Secretary Dulles was continually harrassed on domestic and foreign fronts alike in 1954. The fact that it was an election year did not help the State Department at all in its efforts to deal with ticklish international problems. Each time a plane or technician was dispatched for Indo-China both Republicans and Democrats in Congress jumped up and down about possible "involvement." To make matters worse for the Secretary of State, many of his supporters in Congress were vacillating in their declarations of support.

⁸³Ibid.

Secretary of State Dulles, in a speech at Los Angeles, California, on June 11, 1954, described the history of United States' policy in relation to Indo-China and attempted to defend his course of action in relation to the Geneva Conference. His words contained most of the traditional Dulles' cliches, i. e., "Peace is always easy to achieve--by surrender."⁸⁴ As usual Dulles' policy showed a lack of imagination and flexibility, and as usual President Eisenhower appeared to back his Secretary of State's pronouncements--at least for public consumption.

One important element was missing from Dulles' public utterances at this particular juncture in history--the fact of a diplomatic estrangement between the United States and her ally, Great Britain. The situation had become serious enough after the April 1954 crisis for the British Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to fly to Washington in the summer of 1954 in an effort to reassure President Eisenhower of continued British friendship and cooperation. Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Minister Eden desired to make a personal explanation to President Eisenhower about recent British reluctance to play ball with Dulles in regard to Indo-China military intervention and disagreement over strategy pursued at Geneva. This meeting was intended to

⁸⁴"Here's What Mr. Dulles Says About War,"
U. S. News, June 18, 1954, p. 119.

restore American faith in her British ally, seek common agreement on future policy in Asia, and attempt to regroup allied forces in the Western Alliance after the fall of the Laniel government in France.⁸⁵

The Geneva Agreements were destined to have far-reaching diplomatic consequences. In the future, all parties with vested interests in the Viet-Nam conflict would cite the Geneva Agreements as the final basis for any settlement in Indo-China.

The Communist Chinese policy on the Geneva Agreements was contained in a letter from Premier Chou En-lai to the government of Great Britain. It read, "... [T]he Chinese government deems it necessary that another Geneva Conference on Indo-China be convened... to discuss the question of implementation of the Geneva Agreements in Vietnam."⁸⁶

The North Vietnamese government had the following statement about the Geneva Agreements: "Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam,... the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam must be strictly respected."⁸⁷

⁸⁵"Why Churchill Comes to the United States," U. S. News, June 25, 1954, p. 44.

⁸⁶Burnell, op. cit., p. 222.

⁸⁷George McT. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (New York: Dell, 1967), Appendix 14, p. 432.

The two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, expressed remarkably similar views on the Geneva Agreements. Premier Kosygin expressed his government's policy in a public statement of early 1967. He said, "We come out for strict observance of the Geneva Agreements...."⁸⁸ President Lyndon Johnson put his administration on the record on March 15, 1967, in an address before the Tennessee State Legislature in Nashville. His words were: "We believe that the Geneva accords of 1954... could serve as the central elements of a peaceful settlement."⁸⁹

The Geneva Agreements seemingly had no profound effect upon United States' policy toward Asia, which had been solidified by the Korean War. As before, United States' objectives were to prevent the spread of Communist power and particularly to counteract the strengthened position of Ho Chi Minh. This policy was pursued throughout the Eisenhower Administration although the underlying assumption of Secretary Dulles--that there was a monolithic Asian Communist threat--was increasingly challenged by men with supposedly a more realistic appraisal of the entire situation.

⁸⁸New York Times, February 9, 1967, p. 4.

⁸⁹Ibid., March 16, 1967, p. 8.

CHAPTER V

EISENHOWER-DULLES INDOCHINESE DIPLOMACY

The American people were subjected to a barrage of contradictory propaganda in the period 1950 through 1954. They were told by administration spokesmen that Indo-China was akin to the cork in a bottle which if pulled would loose Communism upon all of Southeast Asia. Having been assured through 1953 that the Communists could not win in Indo-China, that the Free World could depend upon the French, the United States found the French Union forces all but prostrate by June of 1954 and refusing to continue the war by themselves. The Eisenhower Administration proclaimed our intention of never again actively intervening in small wars; then, that the United States would send troops to Indo-China under certain conditions; then, that the U. S. would not send troops under any conditions, only ships and planes. Finally, it was revealed that a negotiated settlement involving partition would be intolerable, and then again that it would be acceptable under certain conditions.

Despite the plenitude of contradictory statements, the Eisenhower Administration did have a policy in relation to Indo-China: the objective was to avoid total defeat and prevent the further spread of Communism. But, it did not

seem to have a definitive method of attaining that end in early 1954. What it did have was at least two major policy proposals for consideration. The first proposal was advocated by Secretary of State Dulles and Admiral Arthur Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁹⁰

According to the Radford Plan United States' naval and air forces would have intervened in Indo-China on a scale equal to that achieved in Korea; American air attacks would have been confined to Indo-China unless the Chinese Air Force intervened; atomic weapons would not have been barred from the conflict; the French would have been required to grant full independence to the Associated States, submit to over-all American command, furnish one-hundred thousand additional combat troops, and hold alone on the ground during the six to nine months necessary for American missions to train effective native troops for combat. The heart of the plan was that no United States' ground forces would have been utilized. Any additional forces required would have come from a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. This proposed alliance would have been composed of England, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and the Associated States of Indo-China. The creation of SEATO or the Manila Pact is detailed in Chapter Seven.

⁹⁰"Intervention in Indo-China: Radford's Policy," New Republic, June 14, 1954, pp. 3-7.

