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Eisenhower, Vietnam, and the Geneva Conference of 1954

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis examines the 1954 Geneva Conference which appeared to be a turning point in America's foreign policy in Indochina. The Conference was initially held to discuss the Korean War armistice but as the the French position in Indochina deteriorated, the Conference evolved into a French effort to end their Indochina commitment and, thus, the first Indochina war. The role of the Eisenhower administration at Geneva and whether that role was part of a clearly defined foreign policy agenda or a policy that merely reacted to events as they occurred is examined. The thesis shows that a negative attitude toward the Conference resulted in a policy of non-participation with the American delegation in basicly an observer status. The thesis also shows the Conference marked a turning point in United States policy toward Indochina in that it became one of active participation in the area rather just one of monetary or material aid to the French.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The American effort in Vietnam was a long and costly one with more than fifty thousand American combat personnel losing their lives. Historians have been critical of the Vietnam policies of each of the presidents involved in Indochina and of the manner in which each seemed to react to Vietnam only in relation to other foreign policy issues. Harry S. Truman has been cited for originating the commitment in the wake of the "fall" of China to communism in 1949 and the start of the Korean War in 1950; John F. Kennedy for militarizing that commitment as part of his Third World contest with the Soviet Union and for conspiring in the coup that overthrew the regime of Ngo Ninh Diem; Lyndon B. Johnson for escalating the military role of the United States and for making the conflict an American war; and Richard M. Nixon for promising to end the war, while in actuality extending it in terms of both ferocity and territory to prove the credibility of the American commitment in order to secure his other foreign policy goals. Only President Dwight David Eisenhower has received any scholarly praise for his

Indochina policies, which are viewed as moderate in comparison to his successors and designed to avoid an American military commitment.[1] Is this praise justified? Did Eisenhower have a well defined Indochina policy or did he too just react to events and larger foreign policy considerations?

One way to answer these questions is to look at the 1954 Geneva Conference and Eisenhower's role in it. The Conference was initially held to discuss the Korean armistice and the conflict between the French and the various rebel groups in Indochina (primarily the Viet Minh in Vietnam).[2] As the French position in Indochina deteriorated, the Geneva Conference evolved into a French effort to end their Indochina commitment and, thus, the first Indochina war. What role did the Eisenhower administration play at Geneva and was that role part of a clearly defined foreign policy agenda? Did the Eisenhower administration have a clearly defined set of goals at the

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[1]Robert A. Divine, Eisenhower And The Cold War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies Of Containment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); George C. Herring, America's Longest War, The United States In Vietnam, 1950-1975 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979).

[2]Indochina was composed of three countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The French were in conflict with various nationalist groups in all countries; however, the Vietnam conflict posed the greatest threat to French control and authority.

Geneva Conference and a plan for achieving those goals? In addressing these questions, primary emphasis has been directed toward three purposes: (1) To describe events leading up to the Geneva Conference. This will include a brief history of the French involvement in Indochina and the United States' support of that involvement. The history will show how events evolved into the situation that made a conference necessary; (2) To disccuss the 1954 Geneva Conference, the parties involved, and their policies and goals at the Conference; (3) To describe the meaning of the results of the Conference and assess whether the Eisenhower administration's role at the Conference was part of a clearly defined Indochina policy.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY FRENCH AND U.S. INVOLVEMENT THROUGH 1952

France had always encountered opposition to its control in Vietnam: by the 1920s dissident groups or political organizations composed of French educated civil servants, school teachers, and professionals organized to oppose the French. The groups included the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD), Tan Viet, and the Communist Party of Indochina. Their goals included political and social change in Vietnamese society and the total independence of Vietnam from France. The groups initiated a campaign of anti-French agitation and terrorism to accomplish their goals but a lack of cooperation among the groups and the lack of a clearly defined political and social strategy hampered their efforts. The dissidents were also relatively few in number and a severe crackdown by the French drove many of them to China.[3]

A more potent threat to French control came when Japanese forces conquered the French in Vietnam during the early stages of World War II. However, the Japanese

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[3]Frances FitzGerald, Fire In The Lake (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972), pp. 61-62.

agreed to allow the French to maintain their bureaucracy in Vietnam under Japanese supervision. Soon after the Japanese invaded Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese nationalist and communist leader, organized the various Vietnamese factions into the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh or the Vietnamese Independence League to fight the Japanese occupiers. The League soon became known as the "Viet Minh."[4] The Viet Minh contained many non-communists who viewed Ho and the Viet Minh as the best means to fight the Japanese and win eventual independence from the French. After World War I, Ho had traveled abroad seeking help to free Vietnam from the French. Ho's first contact with European socialist thought came in London in 1913 when he joined the Lao Dong Hoi Nagai or Overseas Workers Organization. Ho moved to Paris in 1917 and made contact with leftist groups there which included a great many Vietnamese expatriates. While in Paris, Ho studied the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin and became the first Vietnamese member of the French Young Socialist Movement and later joined the ninth cell of the newly formed French Communist Party. Acting on President Woodrow Wilson's words that all nations should have the right of self determination, Ho tried to present an eight point program

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[4]Stanley Karnow, Vietnam (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), p. 127.

for Vietnam's independence to Wilson at the Versailles peace conference. President Wilson refused to see him.

Ho moved to Moscow in 1924 and was transformed from a propagandist into a practical organizer through his study of socialism and communism. In 1925 Ho traveled to China where he helped organize the Vietnam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth) which became the foundation for the Indochinese Communist Party founded in 1930. By the time the Viet Minh was created during World War II, Ho Chi Minh had become the leading communist patriot in Southeast Asia.[5] During the Second World War, the Viet Minh (with aid from the United States) fought the Japanese for the same reasons its various factions had fought the French before the war: to free Vietnam from a foreign power.

The Potsdam Conference in 1945 divided Vietnam for occupation purposes between China and Great Britain at the sixteenth parallel. China was to accept the surrender of the Japanese forces in the northern sector while Great Britain would perform similar duties in the south. The French were not part of the agreement, but they were determined to regain control of Vietnam after the war.

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[5]Frances FitzGerald, Fire In The Lake (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972), p. 221; Robert Goldston, The Vietnamese Revolution (New York: The Bobbs-Merril Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 50-54.

French military forces accompanied those of Great Britain and China when they moved into Vietnam in September, 1945. The Chinese took over from the Japanese, and stayed long enough to acquire a series of agreements from the French that exchanged French prewar rights and privileges in China for the the Chinese withdrawal from the northern part of Vietnam. With the agreements signed and with internal problems of their own, the Chinese withdrew from Vietnam in October, 1946, leaving the entire area to the British and French.[6] The British left in 1946 soon after supervising the Japanese surrender in the southern part of Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh had earlier warned the ruling French government (the Free French) that if independence were not granted Vietnam at war's end, the Viet Minh would fight until independence was received.[7] Soon after the French reestablished themselves in Vietnam, Ho entered into an agreement in March 1946 with a representative of the French military in Vietnam in which France was supposed to recognize Ho's recently established Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as a free state with its own

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[6]Archimedes L.A. Patti, Why Vietnam? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 381.

[7]Barbara W. Tuchman, The March Of Folly (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 240.

Parliament, Army, and finances. The agreement was never recognized by the French government and French forces occupied all major Vietnamese cities. Ho tried to gain recognition of the agreement through negotiation with the French government. However, an armed clash in November 1946 between French forces and Viet Minh troops over customs control in the port of Haiphong led to a French attack on the city. Ho and the DRV government were forced to flee and shortly thereafter Ho redeemed his pledge and the French found themselves involved in a guerrilla war against the Viet Minh.[8] At first, the Viet Minh did not present a serious threat to French control or authority, but as time passed, guerrilla activities increased and became more organized. Supported by the Soviet Union and China (after the communist takeover in 1949), the Viet Minh began to threaten seriously French interests.

Facing a greater challenge to their authority, the French, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, initiated a policy of appeasement toward the Vietnamese people. Through a series of agreements that promised much but delivered little, the French tried to win popular support away from Ho and the Viet Minh and place it behind a Vietnamese government headed by a man named Bao Dai[9],

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[8]Patti, Why Vietnam?, pp. 382-383.

[9]Ibid., p. 477.

who was hand picked by the French.[10] Bao Dai was born in 1913 as Prince Nguyen Vinh Thuy, son of Emperor Khai Din who was, in title, Emperor of Vietnam. Bao Dai succeeded to the throne in 1926 but did not occupy it until 1932, at the age of 19. During World War II, Bao Dai collaborated with the French and Japanese administrations in Vietnam but was forced to abdicate his position of "authority" by the Japanese in 1945. He then served Ho Chi Minh as citizen Vinh Thuy in the position of "Supreme Political Advisor" when Ho formed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in 1946. When the French decided to establish a Vietnamese government to draw support away from Ho Chi Minh and the DRV, they sought Bao Dai as the Chief of State because of his link to the Vietnamese monarchy. The French hoped that the return of "Emperor" Bao Dai would give the non-communist government legitimacy in the minds of the Vietnamese people. Bao Dai was very nationalistic and a cautious and calculating politician. He was convinced that a representative

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[10]The agreements included a secret protocol signed at the Bay of Along on December 7, 1947; an accord signed at Ha Long Bay on June 5, 1948; and the Elysee Agreements, signed on March 8, 1949. For further information see: Dean Acheson, Present At The Creation (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1969), p. 671; Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, End Of A War (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p. 15; Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle For Indochina, 1940-1955 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 225-226.

government in Vietnam could not be established without the participation or at least the tacit approval of the Viet Minh. Because of his royal blood, the French tried for two years to convince Bao Dai to lead the government they wanted to establish. When Bao Dai finally accepted the position of Chief of State, he made the same demand for Vietnamese independence that Ho Chi Minh made.[11] The agreements that were signed with Bao Dai's government promised a greater role for the Vietnamese people in the administration of their affairs and implied eventual independence. However, the French retained all authority in the military, diplomatic, economic, and financial areas and were slow to enact the provisions of the agreements. French control was not total, however, because of Bao Dai's collaboration with the French and Japanese during World War II and the lack of progress toward actual independence, Bao Dai was perceived as a French puppet by the majority of the Vietnamese people who were not swayed from their support of the Viet Minh.

The United States had supported Ho and the Viet Minh in their effort against the Japanese during World War II, but what would United States' policy toward Indochina be now that the war had ended? President Franklin Delano

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[11]Patti, Why Vietnam?, pp. 394-397, and 477; Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 25.

Roosevelt had hoped that World War II would mark an end to colonialism. He favored international trusteeship and eventual independence for colonies like Vietnam. However, the governments of Great Britain and France and the military advisors of the United States did not support a policy that might cost important colonies or military bases.[12] Roosevelt had moderated his position by 1945 when he indicated that if France assumed the role of trustee then he would not object to France's retaining her colonies on the understanding that total independence would be assured.[13] FDR's death and the growing antagonism between the Soviet Union and the West tilted American policy toward the British and French view. The need for allied support in the Cold War and the fear that newly independent colonies would fall to communism caused President Harry S Truman to inform the French in 1946 that the United States would not oppose the return of French authority to Vietnam.[14]

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[12]Herring, America's Longest War, pp. 5-6; George McT Kahin, Intervention, How America Became Involved In Vietnam, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986), pp. 3-4; . Patti, Why Vietnam?, pp. 17, 121; Tuchman, The March Of Folly , pp. 237-240.

[13]Patti, Why Vietnam?, p. 121.

[14]Acheson, Present At The Creation, p. 671.

Acceptance of French authority in Vietnam, however, did not mean acceptance of Vietnam as a French colony. Eventual Vietnamese independence remained a goal of American foreign policy. The State Department viewed the American role in Vietnam as one that would help the nationalist aims of the Vietnamese people while minimizing the strains that would likely occur with the French government as the United States worked for Vietnamese independence. While the French-Vietnamese agreements that were signed in the late forties and early fifties moved in the direction of American goals, the State Department did not believe that they went far enough or would be implemented fast enough to satisfy the majority of nationalists in Vietnam.[15]

During this period, the Truman administration developed a foreign policy based on a system of pacts or alliances designed to "contain" the spread of communism. The Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were among the efforts to bring closer economic and military cooperation among Western European allies in order to stop Soviet expansionism in Europe.[16] Although there were no pacts or alliances designed to

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[15]Ibid.

