

III The Geneva Accords 1954

- A. U.S. Military Planning and Diplomatic Maneuver, January-July, 1954
- B. Role and Obligations of the State of Vietnam
- C. The Viet Minh Position and Sino-Soviet Strategy
- D. The Intent of the Geneva Accords

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS
1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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THE GENEVA ACCORDS

1954

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PART III

THE GENEVA ACCORDS

1954

Foreword

This part of the study examines the Geneva Conference of 1954. Section A deals with U.S. positions before and during the conference. Section B discusses the role of the Bao Dai Government of Vietnam during Geneva, and its consequent obligations. Section C relates the Viet Minh position at Geneva to overall objectives and strategy of the communist powers. The final portion, Section D, analyzes the outcome of the conference as viewed first by the communists, then by the West, and finally as its spirit and effects can be seen in objective retrospect.

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A. U.S. MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC
MANEUVER, JANUARY-JULY 1954

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III. A. U.S. MILITARY PLANNING AND DIPLOMATIC MANEUVER, JANUARY-JULY 1954

SUMMARY

It is charged that the U.S. tried to sabotage the Geneva Conference, first by maneuvering to prevent the conference from taking place, then by attempting to subvert a settlement, and finally, by refusing to guarantee the resulting agreements of the conference. The documentation on this charge is complete, but by no means unambiguous. While "sabotage" may be a strong word, it is evident that the U.S. by its actions and statements during this period did seek to down-play the conference, disassociate itself from the results, and thereby did cast doubt on the stability of the accords.

After the Big Four Conference at Berlin in February, 1954, U.S. efforts were directed at preventing a French collapse in Vietnam prior to a settlement at Geneva. If the conference were to take place, the U.S. believed that any settlement likely to result would be contrary to U.S. interests. The U.S. aim was, therefore, to take the emphasis off the conference and put it back onto the battlefield. This renewed emphasis on a military approach was put in the context of what Washington referred to as "united action," of the same character as UN intervention in Korea -- broad, multi-lateral, and military. Even as the French-Vietnamese military position continued to deteriorate on the battlefield, the U.S. became more convinced than ever of the need for decisive military victory. The recent experience of Korea only served to convince Washington that meaningful compromise with the communists was impossible. The U.S., however, did have to react to French proposals for a peace conference, and did so by insisting on a strong French stand, bolstered by continued fighting while negotiations were in progress. Moreover, the U.S. threatened to "disassociate" itself from the conference if the results were not favorable to the West (Tab 1).

As the conference became more of a reality, the U.S. aim was to keep the united action option open in the event that France would find the course of negotiations at Geneva unpalatable. Washington was convinced that the conference would fail because of communist intransigence and that, therefore, France would have no choice but to turn to the united action alternative. France wanted U.S. military support, but was reluctant to pay its price. The price was U.S. insistence on complete independence for the Associated States of Indochina as soon as possible. The U.S. would make no pledges to France, moreover, without firm and broad allied support -- support which was never forthcoming on the military side. France, unwilling to accept the prerequisites for U.S. intervention, and under domestic pressure, decided to pursue a political settlement at the conference table rather than united military action. Nevertheless, France used these U.S. conditions and the united action option as a lever at the conference. When the French situation in Indochina deteriorated beyond

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the point that U.S. military assistance would be profitable, and after seeing the futility of organizing united action, Dulles withdrew the option (Tab 2).

As the negotiations at the conference progressed, Washington shifted its weight away from intervention through united action and instead concentrated on unifying the West into a regional military pact and creating a united diplomatic front at the conference to obtain the best possible settlement for the West. The implied threat of U.S. intervention, however, was allowed to remain. Throughout July of 1954, then, united action took on a futuristic bent -- as a Free World Regional Defense Organization (ultimately to become SEATO) to secure Laos, Cambodia, and a "retained Vietnam" -- after the conference completed its work. Diplomatically, the U.S. took the initiative in forming a seven-point negotiating position with the British, a position which was, in large part, ultimately accepted by France. Except for a provision admitting the inescapability of a partitioned Vietnam, the seven-point program was a maximum western position. Yet, even as we urged our desires on France, we made clear that we would not be able to sign, guarantee, or associate ourselves with any accord. The U.S. role was to be passive and formal and firmly against co-signing any document with the communists. In effect, the U.S. delegation attempted to forward its ideas on a proper settlement to the "active negotiators" representing western interests. The U.S. would do nothing to impair its future flexibility with respect to Indochina. As matters turned out at the conference, the final terms of the settlement came close to meeting seven Anglo-American conditions (Tab 3).

DISCUSSION

- III. A. Tab 1 - U.S. Pre-conference Maneuvers - January-April 1954
2 - U.S. and French on United Action, May-Mid June 1954
3 - U.S. Negotiating Position During the Conference

A1

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 1.

U.S. PRE-CONFERENCE MANEUVERS, JANUARY-APRIL 1954

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>U.S. Aims to Keep the Fight on the Battlefield</u>	A-5
a. U.S. Opposed to Geneva Conference.....	A-5
b. Alternatives to Military Victory Appear Infeasible.....	A-5
c. Elections Would Be Subverted.....	A-5
d. The U.S. Proposes "United Action".....	A-6
e. U.S. Discourages Early Cease-fire.....	A-7
2. <u>Events Make the Geneva Conference Inevitable</u>	A-8
a. U.S. Plans Initial Geneva Position.....	A-8
b. NSC Recommends Strong U.S. Stand.....	A-8
c. Dulles Announces Possibility of U.S. Disassociation.....	A-8
d. Dulles Deprecates Partition.....	A-9
3. <u>U.S. Makes Final Preparations for Geneva</u>	A-9
a. French Inform U.S. of Opening Proposals.....	A-9
b. JCS Study French Proposals.....	A-9
c. Eisenhower Suggests Possibility of United Action.....	A-9
d. NSC Recommends Continued Study of United Action.....	A-10
e. U.S. to Be an "Interested Nation," Not a Negotiator.....	A-10

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
f. U.S. Takes Hard Line for Geneva.....	A-11
g. French Military Situation Deteriorates.....	A-11
h. Viet Minh Successes Merely Confirm U.S. Hard Line.....	A-12

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 1. U.S. PRE-CONFERENCE MANEUVERS, JANUARY-APRIL 1954

1. U.S. Aims to Keep the Fight on the Battlefield

a. U.S. Opposed to Geneva Conference

Negotiation of a settlement of the Indochina War was never happily accepted by the United States. Consistently, Washington took the position that France should negotiate only from a posture of clear military advantage which, assuming success of the Navarre Plan, would not come about until some time in 1955. While recognizing strong pressures in the French National Assembly and among the French public for peace, the U.S., clearly influenced by the experience at Panmunjom, hoped to convince the Laniel government against making a premature commitment to talks with the Viet Minh. The U.S. could not prevent Laniel from expressing publicly his administration's desire for peace, but sought to persuade him against actually sitting down at the bargaining table. As late as December 1953, Laniel agreed that Washington's approach was the correct one. 1/ Two months later, however, the picture had changed. At Berlin, the Big Four decision to convene an international conference on Indochina at Geneva evidenced the irresistible pressure in French government circles for talks with the Viet Minh.

b. Alternatives to Military Victory Appear Infeasible

Compelled to go along with Anglo-French preference for negotiating with the communists, the U.S. nevertheless did not shake its pessimism over the probable results. Our position remained that nothing short of military victory could settle the Indochina War in a manner favorable to Free World interests. The rationale behind this unequivocal perspective on negotiations was first set out fully by the JCS in March 1954, when the Chiefs examined the alternatives to military victory and found them all infeasible or unacceptable to the U.S. A cease-fire prior to a political settlement, the JCS paper stated, probably would "lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position." A coalition government would lead to communist seizure of power from within, with the U.S. helpless to prevent it. Partition, on the other hand, would amount to recognition of communist success by force of arms, cession to the communists of the key Tonkin Delta, and undercutting of our containment policy in Asia.

c. Elections Would Be Subverted

The Chiefs also commented at some length on the difficult question of elections. They took the position that even if elections in Vietnam could be carried out along democratic lines (which they doubted), a communist victory would almost certainly result because of communist territorial control, popular support, and superior tactics:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"Such factors as the prevalence of illiteracy, the lack of suitable educational media, and the absence of adequate communications in the outlying areas would render the holding of a truly representative plebiscite of doubtful feasibility. The Communists, by virtue of their superior capability in the field of propaganda, could readily pervert the issue as being a choice between national independence and French Colonial rule. Furthermore, it would be militarily infeasible to prevent widespread intimidation of voters by Communist partisans. While it is obviously impossible to make a dependable forecast as to the outcome of a free election, current intelligence leads the Joint Chiefs to the belief that a settlement based upon free elections would be attended by almost certain loss of the Associated States to Communist control."