In direct contrast to the Radford Plan was the British Plan which called for a negotiated settlement which would partition Viet-Nam somewhere near the sixteenth parallel, while maintaining Cambodia and Laos intact, with full independence. The supervision of such a truce would have been entrusted to one of the uncommitted "Colombo Nations." This group included India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, and Indonesia. As a result, the machinery for maintenance of peace would have become an Asian responsibility. SEATO would then have been developed slowly with primarily Asian members. A vast economic and technical aid program would then have been organized during the time period gained in such a settlement.⁹¹

It seemed fairly obvious that President Eisenhower was inclined to support the so-called Radford Plan-- especially so after the April 3, 1954, secret meeting of Congressional leaders. However, the President added significant conditions to the implementation of the Radford Plan; the United States would only intervene if our allies, the British, went along and if we got moral sanction from the United Nations.⁹²

The events of April 24 in Paris brought United States' policy to a temporary impasse. The situation did not remain static long, however, as the reversal for Secretary

⁹¹Ibid.
(New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 373.

⁹²Eisenhower, Mandate for Change,

Dulles' plan only postponed the inevitable involvement. It was considered no accident by many observers that Admiral Robert Carney, Chief of Naval Operations, made a speech threatening armed intervention in Indo-China at approximately the same time that the Foreign Minister of France declared the willingness of his nation to begin peace talks at Geneva.

When viewed in the perspective as only one in a series of interventionist speeches by Dulles, Radford and Nixon, the Carney pronouncement could not be dismissed lightly. According to author Freda Kirchwey, the pattern had been established in American Indochinese policy for some months prior to the April events. She commented thusly:

... a high government official makes a statement provocative in nature; Congress and the public take alarm, so the administration withdraws one or two steps; but each time the retreat is not quite so far as the previous one. And meanwhile opinion in and out of Congress shifts--subtly but inevitably--from 'no intervention in Indo-China' to an anxious⁹³ fear that 'we must do something about Indo-China.'

When viewed as a part of the total picture of United States' international diplomacy, the events of April 1954 were less contradictory than they appeared day by day in the nation's press. These moves were premeditated diplomatic acts in anticipation of American reversals at Geneva. Assuming this outcome, the diplomats looked to a regrouping

⁹³Freda Kirchwey, "Washington Edges Toward War," Nation, June 5, 1954, pp. 473-474.

of non-Communist powers in Asia, under American leadership and, if possible, with United Nations' sponsorship. Under the Dulles' strategy, if the Communists refused to be intimidated at Geneva, the only Allied alternative was war.⁹⁴

As early as March 29, 1954, in his speech before the Overseas Press Club of America, Secretary of State Dulles had given blunt notice to the Communist world that the United States did not intend to stand by and let Indo-China be swallowed up, even if it meant the possibility of war.⁹⁵ In his press conference of March 31, 1954, President Eisenhower substantially backed up Secretary Dulles' statement. The President said the speech must stand by itself--he had personally gone over every word of it beforehand and was in total agreement with the Secretary of State. However, the President refused to rule out the possibility that American troops might ultimately have to be used in Indo-China.

... [E]ach case has its own degree of risk and danger; consequently each must be met on its merits.

I couldn't possibly give you a general rule of what the United States would do in a situation, because no one could know all of the circumstances surrounding it.⁹⁶

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵"Dulles Warns Communists They Can't Have Indo-china," U. S. News, April 9, 1954, pp. 70-73.

⁹⁶"Decision to Win in Indo-China," New Republic, April 12, 1954, p. 3; Dwight Eisenhower, Presidential Papers of the United States: 1954 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 366.

Revision of United States' Asian policy at the hands of Secretary Dulles began shortly after President Eisenhower's inauguration. The Secretary of State seemed to possess an aptitude for creating a maximum of dissension between the United States and her allies. In his first message as Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles proclaimed the "unleashing of Chiang Kai-shek's forces on Formosa." His message to that effect had a startling effect on American allies.

The next move in this new Asian policy was the repudiation of the Yalta Agreement. During the 1952 GOP Convention, Richard Nixon and Arthur B. Lane, ex-ambassador to Poland, were among those urging Dulles to incorporate the idea in the Party Platform. When implemented, it demonstrated the Russians as the culprits rather than Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dean Acheson. As a result of the unexpected setback, the repudiation received a quick pigeonhole, but not before antagonizing Britain, a co-signatory who had been opposed to the GOP action but was not consulted prior to the Republican action.⁹⁷

The embarrassment for United States' allies was matched by a Dulles-inspired Eisenhower campaign speech promising liberation to peoples under the yoke of Communism.

⁹⁷"The Dulles Record," Nation, August 24, 1954, p. 144.

This pronouncement equally horrified our allies and provided the Kremlin with fresh fuel for its propaganda machine.

During his first month as Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles broadcast an ultimatum to France to ratify the European Army Treaty at once or face an end of American aid. He appeared to use his authority to corroborate Communist propaganda about France's satellite relationship to the United States. When France reacted with understandable indignation, Dulles flew to Paris and soothed her ruffled feathers with the assurance that his speech was designed primarily for domestic consumption, i. e., the reconciliation of western U. S. Republicans to the annual foreign aid bill pending before Congress.

Speaking at Williamsburg, Virginia, on May 15, 1954, Mr. Dulles continued the right-wing line with this comment: "The Soviet rulers occasionally tell us that there could be coexistence between their society and ourselves. We must, however, beware of these professions." This was Secretary Dulles' most successful effort to give the impression that the United States had adopted a hard-line policy directed toward Communism.⁹⁸

Apparently Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was committed to whatever course of action he deemed necessary to attain American objectives in Southeast Asia. He found

⁹⁸Ibid.

it difficult in pursuing this policy to announce American actions with candor because of two factors: (1) Secretary Dulles was determined to find a formula for Southeast Asia which would gain the support of France, Indo-China, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and India while avoiding the direct use of United States' troops, and (2) an administration which had sought to make political capital out of Truman's intervention in Korea could not publicly contemplate similar action without first educating the American electorate.⁹⁹

To Secretary Dulles a negotiated peace would have been a Communist victory. So Dulles spoke on March 29, 1954, in part, to block negotiations between the French and Chinese at Geneva and, in part, to gain time for a regrouping of shattered administration diplomatic objectives.