[16]Gaddis, Strategies Of Containment, pp. 19-24, 25-51.

contain communism in Asia, the area was not ignored by the Truman administration. President Truman met with the National Security Council (NSC) in December, 1949, to discuss and establish policy guidelines in meeting the communist threat in Asia. The guidelines included: a readiness to help Asian governments threatened by communist subversion by providing political, economic, and military aid; pursuit of the possibility of developing some form of collective security arrangement in the area; promotion of economic conditions that would contribute to political stability; and the difficult task of using American influence to resolve nationalist-colonialist conflicts without harming relations with the colonial power involved.[17] The NSC believed that if Vietnam or Southeast Asia fell to communism, then Australia, the Middle East, and the countries in between would fall in due course.[18]

The maintenance of a non-communist Vietnam thus became part of Truman's containment policy in Southeast Asia. While the focus was on communism, the nationalist-colonialist aspect of the Vietnam conflict had not been

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[17]The Senator Gravel Edition, The Pentagon Papers, The Defense Department History Of United States Decisionmaking On Vietnam, 4 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 39.

[18]Ibid., p. 82.

entirely ignored by the United States government. The NSC, in a 1949 study of Asian policy, stated that the French-Vietnamese conflict stemmed from:

> the decline of a European colonial power [France], the rise of militant nationalism [the Viet Minh], and a widening political consciousness of the people. The United States should continue to use its influence looking to resolving the nationalist-colonialist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalists . . . we must approach the problem from the Asiatic point of view . . . in meeting the common problems of the area . . . .[19]

The United States recognized the role militant nationalism played in the Vietnam conflict but was not prepared to support nationalists like Ho because of the perception that he was nothing more than a Kremlin puppet. Because of the aid Ho and the Viet Minh nationalists received from the Soviet Union and Communist China, they were viewed more as communists rather than nationalists. The recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which had been established by Ho and the Viet Minh in September, 1945, by the Soviet Union and Communist China in 1950, appeared to confirm the United States' belief that Ho was just another tool for the Soviet plan of communist expansion.[20]

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[19]Ibid. p. 37.

[20]Acheson, Present At The Creation, p.672, Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1993), pp. 166-167; and Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 40-41.

As a counter to the DRV, the French National Assembly ratified legislation for the independence of Vietnam on February 4, 1950 with Bao Dai as Vietnam's Chief-of-State. However, Vietnam was still largely controlled by the French and few Vietnamese supported Bao Dai, who continued to be viewed with disdain. In addition, the establishment of the DRV and its recognition by two foreign powers complicated French efforts to win support away from the Viet Minh by giving Ho's nationalists something additional to fight for: a recognized Vietnamese state governed by a Vietnamese hero for the the Vietnamese.

The Truman administration recognized that the legitimate concerns of the nationalists had to be satisfied and that a native government should be established with a leader capable of attracting the non-communists away from Ho Chi Minh.[21] Up to this time Ho was viewed as the only alternative by Vietnamese who opposed French rule. The Truman administration tried to change that by supporting Bao Dai and attempting to use military and economic aid to increase popular support for his regime. Thus an effort was made to convince the

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[21]Acheson, Present At The Creation, p.672, Hammer, The Struggle For Indochina, pp. 225-226, and Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 34-40.

Vietnamese of the genuine American concern for their welfare and independence. The administration's goal was a non-communist Vietnam with a government supported by the people. The United States recognized the role that nationalism played in the conflict but nationalism placed second behind the external threat of communism. United States policy was designed more to deal with the external threat of communism than with the internal problems that inspired the nationalists to revolt against the French. Most American aid was in the form of military hardware and the training to use it and did not address the internal problems of the Vietnamese such as high taxes, low wages, and inequitable land distribution. All American aid for Vietnam at this time was handled by the French government and not the government of Bao Dai. Therefore, even with a plan that might have addressed these internal problems, the plans would have required the unlikely approval of the French government.[22]

The Korean War and Communist China's role in it increased American fears of the loss of Indochina to communism. In May, 1950, the Truman administration sent a $10 million military aid package to France for Vietnam. At the same time, the administration sent a Military

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[22]Ibid.

Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) composed of thirty-five men to Vietnam to supervise the use of American equipment. In May, 1951 in a special message to Congress, President Truman announced a $930 million military and economic aid program for the Southeast Asia area. President Truman declared that the Soviet Union had reduced China to a satellite state and was preparing to do the same to Korea, Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam), Burma, and the Philippines. The loss of these nations to communism would not be tolerated by the Truman administration.[23]

Despite such aid, by 1952 the military situation in Vietnam consisted of a stalemate between the French and Viet Minh forces. Soviet and Communist Chinese aid, in addition to Vietnamese popular support, allowed the Viet Minh to push the French to the point where they were no longer able to fight the war without outside military assistance. The French, even with superior weapons and often greater troop strength, could not decisively defeat the Viet Minh and their guerrilla tactics. At this same time there was a growing opposition to the war in France and as many citizens put pressure upon President Vincent Auriol to end the war and bring the troops home.

In 1952, President Auriol turned to the United States

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[23]Tuchman, March Of Folly, p. 250.

for additional military aid to save Vietnam for the French. Earlier increases in American aid to the French had been offset by increased Chinese and Soviet aid to the Viet Minh. This allowed a stalemate between the French and Viet Minh to develop. The United States feared that an end to the Korean War would not only increase Communist China's ability to supply aid to the Viet Minh but might also tempt the Chinese to intervene directly thus altering the stalemated situation to the Viet Minh's advantage. The administration believed that if the Communist Chinese intervened with air and ground forces, the French would probably be driven out of the country unless they received substantial outside support.[24]

Direct United States intervention thus became a major issue for American policy makers. NSC 124, written in February, 1952, avoided recommending the use of American ground forces if Chinese troops intervened on the Viet Minh's behalf but suggested several alternatives.[25] These included the use of naval, air, and logistical support for French forces, a naval blockade of Communist

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[24]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 88.

[25]The National Security Council studied issues considered vital to the security of the United States. The results of these studies were released in the form of papers like NSC 124. A short history of the issue, the effects on the United States, and the Council's recommendations to resolve the issue were usually included in the paper.

China, and attacks by American land and carrier based aircraft on military targets in Communist China. Action against Communist China constituted a "de facto" war without a formal declaration, and the NSC suggested that it would be "desirable" to consult with key members of both parties in Congress before such action took place.[26]

A House Foreign Affairs subcommittee held a session in May, 1952, to determine French problems in Vietnam and the possible effects that they might have on United States policy toward the area. Christian Pineau, a member of both the French Parliament and a special commission on Vietnam, spoke before the subcommittee to explain French problems in Vietnam. He declared that it would be impossible to defeat the Viet Minh without Vietnamese popular support and that acquiring such support was an economic and political problem. The economic problems included wealthy landowners exploiting peasant farmers while the political problems included a weak executive, Bao Dai, who did not represent the various political opinions of the country. Pineau indicated that the war

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[26]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 88 and Document No. 10, "NSC Staff Study On United States Objectives And Courses Of Action With Respect To Communist Aggression In Southeast Asia," p. 375.

might be lost or at the least continue at a stalemate.[27]

Pineau, however, offered no explanations as to how the French government planned to acquire the political support required to defeat the Viet Minh. Yet, by declaring the need to increase popular support, Pineau stated what the United States had been advocating since the 1940s. The French government had always been reluctant to do anything that might cause it to lose any power or authority in Vietnam. The United States, however, had been trying to improve Vietnam's economic situation through its foreign aid programs. Politically, Bao Dai's weaknesses were known to the United States; nevertheless, he was considered the most capable anti-communist leader Vietnam had at the time. By stating basic American policy to the committee members, Pineau may have been trying to establish or uphold the credibility of the French position in Vietnam in order to maintain or increase American military and economic aid. Whether or not Pineau's pleas for additional aid were a factor in Truman's decision to supply such aid is uncertain. With the fighting in Korea and the approaching presidential elections, the Truman

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[27]Committee on Foreign Affairs, Selected Executive Session Hearing of the Committee, 1951-1956, vol 18, United States Policy in the Far East, Part 2, United States House of Representatives (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1980), pp. 12-20.

administration and the Democratic party could not risk losing another country to communism after the China debacle in 1949. In any case, before he left office in 1953, President Truman announced a $60 million militaryand economic aid package for the Indochina area.[28]

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[28]Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 167.

CHAPTER 3

THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION THROUGH APRIL, 1954

Throughout the Truman administration, the French position in Vietnam went from one of strength against the Viet Minh to one of stalemate and then decline. France's declining position in Vietnam and a program of increasing United States aid to the French were among the administration's legacies to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953. The deteriorating French position forced Eisenhower to adopt a more aggressive approach to the Vietnam conflict, although the Eisenhower administration's view of communism, Southeast Asia, and the rest of the world paralleled that of the Truman administration. In his State of the Union message on February 2, 1953, Eisenhower declared: "The freedom we cherish and defend in Europe and in the Americas is no different from the freedom that is imperiled in Asia."[29] Eisenhower's policy, as explained later in his memoirs, was "to convince the world that the

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[29]U.S., President, Public Papers Of The Presidents Of The United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1960), Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953, p. 13.

Southeast Asian war was an aggressive move by the communists to subjugate the entire area . . . . Our own people as well as citizens of the three Associated States of Indochina [Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos] had to be assured of the true meaning of the war."[30] The Vietnamese had to be convinced that communism, not French colonialism, was their major enemy. Above all, the communists were not going to be allowed to win in Vietnam.

Accordingly, the United States commitment to Vietnam escalated throughout 1953. As Eisenhower explained in response to questions at a governor's conference in Seattle, Washington on August 4, 1953, Indochina was the lead "domino" in Asia and communism must be stopped there. If Indochina fell to communism, then Burma, India, Indonesia, the Malayan peninsula, and Pakistan became threatened by communism.[31] While Eisenhower gave as a justification for increased American aid the possible loss of Vietnam and, eventually, the Asian theater to communism, he did not mention another ingredient in the administration's policy: the need to placate the French in order to further American foreign policy in Europe.

As noted earlier, American postwar European policy

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[30]Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 168.

[31]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 541.

evolved into a general containment policy that relied on a system of pacts or alliances, such as NATO, to contain Soviet expansionism. In the NATO example each member nation maintained its armed forces as separate entities. One of Eisenhower's foreign policy goals was a more closely integrated European economic and political system. Eisenhower believed that no such unity could be achieved without some type of "spur" such as the European Defense Community (EDC). Originally proposed by France to prevent the full rearming of West Germany (a still hated former conqueror), the EDC was an army composed of units from various Western European countries under one unified command. Eisenhower grasped the EDC concept not only as a means to unify Europe economically and politically but also as the major European defense against a Soviet invasion. Eisenhower viewed France as a key member of the EDC because of its size and status as a major power. France was viewed as a bulwark against communism in Europe and French approval of the EDC became essential. The French government recognized the importance that Eisenhower placed on the EDC and France's role within it. A treaty had been signed in 1953 creating the EDC but France had not ratified it. The French government now indicated (with its position in Indochina deteriorating) that France could not supply forces for the EDC without

additional aid for Indochina. Thus the United States became a "hostage" to the EDC since France kept withholding its ratification of the treaty as a means to acquire additional United States aid for Indochina.[32] In one sense, the United States tried to buy French approval of the EDC by helping to maintain or stabilize their position in Vietnam.

In addition, various other developments affected American foreign policy during 1953. The end of the Korean War, the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and even the atmosphere created by McCarthyism in the United States forced the Eisenhower administration to modify its approach to the containment policy. By the end of 1953, the Eisenhower administration expressed its national security policy in NSC 162/2 which called for a strong military with an emphasis on the capability of inflicting massive retaliatory damage.[33] The "massive retaliation" policy considered nuclear weapons as legitimate as any other weapon in the American arsenal. The containment policy was modified to allow for more reliance on nuclear

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[32]Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower The President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 49; Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, pp. 152-153; and Herring, America's Longest War, p. 21.