The JCS views, together with their recommendation that the U.S. not associate itself with any settlement that "would fail to provide reasonably adequate assurance of the future political and territorial integrity of Indochina..." were approved by the Secretary of Defense on 23 March. 2/

d. The U.S. Proposes United Action

Secretary Dulles on March 29 publicly proposed collective military operations as a future course of action for the "free world" in Indochina. Dulles suggested the organization of a ten-nation collective defense alliance for Southeast Asia. 3/ Such a coalition was the U.S. Government's preferred alternative to unilateral U.S. intervention, either at Dien Bien Phu, or subsequently in a more general context. With the climax at Dien Bien Phu approaching, the inter-agency debate in Washington had made clear that American intervention there solely with air and naval forces was neither desirable nor feasible, and there was little support for a ground intervention. United action also was the result of the Eisenhower's Administration's inability to marshal support among Congressional leaders for a unilateral U.S. intervention without participation by the allies. President Eisenhower himself clearly preferred intervention through united action to a purely American undertaking.

The united action proposal, however, was not acceptable either to the British or to the French before the Geneva Conference. The British thought that any military intervention under united action prior to Geneva would impede a political settlement at the Conference and most likely lead to a further expansion of the war, including a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

possible Chinese intervention. London, therefore, was only willing to consider the establishment of a collective defense alliance in Southeast Asia after the Geneva Conference. France saw Dulles' proposal for united action as a parry of the urgent French request for immediate U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Initially, the French feared that united action would internationalize the war and thereby place it beyond control of Paris. Later, the French came to fear that united action would be used as a device to impede negotiations. For these reasons, the American proposal for united action failed to gather support either in Paris or in London before Geneva.

e. U.S. Discourages Early Cease-fire

In the months before the conference, the U.S. maintained an adamant opposition to any course other than full prosecution of the war. Dulles told French Ambassador Henri Bonnet on 3 April, for instance, that a negotiated settlement would lead only to face-saving formulae for either a French or a Viet Minh surrender. The Secretary termed a division of Indochina "impractical" and a coalition government the "beginning of disaster." Writing to Churchill on 4 April, Eisenhower echoed this line, asserting: "There is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a communist retirement." And it was precisely to bring about the latter -- China's "discreet disengagement" -- that the President wanted British cooperation in "united action." 4/

The U.S. was concerned that a disaster at Dien Bien Phu would propel the French into acceptance of an immediate cease-fire even before the conference could begin. Dulles obtained assurances from Bidault that the French would not adopt that approach. 5/ The British did not share U.S. fears. Eden doubted that a cease-fire would lead either to a massacre of the French or to large-scale infiltration of French-held terrain by Viet Minh forces. 6/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

2. Events Make the Geneva Conference Inevitable

a. U.S. Plans Initial Geneva Position

Assured that the French would not cease fire prior to the conference, Washington forged ahead in late April and early May in search of a policy that would guide the American delegation. The National Security Council, less than a week before the opening conference session, carefully examined American alternatives. 7/ The NSC urged the President not to join the Geneva deliberations without assurance from France that it was not preparing to negotiate the surrender of Indochina. Again, the Korean example was foremost: Communist tactics, the NSC said, will likely resemble those at Panmunjom: a cease-fire with lack of compliance by the communists because of ineffective supervision, a wilting French position before the communists' typical dilatory tactics, all resulting in the French accepting almost any terms.

b. NSC Recommends Strong U.S. Stand

The NSC, therefore, decided that the French had to be pressured into adopting a strong posture in the face of probable communist intransigence. The NSC urged a policy of informing Paris that its acquiescence in a communist takeover of Indochina would bear not only on France's future position in the Far East, but also on its status as one of the Big Three; that abandonment of Indochina would grievously affect both France's position in North Africa and Franco-U.S. relations in that region; that U.S. aid to France would automatically cease upon Paris' conclusion of an unsatisfactory settlement; and, finally, that communist domination of Indochina would be of such serious strategic harm to U.S. interests as to produce "consequences in Europe as well as elsewhere [without]...apparent limitation." In addition, the NSC recommended that the U.S. determine immediately whether the Associated States should be approached with a view to continuing the anti-Viet Minh struggle in some other form, including unilateral U.S. involvement "if necessary."

c. Dulles Announces Possibility of U.S. Disassociation

The NSC's adamant attitude was reflected in Dulles' extreme pessimism over the prospects for any meaningful progress in talks with the communists. At Geneva on April 25, the Secretary said that the solution of the Indochina problem was the primary responsibility of France, the non-Communist Vietnamese, and the Viet Minh. The U.S. would not normally expect to "interpose [its] veto" except "where we felt that the issues involved had a pretty demonstrable interest to the United States itself." And he went on to say that if highly disadvantageous solutions were proposed at the conference which the U.S. could not prevent, "we would probably want to disassociate ourselves from it [the Conference]." 8/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

d. Dulles Deprecates Partition

This first official indication for public consumption of U.S. refusal to join in a settlement contrary to our interests, was coupled with a comment by Dulles on the possibility of partition. In views that would change later, Dulles said he did not see how partition could be arranged with the fighting not confined to any single area. Although he did not actually rule out partition, he made it clear that the U.S. would agree only to a division equivalent to a communist surrender, one that would place all the communist troops in a small regroupment area out of harm's way. But that arrangement "might not be acceptable to them," he said coyly.

3. U.S. Makes Final Preparations for Geneva

a. French Inform U.S. of Opening Proposals

The test of U.S. policy came May 5 when the French informed Washington of the proposals they intended to make in the first round of talks. The proposals included a separation of the Vietnam situation of "civil war" from the communist aggressions in Cambodia and Laos; a cease-fire supervised by international authority, to be followed by political discussions aimed at free elections; the regrouping of regular forces of the belligerents into defined zones upon signature of a cease-fire agreement; the disarming of all irregular forces (i.e., the Viet Minh guerrillas); and a guarantee of the agreements by "the States participating in the Geneva Conference."

b. JCS Study French Proposals

Once more, the Chiefs, in reviewing the proposals, fell back on the Korean experience, which they said demonstrated the certainty that the communists would violate any armistice controls, including those supervised by an international body. An agreement to refrain from new military activities during armistice negotiations would be a strong obstacle to communist violations; but the communists, the JCS concluded, would never agree to such an arrangement. The Chiefs therefore urged that the U.S. not get trapped into backing a French armistice proposal that then could be taken up by the communists and exploited to bind us to a cease-fire. The only way to get satisfactory results was through military success, and since the Navarre Plan was no longer tenable, the next best alternative was not to associate the U.S. with any cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory political settlement. The first step, the Chiefs believed, should be the conclusion of a settlement that would "reasonably assure the political and territorial integrity of the Associated States..."; only thereafter should a cease-fire be entertained. 9/

c. Eisenhower Suggests Possibility of United Action

As previously, the Joint Chiefs' position became U.S. policy, in this case with only minor emendations. The President, reviewing the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

JCS paper, agreed that the U.S. could not back the French proposal with its call for a supervised cease-fire that the communists would never respect. Eisenhower further concurred with the Chiefs' insistence on priority to a political settlement, with the stipulation that French forces continue fighting while negotiations were in progress. He added that the U.S. would continue aiding the French during that period and would, in addition, work toward a united action coalition "for the purpose of preventing further expansion of communist power in Southeast Asia." 10/

d. NSC Recommends Continued Study of United Action

These statements of position paved the way for a National Security Council meeting May 8 which set forth the guidelines of U.S. policy on negotiations for the delegation at Geneva. The decision taken at the meeting simply underscored what the President and the Chiefs had already stated:

"The United States will not associate itself with any proposal from any source directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls. The United States could concur in the initiation of negotiations for such an armistice agreement. During the course of such negotiations, the French and the Associated States should continue to oppose the forces of the Viet Minh with all the means at their disposal. In the meantime, as a means of strengthening the hands of the French and the Associated States during the course of such negotiations, the United States will continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and promptly activate a Southeast Asian regional grouping for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia." 11/)

e. U.S. to Be an "Interested Nation," Not a Negotiator

Before receiving detailed instructions from Dulles, Smith spoke twice at the first round of plenary sessions, once on May 10 (the second plenary) and again on May 12 (at the third). At these sessions, Smith brought home two major points of U.S. policy: first, he declined to commit the U.S. in advance to a guarantee of the settlement, despite Bidault's call for all the participants to make such a guarantee; 12/ second, he proposed that national elections in Vietnam be supervised by an international commission "under United Nations auspices." Smith stressed that the UN should have two separate functions -- overseeing not only the cease-fire but the elections as well. Both these points in Smith's speech were to remain cardinal elements of U.S. policy throughout the negotiations. 13/ On 12 May Smith received instructions clearly designed to make the U.S. an influential, but unentangled and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

unobligated, participant. The U.S., Dulles cabled him, was to be "an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation." Its primary aim would be to:

"...help the nations of that area [Indochina] peacefully to enjoy territorial integrity and political independence under stable and free governments with the opportunity to expand their economies, to realize their legitimate national aspirations, and to develop security through individual and collective defense against aggression, from within and without. This implies that these people should not be amalgamated into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship."

Accordingly, Smith was told, the U.S. should not give its approval to any settlement or cease-fire.