Premier Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault of France could not return to Paris empty-handed from Geneva and Secretary Dulles was fully aware of the diplomatic implications if they were to do so. The government of France would have fallen and been replaced by one promising peace at any price and one unfriendly to the Western Alliance. Secretary Dulles was then faced with the prospect of creating a "new situation;" he found it mandatory to persuade the non-Communist leaders of Europe and Asia that the war was not a colonial war, but instead a war of national liberation deserving their support.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹"Decision to Win in Indo-China," loc. cit.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

AMERICAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY SUPPORT OF
THE DIEM REGIME

Ninety-six days after the Geneva Agreements were signed, President Dwight Eisenhower offered Ngo Dinh Diem United States' aid in building a strong state in southern Viet-Nam. Eisenhower's letter arrived in Saigon at a time of severe political rivalry in the French zone of Viet-Nam. Although the French remained in complete authority until January 1, 1955, and in partial control until April 1956, Vietnamese elements within the Bao Dai government were struggling for control. Following the Eisenhower letter, the United States threw the full weight of its economic and military assistance behind Diem. Major criticism has since been leveled at the political role played by the Eisenhower Administration--more especially at the role played by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

President Eisenhower's letter encouraged Diem politically, encouraged the wise use of American aid in constructive ways, and requested Diem's cooperation in assuring that the South Vietnamese government would weather the period of tribulation facing it.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹Louis L. Gerson, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy: John Foster Dulles (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), p. 190.

President Eisenhower wrote the following to Diem:

"The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."¹⁰²

Diem had apparently been chosen to succeed Bao Dai in the secret councils of the U. S. State Department. In a short time various legislative leaders followed suit by endorsing Diem. Senator Mansfield expressed his personal confidence in the Diem regime, reminding critics that Diem's power was delegated by Chief of State Bao Dai, who in turn derived his authority from the French government. Diem had been appointed Premier by Bao Dai during the Geneva Conference and was thereafter the strong man of South Viet-Nam.¹¹⁴ Mansfield expounded upon the Diem regime on the floor of the U. S. Senate thusly: "In the event the Diem government falls ... the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union Forces...."¹⁰³

General J. Lawton Collins assumed the office of U. S. Special Ambassador to South Viet-Nam in 1954. In the New York Times of November 18, 1954, Collins described his mission in these words: "I have come to Vietnam to bring

¹⁰²Letter from President Eisenhower to Ngo Dinh Diem, October 25, 1954, Presidential Papers of the United States, 1954 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 948.

¹⁰³Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, December 1, 1954, pp. 16252-16253.

every possible aid to the Government of Diem and his Government only. It is the legal Government in Vietnam, and the aid which the United States will lend it ought to permit the Government to save the country." According to Collins, Diem had developed a program of social, political and economic reforms which, if implemented, would give the United States a reasonable chance of success in preserving the integrity of the region.¹⁰⁴

General Collins further outlined his assigned task as one of instructing the Vietnamese Army in the newest military techniques evolved in Korea, Greece, and Turkey. The American mission was to work under the supervision of French General Paul Ely, who remained Commander in Chief in Indo-China until 1956. The major American objective was to build an autonomous Viet-Nam--politically and militarily.¹⁰⁵

A pressing question in the late 1950's and early 1960's was how Ngo Dinh Diem won absolute power in war-torn South Viet-Nam and managed to entrench himself as the strong man of that besieged outpost of United States' influence? Much was written about the situation and especially the part played by Secretary of State Dulles and the United States State Department.

¹⁰⁴"What We're Doing in Indo-China," U. S. News, March 4, 1955, pp. 82-88.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

The odds were certainly against Diem in his quest for power. First, he had been a former supporter of Ho Chi Minh who broke with the revolutionary leader when Communism found a greater voice than did nationalism in the Viet-Minh movement.

Second, Diem had been faced by diverse religious and political factions in his drive for power and stability. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects as well as the Binh Xuyen underworld organization that controlled vice in Saigon were determined that he should not succeed unless they were included in a coalition government.¹⁰⁶

Third, Diem had found little private support from the American Special Ambassador to Viet-Nam, General J. of Lawton Collins. Although publicly supporting the Premier, the General had secretly reported to President Eisenhower in late April 1955 that Premier Diem was doomed politically and the South Vietnamese Army was totally incompetent. The Ambassador reportedly had gone so far in his opposition to Diem as to call an off-the-record press conference in Saigon in early May to report that the nation needed a constitutional monarchy headed by Bao Dai.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ "American Dilemma in South Vietnam," Nation, May 14, 1955, p. 413; "Diem's One-Family Regime," New Republic, January 30, 1961, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ "Tremors from Washington," Time, May 2, 1955, p. 34; "The United States versus the French," Time, May 16, 1955, p. 31.

Fourth, the Diem regime was constantly harrassed by the remnants of French political power in the South. The French were maneuvering desperately to preserve what their diplomats referred to as "the French presence" in both halves of the divided nation. A significant part of the French plan called for the continued reign of the absentee playboy, Bao Dai, over the destinies of the South. Although the French Commissioner, General Paul Ely, supported Diem, the French government in Paris was striving to undermine his influence over the population of the South.¹⁰⁸

By a series of events just short of miraculous, Diem overcame all these obstacles in his path--despite the meddling of General Collins and the confused diplomacy of Secretary Dulles. The fact that Diem had once been a disciple of Ho Chi Minh seemed to work in Diem's favor. Ho Chi Minh was a national hero--North and South. Premier Diem used his record as a fellow nationalist to gain some semblance of a popular mandate from the people of South Viet-Nam. His subtle manipulation of the politically popular theme of nationalism, without reference to Ho Chi Minh, gained him the desired objectives.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸"Dangerous Vacuum," Newsweek, May 16, 1955, p. 46; "Diem Besieged," Time, March 21, 1955, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹Interview with General J. Lawton Collins, "What We're Doing in Indo-China," U. S. News, March 4, 1955, p. 82; Ernest K. Lindley, "A Friend Named Diem," Newsweek, May 20, 1957, p. 40.