[33]Divine, Eisenhower And The Cold War, p. 36; Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 412-428.

weapons. This turned it into more of a "deterrent" policy since it forced a possible aggressor to consider the possibility that a limited war could turn into a nuclear war.

Economic concerns were a motivating force behind NSC 162/2. Eisenhower believed that economic stability and military strength worked together. If defense spending increased without regard to the country's economic outlook, American economic strength would weaken, and the overall defensive posture of the United States would decline.[34] The dependence on nuclear weapons allowed reductions in conventional forces, notably ground troops and naval forces. The United States, therefore, could not afford to be drawn into conventional conflicts like Korea and Vietnam due to the drain on domestic resources and various other commitments around the globe. President Eisenhower thus became caught between the desire to save Vietnam from communism on the one hand and the desire not to be drawn into a costly military involvement on the other. The nuclear threat was a cheap deterrent that Eisenhower hoped would help Vietnam. It was less costly for the United States to supply the French with military and economic aid under the ultimate shadow of the nuclear

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[34]Gaddis, Strategies Of Containment , pp. 127-176.

umbrella than to become directly involved with its military forces.

However, as 1953 progressed, it became evident that American aid had not helped the French stabilize their position in Vietnam. As a result, Walter Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, was directed to arrange a military mission to Vietnam to explore the ways and means of using American aid more effectively against the communists.[35] By Smith's direction, Lt. General John W. O'Daniel went to Vietnam in June to confer with the French military and act as a military liaison between the French in Vietnam and the Eisenhower administration in Washington.

The end of the Korean War made it possible for the Communist Chinese to increase their military aid to the Viet Minh. This development enabled the Viet Minh to increase its pressure against the French and weaken the French position even further. As the military situation deteriorated, so did French government and popular support for the war. This lack of support placed the government of Prime Minister Joseph Laniel in danger of collapsing. With French fortunes declining in Vietnam, many French politicians saw less to fight for and believed it

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[35]Stephen E. Ambrose, Ike's Spies (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1981), p. 244.

meaningless to lose men and money in a war for a country that would eventually become independent. The war thus became a losing proposition and the French government began to think seriously of negotiating with the Viet Minh in order to end the Vietnam conflict. In October, 1953, the French National Assembly passed a resolution that Prime Minister Laniel do everything possible to end the war.[36] Prime Minister Laniel summed up the French government's position by indicating that, like the United States in Korea, France would welcome a diplomatic solution to the conflict.[37]

American policy, at this point, opposed negotiation. Both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles viewed a negotiated settlement as a Communist victory.[38] The French and Vietnamese forces, even with American aid, could not decisively defeat the Viet Minh army. If the French negotiated themselves out of Vietnam, the existing Vietnamese army would not have a chance alone against the Viet Minh. A negotiated settlement thus was out of the question. But what other option did the United States have?

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[36]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, P. 108.

[37]Hammer, The Struggle For Indochina, p. 312.

[38]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 142-143.

The American military option was not a viable one at this time. The military leadership did not totally support United States involvement in Vietnam. They believed that it would require more men and equipment in order to win than the United States could afford to use and still maintain its other commitments. Additionally, the military believed that if American troops were used, it would have to be without the restrictions that the military believed tied its hands in the Korean conflict. In light of existing commitments, the military desired a reevaluation of the conflict in order to determine if it were really worth the price that it would take to win a complete victory.[39]

President Eisenhower opposed the use of American combat troops in Vietnam on a unilateral basis, especially if the French retained tactical control of them. Eisenhower let it be known that he would never agree to send United States ground troops as mere reinforcements for French units, to be used only as they saw fit.[40] There were practical and ideological reasons for Eisenhower's beliefs. The war, as it was being fought, did not appear winnable and Eisenhower did not want to use American forces in any limited action where they would not

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[39]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 88-93.

[40]Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 341.

be decisively effective. The French did not have the support of the Vietnamese people which the President considered a prerequisite for victory. Eisenhower did not want to commit American power or prestige to what might be a losing effort and decided that the only way that American troops would be used was as part of a united action with other allied nations.[41]

In addition, Eisenhower believed that neither the American people nor the American economy would support another Asian war. In addition, the world viewed France as a colonial power and Eisenhower did not want to be judged as supporting colonialism.[42] He, therefore, supported Vietnamese independence and a united action instead of unilateral action as conditions for intervention. Granting Vietnam its complete independence would quiet French critics who believed France was fighting to preserve its colonial empire.

French authority and control in Vietnam deteriorated further during the early months of 1954. The French relied more and more on American aid. The requests for such aid forced the Eisenhower administration to reevaluate continually its Southeast Asian policy. NSC

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 337 and Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 177.

5405, dated January, 1954, established the basic objective in Southeast Asia as preventing the area's loss to communism by assisting in the development of governments strong enough to withstand communist attacks from within and without. The document proposed strengthened covert operations, regional defense arrangements, and increased aid to the French as methods of accomplishing American objectives. In addition, the American people would have to be convinced of the importance of Southeast Asia to United States security so that they would be prepared to accept any course of action thought necessary to accomplish the administration's goals. The document also mentioned direct American military action as a possible recourse if Communist China directly intervened in the fighting. It suggested that American air and naval units, along with British and French forces, should be utilized in that eventuality. NSC 5405, however, failed to address the question of American ground troops.[43]

In addition to NSC 5405, the administration established a special working group under General George B. Erskine, U.S.M.C., Ret., to evaluate the French Indochina effort, recommend American contributions to it,and study the circumstances in which the United States

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[43]"NSC 5405, January 16, 1954, United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia," Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 434-443.

might have to commit ground forces. The Erskine Report, Part 1, released February 6, 1954, declared that French success depended upon the support of the local populace and French efforts to stimulate such support. The report also recommended that aid be increased and that additional American personnel be sent to the area to serve as instructors and as key assistants to French forces. The specific nature of the duties which Americans would perform was not spelled out.[44] Two-hundred Air Force mechanics had already been sent to Vietnam to help the French maintain B-26 bomber planes supplied earlier by the United States.

Since President Eisenhower opposed the use of American ground troops as a means of supporting the French in Vietnam, the question arose as to whether or not the sending of maintenance personnel would lead to eventual use of American combat personnel. At a February 10, 1954 news conference, President Eisenhower responded to a question concerning possible American involvement in a "hot war" in Indochina: "No one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region than I am. [Eisenhower stated] every move that I authorize is calculated, as far as humans can do it, to make certain that does not

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[44]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 90-92.

happen."[45] The only possible situation that might get American troops directly involved was direct Communist Chinese intervention. In that event, the Eisenhower administration indicated that unless circumstances prevented it, Congressional approval would be required.[46]

Therefore, American policy at this time involved keeping the French army fighting until a native army could be created to take over the job. Therefore, as part of the program to encourage the French to continue the fight, the United States agreed to pay the entire cost of training and equipping the soldiers of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Yet, equipment and training could do little if the Vietnamese themselves would not fight against the communists. A majority of the Vietnamese people still viewed the French as colonialist invaders and could not believe that the Viet Minh, their own countrymen, were determined to subjugate them. In order to make it easier to recruit the required army to replace the French, the administration hoped to convince the Vietnamese people

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[45] U.S., President, Public Papers Of The Presidents Of The United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1960), Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, p. 250.

[46] Executive Sessions Of The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, vol 2, 83rd Congress, Second Session, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 127 and Public Papers, Eisenhower, 1954, p. 320.

that they were fighting for their independence and not for French colonialism.

During the same period that France requested additional American aid to preserve its position in Vietnam, the French government decided to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Sincere or not, the Laniel government had to look as though it were exploring all possible avenues to end the war in order to maintain the fragile public and political support that it had. Other nations supported an effort directed toward a negotiated settlement. Great Britain required a stable situation in Southeast Asia to protect its colonies and interests in the area. If the war could not be won on the battlefield, then Great Britain supported a negotiated settlement as the next logical step in a drive for peace.[47] The Soviet Union desired a period of peace and indicated to the French their fear that the Communist Chinese might drag them into an unwanted Indochina conflict.[48] However, Communist China also desired an end to the Indochina fighting. China viewed itself as the Asian peacemaker and was afraid that the Viet Minh might

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[47]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, p. 108.

[48]United States Department of State, Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1952-1954, vol 26, The Geneva Conference (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1981), pp. 483-484. Hereafter cited as FRUS.

upset the chances for peace through unreasonable demands at a peace conference and further expansionist moves in Indochina. China feared that the Viet Minh might attempt to increase their territorial gains in Indochina through additional military victories. This would strengthen the Viet Minh's position at a peace conference and might cause their delegation to make unnecessarily harsh demands that the French would be obligated to refuse. Thus the conference would be in danger of collapsing. An increase in military activity might also strengthen the argument for a united action by France, the United States, and their allies.[49] China also desired an agreement that denied the United States an excuse to intervene militarily in Indochina and again threaten its borders as it believed they were threatened in the Korean conflict.[50]

The Soviet Union and Communist China had everything to gain and nothing to lose through a negotiated settlement. The French were in a weak position in Vietnam, and a negotiated settlement almost certainly meant a communist victory. The United States was the only major power that did not support negotiation. The Eisenhower administration did not support negotiation for the same

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[49]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 148.

[50]Karnow, Vietnam, pp. 200-201.

reasons that the Soviet Union and Communist China did; it believed that a negotiated settlement meant a communist victory.

Nevertheless, the road to a possible negotiated settlement began at the Berlin Conference held from January 25, 1954 through February 18, 1954. This was a meeting of the foreign ministers of the United States, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union held to discuss the major problems of the day, most notably the Korean armistice. Conference delegates agreed to a second conference to be held in Geneva, Switzerland on April 26, 1954, to discuss the Korean armistice among representatives of countries who participated in the Korean War. However, aware of the pressure on the Laniel government to end French involvement in Indochina, the Soviet Union's Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, proposed that the Vietnam conflict also be discussed at Geneva. The United States opposed discussing Vietnam at Geneva believing that the French were close to negotiating themselves out of the area. However, the French threatened to scuttle the EDC unless the United States supported discussing the Indochina issue at Geneva. In the end, the United States agreed to include the Vietnam conflict at Geneva in order to preserve allied unity and

the EDC.[51]

The final Berlin communique announced the Geneva conference and its purpose of reaching a peaceful settlement of the Korean question and a discussion of the problem of restoring peace in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. Since Communist China was included in the talks and the United States did not recognize it, the final communique included a disclaimer that stated: "It is understood that neither the invitation to, or the acceptance of, the above mentioned conference shall be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition in any case where it has not already been accorded."[52]

Secretary of State Dulles believed that due to the upcoming Geneva Conference, the Viet Minh would soon try to win a major victory and inflict heavy losses on the French. This would strengthen their bargaining position at Geneva and increase "pacifist" sentiment in France.[53] His prediction became reality at Dien Bien Phu.

Dien Bien Phu was a fortified French position near the

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[51] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 415; Kahin, Intervention, pp. 53-55, 65; Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 343; Tuchman, March Of Folly, p. 260.

[52] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 415.

[53] Executive Sessions, Senate Foreign Relations, 1954, p. 165.

Laotian frontier in the northern region of Vietnam. It blocked a road leading from Viet Minh territory to the border of Laos which enabled the Viet Minh to move supplies during the rainy season. The French theory was that the Viet Minh would have to eliminate the roadblock in a major action where the French would concentrate their "superior" forces and firepower. The French did not believe that the Communist Chinese would supply the Viet Minh with heavy artillery and, that if they did, the Viet Minh could not carry the weapons to threatening positions on the hills surrounding the fortress. The French severely underestimated the will of the Viet Minh who were indeed supplied with artillery, carried it up the hills surrounding Dien Bien Phu, and forced the French to submit to a two month siege.