"...which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states or of permanently impairing their territorial integrity or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union of Indochina, or which otherwise contravened the principles stated...above." 14/

f. U.S. Takes Hard Line for Geneva

The NSC decision of May 8, Smith's comments at the second and third plenary sessions, and Dulles' instructions to Smith reveal the hardness of the U.S. position on a Geneva settlement. The U.S. would not associate itself with any arrangement that failed to provide adequately for an internationally supervised cease-fire and national elections that resulted in the partitioning of any of the Associated States; or that compromised the independence and territorial integrity of those States in any way. Smith was left free, in fact, to withdraw from the conference or to restrict the American role to that of observer. 15/

g. French Military Situation Deteriorates

The pessimistic American view of the conference was founded also on the deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military effort, particularly in the Tonkin Delta. After the debacle at Dien Bien Phu, the French gradually shifted their forces from Laos and Cambodia into the Delta; but the Viet Minh naturally did likewise, moving several battalions eastward. U.S. Army intelligence reported on May 26, on the basis of French reports, that the Viet Minh were redeploying much faster than anticipated, to the point where only 2,000 of 35,000 troops originally in northwestern Tonkin remained. To thwart the communist military threat, General Ely told General Trapnell (on May 30) that French forces were forming a new defensive perimeter along the Hanoi-Haiphong axis; but Ely

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

made no effort to hide the touch-and-go nature of French defensive capabilities during the rainy season already under way. 16/ The bleak picture darkened further after General Valluy reported in early June to U.S., British, Australian, and New Zealand Chiefs of Staff assembled in Washington that the Delta was in danger of falling to the communists, that neither Frenchmen nor Vietnamese would fight on in the south in that eventuality, and that only prompt allied intervention could save the situation. 17/

h. Viet Minh Successes Merely Confirm U.S. Hard Line

Valluy's presentation merely reinforced what the U.S. already was aware of, namely, that while the communists put forth unacceptable proposals at Geneva, they were driving for important gains in the Delta that would thoroughly demoralize French Union soldiers and set the stage for French withdrawal to the south. Deterioration on the battlefield and pessimism at the negotiating table, therefore, worked hand-in-hand toward confirming to Washington not that its goals for an Indochina settlement were unrealistic, but rather that the only way to attain them was through decisive military victory in conformity with the original "united action" proposal of March 29.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 1.

FOOTNOTES

1. MemCon between Douglas MacArthur II (State, Europe) and Laniel at Bermuda, December 4, 1953 (SECRET).
2. Radford memorandum to the Defense Secretary (Wilson), March 12, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
3. Dept. of State Press Release No. 165, March 29, 1954. See Part II.B.
4. Dulles "EYES ONLY" tel. No. 3476 to American Embassy - Paris (Dillon) and No. 5175 to American Embassy - London (Aldrich), April 3, 1954 (TOP SECRET); also Dulles "EYES ONLY" tel. NIACT 5179 to American Embassy - London (Aldrich), April 4, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
5. Dulles "EYES ONLY" tel. DULTE 15 to the Acting Secretary (Smith) for passage to the President, April 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. Dulles "EYES ONLY" tel. DULTE 9 from Geneva for Smith, Dillon, and Aldrich, April 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
7. "United States Position on Indochina to be Taken at Geneva," undated (TOP SECRET).
8. The briefing was reported in a priority cable from Dulles at Geneva, tel. SECTO 6, April 25, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL); emphasis supplied.
9. Radford memorandum to SecDef, May 7, 1954, Enclosure: "Comments to be furnished to the Secretary of Defense re Radios SECTO 106 and SECTO 110, dated 5 May 1954, and DA IN 59296, dated 6 May 1954" (TOP SECRET).
10. Ibid.
11. Reported in Dulles "EYES ONLY" tel. TEDUL 43 to Smith at Geneva, May 8, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
12. Verbatim Minutes of the Geneva Conference (Dept. of State), Second Plenary Session, p. 87. (Hereafter cited as U.S. Verb Min [session])
13. U.S. Verb Min/3, p. 122.
14. Dulles priority tel. TOSEC 138 to Smith at Geneva, May 12, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL); emphasis supplied.
15. Ibid.
16. Dillon priority tel. No. 134 from Paris, July 11, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
17. Dulles to American Consulate - Geneva, tel. TEDUL 171, June 7, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 2.

U.S. AND FRENCH ON UNITED ACTION, MAY-MID JUNE 1954

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>U.S. Attempts to Reach Agreement with France on United Action</u>	A-16
a. United Action Stressed as an Option.....	A-16
b. French Request U.S. Terms for Intervention.....	A-16
c. U.S. States Intervention Terms.....	A-16
d. Eisenhower Still Favors United Action.....	A-17
e. The French Reject Independence Options for Associated States.....	A-18
f. Laniel Presents Two Additional Questions to U.S.....	A-18
g. The U.S. Replies.....	A-18
h. Other Concerned Western Nations are Kept Informed.....	A-18
2. <u>Agreement with France Appears Increasingly Unlikely</u>	A-19
a. U.S. Begins Contingency Planning.....	A-19
b. Three Regional Pacts Considered.....	A-19
c. JCS Point Out Key Planning Considerations.....	A-19
d. JCS Urge Limited U.S. Commitment.....	A-20
e. JCS Call for Meeting of Interested Western Powers.....	A-20
f. U.S. Again Requests Independence for Associated States.....	A-21
g. French Response is Encouraging.....	A-21

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
h. Question of Chinese Air Attack Again Arises.....	A-21
i. Dillon Outlines French Position.....	A-21
j. U.S. Repeats Initial Reply.....	A-22
k. Other Obstacles to U.S.-French Accord.....	A-22
l. The Continuing Issue of Independence for Associated States.....	A-23
3. <u>United Action Option Withdrawn.....</u>	A-23
a. Issues Begin to Lose Relevance in Changing War.....	A-23
b. Dulles Considers Withdrawing Option of United Action.....	A-23
c. Dulles Withdraws Option.....	A-24
d. U.S. Turns to Studies with U.K. on Intervention.....	A-24
e. United Action Option Has Come Full Cycle.....	A-24
4. <u>French Use Threat of U.S. Intervention at Geneva.....</u>	A-25
a. French Do Not Intend to Request U.S. Involvement.....	A-25
b. French Bring Out Possible U.S. United Action as a Lever in Bargaining.....	A-25
c. United Action is an Alternative but not a Subverting Force.....	A-25

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 2. U.S. AND FRENCH ON UNITED ACTION, MAY-MID JUNE 1954

1. U.S. Attempts to Reach Agreement with France on United Action

a. United Action Stressed as an Option

The formulation of an American approach to negotiations was paralleled by a search for an appropriate military alternative. Perceiving the inevitable bogging down of talks at Geneva as the consequence of communist procrastination, but also mindful of the bankruptcy of the Navarre Plan, the Administration still hoped that "united action" could be achieved once Britain and France realized, as we had consistently tried to convince them, that negotiating with the communists was a wasteful exercise. But in keeping open the option of united action, the Administration, during May and the first half of June, as in April, carefully conditioned it on a range of French concessions and promises. Thus, this second go-'round of united action was not designed to make further negotiations impossible; rather, it was intended to provide an alternative which the French might utilize once negotiations were conceded by them to be useless.

b. French Request U.S. Terms for Intervention

The issue of united action arose again in early May when Premier Laniel, in a talk with Ambassador Dillon, expressed the view that the Chinese were the real masters of the negotiations at Geneva. This being the case, Laniel reasoned, the Chinese would probably seek to drag out the talks over any number of peripheral issues while the Viet Minh pushed on for a military decision. Readjustment of the French position in the field, with a major withdrawal on the order of 15 battalions to the Tonkin Delta, was probable very soon, Laniel said, unless the U.S. decided to give its active military cooperation. In the interim, the Premier requested that a U.S. general be dispatched to Paris to assist in military planning. 1/

c. U.S. States Intervention Terms

Laniel's views failed to make an impression in Washington. Although the Administration agreed to dispatch a general (Trapnell), Dulles proposed, and Eisenhower accepted, a series of "indispensable" conditions to American involvement which would have to be met by Paris: 2/

(1) A formal request for U.S. involvement from France and the Associated States; similar invitations to other nations;

(2) An immediate, favorable response to those invitations from Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the assurance that Britain "would either participate or be acquiescent";

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(3) Presentation of "some aspect of matter" to the UN by one of the involved Asian states;

(4) A French guarantee of complete independence to the Associated States, "including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time...";

(5) A French undertaking not to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps from Indochina during the period of united action in order to ensure that the U.S. would be providing air and sea, but not combat troop, support;

(6) Franco-American agreement on the training of native forces and a new command structure during united action (Admiral Radford was reported to be thinking in terms of a French supreme command with a U.S. air command);

(7) Full endorsement by the French cabinet and Assembly of these conditions to ensure a firm French commitment even in the event of a change in government in Paris.