When faced with the challenges presented by the religious sects and underworld organizations, Premier Diem was forced to resort to the tactic best understood in war-torn Saigon--force. The Diem government managed to suppress the dissenting factions despite the mixup in signals between Secretary of State Dulles and Special Ambassador Collins. The State Department attempted to cover its embarrassment by explaining that the Collins snafu was not an accurate representation of actual American policy in regard to the Diem government of South Viet-Nam.¹¹⁰ There have since been indications from critics alleging that the United States passively longed for the fall of the Diem regime but miscalculated by underestimating the true strength and character of Ngo Dinh Diem.¹¹¹

With reference to the problem of French political harassment of the Diem government, the position of the State Department in 1955 was that Secretary Dulles personally persuaded the French government to stand aside and refrain from further hindrance to South Vietnamese nationalism. The State Department advocated a moderate position on the part of the French; only through such a policy could moderate

¹¹⁰"The United States versus the French," loc. cit.

¹¹¹"Tremors from Washington," loc. cit.

native leadership retain control of the new government in South Viet-Nam and repulse Ho Chi Minh.¹¹²

The final blow solidifying Diem's position was struck on October 24, 1955, when a plebiscite held in the South found the Premier swamping his playboy opponent, Bao Dai, by some 98.2 per cent of the votes cast.¹¹³ On the following day the government of Premier Diem was granted official recognition by both France and the United States.¹¹⁴ On October 26, 1956, the new Constitution for the Republic of Viet-Nam went into effect and shortly thereafter Diem proclaimed himself to be President of the new Republic.¹¹⁵

Reporting in the June 25, 1955, issue of Nation, author Sam Jaffe leveled substantial criticism at the Diem government. Mr. Jaffe accused his regime of corruption and misuse of American economic and military aid. He said, "It is not an easy job to keep a man like Diem in power, a man who ignores America's advice while reaching into America's pocketbook." Furthermore, according to Jaffe, Diem was the best of a sorry lot of South Vietnamese politicians--the United States was caught in the middle of a disastrous

¹¹²"Riding the Rapids," New Republic, May 16, 1955, pp. 3-4.

¹¹³"Bao Bows Out," Time, November 7, 1955, p. 42.

¹¹⁴New York Times, October 25, 1955, p. 1.

¹¹⁵Ibid., October 27, 1956, p. 10.

situation and at the same time was unable to withdraw her support for fear of a total collapse of South Viet-Nam.¹¹⁶

Bernard Fall echoed these sentiments with his speculation that Diem obviously disposed of both Bao Dai and the remaining French political enclave through the use of a rigged plebiscite. The French thereafter offered little or no resistance to Diem's regime and when the Premier requested their withdrawal in February 1956, the French High Command prepared for its own destruction--an act which was accomplished on April 26, 1956.¹¹⁷ The remaining question is yet unanswered conclusively: who played the greater part in Diem's climb to power and prestige--Secretary Dulles or the Premier himself?

When considering the attempts of the United States Department of State to encourage liberal reforms in the Diem government in the period 1955 through 1960 and the almost total lack of response on the part of Diem to institute such a program, it seems likely that the Premier had the utmost confidence in his personal abilities to entrench his regime with a minimum of American political influence.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Sam Jaffe, "Dilemma in Saigon," Nation, June 25, 1955, pp. 581-582.

¹¹⁷Bernard Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam," New York Times Magazine, May 2, 1965, p. 116.

¹¹⁸"A Billion for Vietnam--For United States, Trouble," U. S. News, November 28, 1960, p. 84.

Over-all, when all the complexities of the situation have been considered, it does not seem illogical to assume that the political role of the U. S. State Department has been overemphasized in the rise to power of the Diem regime.

The major political decision for Secretary Dulles certainly lay in the question of whether to support Bao Dai, the French puppet, or Ngo Dinh Diem, the nationalist. There were no other comparable leaders in sight at the time and so Diem eventually came into almost monarchical control of South Viet-Nam when Bao Dai continued his plush exile on the French Riviera. Secretary Dulles allegedly sought to disclaim the Premier as a political protege, but that was no easy task.¹¹⁹

By 1955 the French Union forces and the People's Army of North Viet-Nam were in the process of regrouping their forces in accordance with the Geneva Accords. This was also the time when a mass migration of North Vietnamese refugees to the South began. An overwhelming majority of these refugees were Catholics fleeing Ho Chi Minh's regime.

A unique political event that occurred in the United States at this particular time was the entrance of Cardinal Spellman of New York into the controversy concerning South Viet-Nam's future. In a speech before the American Legion Convention on August 31, 1954, Spellman declared: "If Geneva

¹¹⁹Gerson, loc. cit.

and what was agreed upon there means anything at all, it means... taps for the buried hopes of freedom in Southeast Asia.... Communism has a world plan and it has been following a carefully set-up timetable for the achievement of that plan."¹²⁰ Certainly this speech sounds like so much idle chatter, but there were subsequent events indicating that American policy reflected some of the Cardinal's sentiments.

A prominent U. S. Senator shared the concern of the Cardinal for the downtrodden lovers of freedom in Viet-Nam. In a speech before the American Friends of Viet-Nam in Washington, D. C., on June 1, 1956, John F. Kennedy declared that America's stake in Viet-Nam rested upon four basic premises. First, the United States was the cornerstone of the Free World in Asia--"a finger in the dike." Second, Viet-Nam was the proving ground of democracy in Asia--the one alternative to Communist dictatorship. Third, Viet-Nam was the test of American responsibility and determination in Asia--"If we are not the parents... then surely we are the godparents." Fourth, America's very security was at stake in Viet-Nam.¹²¹

¹²⁰ New York Times, September 1, 1954, p. 1.

¹²¹ John F. Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam," Vital Speeches, August 1, 1956, pp. 617-619.