During the first week of the battle, it was clear that a French victory was impossible without additional outside aid or intervention. The French feared that Communist China might directly intervene with at least some air support in order to secure a victory before the Geneva Conference. General Paul Ely, French Chief-of- Staff, flew to Washington on March 20, 1954 to discuss the acquisition of additional military hardware and a commitment by the United States to intervene militarily if

the Communist Chinese did so at Dien Bien Phu.[54] Following its established policy, the Eisenhower administration promised to supply additional bomber and cargo planes to the French and to warn the Chinese (through public statements of policy or "leaked" policy announcements) against direct involvement, but it refused any commitment to direct intervention. However, before General Ely left for Paris, he met with Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman, United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral Radford proposed limited and temporary American tactical air support (Operation Vulture) for Dien Bien Phu, believing that Eisenhower, in the end, would not let the French be defeated. He made it clear, though, that presidential and congressional approval was necessary before the strikes were possible. The French formally requested the execution of Operation Vulture in April 1954.[55]

President Eisenhower required Congressional approval of the plan before he would order its implementation. Dulles and Admiral Radford, with Eisenhower's consent, met with Congressional leaders to secure their approval. The Congressmen inquired about allied support for the plan,

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[54]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 97.

[55]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 71-78, 97.

the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the possible use of American ground troops if the air strikes failed, and the possibility that Communist China might intervene and turn the area into another Korean War. Dulles had not yet discussed the operation with America's allies and Admiral Radford had to admit that he was the only member of the Joint Chiefs who supported the plan. The Congressmen then established three conditions for their approval of American intervention in Vietnam. The intervention had to be part of a united action with America's allies, a French declaration of independence for the Indochina area was mandatory, and after that declaration, France had to maintain its troops in the area.[56] Until these conditions were met, there would be no Congressional approval for Operation Vulture.

During this period Eisenhower also formalized his requirements for American intervention. In addition to the above Congressional requirements, Eisenhower specified that the British participate in any venture, that at least some of the other Southeast Asian nations be involved, that France turn the war over to the Americans, but keep their troops in combat, and that France prove that they were not just asking the United States to cover a fighting

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[56]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 100-101.

withdrawal.[57]

Eisenhower knew that these conditions would probably never be met. In a letter to Captain E.E. Hazlett, Jr., U.S.N., Ret., a personal friend of the President's, Eisenhower wrote that for three years he had been trying to get the French to internationalize the war and prove to the world that their effort was anti-communist in nature and their goal to free the Indochinese. The French replies, the President said, were vague and mentioned national prestige, parliamentary infighting, constitutional limitations and the possible effects on their other colonies. The result was a failure to motivate the Vietnamese in the cause which was considered essential for a French victory. Eisenhower believed that the French used "weasel words in promising independence" and that "through this one reason as much as anything else, . . . suffered reverses that [were] inexcusable."[58] Some of Eisenhower's conditions such as internationalizing the war and Vietnamese independence became acceptable to the French as their position in Vietnam or Dien Bien Phu worsened. They did not, however,

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[57]Ambrose, Eisenhower The President, p. 177.

[58]United States Department Of State, Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1952-1954, vol 13, Indochina (Part One) (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 1427-1428. Hereafter cited as FRUS.

agree to all, and that allowed Eisenhower to prohibit the introduction of American ground troops in Vietnam on a unilateral basis.

The inevitable defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the American refusal to intervene militarily at the French outpost served as a foreboding background for the French as the Geneva Conference went into session on April 26, 1954. The discussion of the Korean armistice bogged down as the right of each party to veto unacceptable proposals quickly doomed those talks to stalemate. The emphasis at Geneva then became Indochina, and the Conference turned into peace talks between the opposing parties in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina.

CHAPTER 4

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

The policies that each party followed prior to the Conference determined its diplomatic stance at the Conference. When the United States could not prevent the Indochina conflict from being added to the Conference agenda, the Eisenhower administration decided not to be a direct participant in the Conference proceedings. As noted earlier, the Eisenhower administration agreed to include Indochina in the talks as a means of placating the French to gain their support for the EDC. While other Conference members sought to discuss the problems of the Indochina conflict, the United States sought only French support for its European policy. The Eisenhower administration did not support the quest for a solution to the Indochina conflict under the conditions that existed in Indochina at this time. The administration believed that the Indochina phase of the Conference would fail due to a non-compromising communist attitude brought on by the Viet Minh's strong position in Vietnam.[59]

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[59]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 111-114; Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, P. 343; FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 435-437, 445-446, 714, 1103.

Once the conflict was included on the Conference agenda, the Eisenhower administration needed a policy designed to achieve an established set of goals or an agreement as close to those goals as possible. In the event of a failure to conclude an acceptable agreement, the Eisenhower administration needed an alternate goal such as a Southeast Asian defense organization, similar to Europe's NATO, which would fit into the system of pacts and alliances already designed to contain communism. The administration developed plans for such an alliance; however, the belief that the Conference would fail and the decision not to participate directly in the Indochina phase of the Conference proceedings hindered the administration's ability to develop a realistic Conference policy.

Opinions were divided among administration officials as to the best American approach toward the Conference. A special subcommittee consisting of representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Central Intelligence Agency expressed its belief in March 1954 that a negotiated settlement with the Communist Viet Minh was detrimental to United States security interests. The subcommittee supported a rigid, no compromise position (no concessions to the communist delegations). The committee based its attitude on

concepts that included the improbability of obtaining an agreement with the communists consistent with United States policy interests (a democratic Southeast Asia free of communism) and the idea that an agreement that lessened French control and authority would be viewed by the Vietnamese as a Viet Minh victory and lead to an eventual Viet Minh (communist) takeover of Vietnam through Vietnamese popular support. The committee believed that the resultant loss of territory would eventually lead to the loss of Southeast Asia in accordance with the domino principle.[60] A separate Joint Chiefs document supported the committee's belief and declared a coalition government, elections, and partition as unacceptable possibilities in an agreement. The document explained that a coalition government could lead to a communist takeover because an outside power such as the United States could not prevent increasing communist control as they worked from within the government and throughout the countryside. Partition meant recognizing the communist's military success and ceding key territory which would undercut the containment policy in Asia. The JCS further believed that elections would result in a communist victory due to communist territorial control and Viet Minh

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[60]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 91 and Document No. 24, "The Erskine Report," pp. 451-454.

popular support.[61]

Secretary of State Dulles echoed the JCS view when he stated to congressional leaders in April 1954 that "the most hopeful formula for peace (an end to the French-Viet Minh conflict) in Vietnam was for an agreement with the Viet Minh on the withdrawal of all foreign troops, the establishment of a coalition government, and the holding of elections in six months, all of which would probably result in the loss of Vietnam to the communists."[62] Dulles indicated that what would lead to peace in Vietnam also meant a defeat for the United States since peace meant a communist victory. He believed that in order to have an acceptable agreement, parallel talks concerning collective security or united action ought to be held with allied nations who had interests in Asia. The idea of those talks was probably meant to be more of a veiled threat to make the communists more flexible in Geneva. Even though the United States did not support the Indochina talks at this early stage (April-May), if a settlement became certain, then it was logical to have one that favored the allied side.

The NSC advised President Eisenhower not to participate in the Conference without French assurances

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[61] Ibid.

[62] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1476.

that the surrender of Indochina would not be negotiated. Without such assurances the NSC predicted a possible cease fire, communist non-compliance due to the lack of effective supervision, and a final French collapse with the acceptance of any terms for a negotiated settlement. The NSC suggested that the president pressure France not to give in to the communists in Indochina by suggesting that to do so could affect France's future position in the Far East and North Africa. America should also point out that such an outcome could affect France's position as a big three power and possibly even Franco-American relations and that American aid to France could also stop if a settlement were unsatisfactory to the United States.[63]

The United States Ambassador to France, Douglas Dillon, supported a softer or more realistic position toward the conference and warned administration officials that a rigid American position could lead to "uncomfortable isolation" and would make it difficult to place the blame for a failed Conference upon the Soviets and Communist Chinese.[64] The warning reflected initial administration beliefs that unreasonable demands by the Viet Minh, supported by the Soviet Union and Communist

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[63]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 117.

[64]FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 445-446.

China, would stall the Conference and ultimately make it fail. Dillon further believed that the effect of the negotiations at Geneva upon United States interests depended upon how far the United States would go to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia.[65]

Clearly then, the Eisenhower administration recognized that, prior to the start of the Conference, the French preferred an end to their Indochina commitment. Indeed, when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in May, the French surrender made a negotiated settlement a certainty for France. Partition, a coalition government, and national elections were recognized by the administration as likely ingredients in an agreement and were all viewed as leading to Indochina's loss to communism. The Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the CIA opposed and, through the NSC, advised against any negotiated settlement that made concessions to the communist side, viewing such an agreement as a communist victory and a threat to United States security.[66] As a result, President Eisenhower decided by May that the United States would not be a signatory to an agreement that made concessions to the communists, but instead, the Eisenhower administration would work on a policy that could evolve

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[65]Ibid.

[66]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 115-118.

into an anti-communist alliance in Southeast Asia. The concept of united action was now only brought forward by the administration when the French requested direct United States involvement in Vietnam such as to prevent the fall of Dien Bien Phu in early May. United action was not going to be actively pursued by the United States while the Conference was in session. The administration was developing a policy of non-particpation coupled with an alliance quest at the Conference so that the party that blamed the Democrats for losing China to the communists could not now be blamed for losing Indochina to the communists.

The administration then had no plans to participate in the negotiations concerning Indochina. In addition to the desire to avoid the blame for an unacceptable Indochinese agreement, the United States did not recognize Communist China and refused to accord that nation a status equal to the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain. Even had the administration been willing to do so, the Formosa lobby, established to support Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan (recognized as the Republic of China), was a potent political force in Washington which the Eisenhower administration would not oppose.[67] When the Korean

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[67]Richard Goold-Adams, The Time Of Power (London: C. Tinling and Co., Ltd., 1962), p. 139.

talks stalemated at the Conference, Secretary of State Dulles left Geneva for Washington, leaving Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith in charge of the American delegation. Dulles ostensibly wanted to run the Geneva delegation from Washington in order to keep in better touch with Congressional leaders. He also believed that he would be better able to plan and discuss the administration's collective defense proposals for Southeast Asia with those leaders.[68] Dulles wanted to discuss with Congressional leaders a plan to incorporate Indochina, Thailand, Burma, and the Philippines into the ANZUS treaty that had gone into effect in April 1952. ANZUS was a mutual defense grouping that consisted of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

In his absence, Dulles' instructions to the American delegation forbade it to deal directly with the delegates of the Chinese Communist regime or any other regime not diplomatically recognized by the United States in such a way that might imply recognition. The United States position at the Indochina part of the Conference was to be that of an interested nation that was neither a

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[68] Committee On Foreign Affairs, Selected Executive Session Hearings Of The Committee, 1951-1956, vol. 18, United States Policy In The Far East, Part 2, United States House Of Representatives, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1980), pp. 129-130.

belligerent nor a principal in the negotiations. One United States goal at Geneva was "to assist in arriving at decisions that ensured the territorial integrity and political independence under stable and free governments of the Indochina countries involved."[69] Included in the instructions were seven key principles to be used by the delegation as guidelines for an acceptable Indochina settlement. The seven principles included:

(a) The establishment of an international control commission ready to supervise a cease-fire prior to its taking effect.

(b) United Nations' assumption of the responsibility for supervising the control commission (some other form of international control could be acceptable).

(c) Measures to provide for the security of troops and the civilian population along with guarantees against abuses of the cease-fire by either party.

(d) The release of all prisoners of war.

(e) The evacuation of Viet Minh forces from Cambodia and Laos.

(f) The right (by the United States) to examine post-armistice Indochinese political and

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[69] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 778-779.

economic problems.

(g) The assurance that no provision of a political nature (early elections or troop withdrawal) could lead to a communist takeover.[70]

The seven principles for an acceptable agreement constituted the basic position of the United States at the Conference and became inviolate to the Eisenhower administration. They also precluded an agreement acceptable to the United States since the Viet Minh were not likely to accept a settlement that denied them the victory in Vietnam for which they were fighting.

The United States' instructions to its Geneva delegation reinforced the principle of disapproving any settlement that made territorial or political concessions to the communists. The instructions also stripped from the delegation the authority to participate actively in the talks by forbidding discussion with the principals of the opposing side. They eliminated the forum in which the Eisenhower administration's views could be heard and thus eliminated the influence of the United States, to a great degree, at the talks. The delegation became basically a group of observers who reported events or progress in the talks to Washington and then waited for instructions on

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[70]Ibid., p. 788.

how to proceed. They indicated that while the United States was not participating in the Conference proceedings, it wanted to be able to judge the Conference's results. Instead of actively pursuing a specific policy during conference discussions, the Eisenhower administration's policy became one that reacted to events as they occurred.