It was further agreed that in the course of united action, the U.S. would pursue efforts to broaden the coalition and to formalize it as a regional defense pact.

d. Eisenhower Still Favors United Action

Eisenhower was still insistent on collective action, but recognized that the British might not commit themselves initially and that the Australians, facing a general election later in May, could only give "evidence" of their willingness to participate. A second major problem was Indochinese independence. Dulles posed the American dilemma on this score: on the one hand, the U.S. had to avoid giving Asia reason to believe we were intervening on behalf of colonialism; on the other, the Associated States lacked the personnel and leadership necessary to carrying on alone. "In a sense," said Dulles, "if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured." His solution was that the Associated States be granted (evidently, orally) the right to withdraw from the French Union after passage of a suitable time period, perhaps five or ten years. A final point concerned Executive-Congressional relations once a French request, backed by Parliamentary assent, reached Washington. The President felt he should appear before a joint session of Congress and seek a Congressional resolution to use the armed forces in Indochina. At Eisenhower's request, Dulles directed that State Department begin working up a first draft of such a Presidential message. 3/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

e. The French Reject Independence Options for Associated States

The American response to Laniel's requests set the stage for an extended series of discussions over the ensuing five weeks. In Paris, Dillon communicated the American conditions to Laniel, who accepted the conditions, but with important reservations. First, Laniel indicated his dismay at the U.S. insistence on the right of the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union. The Premier commented that the French public could never accept this condition inasmuch as the Associated States had themselves never made it and since even the Viet Minh envisioned joining the Union. Second, the obvious U.S. reluctance to go beyond air and naval forces disturbed the Premier. He requested that the U.S. provide, in addition, artillery forces and token ground troops. Moreover, he indicated pleasure that UK participation was no longer a prerequisite to American involvement.

f. Laniel Presents Two Additional Questions to U.S.

Laniel's qualified approval of the preconditions was accompanied by a request for a U.S. response to two other questions: (1) Could the U.S. in some way guarantee the borders and independence of Laos and Cambodia following a French withdrawal from those countries? (2) Could the U.S. provide written assurance of prompt air intervention to meet a Chinese Communist air attack on French forces in the delta? 4/

g. The U.S. Replies

The American response to Laniel's demurrers and requests was for the most part negative. On the French-Associated States relationship, which Ambassador Dillon had commented was the chief barrier to a French request for intervention, 5/ Dulles replied (through Dillon) that the U.S. might have some flexibility on the matter, but had to remain adamant on complete independence if we ever hoped to gain Thai and Filipino support. Next, on the question of the extent of U.S. involvement, the U.S. was more amenable: we would not exclude anti-aircraft "and limited U.S. ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by U.S. naval and air forces." As for Laniel's specific requests, Washington answered that it saw no way, in view of the military and legal impracticalities, to guarantee the security of Laos and Cambodia; the alternative was that Laos and Cambodia join with Thailand in seeking a UN Peace Observation Commission (POC) on their territories. On the possibility of Chinese MIG intervention, considered extremely remote by the Defense Department, the French were to be assured that a collective defense arrangement would include protection against that contingency. 6/

h. Other Concerned Western Nations are Kept Informed

During the U.S.-French give-and-take, the British were clearly being kept at arm's length, no longer considered essential to the beginning of a united action. This irked London considerably,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

especially as the Washington-Paris exchanges were making headlines despite efforts to keep them under wraps. It was only because of the stories and British annoyance that Dulles directed that the British, Australian, and New Zealand ambassadors be informed "in general terms" regarding U.S.-French talks. 7/

2. Agreement with France Appears Increasingly Unlikely

a. U.S. Begins Contingency Planning

Although the setting up of several U.S. preconditions to involvement and the qualifications of the French reply by no means made intervention an immediate possibility, the U.S., apparently for the first time, moved ahead on contingency planning. The State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took the lead by producing a hypothetical timetable based on the assumption of U.S.-French agreement in principle to the proposed conditions by 21 May. 8/ FEA also outlined a full slate of urgent priority studies to be undertaken by various Government agencies, including U.S. strategy under differing circumstances of Chinese involvement in the war. 9/ By 24 May, FEA had forwarded a contingency study of the Operations Planning Board which proposed, among other things, U.S. public and private communications to Peking to prevent, or at least reduce the effectiveness of, direct Chinese intervention. 10/

b. Three Regional Pacts Considered

The initiation of planning for U.S. intervention extended to more far-ranging discussions of the purposes, requirements, and make-up of a Southeast Asia collective defense organization. The framework of the discussions evidenced the Government's intention that united action only be undertaken after the Geneva conference had reached a stalemate or, far less likely, a settlement. Three regional formulations were envisaged: the first would be designed for direct action, probably without British participation, either to defeat the Viet Minh or exclude them from gaining control of Indochina; the second, formed after a settlement, would comprise the present SEATO members and functions, in particular actual assistance to the participating Asian states against external attack or "Communist insurrection"; the third would have a broad Asian membership, with its function limited to social and economic cooperation. 11/

c. JCS Point Out Key Planning Considerations

An important input to contingency planning on intervention came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 20 May, the JCS sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense entitled "U.S. Military Participation in Indochina." 12/ In the paper, the Chiefs requested formulation of a Defense Department position on the size of any U.S. contributions and the nature of the command structure once united action began. They noted the "limited availability of U.S. forces

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

for military action in Indochina" and the "current numerical advantage of the French Union forces over the enemy, i.e., approximately 5 to 3." Pointing out the disadvantages of either stationing large numbers of U.S. troops in Indochina or of basing U.S. aircraft on Indochina's limited facilities, the Chiefs considered "the current greatest need" to be an expanded, intensified training program for indigenous troops. The JCS observed, moreover, that they were guided in their comments by the likely reaction of the CPR to U.S. involvement, as well as by the prescription: "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage."

d. JCS Urge Limited U.S. Commitment

In view of these problems and prospects, the JCS urged the limitation of U.S. involvement to strategic planning and the training of indigenous forces through an increase in MAAG to 2250 men. Our force commitment should be limited, they thought, primarily to air-naval support directed from outside Indochina; even here, the Chiefs cautioned against making a "substantial" air force commitment. The Chiefs were also mindful of the Chinese. Since Viet Minh supplies came mainly from China, "the destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina." The Chiefs were clearly taking the position that any major U.S. force commitment in the Far East should be reserved for a war against the Chinese. Recognizing the limitations of the U.S. defense establishment for large-scale involvement in so-called "brush-fire" wars, the Chiefs were extremely hesitant, as had consistently been the case, to favor action along the periphery of China when the strategic advantages of U.S. power lay in decisive blows against the major enemy. Thus, the JCS closed their memorandum with the admonition that air-naval commitments beyond those specified

"...will involve maldployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East. From the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities." 13/

e. JCS Call for Meeting of Interested Western Powers

The JCS evidently also decided that it would be a good idea to gather together military representatives of the U.S., France, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, the Chiefs suggested the downgrading of the representatives to below chief-of-staff level; but apparently on the strong protest of Under Secretary Smith at Geneva, 14/ and of the British too, 15/ the Chiefs acquiesced in a meeting at chief-of-staff level. But prior to the meeting, which began the first week of June, important developments occurred in the U.S.-France go-'round on intervention.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

f. U.S. Again Requests Independence for Associated States

The ticklish problem of bringing France to concede the vitalness of granting full independence to the Associated States occupied center stage once more. On 27 May, the State Department, acknowledging France's hesitancy to go too far on this score, still insisted on certain "minimum measures," the most important of which was that France announce, during or immediately after the signing of the latest draft treaties, 16/ that she would willingly withdraw all her forces from Indochina unless invited by the governments of the Associated States to maintain them or to establish bases. The U.S., the Department added, would be prepared to make a similar declaration if it committed forces. Beyond that step, the French were also asked to permit Indochinese participation in the programming of economic aid, and their direct receipt of all military aid; to find ways to broaden participation of the Vietnamese defense ministry and armed forces in national defence; and to push for the establishment of "representative and authentic nationalist governments" at the earliest possible date. 17/

g. French Response is Encouraging

The French responded with surprising affirmativeness to these proposals. Dillon was able to report from Paris on 29 May, following a conversation with Laniel, that the two perhaps "had now reached accord in principle on political side." Laniel, he reported, urged immediate military talks to complete arrangements on training of the Vietnamese, a new command structure, and war plans. 18/ Inasmuch as Ely and O'Daniel in Indochina had reached general agreements on American assumption of responsibility for training the VNA, the way was apparently cleared for bilateral military talks in Washington to take place simultaneously with, and therefore disguised by, the five-power staff negotiations. 19/

h. Question of Chinese Air Attack Again Arises

Dillon's optimism was cut short rather quickly. When he reported on talks with Schumann, Dillon had added Schumann's and Pleven's concern about Chinese air intervention, which they felt would be so damaging as to warrant a deterrent action in the form of a Presidential request to the Congress for discretionary authority to defend the Delta in case of CCAF attack. The French wanted a virtually instantaneous U.S. response, which would be assured by a Presidential request before, rather than after, overt Chinese aerial intervention. 20/ The State Department's retort was that the French first had to satisfy the previously reported conditions before any such move by the President could be considered.

i. Dillon Outlines French Position

Dillon was no less disappointed by Washington's reply than the French. He cabled back that there apparently was an "extremely serious misunderstanding between U.S. and French": 21/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"French draw sharp distinction between (1) US intervention in present circumstances with Viet Minh bolstered by Chinese Communist materiel, technicians and possibly scattered troops and (2) US reaction against full-scale air attack mounted from Communist Chinese bases."