Senator Kennedy proceeded to praise the accomplishments of the Diem government. His major points dealt with the rehabilitation of three-quarters of a million Catholic refugees from the North, the construction of some forty-five thousand houses for the refugees, two-thousand-five-hundred wells dug, one-hundred schools built, numerous medical centers established, the increased solidarity of the Diem government, the elimination of rebellious religious sects (non-Catholic), a free and independent Republic, the election of a Representative Assembly, land reform, and various social and economic reforms. According to the Senator a veritable land of milk and honey was on the verge of birth in Southeast Asia. The United States must therefore protect her investment and the democratic peoples of the South.¹²²

Author Bernard Fall expressed the opinion that this mass migration of Catholics to the South was the result of an extremely intensive, well-organized, very successful American strategy of psychological warfare directed against the North Vietnamese government. Propaganda slogans and leaflets were distributed in the North bearing such slogans as "Christ has gone to the South," and "the Virgin Mary has departed from the North."¹²³

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 153-154.

In a display of objective reporting, Mr. Fall also revealed a well-kept but significant American political secret concerning the success of North Vietnamese psychological warfare in the South. Approximately eighty-thousand local guerillas and regulars and their dependents went North to seek sanctuary under Ho Chi Minh's regime. Included in the total were some ten-thousand mountain tribesmen who feared the Catholic Diem regime's oppressive policies in a predominantly non-Catholic country.

Another five-thousand local guerillas--the elite of the Viet-Minh political and military operations in the South--went underground. They hid their weapons and became anonymous villagers--at least for the time being.¹²⁴ Such a secret underground organization opposed to Diem would help create the illusion that Diem was successful in winning the populace to his side.

When the French abdicated their responsibility in April 1956, and withdrew, the United States moved into the political vacuum. France, of course, as signatory of the Geneva Accords had the responsibility for carrying out the political provisions of the Agreements, including the provisions for free elections in 1956. The authority was now

¹²⁴Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam,"
loc. cit.

vested solely in the hands of the United States and the Republic of South Viet-Nam, neither of which had signed or ratified the Geneva Agreements and were not legally bound to enforce the provisions of that document; hence, no elections were conducted in 1956.

American aid to Diem strengthened his autocratic control over both the army and the administration of the civil government. The Diem regime successively defeated and weakened the influence of various factions, and created the Republic of Viet-Nam in October 1955 with Diem as the President. When in 1956 North Viet-Nam invoked the Geneva Agreements providing for free general elections, Diem refused. A plebiscite at that time would probably have unified both halves of the divided nation under Communist control from Hanoi. In effect, Diem's actions made permanent the provisional military demarcation line agreed upon at Geneva.¹²⁵

Some political figures in the United States upheld the political decision of President Diem in 1956 not to go through with the general elections. In a speech before the American Friends of Viet-Nam on July 1, Senator John Kennedy expressed the hope that the United States would never give

¹²⁵"American Dilemma in South Vietnam," loc. cit.;
Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam," loc. cit.;
H. A. Steiner, "Viet-Nam: Civil War Again?," New Republic,
July 18, 1955, pp. 11-13.

official approval to early nationwide elections. He reemphasized the fact that the United States was not a party to the Geneva Accords and therefore not responsible for enforcement of the Accords.¹²⁶

At a conference held in London in 1956, the Soviet Union and Great Britain, two signatories of the Geneva Agreements, issued a half-hearted appeal for the elections. The fact that the Soviet Union was not anxious to establish a precedent for East Germany and the other satellites possibly to follow may have been the reason why the Soviet Union did not promote an unpleasant diplomatic incident in regard to the failure to hold elections. In addition, both parties knew that South Viet-Nam would not alter its stand any more than North Viet-Nam would agree to reduce its military force illegally built up in violation of the Accords.

The British were not inclined to push the United States into an intolerable position on the question if a published report by Representative Goodell of New York was any indication of British feelings. Mr. Goodell quoted from an official statement of the United Kingdom on the floor of the House of Representatives. It said in part:

¹²⁶ John F. Kennedy, loc. cit.

Her Majesty's government has always regarded it as desirable that these elections should be held and has advised the Government of the Republic of Vietnam to enter into consultations with the Vietminh authorities in order to insure that all the necessary conditions obtained for a free expression of the national will as a preliminary to holding free general elections by secret ballot. Nevertheless, Her Majesty's government does not agree that (South Vietnam) is legally obliged to follow that course....¹²⁷

Senator Hubert Humphrey, Democrat from Minnesota, expressed his personal support for the Diem government of South Viet-Nam on the floor of the United States Senate. According to Senator Humphrey:

Premier Diem is the best hope that we have in South Vietnam... He deserves... wholehearted support of the American Government and our foreign policy.... If we have any comment to make about the leadership in Vietnam let it be directed against Bao Dai....¹²⁸

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reportedly thought of his policy toward South Viet-Nam as a success, and his opinion of Diem supposedly improved with each meeting of the two men. The United States increased the economic assistance and military aid initiated under earlier Eisenhower directives in hope that the desired objectives would be attained.

¹²⁷ Representative Goodell of New York quoting from statement of United Kingdom, May 1956, Congressional Record, 89th Congress, 1st Session, August 25, 1965, p. 21841.

¹²⁸ Congressional Record, 84th Congress, 1st Session, May 2, 1955, p. 5290.

In spite of United States insistence upon liberal reforms in the Saigon government, dictatorial methods, repression, and eventually civil war characterized Diem's rule in the late 1950's. He suppressed political opposition and failed to enforce even minimal land reform measures. In agricultural Viet-Nam, economic exploitation by a small land-owning elite resulted in widespread peasant defection and insurgency. Diem's policies alienated large segments of the rural population, antagonized the Montagnard tribesmen of the interior, provoked hostility and revolt among nationalists and Buddhists alike, and was being met by open guerrilla warfare among Viet-Minh sympathizers by 1959.¹²⁹

John Osborne, a severe critic of Diem, wrote in a 1957 edition of Life a grim picture of political intrigue.