During early May, the Indochina phase of the Geneva conference began to concentrate on the issues of the effective supervision and control of a cease-fire, the separation of belligerent forces, and the establishment of a framework for a political settlement. Initial French proposals included the separation of the conflict in Vietnam from those in Cambodia and Laos, a cease-fire supervised by a neutral control commission or an international authority other than the United Nations, political discussions leading to free elections, the regroupment of regular forces into defined zones, the disarming of irregular forces, and the guaranteeing of the agreement by the participating states of the Conference (which included the United States).[71]

Initial American reaction to the French proposals was mostly negative. Because of the Korean War experience, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Eisenhower

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[71]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 117.

administration not to get trapped into supporting an armistice proposal. The Joint Chiefs believed that the communists would use such support to bind the United States to a cease-fire that the Viet Minh would ignore. The Viet Minh would then attempt to strengthen their bargaining position through additional military victories. The Joint Chiefs believed that a successful armistice required additional French military victories during the negotiation process and that such victories were unlikely to occur. A political settlement that guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Associated States was another necessity as well. Without such guarantees, the Joint Chiefs believed that the United States should reject any cease-fire accord and that the French and the Associated States should continue to fight.[72]

The National Security Council concurred with the JCS when, on May 7th, it indicated that the United States should not associate itself with any policy directed toward a cease fire before an acceptable political agreement that included international controls was reached. The Council advised that the United Sates could agree with the start of cease-fire negotiations but that while the negotiations were in progress, the French and

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[72]Ibid.

Indochinese should continue to oppose the Viet Minh. The United States should continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and activate a Southeast Asian regional defense grouping to prevent the further expansion of communist power in Southeast Asia.[73] The policy of united action had been developing for some time into a collective security arrangement for Southeast Asia similar to Europe's NATO. The purpose of "preventing further expansion" indicated that the NSC accepted some loss of territory in Indochina to the communists either through a Geneva settlement or an outright military victory in Indochina or Vietnam.

The JCS and NSC view that France should continue to fight ignored the importance and symbolic nature that the battle at Dien Bien Phu had for France. While the French lost approximately five percent of their fighting force at Dien Bien Phu and, in real terms, had more than enough troops and equipment to continue the fighting, the battle grew into a symbol so that it assumed an importance much greater than its actual military value, and with the loss of that symbol, a good many intangible values were also lost.[74] Among those "intangible values" were "spirit" or "will". When Dien Bien Phu fell so did the French will

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[73] FRUS, 1952-1954. 16: pp. 714-731.

[74] Committee On Foreign Affairs-House, p. 130.

to continue the struggle. The French lost their desire to fight for Vietnam and the Eisenhower administration never fully accepted that. This is one of the things that made it so hard for the administration to develop an effective Conference policy. The French would fight to maintain and hopefully strengthen their military position in Vietnam to aid their cause in Geneva, but a victory over the Viet Minh was now out of the question.

The French proposals had mentioned "regroupment zones" throughout Indochina where enclaves of French or Viet Minh forces would be formed. The French plan avoided partition but required a great number of control commission personnel to enforce the maintenance of the zones. Administration officials believed such zones would eventually lead to the partition of Vietnam where the main Indochina fighting took place. Officially, the United States opposed partition, but privately it was accepted as an inevitable occurrence. The Defense Department in May, for example, even drew up its own settlement plan that included the partition of Vietnam around the 20th parallel.[75]

Eisenhower opposed the initial French proposals, stating that the concept of "regroupment" zones implied partition which the President believed would lead to the

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[75]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 142.

"enslavement of millions in the northern partitioned area" as it did in North Korea.[76] Eisenhower also noted that the French proposals failed to specify whether the enforcement procedures were to be made effective before or after the cease-fire. He did not believe that the communists would abide by an agreement that did not include its own self-enforcing procedures. Consequently Eisenhower approved instructions to the United States Geneva delegation indicating that the United States "would not associate itself with any proposal from any source for a cease fire which would take effect in advance of an acceptable agreement, including international mechanisms for enforcement."[77] This reflected the advice given Eisenhower by the Joint Chiefs and the NSC, but of course it was at odds with what the Department of Defense was willing to accept privately.

The Eisenhower administration again became caught between the desire to prevent communist expansion through the partition of Vietnam and the reality that a negotiated settlement would most likely include a partition arrangement. Eisenhower publicly condemned partition but privately accepted its inevitability. The Eisenhower administration's quasi-acceptance of partition became

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[76]Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 357.

[77]Ibid, p. 358.

public shortly after Dien Bien Phu fell to the Viet Minh. Because the Truman administration had indicated that Vietnam was the lead domino in Southeast Asia, Eisenhower believed that it was now necessary to quell public and Congressional fears that the row of dominoes was about to fall. Secretary of State Dulles, therefore, publicly stated that Indochina might not be as important as once believed.[78] The statement implied that the United States could accept Vietnam's loss as long as the rest of Southeast Asia was secure. The statement further recognized the realities of the Geneva negotiations in that a final settlement most likely would include a partition arrangement.

The French felt that Dulles' statement undercut their bargaining position at Geneva. Unaware that the Eisenhower administration's position had altered, France was depending upon the threat of United States intervention to strengthen its bargaining position. Dulles' statement reduced that threat and implied that Vietnam or Indochina might no longer be vital to United States interests. Dulles' intention may have been to allow the Eisenhower administration to direct its efforts towards a regional defense grouping rather than waste its

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[78]U.S., Department of State Bulletin, 30, No. 778, May, 1954, p. 782.

energies fighting partition. A Southeast Asian regional defense grouping, like that of Europe's NATO, accorded with Eisenhower's policy of involving more than the major powers in the problems of the area in order to avoid the stigma of colonialism. Accepting the inevitability of partition allowed the administration to further its goal of securing such a defense grouping. Such efforts eventually bore fruit in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Formally established in September, 1954, SEATO was a defense grouping consisting of the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Its purpose was "to develop the member's individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without against their territorial integrity and stability or against any other state or territory specifically designated and asking for assistance."[79] This protection included the areas of Cambodia, Laos, and Southern Vietnam.

Meanwhile the Conference began to operate in closed or restricted sessions during the middle of May. Most delegates believed that more could be accomplished during

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[79]Guenter Lewy, America In Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 10-11.

restricted sessions or private talks than during open, plenary sessions. As an observer instead of a participant, the American delegation now found itself locked out of many discussions concerning Conference objectives. The delegation could no longer obtain firsthand accounts of Conference discussions and progress and had to rely on information received from the British and French delegations. Yet the delegation could not be certain if it received the whole truth concerning specific Conference proposals from its allies. This predicament further hindered the development of an effective Conference policy by the Eisenhower administration.

Soon after the restricted sessions were initiated, the participants settled a key issue of the Conference. The issue involved whether or not to discuss the military and political settlements separately or collectively. The French preferred the former while the Viet Minh the latter. In a session mediated by the leader of the Soviet delegation, Vyacheslav Molotov, the delegates decided to discuss the military and political settlements separately with the military issues of a cease-fire, disarmament, and "regroupment" as the first objectives. Measures to prevent the reinforcement of belligerents, the disarming of irregular troops, the exchange of prisoners, supervising arrangements, and an international guarantee of the

agreements were added to the military discussions.[80]

With the American delegation in an observer status and now cut off from some key discussions, the United States became almost powerless to exert any of the influence it might have had at the Conference. Such influence could have been derived from the American military and economic aid given France for use in Indochina. While the United States could not cut its aid to the French without seriously jeopardizing their Indochina position (and, therefore, their position at the Conference), the Eisenhower administration might have used the possibility of even greater material aid in an attempt to maneuver the French into a position closer to its own regarding partition, Vietnamese independence, or the conduct of the war.

However, there are several explanations for the United States failure to do this. As mentioned earlier, the Eisenhower administration believed the Conference would fail due to harsh communist demands and resistance to compromise. Once the Conference disbanded, the United States could pursue objectives such as an Asian defense alliance. Another possibility was that by not pressuring France to take a particular stand, the United States

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[80]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 200-206 and Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 133.

avoided being directly accused of sabotaging the Conference and causing its demise. Oddly enough, this uncertainty over what the United States might do either at Geneva or in Indochina might have done more to further the French cause of reaching a settlement in Geneva than the Eisenhower administration realized. Such uncertainty may have influenced the communist side into being more flexible in its negotiating policy than it had to be with a France whose bargaining position was weakened by Viet Minh military victories and French public and political pressure on Laniel's government to end the war.

As the Conference participants established their first objectives of a cease-fire and regroupment, two events occurred that had a major impact upon Conference proceedings. Opposition to the Indochina war in France had grown to the point where, in spite of progress at Geneva, French public and political opinion demanded a quick end to French involvement in the area. French political opposition leader Pierre Mendes-France declared in the French National Assembly that the French aim should be "not the intervention of the United States but an honorable end of the terrible conflict which has lasted for eight years."[81] Shortly thereafter on June 12, 1954 the Laniel government lost a French Parliament vote of

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[81]Karnow, Vietnam, p. 250.

confidence in a 306-296 vote.[82] A new French government then formed on June 18, 1954 under the leadership of Pierre Mendes-France.

The fall of the Laniel government marked a turning point in French policy toward the Indochina war. Prime Minister Laniel believed that United States military aid and, under certain circumstances, intervention was as important as the Geneva Conference. While not placing less importance on American aid, a settlement at the Geneva Conference became the first priority of Mendes-France who promised the French people that he would reach an accord by July 20th or resign. The promise exerted additional pressure on the French Geneva delegation to reach a compromise and undercut any possibility that the Eisenhower administration could use United States aid as leverage at the Geneva Conference.

The second event occurred when the Viet Minh and French delegations began secret negotiations on June 10, 1954. These meetings opened the way to faster progress at the Conference. Regroupment became the primary topic of the first meeting when the Viet Minh proposed a temporary partition of Vietnam with elections at a later date to unify the two areas. France initially opposed the concept of partition, but it eventually became acceptable as a

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[82]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, p. 226.

practical means to settle the regroupment of opposing forces in Vietnam.[83]

During the first weeks of June, the Eisenhower administration began to take a more open and flexible attitude toward partition as well as events at the Conference as a whole. The weak position of Prime Minister Laniel's government, its fall, and the formation of a new French government under Pierre Mendes-France along with that government's dedication to reaching a Geneva settlement stimulated the new American approach to the Geneva Conference. At a military conference in Washington, D.C., on June 9, 1954, the United States agreed with Great Britain that a line between the 17th and 18th parallels could be defensible in the event of Vietnam's partition.[84]

At the same time while the French government dedicated itself to reaching a Geneva settlement, it also sought American intervention in Indochina to stabilize further or to strengthen its position there and at Geneva. If successful, this policy would make it easier to acquire a settlement closer to French terms. As an enticement for America's involvement, the French agreed to discuss internationalizing the war which actually meant "united

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[83]Ibid., pp. 233-235.

[84]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 143.

action." Was the French offer a serious one in light of Mendes-France's pledge to the French people? Apparently the United States did not think so, because the Eisenhower administration did not react quickly or positively to the French request. Dulles pointed out in a telegram to the American Embassy in Paris that the situation in Indochina was not the same in June as it had been when internationalizing the war had been first proposed. At that time, French morale had been high and their military position had still been relatively strong. The situation was then believed salvageable without American ground troops. By June the French had both low morale and a weak military position that could only be saved through a maximum effort, including the use of ground troops. In addition, Dulles and Eisenhower believed "that what the French wanted was not the military advantages of active United States intervention but the political benefits that might be derived from bringing into the open the fact that two allies were negotiating American participation in the fighting."[85] Thus the French negotiating position would be strengthened at Geneva since the Communist side might be more flexible toward French terms in order to keep the United States out of the conflict.

This again demonstrates the way in which the United

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[85]Ibid., p. 132.