Dillon said that, for the French, the U.S. preconditions applied in the first case but not the second, wherein only Congressional authorization was understood to stand in the way of direct U.S. action. Ely, the Ambassador reported, had all along believed he had Radford's personal assurance of an American reaction to Chinese air attack in the Delta. Now, the French wanted to know if they could count on instant U.S. interdiction of a CCAF strike. The Ambassador closed by reminding the Department of the incalculable harm to NATO, to the whole U.S. position in Western Europe, and to the U.S. position against communist worldwide strategy if a Chinese attack were not met. 22/

j. U.S. Repeats Initial Reply

Despite Dillon's protestations, the Department stuck by its initial position of May 15, namely, that Chinese air attack was unlikely and that the U.S. would meet that problem when it arose. 23/ Clearly, the U.S. was unwilling to make any advance commitments which the French could seize upon for political advantage without having to give a quid pro quo in their Indochina policy. Eisenhower affirmed this view and went beyond it: the conditions for united action, he said, applied equally to Chinese direct and indirect involvement in Indochina. The U.S. would make no unilateral commitment against any contingency, including overt, unprovoked Chinese aggression, without firm broad allied support. 24/

k. Other Obstacles to U.S.-French Accord

There were other obstacles to U.S.-French agreement, as brought into the open with a memorandum to the President from Foreign Minister Bidault on June 1. 25/ One was American insistence on French Assembly approval of a government request for U.S. intervention. The French cabinet considered that to present a program of Allied involvement to the Assembly except under the circumstance of "a complete failure of the Geneva Conference" attributable to the communists "would be literally to wish to overthrow the French Government." A second area of continuing disagreement concerned the maintenance of French forces in the field and the nature of a U.S. commitment. The French held that the U.S. could bypass Congress by committing perhaps one division of Marines without a declaration of war. 26/ Although assured that the Marines, being part of the Navy, would be included in a U.S. air-naval commitment, the French wanted much more.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

1. The Continuing Issue of Independence for Associated States

A final, but by no means negligible, French objection to the U.S. proposals was the independence issue. Far from having been settled, as Dillon supposed, the French were still unhappy about American pressure for concessions even after the State Department's May 27 revisions. The French were particularly disturbed (as Bidault implied) at the notion that the Associated States could leave the Union at any time, even while French fighting men were in the field on Indochina's behalf. France was perfectly willing, Bidault remarked, to sign new treaties of association with the three Indochinese States, to allow them a larger voice in defense matters, and to work with them toward formation of truly national governments; but, to judge from his commentary, Paris would not go the whole route by committing itself in advance to Indochina's full freedom of action. And while this and other issues remained unresolved, as Dulles observed on June 4, Laniel's reported belief that the U.S. and France were politically agreed was, to Washington, a "serious overstatement." 27/

3. United Action Option Withdrawn

a. Issues Begin to Lose Relevance in a Changing War

Early in June, the unsettled issues separating the U.S. from France began to lose their relevance to the war. Even if they could be resolved, it was questionable whether U.S. involvement could any longer be useful or decisive. Thus, on the matter of training the VNA, we were no longer certain that time would permit our training methods to take effect even if the French promptly removed themselves from responsibility in that area. State Department opinion now held that the Vietnam situation had deteriorated "to point where any commitment at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider U.S. training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for U.S. participation war Indochina." 28/

Simply put, the Department had determined that the grave but still retrievable military situation prevailing at the time united action was proposed and pursued had, in June, altered radically. Morale of the Franco-Vietnamese forces had dropped sharply, the whole Tonkin Delta was endangered, and the political situation in Saigon was dangerously unstable. 29/ Faced with this uniformly black picture, the Administration moved to withdraw united action from consideration by the French.

b. Dulles Considers Withdrawing Option of United Action

By mid-June, American diplomacy was in an unenviable position. At Geneva, very little progress had been made of a kind

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

that could lead any of the Allies to expect a satisfactory outcome. Yet, the alternative which the U.S. had kept open no longer seemed viable either. As Dulles told Smith, any "final agreement" with the French would be "quite impossible," for Paris was moving farther than ever from a determination that united action was necessary. "They want, and in effect have, an option on our intervention," Dulles wrote, "but they do not want to exercise it and the date of expiry of our option is fast running out." 30/ From Paris, in fact, Ambassador Dillon urged the Secretary that "the time limit be now" on U.S. intervention." 31/ And Dulles was fast concluding that Dillon was correct.

c. Dulles Withdraws Option

In view of France's feeling that, because of strong Assembly pressure for a settlement, no request could be made of the U.S. until every effort to reach agreement at Geneva had been exhausted, 32/ Dulles in effect decided on 15 June that united action was no longer tenable. In a conversation with Bonnet, in which the Ambassador read a message from Bidault which indicated that the French no longer considered the U.S. bound to intervention on satisfaction of the seven conditions, the Secretary again put forth the difficulty of the American position. He stated that the U.S. stood willing to respond to a French request under the conditions of 11 May, but that time and circumstance might make future U.S. intervention "impracticable or so burdensome as to be out of proportion to the results obtainable." While this standpoint would be unsatisfactory to Bidault, especially in his dealings with the communists at Geneva, Dulles "could not conceive that it would be expected that the U.S. would give a third power the option to put it into war at times and under conditions wholly of the other's choosing." 33/ United action was, then, not removed from consideration at a later date; but it was shelved, and it never appeared again in the form and with the purpose originally proposed.

d. U.S. Turns to Studies with U.K. on Intervention

During this period of a gradual "break" with France on united action, the alternative for the United States became a collective defense arrangement with British participation. Once again, U.S. hopes shifted to London, particularly when Eden, on 9 June, told Smith of his extreme pessimism over the course of the negotiations. Smith drew from the conversation the strong impression that Eden believed negotiations to have failed and would now follow the U.S. lead on a coalition to guarantee Cambodia and Laos "under umbrella of some UN action" (Smith's words). Whether the U.S. and U.K. would act prior to or after a likely settlement at Geneva by the desperate French became the major area of inquiry. 34/

e. United Action Option Has Come Full Cycle

The rebirth and demise of united action was a rare case of history repeated almost immediately after it had been made. The

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

United States, having failed to interest Britain in united action prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, determined to plunge ahead without British participation as a sine qua non. But, the caveat to the French grew in importance. Conditions which had been given the French before the fall of Dien Bien Phu were now augmented, most importantly by a greater detailing of the process the French government would have to go through before the U.S. would consider intervention.

4. French Use Threat of U.S. Intervention at Geneva

a. French Do Not Intend to Request U.S. Involvement

Even while the French pondered the conditions, urged their refinement and redefinition to suit French policies, and insisted in the end that they saw no political obstacles separating the U.S. and France, Washington foresaw that the French were very unlikely to forward a request for U.S. involvement. Having learned something from the futile diplomatic bargaining in April, Department of State representatives in Paris and Washington saw that what the French wanted was not the military but the political benefits of U.S. involvement; and they thought they could get them by bringing into the open the fact that the U.S. and France were negotiating active American participation in the fighting. Thus, Dillon correctly assessed in mid-May that French inquiries about U.S. conditions for intervention represented a "wish to use possibility of our intervention primarily to strengthen their hand at Geneva." ^{35/} Dillon's sensitivity to the French position was proven accurate by Bidault's memorandum to the President: France would, in reality, only call on the United States if an "honorable" settlement could clearly not be obtained at Geneva, for only under that circumstance could the National Assembly be persuaded that the Laniel government had done everything possible to achieve peace.

b. French Bring Out Possible U.S. United Action as a Lever in Bargaining

Our recognition of the game the French were playing did not keep us from posing intervention as an alternative for them; but by adhering tenaciously to the seven conditions, the U.S. ruled out either precipitous American action or an open-ended commitment to be used or rejected by Paris. "We cannot grant French an indefinite option on us without regard to intervening deterioration" of the military situation, Dulles wrote 8 June. ^{36/} As much as the Administration wanted to avoid a sell-out at Geneva, it was aware that events in Indochina might preclude effective action even if the French suddenly decided they wanted U.S. support.

c. United Action is an Alternative But Not a Subverting Force

The United States, then, did not propose united action with the intention of subverting the Conference. Instead, united action was offered as a palliative if the Conference should become an exercise

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in futility for the Western side. Washington clearly hoped that France would find it could not gain an "honorable settlement" through talks with the Viet Minh, and that the British could admit to having been unrealistic in postponing a commitment to united action pending the outcome of talks. In short, the U.S. predicted and welcomed the Conference's "subversion" through communist intransigence; yet when, in mid-June, the Conference began to break for what would be a lengthy recess, Washington had to conclude that united action was no longer appropriate to military circumstances in Indochina, nor feasible given U.S. insistence on intervention only under conditions conducive to a decisive success. By the end of June, therefore, the pattern of U.S. diplomacy shifted -- from united action in Indochina to collective defense in Southeast Asia, and from disenchantment with the Geneva Conference to attempts to influence a settlement at least basically in keeping with our interests.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dillon tel. from Paris No. 4287 to Dulles, May 10, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
2. In forwarding these conditions to the Embassy for transmittal to the French, Dulles noted that a prompt, favorable decision would be premature inasmuch as it might internationalize the war in a way offensive to the British, leaving the French with the difficult choice of internationalization or capitulation. Dulles "eyes only" tel. to Paris NIACT 4023, May 11, 1954 (TOP SECRET). The conditions are also cited in Jean Lacouture and Philippe Devillers, La fin d'une guerre: Indochine 1954 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960), pp. 176-77.
3. Dulles' words are as paraphrased. In a State Department Memorandum of Conversation, May 11, 1954, of a White House conference May 10 attended by the President, Dulles, Wilson, Deputy Defense Secretary Anderson, Radford, Robert Bowie, and Douglas MacArthur II (TOP SECRET).
4. Dillon "eyes only" from Paris to the Under Secretary (for Dulles) No. 4383, May 14, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
5. Dillon commented: "I am certain that unless we can find some way to get around this requirement [that the Vietnamese have the option of leaving the French Union], French will never ask for outside assistance." In ibid.