Behind a facade of photographs, flags and slogans there is a grim structure of decrees, political prisons, concentration camps, milder 're-education centers,' secret police. Presidential 'Ordinance No. 6' signed and issued by Diem in January, 1956, provides that 'individuals considered dangerous to national defense and common security' may be confined by executive order in a 'concentration camp'. Only known or suspected Communists who have threatened or violated public security since July, 1954, are supposed to be arrested and 're-educated' under these decrees. But many non-Communists have also been detained. The whole machinery of security has been used to discourage active opposition of any kind from any source.¹³⁰

¹²⁹David Hotham, "South Vietnam--Shaky Bastion," New Republic, November 25, 1957, pp. 13-16.

¹³⁰John Osborne, "The Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam," Life, May 13, 1957, p. 156.

During the Eisenhower Administration the United States Department of Defense was instrumental in the creation of several agencies in South Viet-Nam designed to strengthen the military preparedness of the Republic's Army. This was the era when the system of sending United States Army "advisors" to South Viet-Nam began.

The United States Training Relations and Instructions Mission (TRIM) was created for the express purpose of building a strong military force in the Republic. On February 12, 1955, Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel assumed command of TRIM with a staff of three-hundred commissioned and non-commissioned officers. A program of military improvement and training was instituted at once. Until April 1956 General O'Daniel was technically subject to the orders of the French High Command.¹³¹

Another significant United States' agency created at this time was the United States Operations Mission (USMO) which attempted to determine the needs of the country by direct contact with the population.¹³²

In 1955 the United States contributed some two-hundred-thirty-five million dollars in military aid to the government of the Republic of South Viet-Nam; not included

¹³¹General William J. Donovan, "The Struggle in Asia," Vital Speeches, April 1, 1955, pp. 135-136; Jaffe, loc. cit.

¹³²Donovan, loc. cit.

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in this total were actual arms, some thirty million in economic aid, and fifty-five million for refugee resettlement.¹³³

By 1957 United States' aid was in excess of two-hundred-fifty million dollars for military expenditures alone.¹³⁴ Total aid pumped into South Viet-Nam in the years 1954 through 1957 totalled some seven-hundred-seventy million dollars.¹³⁵

British correspondent David Hotham concluded that despite generous American aid, Viet-Nam was one of the least stable governments in Asia. He felt that American propaganda efforts made the Diem government a "paper tiger" by drawing a curtain of dollars and publicity over the confusion and chaos present in the government.¹³⁶

When the French lost the Indo-China War in 1954, the only hope of saving the South from Communism lay in the accomplishment of three main objectives of American policy. These were: (1) unite the South under a popular political leader with a stable basis among his people; (2) give the South genuine political and economic independence so it could stand alone and even outbid the competing system in

¹³³"One Dam Holds Against the Red Tide," U. S. News, March 23, 1956, p. 40.

¹³⁴"The Two Vietnams," New Republic, July 1, 1957, p. 7.

¹³⁵Hotham, loc. cit.

¹³⁶Ibid.

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the North; and (3) over a long-range basis, lift the standard of living of the masses taking refuge south of the seven-teenth parallel.¹³⁷

Despite the massive American aid program, none of these essential objectives was achieved. The political leadership of Diem was a failure in regard to the unification of the South on a popular basis--he had to resort to a police state in order to control the dissident elements.

With regard to political and economic independence for the South, it was facetious to think of a nation as independent when eighty per cent of its imports were being paid for by the United States Treasury.¹³⁸

President Eisenhower summed up his policies toward Viet-Nam in a revealing address before Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, on April 4, 1959. According to the President: "Unassisted, Vietnam cannot at this time produce and support the military formations essential to it, or, equally important, the morale--the hope, the confidence, the pride--necessary to meet the dual threat of aggression from without and subversion within...."¹³⁹ Eisenhower continued by declaring that Viet-Nam must have a degree of safety--both for her people and her property. This was the President's

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The Importance of Under-
Standing," Vital Speeches, May 1, 1959, pp. 418-421.

reasoning for the large American military and economic aid programs. The Chief Executive also demonstrated his belief that the security of the United States and her national interests demanded that the American people attempt to sustain in Viet-Nam the morale, economic progress, and military strength necessary for that nation's continued existence.¹⁴⁰

All United States public commentary of the late 1950's did not condemn the Diem government. Among those prominent columnists who offered support was Ernest Lindley. His position, in effect, was that Diem had managed to bring order to South Viet-Nam out of chaos. Despite the military defeat suffered at the hands of Ho Chi Minh, the political setbacks of the Geneva Conference, the half-hearted policy of the United States--Diem had managed to bring some semblance of order to his country in less than two years. Private armies were wiped out, the Communists were driven underground, the countryside was partially pacified, most refugees were resettled, and an emergence of nationalism was apparent. President Diem was largely responsible for any achievements.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ernest K. Lindley, "A Friend Named Diem," Newsweek, May 20, 1957, p. 40.

CHAPTER VII

THE MANILA PACT: POLITICAL, MILITARY,
AND DIPLOMATIC LIABILITIES

The Geneva Agreements, although a diplomatic setback for the United States, had no profound effects on American policies toward Southeast Asia. As before, United States' objectives were to prevent the spread of Communism and particularly to counteract the strengthened position of Ho Chi Minh's regime. Secretary of State Dulles expressed this most lucidly in the words: "The Geneva outcome did... confirm the need for unity.... Any significant expansion of the Communist world would, indeed, be a danger to the United States,...."¹⁴²

John Foster Dulles' philosophy was pragmatic by nature. He did not wish to mourn the past failures of his diplomacy but desired only the opportunity of guiding American policy in such a manner as to prevent the loss of Vietnam to Communism from leading to the extension of that system throughout Southeast Asia. In order to prevent such

¹⁴² John Foster Dulles, "The Manila Pact and the Pacific Charter," Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, November 9, 1954, pp. 15886-15887.

an extension of that system, the Secretary of State and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain had agreed in principle to a collective defense agreement for Southeast Asia at their Washington meeting in June 1954.¹⁴³

Secretary Dulles and Prime Minister Churchill both felt a compromise peace in Asia was nearly impossible after the disastrous results taking place at Geneva. Dulles viewed the creation of a mutual defense treaty as an important deterrent to the growing influence of Red China; he hoped that his proposal for a mutual security treaty would provide the collective defense system so badly needed but lacking in March-April 1954.