States became caught between its ideals and the realities at Geneva. A stronger French bargaining position benefited the United States because of the flexibility it created in the communist delegation. That flexibility could lead to a settlement closer to administration goals. However, the Eisenhower administration could not afford to be directly linked, for political reasons, with what it considered the French failure in Indochina and French efforts in Geneva to extricate themselves from it. Such an association opened the administration to the charge of "selling out to the communists." French terms included concessions such as partition which, while accepted as inevitable, were not officially approved by the administration. The French appeared to be trying to manipulate the United States into a position of indirect support at the Conference.

By June 19, 1954, three major issues had been settled at Geneva. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were to be dealt with separately not collectively. Military and political issues were also to be negotiated separately with the first priority given to the military issues. The delegates agreed to the composition of the control commission when the communist side permitted non-communist states to be a majority in its make-up. However, the partition of Vietnam and the timetable for

elections to reunite the country still needed to be decided. In general the communist side had been more flexible in its position than anticipated by the United States. The Conference had been stalled several times; however, pressure by the Soviet Union and China on the Viet Minh and Britain's strong support of French efforts (along with American non-participation) had produced compromises that permitted the Conference to proceed.

The Conference recessed on June 19, 1954, with the understanding that the military committees would continue to meet in Geneva and in Indochina to work on the details of monitoring a cease-fire. Even though the Conference had been recessed, secret or unofficial discussions still took place between the French and communist powers. In one such meeting Mendes-France met with Chou En-lai, Communist China's Premier, Foreign Minister, and representative at the Conference, who confirmed that he supported a military settlement before a political settlement, recognized the existence of the three states of Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) as independent political entities, and accepted the concept of Vietnam's partition with elections at a later date to rejoin the two zones.[86] Chou's support for these terms almost guaranteed their acceptance by the Viet Minh as Chou

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[86]Eisenhower, Mandate For Change, p. 369.

declared that he "would see that the Viet Minh were thoroughly prepared for serious discussions on a military settlement."[87] Shortly thereafter, Chou returned to China where he met with Ho Chi Minh to discuss the Conference.

After Mendes-France assumed authority from Prime Minister Laniel, Dulles reiterated his instructions to the American delegation that it was not to take any substantive position except that which was directed from Washington.[88] With the new regime's promise of peace by July 20, 1954, the Eisenhower administration believed it even more important now than at the beginning of the Conference that nothing be done that could be misinterpreted as support for an agreement that could only be a surrender to the Communists During the recess in June, Bedell Smith left Geneva for Washington to confer with Dulles and President Eisenhower about events at the Conference. Smith left U. Alexis Johnson, United States Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, as head of the American delegation.

Johnson shortly thereafter reported to the State Department on the meeting between Chou En-lai and Mendes-France and on another between French

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[87]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 147.

[88]FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1189.

representatives and those of the Viet Minh. Though specific details of discussions were not given to him, Johnson reported that "an agreement on Vietnam could be reached within ten days"[89] through underground military talks. The administration's idea that the Geneva Conference would fail due to the intransigent attitudes of the communist side now became totally invalid. The Eisenhower administration now had to modify its policy of non-participation and outright rejection of a settlement in order to deal with the reality of a certain negotiated settlement.

The Eisenhower administration thus turned toward the policy of influencing the negotiations so that the results would come as close to American interests or policy as possible. However, the administration was not in a strong position to do this and was continuing to react to Conference events without any consistent policy of its own. Because of its observer or non-participating status, the United States delegation was not in a position to exert much influence at this important point of the proceedings. Had the Eisenhower administration developed a formal Conference policy and participated in Conference discussions to emphasize its viewpoints, the administration would have been in a stronger position to

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[89]Ibid., p. 1222.

exert the influence which its considerable aid to France had earned. The administration, of course, had expressed its views in telegrams or meetings with allied representatives, but that was an entirely different situation than being a participant at the Conference to exert influence or apply direct pressure during Conference discussions.

The United States was thus forced to develop a passive Conference policy which was dominated by the pressure of Conference events. The administration's rejection of partition had already developed into the acceptance of its inevitability. The only question remaining was how much territory could be given up without jeopardizing the rest of non-communist Indochina's security or American interests in the area.

The reevaluation of the administration's policy was discussed with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in Washington during the Conference recess. The Washington meetings between the United States and Great Britain were held to ease tensions created by the lack of British support for united action when it was first proposed. Another point of contention between the two powers concerned partition. While the Eisenhower administration had accepted its inevitability, it was not formally part of its Indochina

policy. Great Britain, on the other hand, always viewed partition as a workable solution for peace.

The discussions with Great Britain fully convinced the Eisenhower administration of the inevitability of a Geneva settlement and that developments required new ideas for an acceptable agreement. In the end and through much debate, the discussions produced a second seven point list of conditions for an acceptable agreement which were similar to the earlier list drawn up by the Eisenhower administration. The list specified:

(a) Viet Minh withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos and the preservation of their integrity and independence.

(b) Partition no lower than the 17th parallel.

(c) No restrictions on the Indochina states that would inhibit their ability to maintain stable, non-communist states (e.g. sufficient internal security forces and the right to import arms or request aid from foreign advisors).

(d) No political clause that might lead to a complete communist takeover.

(e) Nothing that might preclude the reunification of Vietnam at a later date through peaceful means.

(f) The right of inhabitants to transfer peacefully from one zone to another.

(g) An effective arrangement for international control.[90]

The seven points represented the United States' reevaluation of and reaction to the events in Geneva. The United States now viewed a settlement of some type as a certainty. Yet while the British considered the seven points as a basis for further negotiation, the Eisenhower administration considered them minimal requirements for an acceptable agreement. The administration suggested it might accept or "respect" less than the seven points but would not associate with less.[91] The Anglo-American talks were completed on June 29, 1954. In a declaration of common principles the United States and Great Britain announced their support of peoples who were striving to be independent and their unwillingness to "be a party to any arrangement or treaty which would confirm or prolong . . . unwilling subordination."[92] Providing additional support for the French they declared, "If at Geneva the French government is confronted with demands which prevent

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[90]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 267-288; FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1258-1259.

[91]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 267-288 and FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1256-1259.

[92]FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1260.

an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated."[93]

This statement implied a new allied resolve to settle the Indochina problem. This strengthened the French bargaining position at Geneva and reflected the recognition by the United States that such open support was now in its best interests. A stronger French bargaining position increased the chances that a settlement close to the seven points might occur. The declaration of common principles provided the United States the means of accepting a possible Geneva settlement without actually being a party to it. A final settlement might include several but not all of the requirements drawn up by Great Britain and the United States, allowing the Eisenhower administration to accept the settlement without signing it. The United States would then avoid the charge of obstructing the settlement and leave the path clear for some future policy. The declaration also presented a more unified allied position toward the Geneva Conference by showing the allied powers standing togetheron certain principles.

However, problems quickly developed between the allied powers over the interpretation of the seven points.

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[93]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 144.

France was not happy with the seven points and did not understand how "peaceful reunification" could occur without elections that would probably lead to a communist victory and the resultant loss of Vietnam and the rest of Indochina to the communists. France and Great Britain desired a stronger commitment by the United States to a settlement that either followed or closely followed the principles of the seven points. The American promise to "respect" the final agreement was not considered sufficient.[94]

What the allies did not realize was that the Eisenhower administration's reassessment of its Geneva policy did not mean a change in its basic policy. The United States accepted the direction in which the Conference was going (toward partition) but did not change its basic policy of not being associated with an agreement that made concessions to the communists. Dulles believed that even though peaceful reunification meant elections, an agreement should provide a period before elections to enable the democratic government to prove itself and become accepted by the population. In response to allied misgivings or confusion concerning the seven points, Dulles explained, on July 7, 1954, that in "respecting" an

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[94]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 144-146; FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1330-1331, 1363-1364, and 1258-1259.

agreement, the United States would not oppose a settlement which conformed to the seven points. It did not mean that the United States would guarantee such a settlement or that it would necessarily support the settlement publicly. Respect also meant that the United States would not seek directly or indirectly to upset the settlement by force.[95]

As France discussed the seven points with the United States it also requested the return of Dulles or Bedell Smith to Geneva in order to further strengthen the French bargaining position. When the Conference resumed in July, the Eisenhower administration intended to leave Ambassador Johnson in charge of the American delegation. The administration believed this low level of representation (as opposed to Bedell Smith or Dulles) avoided the embarrassment created "by what might [become] a spectacular disassociation of the United States from France."[96] A higher level of representation might associate the United States with an agreement that did not coincide with administration policy. In such an instance, the United States would have to back away from the

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[95]Ibid., p. 145.

[96]FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1310, and 1330-1332; FRUS, 1952-1954, 13: p. 1795.

agreement causing the "embarrassment" of "spectacular disassociation" with France. The administration did not want to be viewed as breaking up the Conference.

However, not every one in the administration opposed a higher level of representation in Geneva. James Hagerty, President Eisenhower's friend and press secretary, argued that without higher level representation the United States would not have an opportunity or forum to express its views on whatever settlement was agreed upon. "If we [the United States] are not on record to oppose the settlement when it happens, it will plague us [the Republican administration] through the fall and give the Democrats a chance to say that we sat idly by and let Indochina be sold down the river to the communists without raising a finger or turning a hair."[97] Hagerty indicated that a higher level of representation should lead to a more active role for the American delegation at the Conference and give more weight to administration views.

President Eisenhower leaned toward granting the higher representation request if it could be done without jeopardizing United States principles or having to disassociate the United States from its allies at Geneva under "circumstances which would be even more dramatic and

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[97] FRUS, 1952-1954, 13:: p. 1798.

disastrous than if there is not high-level attendance."[98] Following a discussion with Dulles concerning the possible situations that might occur at Geneva, Eisenhower ordered a message sent to Mendes-France and Anthony Eden explaining the United States position in detail and asking for their assessment. If they replied with a position that the United States could accept, the United States might upgrade its representation to the ministerial level.

The American message sent to Mendes-France on July 10, 1954 reiterated that the seven points were the minimum that the United States could accept in an agreement and not the optimum as the French and British appeared to view them. Dulles believed that in order to reach a quick settlement the French were prepared to accept proposals that varied from the seven points such as neutralizing and demilitarizing the Indochina states so as to impair their ability to maintain stable, non-communist regimes and accepting elections so early that a communist victory was assured. Dulles made it clear that it was France's right to negotiate its own agreement but that the United States had its own principles to protect. Dulles reiterated: "We do not wish to put ourselves in the position where we would seem to be passing moral judgment upon French action

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[98] Ibid., p. 1807.

or disassociating ourselves from the settlement at a moment and under circumstances which will be unnecessarily dramatic."[99]

Mendes-France replied that the lack of major United States representation weakened the French bargaining position to achieve the ends Dulles desired. Additionally, Dulles' presence would give the United States a veto power over the accords as the French would not agree to anything that was unacceptable to the United States. Without his presence, the communists were sure to increase the pressure to accept provisions that strayed from the seven points. Mendes-France added that if the United States failed to represent itself at the ministerial level, it would be the first time since World War II that the United States was not represented at a major conference as equals with other nations. The policy, Mendes-France observed, indicated a return to isolationism.[100]

Mendes-France's letter did not actually reflect the true picture in Geneva. He alluded to a "veto power" that the United States did not have, and thus could not use unless it was prepared to accept the blame for a possible failed Conference. By accepting partition sooner than the

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[99] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1331.

[100] Ibid., p. 1337.

United States, France had already shown a readiness to accept items unacceptable to basic United States foreign policy.

In an attempt to settle the representation issue, Dulles and Mendes-France met in Paris on July 14. By the end of the meeting they approved a Franco-American position paper on the Conference that promised the French would try to use the seven point United States program as the basis for a settlement. France recognized that the United States would not accept terms that differed from the seven points, but if the settlement was one the United States could "respect," then its position would be expressed "unilaterally or in association only with non-communist states in terms which apply to the situation."[101] The United States announced that it would "treat any respectable agreement as if it stemmed from the United Nations charter and would seek to establish a collective defense organization, together with other nations concerned, to safeguard the peace."[102] The statement supported France but allowed the United States to decide if an agreement were "respectable." The Eisenhower administration still did not plan to be a signatory to an agreement that strayed from its basic

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[101] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1363 and FRUS, 1952-1954, 13: p. 1830.