Dillon proposed that the real objection among Asians to the position of the Associated States rested not on the "purely juridical" problem of the right to leave the Union, but on Indochina's lack of powerful national armies. The Ambassador recommended that American training and equipping of the Vietnamese National Army (VNA), coupled with a French statement of intention to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps after the establishment of peace and a national army, would significantly dampen Asian antagonism to the Bao Dai regime. (Dillon from Paris tel. NIACT 4402 to Dulles, May 17, 1954, TOP SECRET). Why Dillon assumed Asians would significantly change their attitude toward French Indochina when, even with an American takeover of the training and equipping of the NVA, French forces would still be on Vietnamese territory for a lengthy period is not known.

6. Dulles "eyes only" to Paris (Dillon) tel. NIACT 4094, May 15, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
7. Dulles "eyes only" to Smith at Geneva tel. TEDUL 75, and to Dillon at Paris No. 4104, May 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
8. FEA memorandum, "Procedural Steps for Intervention in Indochina," undated (entered into FE files May 17, 1954) (TOP SECRET).
9. FEA, Annex on "Studies to be Undertaken Immediately within United States Government," attached to ibid., (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

10. OCB, Studies with Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina, Tab E, "Plan for Political Warfare in Regard to Communist China intervention in Indochina," undated, in enclosure to memorandum from E. F. Drumright to Robert Murphy, May 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
11. This conceptualization stemmed from discussions of the NSC Planning Board, and was part of a broader contingency study program. See the Board's statement in an enclosure to a memorandum for Robert Bowie (the Board's chairman), May 19, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
12. Memorandum from JCS to the Secretary of Defense, May 20, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
13. These conclusions were subsequently confirmed when, at the direction of General Ridgway, a technical team of seven officers representing the Engineer, Transportation, and Signal Corps went to Indochina on a covert mission to determine military and military-related resources available there in the event U.S. intervention was implemented. The team spent the period May 31-June 22 in the field. Their conclusions were, in general, that Indochina was devoid of the logistical, geographic, and related resources necessary to a substantial American ground effort such as Ridgway felt would be required for a success. The group's findings are in a report from Col. David W. Heiman, its leader, to Ridgway, July 12, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL).

The Chiefs' conclusions were disputed, however, by Drumright (in a memorandum to MacArthur, May 24, 1954, TOP SECRET). He argued that if, as everyone agreed, Indochina was vital to American security, the U.S. should not consider more than a token ground troop commitment to be a serious diversion of our capabilities. While not arguing for a substantial troop commitment, Drumright suggested that the U.S. plan for that eventuality rather than count on defense with atomic weapons or non-nuclear strikes on Chinese territory. Somehow, however, Drumright's concern about the Chinese did not extend to the consideration that a massive U.S. troop commitment, which he stated elsewhere in the memorandum might prove necessary should token forces fail to do the job, risked bringing on the Chinese.
14. Smith from Geneva "eyes only" tel. DULTE 100 to Dulles, May 23, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
15. Dulles to Smith at Geneva tel. TEDUL 116, May 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
16. On April 28 French and Vietnamese representatives in Paris initialled separate treaties of independence and association. The treaties did not take effect, however, until June 4, when the French National Assembly finally approved the documents.
17. Dulles tel. to American Embassy - Paris No. 4272, May 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Lacouture and Devillers, p. 192.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

18. Dillon priority telegram from Paris No. 4596, May 29, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Smith from Geneva SECTO 331, May 28, 1954 (TOP SECRET) and Dillon from Paris (reporting talks with Schumann) No. 4580, May 28, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
19. McClintock from Saigon No. 2468 to Dulles, May 19, 1954 (SECRET); Dillon from Paris "eyes only" for Dulles, Smith, and McClintock No. 4566, May 27, 1954 (TOP SECRET), reporting Trapnell-Ely talks. Ely and O'Daniel were still at odds, Dillon noted, over structural changes in the NVA, war strategy, and the role of U.S. advisors.
20. Ibid.; also, Dillon priority telegram from Paris No. 4612, May 31, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
21. Murphy (acting Secretary) to American Embassy - Paris NIACT 4325, May 29, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
22. Dillon from Paris No. 4607, May 30, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Dillon from Paris No. 4625, June 1, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
23. Murphy to American Embassy - Paris NIACT 4332, May 31, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
24. Eisenhower's unwavering attitude toward action in Asia only in concert with allies put him at odds with Dulles, who was prepared to act unilaterally at least in circumstances of overt aggression. When the issue of possible CPR air intervention came before the President, he is reported to have reacted sharply. Evidently supposing that conflict in the air would mean a Sino-U.S. war, the President said the United States would not intervene in China on any basis except united action. He would not be responsible for going into China alone unless a joint Congressional resolution ordered him to do so. The United States should in no event undertake alone to support French colonialism. Unilateral action by the United States in cases of this kind would destroy us. If we intervened alone in this case, we would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world. He made very plain that the need for united action as a condition of U.S. intervention was not related merely to the regional grouping for the defense of Southeast Asia but was also a necessity for U.S. intervention in response to Chinese Communist overt aggression.

Yet, when reminded by his Special Assistant, Robert Cutler, of NSC 5405's position that U.S. unilateral action could not be ruled out in the event of overt Chinese aggression against Thailand, Burma, or Malaya, and of Dulles' September 2, 1953 warning to China of a direct U.S. response to Chinese aggression in Indochina, the President stated that no difference existed between himself and Dulles. (Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Cutler, June 1, 1954, TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The next day, June 2, the President directly confronted Dulles on this matter. Dulles distinguished between U.S. involvement in a collective grouping, which could only come about on satisfaction of the preconditions, and action in response to overt Chinese aggression. The Secretary's view was that in the latter case, the U.S. should act unilaterally upon authorization by Congress, citing prior statements by himself and the President that had warned China of the consequences of overt aggression. The President responded, according to Cutler's report, that direct Chinese aggression would force him to go all the way with naval and air power (including "new weapons") directed at air bases and ports in mainland China. He would therefore have to have much more than Congressional authorization in view of the likely public reaction to a Presidential request of Congress for war acts against China. Even though the Thais, Filipinos, French, and Indochinese would likely support such action, other countries, such as Australia, had to be brought along as well. The President, in short, was as concerned about the politics as the logic of getting involved in a conflict with China. (Memorandum of conference in the President's office, June 2, 1954, involving the President, Dulles, Anderson, Radford, MacArthur, and Cutler, TOP SECRET.) At its 200th meeting on 3 June, the NSC received, considered, and agreed upon the President's views.

Following this important Presidential determination, Dulles called in the Australian and New Zealand ambassadors on the question of overt Chinese aggression in Southeast Asia. He explained that direct Chinese action was unlikely, but that the French had been pressing for assurance of a U.S. reply to Chinese air intervention in the delta. He reported the U.S. position that Chinese aggression required a collective response and a UN appeal, and distinguished this procedure from the united action concept of March 29. A brief memorandum was suggested by the Secretary by which the ANZUS powers would pledge, in the event of overt CPR aggression, to request approval of their parliaments for the use of armed forces, support a UN appeal by the attacked party, and seek to persuade other free nations to join in acting against China. The ambassadors, however, merely asked questions and, apparently, the proposed memorandum was not agreed upon by any of the Allies during the course of the Geneva Conference. See Dulles priority tel. to American Embassy - Canberra No. 238, June 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

25. Memorandum from Bidault to Eisenhower, Geneva, June 1, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Smith from Geneva tel. DULTE 156, June 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
26. Dillon tel. to Dulles No. 4766, June 9, 1954 (TOP SECRET). Also, Dulles tel. to American Embassy - Paris No. 4286, May 27, 1954 (TOP SECRET); here, the American position was that French forces would be maintained during united action except for normal troop rotation, replacement by native forces as the military situation permits, and consultation with allies engaged in the united action.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

27. Dulles to American Embassy - Paris tel. No. 4421, June 4, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
28. Murphy (acting Secretary) "eyes only" tel. to American Embassy - Paris (Dillon), No. 4508, June 10, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
29. Dulles "eyes only" priority to American Embassy - Paris No. 4579, June 14, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
30. Dulles priority to American Consul - Geneva (Smith) TEDUL 197, June 14, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
31. Dillon "eyes only" from Paris to Dulles No. 4841, June 14, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
32. See, e.g., Schumann's remarks to Dillon in the latter's cable from Paris No. 4766, June 9, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
33. Dulles to American Consul - Geneva (Smith) TEDUL 208, June 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
34. Smith "eyes only" for the Secretary from Geneva DULTE 164, June 9, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
35. Dillon priority telegram to Dulles No. 4424, May 18, 1954. Cf. Dulles' comment of June 7 in a cable to Geneva (priority TEDUL 169, TOP SECRET): "I have long felt and still feel that the French are not treating our proposal seriously but toying with it just enough to use it as a talking point at Geneva."
36. Dulles priority tel. to American Consul - Geneva TEDUL 175, June 8, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 3.