The United States desired a broadly based treaty in Asia, including most of the non-aligned neutrals, but was forced by circumstances to settle for a vague, mutual security pact that included few militarily and politically important nations of that region.

When the ANZUS pact was signed in September 1952, the U. S. Department of State desired other Asian members--particularly the Philippines. Both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations were reluctant to include the British in any such mutual security pact because of Britain's historic colonial policy in Asia and her current diplomatic

¹⁴³New York Times, June 29, 1954, p. 1.

courting of Communist China. However, the sudden turn of diplomatic events in April 1954 stimulated the Americans' urgent desire for such a mutual security pact, and when Prime Minister Churchill agreed in principle in an attempt to restore the shattered Anglo-American alliance, the U. S. took the bait--later to regret their hasty action.¹⁴⁴

The British insisted upon the inclusion of the "Colombo Powers" in any treaty--contending that Indian support was crucial to the success of any projected treaty. The British won this diplomatic argument; at their insistence the Colombo Powers were invited to participate in the creation of a military security pact--only Pakistan was to accept the invitation. Much to allied embarrassment, the remaining powers, led by India, boycotted the Manila Pact meeting and convened in December 1954 to discuss "problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples." To Dulles' chagrin, they called for another meeting in April 1955 with Red China as an invited guest.¹⁴⁵

In his message to Foreign Minister Eden of Britain, Prime Minister Nehru of India declined the invitation and expressed a belief that such a conference could only bring dissension and division in Asia. He further discouraged

¹⁴⁴O. Edmund Clubb, "Disunity in SEATO--Asia Prefers Asians," Nation, March 12, 1955, pp. 217-219.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

British participation in any Asian treaty. As a result of Nehru's antipathy for American political involvement in Asia, the American State Department was eventually forced to settle for a weakened version of the hoped for treaty.¹⁴⁶ One author compared the treaty signing ceremony to a shotgun wedding.¹⁴⁷

A consistent critic of United States policy, J. Alvarez del Vayo of Nation magazine, expressed an opinion that the signing of the Manila Pact on September 8, 1954, was an effort on the part of U. S. diplomats to salvage some traditional policies that had recently been dealt a death blow with the defeat of the European Army Concept (EDC) by the French National Assembly. Del Vayo argued that traditional American policy was built around the practice of submerging Western differences behind the United States-created facade of a gigantic Communist bogeyman.¹⁴⁸

G. S. Bhargava, writing in a 1954 edition of New Republic quoted Prime Minister Nehru as describing U. S. policies in Asia as "doublethink and doubletalk." On the event of the signing of the Manila Pact, Nehru had said: "I find this treaty a very unfortunate event. The steps

¹⁴⁷Clubb, loc. cit.

¹⁴⁸J. Alvarez del Vayo, "Our Uncontrollable Allies," Nation, September 18, 1954, pp. 225-226.

taken in the name of aggression themselves encourage aggression."¹⁴⁹ Nehru apparently feared SEATO as a new tool of American political domination in Asia.¹⁵⁰

The first concern for Secretary of State Dulles lay in the political status of Viet-Nam, Laos, and Cambodia where Dulles believed a continued French presence to be a distinct liability. The infant states of Indo-China had to be assured of independent futures--the only way of insuring this objective was to offer political and military aid to the friendliest regimes. This practice brought forth angry bursts from neutralist politicians such as Nehru. The resounding theme was woven around the ideology that America's anti-colonial claims would not carry greater weight until she exercised greater care in the choice of friends and partners. It was said that the choice of Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee, and now Ngo Diem hurt U. S. prestige.¹⁵¹

It is unfortunate that the Manila Pact was signed at a time when solidarity among the allies had become strained, Congressional elections were pending in the United States, and the concept of non-alignment had become so prevalent among the newly independent nations of Asia. In regard to

¹⁴⁹G. S. Bhargava, "Delhi Dispatch--One Section of Asian Opinion," New Republic, October 4, 1954, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰Arthur H. Dean, "Collective Defense in Southeast Asia," Current History, July 1956, pp. 7-14.

¹⁵¹Bhargava, loc. cit.

the problem presented by lack of solidarity among the allies, Secretary Dulles had admonished American allies thusly:

If we are weak in situations in the Far East,... we may get pressures elsewhere... The Europeans need to remember that our power is primarily nuclear and would not be engaged in a [local] conflict in the Far East. Nothing would be more foolish than for us to invade the Chinese mainland with 650 million inhabitants.¹⁵²

Secretary of State Dulles was apparently chiding those European statesmen who were afraid that the United States' preoccupation with Asia would eventually weaken U. S. influence and responsibility in Europe. It also appears on close scrutiny that the Secretary revealed a fallacy in American military strategy for the 1950's--it can be a mistake to put all your eggs in one basket.

With reference to the newly independent neutral nations in Asia, some observation can be noted in regard to their obstinate position. They declared their independence with one hand and requested economic and military aid with the other. Neutrality had a strange definition for Nehru when one considers his running battle with Pakistan and his outspoken criticism of U. S. policies in regard to South Viet-Nam.

This then was the difficult political and diplomatic situation in which Secretary of State Dulles found

¹⁵² Louis Gerson, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy: John Foster Dulles (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), pp. 188-193.

himself. In attempting to arouse Senate support for ratification of the treaty, he was faced with the fact that his policies were being used as both a political and diplomatic football. He did not question the sincerity of the neutrals, led by Nehru; however, he was concerned about their lack of concern over the international Communist challenge to freedom.¹⁵³ The same concern he found lacking in some influential figures in the United States Senate.