[102] Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, p. 274.

principles but, the position paper, along with further consultation with Eisenhower, allowed Dulles to notify Mendes-France that Bedell Smith would return to the United States delegation in Geneva.

The decision to send Bedell Smith back to Geneva set aside the fear that France would tie the United States to an agreement it did not find satisfactory. The Franco-American position paper allowed the United States the opportunity to "respect" an agreement without actually endorsing or signing it. Smith's instructions stated that he was "the representative of a nation friendly to the non-communist states primarily interested [in the negotiations], which desires to assist, where desired, in arriving at a just settlement [and that he was to] avoid participation in the negotiations in any way which would imply . . . that the United States was so responsible for the result that it [was] honor bound to guarantee that result to the communists . . . The non-communist belligerents rather, than the United States, should be the active negotiators . . . ."[103] Although the United States did not participate in the ongoing negotiations of the Conference, Smith's presence indicated a direct American concern for the outcome.

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[103] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: p. 1390 and FRUS, 1952-1954, 13: p. 1845.

Mendes-France began negotiations concerning partition of Vietnam with Chou En-lai on July 13. They reached no agreement but by July 15, 1954, Mendes-France acquired the support of Eden and Molotov for partition at the 16th parallel. The Viet Minh desired the 18th parallel and opposed the French proposal. Pressured by Molotov and Chou En-lai, they accepted the 17th parallel as a compromise solution. The delegates also approved the formula for the cease fire control commission which would consist of one communist, one pro-Western, and one Asian neutral country. The formula eliminated an automatic veto by either the communist or French sides in any potential disagreement during the cease fire.[104]

The date for the elections to reunite Vietnam became the next major issue to be settled. The Viet Minh wanted early elections for an assured victory while the French desired at least eighteen months from the effective date of the agreement to the elections. The delay would give the French time to strengthen or increase the support of the non-communist government, increasing its chances at the polls. Molotov proposed two years which the French readily accepted and the Viet Minh readily rejected. A little pressure by Molotov and Chou En-lai convinced the

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[104]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 280-293.

Viet Minh that two years was the best course of action. All major Conference issues were agreed upon by July 20, 1954; Mendes-France had made his deadline.[105]

The area where United States influence played a direct part in the negotiations was in convincing the nationalist government of Bao Dai not to obstruct the final agreement's ratification over the partition issue. Bao Dai had been relatively quiet on the issue since April when the French promised that they would not seek a settlement based upon partition. With partition in the settlement, Bao Dai now threatened to disrupt the Conference.

The United States had become associated with Bao Dai's government through the French effort to establish a non-communist nationalist government as an alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV in 1951. During the period from 1947 to 1951, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) assessed Bao Dai as not just a French puppet but a true nationalist who wanted the French out of Vietnam as much as Ho Chi Minh.[106] When negotiations began with Bao Dai on establishing a Vietnamese non-communist government, he initially demanded complete independence and a severance

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[105] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1394, 1322, 1392, 1261-1263, and 1426-1427.

[106] Patti, Why Vietnam?, p. 394.

of all ties with France. Fearing that such demands might spark a French withdrawal and that Bao Dai would not survive alone against the Viet Minh, the United States offered Bao Dai large amounts of aid to tone down nationalist demands.[107] Such aid, along with parallel objectives for Vietnam such as complete independence and no partition, placed the United States in a more influential position than France to quell Bao Dai's threatened disruption of Conference proceedings.

The United States, fearful of being held accountable for blocking the final agreement through its support of Bao Dai, used its influence on him to prevent the disruption of the final negotiations. In so doing, the Eisenhower administration again got caught between its anti-communist ideals and the realities in Geneva. While publicly condemning partition and privately accepting its inevitability, the administration had done nothing up to this time to prepare Bao Dai's government for its acceptance. American representatives now explained to Bao Dai that the United States did not support or recognize partition but supported only a "temporary" arrangement until elections reunited the country. The United States, placing further emphasis on its position, informed Bao Dai

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[107]George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979), p. 27.

that it would neither use force to upset an agreement nor insist on a United States right to give direct military assistance or training to the Vietnamese military. The United States was definitely not prepared to fight if the Bao Dai government refused to support the French on the partition issue.[108] Bao Dai had little choice but to go along with the French.

Dulles notified Washington on July 20 that a negotiated settlement was going to be signed that day.[109] The final agreements were signed at 3:20 A.M., July 21, 1954.[110] For the United States, it was not a question of whether or not to sign the agreements (it would not) but whether or not to disassociate itself totally from it. The United States had little choice in the decision not to sign the agreements based on its stance that it would not associate itself with an agreement that made what it saw as concessions to the communists.

The Geneva documents included three separate military agreements, a final declaration by the powers involved in the Conference, six unilateral declarations (two by Cambodia, two by Laos, and two by France), and thirteen

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[108] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1426-1427.

[109] Ibid., p. 1479.

[110] Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, p. 299.

final speeches.[111] No political arrangement was signed. The agreements were a system of compromises that provided for the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel with further division by a demilitarized zone. Representatives of both areas were to meet by July 20, 1955 to discuss holding elections to reunify the country by July 20, 1956. An International Control Commission (ICC) comprised of members from Canada, India, and Poland, was to supervise the elections, freely conducted by secret ballot.

A Joint Commission supervised by the ICC also had the responsibility of working out the disengagement of military forces and implementing the cease fire. The regroupment of belligerent forces in their respective zones was to take place within 300 days after the cease fire went into effect. Civilians also had the option of moving to either zone during this period. After that period, the introduction of fresh arms, equipment, and personnel were limited to the normal rotation and replacement of damaged or destroyed equipment. New military bases and alliances were prohibited. The ICC was to form fixed and mobile inspection teams that would have free access to both zones along with the complete cooperation of local political and military officials.

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[111] Ibid., pp. 302-303.

Prisoners of war and civilian internees were to be released within thirty days of the cease fire. No repressive measures were to be taken against anyone for their activities during the war.[112]

The ICC supervised the work of mixed commissions representing both sides, making decisions by majority vote. If it failed to agree on an issue that threatened the peace, the Commission was to report back to the Geneva powers for consultation. It was also informed of disputes that the Joint Commissions could not resolve. The cease fire went into effect on July 27, 1954 for North Vietnam and August 15 for South Vietnam to allow both sides adequate time for disengagement and regroupment in their respective zones.[113]

Bedell Smith made the the first American acknowledgment of the accords when they were made public on July 21, 1954. He announced that the United States government was not prepared to sign the accords but that it would refrain from the threat or use of force to disrupt them. The United States viewed any renewal of the fighting as a violation of the agreements, threatening international peace and security. In Vietnam, as in all

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[112] Ibid.

[113] Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 159, Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 302-303, and Goold-Adams, The Time Of Power, p. 142.

nations which were divided "against their will," the United States would continue to seek United Nations sponsored elections.[114]

Eisenhower expanded on Bedell Smith's remarks concerning the Geneva settlement at a news conference on the same day. Eisenhower explained that the United States had not been a belligerent in the war.

> The primary responsibility for the settlement in Indochina rested with those nations which participated in the fighting. Our role at Geneva has been at all times to try to be helpful where desired and to aid France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to obtain a just and honorable settlement . . . . Accordingly the United States has not itself been a party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference . . . . The agreement contains features which we do not like but a great deal depends on how they work in practice.[115]

Eisenhower had announced that the United States was free to follow its own policies in the area since it had not taken part in the development of the accords or signed them.

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[114]Peter Lyon, Eisenhower Portrait Of The Hero (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974), p. 617.

[115]Public Papers, Eisenhower, 1954, pp. 641-642.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

United States support of the French in Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) began when President Truman informed the French in 1946 that the United States would not oppose the return of French authority to the area. Up to this time the United States, through the Roosevelt administration, had supported the concept of international trusteeship and eventual independence for the area after World War II.[116] Truman's support of the French in Indochina did not mean that he supported French colonialism as eventual Indochina independence remained a goal of United States foreign policy. However, this initial acceptance and support for the French in Indochina created the impression in the eyes of the Indochinese that the United States supported the French as a colonial power.

Through a system of pacts and alliances, Truman initiated a containment policy in Europe, the goal of which was to contain the spread of communism. No pacts or alliances existed for Southeast Asia but Truman

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[116]Patti, Why Vietnam?, pp. 17, 21.

incorporated the area into his policy. Guidelines for thethe area were established that included providing political, economic, and military aid to threatened nations, such as Vietnam, and pursuing the creation of some type of alliance to contain the spread of communism in the Asian area. Thus the maintenance of a non-communist Vietnam became part of the containment policy.[117] While Truman viewed the containment policy as valid in Southeast Asia, that policy ignored the nationalist sentiment behind the conflict that the French found themselves in soon after they reentered Vietnam in 1946. Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were, from the beginning, viewed by the United States more as communists than as nationalists since their primary support came from the Soviet Union (until the 1949 defeat of the nationalist Chinese under Chiang Kai-shek by the Communist Chinese).

The nationalist aims of the Vietnamese people were recognized by the Truman administration but as long as the people's aspirations were personified by the Communist Viet Minh the administration could give them no direct support. The administration, however, tried to nudge the French toward supporting the independence of Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. The French, in turn, established

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[117]Gaddis, Strategies Of Containment, pp. 19-24, 25-51; Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 39.

an indigenous government in Vietnam under the leadership of a Vietnamese citizen, Bao Dai, and they initiated a series of treaties whose purposes were to turn over an increasing amount of self-government. The overall goal of this process was intended to win support for Bao Dai by drawing it away from Ho and the Viet Minh. However, the treaties were slow to be implemented and the French actually retained all authority. The Vietnamese people knew this and refused, as a whole, to support Bao Dai and viewed him as a tool or puppet of the French. The Truman administration recognized Bao Dai's weaknesses but considered him the only alternative at the time for a Vietnamese head of state.[118] The administration also recognized that the French retained all authority in the area and that only a positive move toward total Vietnamese independence would satisfy the aspirations of the nationalists. The French were not prepared to make that move during the late forties and early fifties.

The additional aid provided to the Viet Minh in the early 1950s by the Communist Chinese allowed them to push the French to the point of requesting an ever increasing amount of military aid from the United States. Truman's primary role in the Vietnam conflict was that of

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[118]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, p. 25; Hammer, The Struggle For Vietnam, pp. 209-222; Patti, Why Vietnam?, p. 394.

establishing that pattern of financing the French war effort. By the time Truman turned the presidency over to Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, the French had slipped from a position of power and strength in Vietnam to a position of decline. Eisenhower inherited a pattern of increasing United States aid to the French along with a continual slide in their military position.

The Eisenhower administration's views on communism and Southeast Asia were similar to those of the Truman administration. They both believed that communism should be prevented from encroaching on the Indochina area and that if it did, it would then spread throughout Asia and beyond. This "domino principle" first appeared during the Truman administration and was later popularized during Eisenhower's term.[119] The deteriorating French military position in Vietnam inherited by Eisenhower forced him to take a more aggressive approach than Truman to the conflict. United States military and economic aid to the French for Vietnam steadily increased throughout Eisenhower's first two years in office. Not only money and equipment were sent to Vietnam but "advisors" or "instructors" also made the journey to train and advise the French and a developing non-communist indigenous army on how best to utilize the American equipment. Air Force

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[119] Public Papers, Eisenhower, 1953, p. 536.

mechanics were also sent to maintain aircraft supplied earlier to the French. Thus, not only did Eisenhower continue the pattern of increasing aid expenditures established by Truman for Vietnam, but he also increased the physical presence of the United States with the deployment of additional maintenance and training personnel.

Various factors affected the development of Eisenhower's policy toward Vietnam. They included McCarthyism, the Korean war, and the Cold War with the Soviet Union. McCarthyism meant that political repercussions of negotiating with and making concessions to the Communist Viet Minh might have devastated the administration and the Republican party in the next election period. The Korean conflict and the Cold War with the Soviet Union further fueled the anti-communist fervor in the United States. This anti-communist fervor gave Eisenhower less flexibility to deal with international issues such as the Geneva Conference and Indochina.