THE U.S. NEGOTIATING POSITION DURING THE CONFERENCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>Threat of United Action Influences Negotiations</u>	A-34
a. United Action is Allowed to Remain a Public Option.....	A-34
b. France and U.K. Exploit U.S. Threat.....	A-34
c. Eden Viewed as Moderating U.S. Threat.....	A-34
2. <u>U.S. Pushes for a Regional Pact</u>	A-35
a. Communists Appear Intransigent.....	A-35
b. French Increasingly Interested in Partition.....	A-35
c. Two New Factors Enhance Partition.....	A-35
d. Communist Concessions Show More Promise.....	A-36
e. U.S. Remains Pessimistic.....	A-36
3. <u>U.S. Attempts to Unify Western Diplomatic Position</u>	A-36
a. French Request Statements of U.S. and U.K. Support.....	A-36
b. U.S. and U.K. Issue Joint Statement.....	A-37
c. U.S. and U.K. Formulate "Seven Points" Agreement.....	A-37
d. British Adherence to Seven Points Remains Doubtful.....	A-38
e. French Generally Concur with Seven Points.....	A-38

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
4. <u>U.S. Representation at Geneva Influences Favorable Outcome</u>	A-39
a. French Request High-Level U.S. Representation.....	A-39
b. Dulles Objects to High-Level U.S. Representative.....	A-39
c. Dulles Lists Objections.....	A-40
d. Dulles and Mendes-France Agree on the Seven Points.....	A-40
e. France Continues Insistence on High-Level U.S. Representation.....	A-41
f. The U.S. Reconsiders French Request.....	A-41
g. Bedell Smith Instructed Not to Commit the U.S.....	A-41
h. Smith's Presence Reinforces Western Position.....	A-42

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 3. THE U.S. NEGOTIATING POSITION DURING THE CONFERENCE

1. Threat of United Action Influences Negotiations

a. United Action is Allowed to Remain a Public Option

Between mid-June and the end of the Conference on 21 July, U.S. diplomacy worked at unifying the Western alliance behind a Southeast Asia defense pact and at coalescing a united Western diplomatic front at Geneva so as to obtain the best possible settlement. In this process, the Western alliance gradually cohered. The result was that Anglo-French cooperation was gained not only for the concept of a regional security pact, but also for a firm negotiating position vis-à-vis the communists. Additionally, although the U.S. private position was, by late June, to abide by a settlement which partitioned Vietnam and provided for "the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means" (under the U.S.-U.K. seven-point memorandum of 29 June, our public posture at the Conference left unclear to the communists just what terms would in fact be acceptable to us. For our part, united action was a dead issue by mid-June; but the communist negotiators could not have known this. As a result, they may well have been influenced toward a settlement by the belief that further prolongation of talks would only reinforce Western unity, perhaps coalesce a united response in Indochina previously unobtainable by the U.S., and very likely bring the three Indochinese states into the proposed American security treaty.

b. France and U.K. Exploit U.S. Threat

Both the French and the British negotiators made excellent use of America's ambivalent status. The Chief French delegate, Jean Chauvel, told a Russian delegate, Kuznetsov, for instance, that France's proposed division of Vietnam at the 18th parallel would probably be more acceptable to the other conferees than the unreasonable Viet Minh demand for the 13th parallel. Chauvel added that a settlement along the French line would thereby avert the risk of an internationalization of the conflict. 1/ Edén also used the implied threat of U.S. involvement. During late May, he warned Chou "again" of the dangers inherent in the Indochina situation, which could lead to unpredictable and serious results. When Chou said he was counting on Britain to prevent this from happening, the Foreign Secretary replied Chou was mistaken, since Britain would stand by the U.S. in a showdown. 2/ And Bidault and Smith, in mid-June, agreed that in view of genuine Sino-Soviet desire to keep the Conference going, Chinese concern over U.S. bases in Laos and Cambodia should not be dispelled. 3/

c. Edén Viewed as Moderating U.S. Threat

The British seem to have played a particularly vital role in exploiting ambiguous American intentions for diplomatic gain. At the Conference, Edén was in close contact with Molotov and Chou, and evidently

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

earned their confidence and respect. He was clearly viewed as a moderating element who could be counted on (as Chou put it) to influence the U.S. away from rash actions such as might subvert the Conference. Eden's conduct, therefore, served as a barometer to the Communists of the prospects for Western agreement to a settlement. When the British agreed to participate in five-power military staff talks in Washington (3-9 June), and when Eden and Churchill flew to Washington in late June for talks with Dulles and Eisenhower, the communists may have believed that the U.K. was undergoing some kind of reassessment of its attitude toward U.S. proposals for a Southeast Asia coalition. The implicit warning of U.K. participation in a "united action" approach which it had previously rebuffed, whether or not the actual intention of the British leaders, could not have been missed in Moscow and Peking.

2. U.S. Pushes for a Regional Pact

a. Communists Appear Intransigent

By mid-June there seemed to be little reason to expect that the Geneva Conference, even if it reconvened in July, would see any significant breakthroughs from the communist side. Inasmuch as the French had decided, under a new government committed to a settlement by 20 July, to continue their "underground" military discussions with the Viet Minh, U.S. diplomatic efforts concentrated on pushing the British to agree to a treaty system for Southeast Asia that would, in effect, guarantee the security of those areas left in non-communist hands following a settlement. On 14 June, Dulles observed that events at Geneva apparently had "been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known." Dulles assumed that the departure of Eden was "evidence that there was no adequate reason for further delaying collective talks on Southeast Asia defense." 4/

b. French Increasingly Interested in Partition

While plans were being laid to press ahead with a regional coalition, important developments occurred at the Conference. Partition, which the communist side had introduced in late May as a compromise formula, was being given serious attention by the French. Informed of this by Smith, Dulles reiterated the view that the U.S. could not possibly associate itself with a sell-out of the Delta any more than we could be expected (as Jean Chauvel had urged) to "sell" partition to the non-communist Vietnamese. 5/

c. Two New Factors Enhance Partition

Two qualifications to the partition concept cropped up in the same period. A five-power military staff conference in Washington (U.S., U.K., France, Australia, and New Zealand) had ended 9 June with

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

a report that considered the Thakhek-Dong Hoi line (midway between the 17th and 18th parallels) defensible in the event Vietnam were partitioned. 6/ Moreover, Chauvel had told U. Alexis Johnson, then a member of the American delegation, that French flirtation with the idea of one or more enclaves for each side in the northern and southern zones of divided Vietnam had been abandoned. Chauvel indicated his government had decided it would rather give up Haiphong than accept a Viet Minh enclave in the south if the choice came to that. 7/ The conference report and the Paris change of heart on the enclave concept had the effect of convincing some that if partition were adopted, it could provide for a solid, militarily defensible South Vietnam.

d. Communist Concessions Show More Promise

In another area, the communists had conceded -- with Chou En-lai's proposal at a restricted Conference session of 16 June -- that Laos and Cambodia were problems distinct from that in Vietnam. And in a conversation with Smith, Molotov added his conviction that Pham Van Dong already had evidenced his willingness to withdraw Viet Minh "volunteers" from Laos and Cambodia. 8/ But, here as with partition, communist initiatives only satisfied in small part the American conception of acceptable terms. Until regular Viet Minh forces were entirely removed from Laos and Cambodia, until their puppet Free Khmer and Pathet Lao elements were disarmed or withdrawn, and until the right of the royal governments to seek outside support for self-defense was confirmed, the U.S. saw little progress in Chou's statement.

e. U.S. Remains Pessimistic

The gloom in American circles thickened considerably in late June. Continued irresolution at the conference table, together with the strong feeling in Washington that the French delegation, now responsible to Premier Mendès-France (as of 18 June), would conclude a settlement as soon as the Conference reconvened, led Dulles to caution Smith against becoming involved in committee work (as the French proposed) that would appear to link the U.S. to any final decisions. "Our thinking at present," Dulles cabled Smith on 24 June, "is that our role at Geneva should soon be restricted to that of observer" 9/

3. U.S. Attempts to Unify Western Diplomatic Position

a. French Request Statements of U.S. and U.K. Support

While the U.S. wanted to cut back on its involvement in the Conference proceedings, the French hoped to obtain, as previously, sufficient U.S. support to bolster their negotiating position in the face of communist pressure. Thus, on 26 June, Henri Bonnet delivered an aide-memoire from his government to Dulles and Eden, noting the difficulties