United States Congressional elections were but a few weeks away. Some political strategists were attempting to prove the Secretary of State was the weak link in the Eisenhower chain of command. In a news conference as early as May 12, 1954, President Eisenhower had attempted to squelch this movement and demonstrated his personal approval of Secretary Dulles' Asian policies. He said:

... Some have assumed that there has been a difference of opinion between the Secretary of State and myself... I think I have assured this group several times that I know of no important announcements made by either one of us in this regard that isn't the result of long and serious conferences.

... Mr. Dulles said we will not give up; no matter what happens down there, we will never give up even if these three [Associated States] should fall.... Naturally, all of us want to save them because of their importance, but it has to be done on their invitation.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, Presidential Papers of the United States: 1954 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 107.

The President further commented that his desire was that the Associated States would voluntarily express their conviction to become members of a mutual defense pact. He explained that his administration was attempting to build a row of dominoes so strong that it could withstand the fall of one, if necessary.¹⁵⁵

Because of the allied reluctance to commit themselves to a strong stand on collective defense, including American insistence that naval and air power were sufficient for meeting aggression, the State Department went through an evolutionary modification of an earlier stand that the real need was for a NATO-like military force to put teeth into the treaty. Vice President Nixon's speech before the Veteran's of Foreign Wars Convention in Philadelphia on August 2, 1954, demonstrated these modifications in basic policy. He said that traditional mutual defense pacts like NATO would not have saved Indo-China because such a pact would have drawn a border line; in Indo-China the Communists did not march across the border--they went under it.¹⁵⁶

The Manila Pact, signed on September 8, 1954, had three main purposes according to Secretary Dulles. First,

¹⁵⁵President Eisenhower's Press Conference of May 12, 1954, U. S. News, May 21, 1954, p. 88.

¹⁵⁶Richard Nixon, "A New Approach by the United States in Fighting Communism," U. S. News, August 13, 1954, pp. 26-27.

to provide a deterrent against open armed aggression; second, to provide a defense against subversion; third, to improve economic and social conditions in Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁷

Secretary of State Dulles preferred the term Manila Pact to the more commonly used name--Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The official name was in reality The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty (SEACDT).

When problems arose as to correct pronunciation, Dulles suggested the term Manila Pact--a term he subsequently used in all his public utterances.¹⁵⁸ The official text of the Manila Pact and its Protocol were presented to the United States Senate for ratification on November 10, 1954, by President pro tempore Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire.¹⁵⁹

The most controversial treaty provisions were Articles III and IV. A significant portion of Article IV follows:

Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and

¹⁵⁷ John Foster Dulles, "Report from Asia," Vital Speeches, April 1, 1955, pp. 1122-1125.

¹⁵⁸ "Successful Salvage," Time, September 20, 1954, p. 35; John Foster Dulles, "The Asian Defense Pact," Vital Speeches, October 1, 1954, pp. 738-739.

¹⁵⁹ Congressional Record, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, November 10, 1954, p. 15912.

agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.¹⁶⁰

If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party... is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.¹⁶¹

The State of Viet-Nam, still a subsidiary of French control in the South, did not sign the treaty. Neither did any provision of the treaty itself commit the signatories to provide troops or other support to any government or state in southern Viet-Nam. The Articles quoted above clearly indicated that, in the event of an armed attack from outside, each nation would respond according to the provisions of its own constitution.

Not to be overlooked is an additional protocol to the Manila Pact, signed unanimously on the same day as the original treaty. The protocol designated Laos, Cambodia, and the "free territory under the State of Viet-Nam" as coming under the attack, subversion, and economic aid sections of the treaty. In effect, the treaty recognized

¹⁶⁰The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, Article IV, Section 1, United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, 1955 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1956), pp. 81-85.

¹⁶¹Ibid., Article IV, Section 2.

the southern zone of Viet-Nam as a political entity. The protocol said in part:

Designation of states and territory as to which provisions of Articles IV and Article III are to be applicable:

The Parties to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty unanimously designate for the purposes of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam.¹⁶²

The various ambiguities contained in the controversial pact led to several heated exchanges in the United States Senate between Secretary of State Dulles and various Senators opposed to its principles and implied commitments. One such exchange follows:

Senator T. F. Green, Rhode Island: Then we are obliged to help put down a revolutionary movement?

Secretary Dulles: No. If there is a revolutionary movement in Vietnam or in Thailand, we would consult together as to what to do about it,... it would be a very grave threat to us. But we have no undertaking to put it down;...

Senator Homer Ferguson, Michigan: In other words, ... 'armed attack' in paragraph 1 of article IV [refers to] ordinary armed attack rather than a subterfuge...?

Secretary Dulles: Yes, sir.... [A]rticle IV, paragraph 2, contemplates that if that situation arises or threatens, that we should consult together... in order to agree on measures which should be taken. That is an obligation for consultation. It is not an obligation for action.¹⁶³

¹⁶²Protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, op. cit., pp. 87-89; Dulles, "The Asian Defense Pact," loc. cit.

¹⁶³U. S. Senate, The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), pp. 25, 28, 33.

From the historical perspective it is interesting to compare Secretary Dulles' interpretation of the American commitment with the contradictory interpretations of his successor. The New York Times of November 27, 1966, quotes Secretary of State Dean Rusk: "... we are not acting specifically under the SEATO treaty." In the Vietnam Hearings, conducted by Congress in 1966, Rusk gave the following statement under cross-examination:

Senator Fullbright of Arkansas: ... Does the Southeast Asia Treaty... commit us to do what we are now doing in Vietnam?

Secretary of State Rusk: Yes Sir, I have no doubt that it does.¹⁶⁴

In a very real sense the Manila Pact has proven to be a political and diplomatic albatross for the United States. The over-all effect seemed to negate American influence in Asia and tended to draw U. S. military forces into an untenable position. Equally harmful was the effect of the pact upon the domestic political scene. It had a tendency to cause Congressional figures to take a firm stand either for or against it, and it pushed Secretary of State Dulles as well as his successor into inflexible and contradictory positions that weakened the nation both militarily and politically.

¹⁶⁴United States Senate, The Vietnam Hearings, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, January-February, 1966, p. 11.

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