The development of the European Defense Community also affected Eisenhower's policy toward the French in Vietnam. Truman attempted to integrate his European and Asian policies with the containment policy, but Eisenhower's policies were directly linked through the

EDC. The EDC was a multinational European army through which Eisenhower planned to defend or deter an attack by the Soviet Union on Europe and provide the impetus for closer economic and political cooperation among the European nations. Eisenhower viewed France as the key member of the EDC because of its size and status as a major power.[120] The French government recognized the importance that Eisenhower placed on the EDC and France's role within it. By constantly threatening to vote against the EDC's creation, France capitalized on Eisenhower's eagerness and thereby acquired the additional aid it sought for Vietnam. However, increased American aid did little to improve the French position in Vietnam as it was offset by increased Communist Chinese aid to the Viet Minh. The difference in the quality and amount of materials given to the French was also offset by the determination and guerrilla tactics of the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh succeeded in pushing the French to the bargaining table at Geneva.

The Eisenhower administration opposed the concept of France negotiating a settlement involving Indochina. It believed, before the subject was brought up during the Berlin Conference, that France might try to negotiate

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[120]Ambrose, Eisenhower The Hero, p. 49; Gaddis, Strategies Of Containment, pp. 152-153; Herring, America's Longest War, p. 21.

itself out of the area and leave it to the communist forces.[121] The administration's policy, before the battle of Dien Bien Phu, became one that tried to keep the French fighting while building an indigenous army capable of supporting or supplanting the French forces. As an added incentive, the administration agreed to pay the entire training and equipping costs of that army. The additional equipment, training, and support provided by the United States failed to improve the French military position. Both the French forces and people did not have the will or heart to sustain the French effort and carry it to victory. There was little to fight for. In order to gain any measure of popular support for their military effort, the French had to make political promises that would lead to Indochina's independence, and the French did not have the desire to fight for an independent Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. French arrogance led to the poorly planned strategy that resulted in the siege at Dien Bien Phu. After defeat there, the French fought basically a holding action until they could negotiate themselves out of the region at the Geneva Conference.

The battle at Dien Bien Phu represented the closest point that the United States came to intervening militarily in the Indochina or Vietnam conflict. France

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[121]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp, 86-87, 96.

requested United States intervention at Dien Bien Phu, and plans were made, with Eisenhower's approval, to conduct air support operations for the French garrison at the fortress. However, Eisenhower also required certain conditions be met, such as united action with our allies and congressional approval, before such plans were implemented. Congressional leaders themselves required certain conditions of the French that included guaranteed independence for the Indochina countries. As desperate as the situation was, the French refused to meet all presidential and congressional conditions for United States intervention. This allowed the Eisenhower administration to avoid the commitment of United States combat personnel in Vietnam. Eisenhower may have believed that the French would never meet his or Congress' conditions for active involvement since similar conditions for intervention had been offered and refused before. Whatever their position in Vietnam, the French had always refused to do anything that represented a possible loss of control over their conduct in the Vietnam conflict. Eisenhower may have believed that the French would again refuse his conditions and that he was safe in offering a plan for military involvement. He showed his support for the French by allowing his staff to prepare a plan for intervention. However, Eisenhower avoided the

responsibility for the plan's implementation since the French refused to meet all pre-conditions for such intervention. At no time during the remaining period of the Geneva Conference did the United States come as close to actually committing combat personnel to the Vietnam conflict.

During the Berlin Conference in January, 1954, the United States had opposed discussing the Indochina problem at the Geneva Conference without a clear-cut military victory by the French. However, Great Britain supported discussing a possible settlement of the conflict as a means of protecting its Asian interests and bringing stability to the region. France, at first, hoped to end the conflict and preserve its presence in the region. It was only after Dien Bien Phu that the French truly desired to leave.[122] Strong support by the British along with the possibility that France would vote against the EDC forced the United States to agree to add Indochina to the Geneva agenda. The United States agreed to Indochina's inclusion in order to preserve allied unity and the EDC.

Once the Indochina conflict was included on the Geneva agenda, the United States needed to establish definite

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[122]Committee On Foreign Affairs, House, p. 130.

goals for a possible settlement and develop a policy designed either to achieve those goals or come as close to them as possible. The development of an effective conference policy was hampered by several factors. The United States did not formally recognize the Viet Minh and Communist China and could not participate in diplomatic proceedings with delegations that technically did not exist. The Eisenhower administration refused to view the Conference in a positive manner and feared being associated with a possible settlement that made concessions to the communists. Such concessions represented a victory for the Viet Minh that the administration could not recognize for political reasons. The negative view of the Geneva Conference was reflected throughout the Eisenhower administration. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, and Secretary of State Dulles shared the view that a negotiated settlement that made concessions to the communists was not in the best interests of the United States. They supported a non-participatory policy by the United States in Conference proceedings. Douglas Dillon, United States Ambassador to France, supported a softer position that would be less likely to lead to the isolation of the United States at the Conference and make it difficult to blame the Soviet Union and Communist China

if the Conference failed. The result of so much negative feeling toward the Conference was a policy of American non-participation.

The instructions to the United States delegation to the Conference forbade it to deal directly with the Communist Chinese delegates or any regime not recognized by the United States (such as the Viet Minh in Vietnam and the various rebel groups in Cambodia and Laos). The United States played the part of an "interested" nation that was to be neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiations. One goal mentioned in the instructions was to assist France in arriving at decisions that preserved the territorial integrity and political independence under stable and free governments of the Indochinese countries involved in the discussions.[123]

Since the United States delegation's instructions were to participate as an observer, it was not clear how the delegation was to assist in arriving at the aforementioned decisions. The delegation was stripped of the authority to participate actively in the Conference by being prohibited contact with the principals of the opposing sides. The delegation's instructions provided no forum for the administration to air its views thus eliminating

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[123] FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 778-779.

or restricting any influence the United States might have had at the Conference.

The instructions forced the administration into a reactive policy instead of one that actively pursued a specific goal. The Eisenhower administration became caught between its ideals of a non-communist Southeast Asia and the realities that brought about the inclusion of Indochina on the Geneva agenda. Circumstances dictated that some type of settlement would occur, especially after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The Viet Minh, the architects of that defeat, were not going to accept a settlement that denied it the fruits of its victory. If the United States actively opposed a settlement, then it opened itself up to the charge of obstructing the Conference in its effort to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The United States thus played the part of passive giant at the Conference and tried not to become associated with the events that took place. It hoped that the Conference would fail on its own due to extreme communist demands and an uncompromising attitude brought on by the Viet Minh's superior military position in Vietnam. The United States could then pursue a policy of building up indigenous military forces and perhaps a united action to defeat the Viet Minh.

The Eisenhower administration underestimated the Soviet and Communist Chinese desire to reach a peaceful solution to the Indochina problem. Together they pressured the Viet Minh into accepting compromises that led to settling the issues of a cease-fire, the separation of forces (partition), disarmament, and the regroupment of military forces. Intransigence by any party in the handling of these issues could have disrupted or ended the Conference. Uncertainty created by what the United States might do at the Conference or even in Vietnam to help the French may have helped negotiations more than the Eisenhower administration realized. That uncertainty kept the communists guessing as to actual United States policies and kept them more open to compromise. In this respect, the United States helped the Conference by not having a specific Conference policy.

The fall of the French government of Prime Minister Laniel and the establishment of a government under Prime Minister Mendes-France forced the United States into a more open approach to the Geneva Conference. Laniel's government had been more amenable to United States' thinking regarding its polices in Indochina and kept (or pretended to) the option open of continuing the fighting in Vietnam until an absolute victory had been won. The Mendes-France government made no secret concerning its

Geneva policy and promised a negotiated settlement by July 21, 1954. With a settlement of some type a certainty, the Eisenhower administration hoped to influence results of the Conference so as to acquire a settlement as close to its wishes as possible. Those wishes had been expressed earlier in a list of seven principles that included the right by the United States to examine post-armistice Indochinese political and economic problems and the assurance that no provision be included (such as early elections) that might lead to a communist takeover.[124] The administration was in a poor position to achieve these goals because of the United States delegation's observer status at the Conference.

This status resulted in Conference events creating United States policy rather than its policy creating Conference events. An Anglo-American conference was held in Washington during a June Conference recess to smooth rough feelings created by conflicting policies in Southeast Asia. The discussions produced a second seven point list for an acceptable Conference settlement that exemplified the manner in which the administration's policies were shaped by Conference events. The administration was forced to revise policies such as its opposition to the partition of Vietnam to its acceptance

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[124] Ibid.

no lower than the 17th parallel.[125] While accepting previously the inevitability of partition, the administration had not done so as openly as during these Washington discussions. The seven points still made an acceptable agreement impossible for the United States since the Eisenhower administration continued to refuse to recognize a settlement that made concessions to the communists. However, the administration now indicated that it would at least respect a Geneva settlement that came close to the seven points. The seven points represented the United States' reevaluation of and reaction to Geneva events. Meanwhile when it became clear that the French desired a definite settlement of the conflict, the talks at Geneva focused on the supervision and control of a cease-fire, the separation of belligerent forces, and establishing a framework for a political settlement. Supervision and control evolved into the International Control Commission (ICC) composed of one Western, one communist, and one Asian neutral country. The separation of forces evolved into the partition of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. A political settlement was not specifically developed but elections were to be held two years from the effective date of the

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[125]Devillers and Lacouture, End Of A War, pp. 267-288; FRUS, 1952-1954, 16: pp. 1256-1259.

final accords to reunite the two halves of Vietnam and establish a government supported by the people.[126]

A comparison of the Geneva accords with Eisenhower's original and modified seven points shows a remarkable similarity between them. They were in agreement in provisions that stipulated that the ICC be in place prior to a cease-fire taking effect, measures that provided for the security of military troops and the civilian population (free travel from either zone), the release of prisoners of war, the evacuation of Cambodia and Laos by the Viet Minh, and partition no lower than the 17th parallel. The United Nations was not going to assume the responsibility of the ICC, but the United States accepted the ICC as a viable alternative. The right to examine the future political and economic problems of the Indochina area was left open to the United States since it did not sign the accords. There were no specific provisions leading to communist rule or that prohibited the peaceful reunification of Vietnam. However, Vietnam's peaceful reunification and the possibility of a communist takeover depended upon the outcome of the proposed elections in 1956 and whether or not the United States or the Viet Minh accepted those election results.

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[126]Gravel, Pentagon Papers, pp. 270-282.

Was Eisenhower's Conference policy a success? Although the final accords met the intentions of Eisenhower's seven points, they represented a policy defeat for the President. Eisenhower expected the Conference to collapse due to unreasonable demands and an uncompromising Communist attitude similar to that shown in the Korean negotiations. But the Soviet Union and Communist China were more open to compromise than the United States expected. The administration's decision not to participate in the negotiations may have influenced the Soviet Union and Communist China to propose compromises that France could accept and lead to the final accords. In the end the administration failed to prevent the loss of territory to the communists, to keep the French fighting until an indigenous army could replace them, and to develop united action as an acceptable policy to the allies when intervention was requested.

Did Eisenhower's policy avoid a direct military involvement by the United States in Indochina? Eisenhower's policies kept American combat personnel from direct military involvement in Vietnam because of the French refusal to meet all specified conditions for such involvement. Eisenhower recognized French unwillingness to relinquish any type of authority in the conduct of the war and may have tailored his conditions for United States

intervention with the intent that the French would have no alternative but to refuse them. The fear of losing control of the war and its Indochina colonies was the reason why the French refused to allow the United Nations to become involved in the Indochina area. Thus, Eisenhower might have used French pride as a foreign policy tool to avoid direct American military involvement in Vietnam.

Eisenhower's policy at the Conference or during the Conference period, for the short term, kept American armed forces from direct involvement in the Indochina region. However, the Conference marked a turning point in United States policy for the Indochina region (primarily Vietnam) in that it became one of active participation in the area rather just one represented by monetary or military aid to the French. While the accords did not formerly establish two separate nations in the North and South of Vietnam, the two areas were treated as such by allies and antagonists. Ho and the Viet Minh set about formally establishing their government in North Vietnam, and the United States initiated a policy of helping the government in the South establish itself as a viable entity, eventually replacing the French as its primary benefactor. This effort of creating a democratic government in South Vietnam laid the groundwork for

subsequent administrations to become more involved in the area.

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