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of the French position. The French wanted to "assure the State of Vietnam a territory as solid as possible," but the Viet Minh were unlikely to make concessions in the Tonkin Delta, and the Vietnamese in Saigon were likely to object violently to a partition arrangement. The French government, therefore, hoped that the U.S. could find a way to assist it in both directions: first, the U.S. and U.K. might issue a declaration following their upcoming talks in Washington that would "state in some fashion or other that, if it is not possible to reach a reasonable settlement at the Geneva Conference, a serious aggravation of international relations would result"; second, the U.S. might intercede with the Vietnamese to counsel them against opposing a settlement really in their best interests. 10/

b. U.S. and U.K. Issue Joint Statement

The second suggestion was never given serious consideration, for the U.S. did not wish to be tied to a settlement that would cede territory to the Viet Minh. The first, however, was acted upon when Churchill and Eden arrived in Washington on 24 June. Four days later, the U.S. and U.K. issued a joint statement which warned: "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated." 11/

c. U.S. and U.K. Formulate "Seven Points" Agreement

Of more immediate consequence for the course of the negotiations was the unpublicized agreement between the two countries on a set of principles which, if worked into the settlement terms, would enable London and Washington to "respect" the armistice. The principles, known subsequently as the seven points, were communicated to the French. They were: 12/

- (1) Preservation of the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia, and assurance of Viet Minh withdrawal from those countries;
- (2) Preservation of at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Tonkin Delta, with the line of demarcation no further south than one running generally west from Dong Hoi;
- (3) No restrictions on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers";
- (4) No "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control";

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(5) No provision that would "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means";

(6) Provision for "the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam";

(7) Provision for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement."

d. British Adherence to Seven Points Remains Doubtful

Although agreement to the seven points represented something of an American diplomatic victory (with the important exception of point 2, where the U.S. for the first time conceded that partition was inescapable), the U.S. was by no means confident that the British would actually abide by the relatively hard bargaining lines set forth. ". . . we have the distinct impression," Dulles wrote, "that the British look upon this memorandum of the seven points merely as an optimum solution and that they would not encourage the French to hold out for a solution as good as this." The Secretary observed that the British, during the talks, had settled for agreement to "respect" the final terms; they preferred something stronger, and in fact "wanted to express these 7 points merely as a 'hope' without any indication of firmness on our part." The U.S., quite aside from what was said in the seven points, "would not want to be associated in any way with a settlement which fell materially short of the 7 point memorandum." ^{13/} The possibility of a unilateral withdrawal was still being "given consideration," Dulles reported, ^{14/} even as the seven points were agreed upon.

e. French Generally Concur with Seven Points

Despite reservations about the feasibility of implementing the seven points, the U.S. hoped to get French approval of them. On 6 July Dillon telegraphed the French reaction as given him by Parodi, the Secretary-General of the cabinet. With the exception of point 5 dealing with elections, the French were in agreement. They were confused about an apparent conflict between the elections provision and point 4, under which political provisions, which would include elections, were not to risk loss of retained Vietnam. In addition, they felt U.S. intention merely to "respect" any agreement was too weak a term, and requested clarification of its meaning. ^{15/}

Dulles responded the next day to both matters. Points 4 and 5 were not in conflict, he said. It was quite possible that an agreement in line with the seven points might still not prevent Indochina from going communist. The important thing, therefore, was to arrange for national elections in a way that would give the South Vietnamese a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

liberal breathing spell:

" . . . since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements [in South Vietnam] best chance."

And so far as "respect" of that agreement was concerned, the U.S. and U.K. meant they

"would not oppose a settlement which conformed to seven points It does not of course mean we would guarantee much settlement or that we would necessarily support it publicly. We consider 'respect' as strong a word as we can possibly employ in the circumstances 'Respect' would also mean that we would not seek directly or indirectly to upset settlement by force." 16/

4. U.S. Representation at Geneva Influences Favorable Outcome

a. French Request High-Level U.S. Representation

The seven points, Dulles' clarification of the U.S. position on elections in Vietnam, and his delimitation of the U.S. obligation towards a settlement were for the most part satisfactory to the French. But to Paris, the firm American position, to be influential at the Conference, had to be supplemented by high-level representation. Otherwise, Mendès-France argued, the French could not present a strong front when Molotov and Chou resumed their places in the coming weeks. Answering U.S. doubts, Mendès-France averred that the French bargaining position was precisely in line with the seven points and would not deviate substantially from them. With great feeling, he told a member of the U.S. Embassy in Paris that the presence of either the Secretary or the Under Secretary was "absolutely essential and necessary." 17/

b. Dulles Objects to High-Level U.S. Representative

The U.S. remained opposed to any proposal that implied acceptance of the final terms. While recognizing Mendès-France's difficulties in carrying on almost alone, Dulles firmly believed the French would end by accepting a settlement unsatisfactory to the U.S. -- whether or not the U.S. delegation was upgraded. 18/ Moreover, were the U.S. to send Smith or Dulles back to Geneva only to find the French compelled to negotiate an unacceptable agreement, Washington would be required to dissociate itself in a manner "which would be deeply resented by the French as an effort on our part to block at the last minute a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

peace which they ardently desire," possibly with "irreparable injury to Franco-American relations" 19/

c. Dulles Lists Objections

On 10 July these objections to Mendès-France's pleadings were forcefully raised in a direct message to the French Premier from the Secretary. Dulles stated that the presence of high-ranking Western Big Three delegates at Geneva would be no "substitute for a clear agreement on a joint position which includes agreement as to what will happen if that position is not accepted by the Communists." Denying that a true united front existed even with the seven-point memorandum, Dulles went on to say that the seven points seemed to be "merely an optimum solution" not only for the British, but equally for the French. He cited French willingness to permit communist forces to remain in northern Laos, to accept a demarcation line "considerably south of Donghoi," to neutralize and demilitarize Laos and Cambodia, and to permit "elections so early and so ill-prepared and ill-supervised as to risk the loss of the entire area to Communism" These, said Dulles, were illustrative of a "whittling-away process" which, cumulatively, could destroy the intent of the seven points.

Thus, believing that the French had already gone far toward nullifying some of the major provisions of the U.S.-U.K. memorandum, Dulles reiterated the long-standing position that the U.S. had the right "not to endorse a solution which would seem to us to impair seriously certain principles which the U.S. believes must, as far as it is concerned, be kept unimpaired, if our own struggle against Communism is to be successfully pursued." Dulles added that a U.S. position that created uncertainty in the minds of the enemy "might strengthen your hand more than our presence at Geneva" 20/

d. Dulles and Mendès-France Agree on the Seven Points

Mendès-France, in reply, stated that France would accept nothing unacceptable to the U.S. 21/ Apparently, this move had some effect on Dulles, for he flew to Paris for talks that resulted in a Franco-American endorsement of the U.S.-U.K. memorandum. 22/ In addition, Mendès-France and Dulles signed a position paper on the same day (14 July) that reiterated the U.S. position at the conference as "a friendly nation" whose role was subordinate to that of the primary non-communist parties, the Associated States and France. This paper went on to describe the seven points as those acceptable to the "primarily interested nations" and as those which the U.S. could "respect." However, should terms ultimately be concluded which differed markedly from the seven points, the U.S. would neither be asked nor expected to accept them, and "may publicly disassociate itself from such differing terms." Dulles further obtained from the French certain assurances

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

regarding coordinated action regardless of the outcome of the conference. The position paper declared America's intention "to seek, with other interested nations, a collective defense association designed to preserve, against direct and indirect aggression, the integrity of the non-communist areas of Southeast Asia following any settlement." 23/

e. France Continues Insistence on High-Level U.S. Representation

On all but one matter, the U.S. and France were now in complete accord on a negotiating strategy. That strategy, if adhered to, would not only prevent a sell-out to the communists, but also provide the framework for further allied discussions whether or not a settlement were concluded. The point of difference was Mendès-France's continued insistence that his delegation be supported by the presence of Dulles himself. Writing to Dulles of his understanding of the seven-point position paper just signed, the French Premier added:

"... In effect, I have every reason to think that your absence would be precisely interpreted as demonstrating, before the fact, that you disapproved of the conference and of everything which might be accomplished. Not only would those who are against us find therein the confirmation of the ill will which they attribute to your government concerning the re-establishment of peace in Indochina; but many others would read in it a sure sign of a division of the western powers." 24/

f. The U.S. Reconsiders French Request

For reasons not entirely clear, Mendès-France's appeal for high-level U.S. representation at Geneva was now favorably received in Washington. Dulles was able to inform Mendès-France on 14 July:

"In the light of what you say and after consultation with President Eisenhower, I am glad to be able to inform you that the President and I are asking the Undersecretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith, to prepare to return at his earliest convenience to Geneva to share in the work of the conference on the basis of the understanding which we have arrived at." 25/

For the first time since mid-1953, the U.S. and France were solidly joined in a common front on Indochina.

g. Bedell Smith Instructed Not to Commit the U.S.

On 16 July Smith received a new set of instructions based upon the U.S.-France seven-point agreement. After reiterating the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

passive, formal role the U.S. was to play at the Conference, Dulles told the Under Secretary (1) that if a settlement should be reached he was to issue a unilateral (or, if possible, multilateral) statement that "conforms substantially" to the seven points; (2) that "The United States will not, however, become cosignatory with the Communists in any Declaration"; (3) that the U.S. should not be put in a position where it could be held responsible for guaranteeing the results of the Conference; (4) that Smith's efforts should be directed toward forwarding ideas to the "active negotiators" (France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam); and (5) that the U.S. should avoid permitting the French to believe that a breakdown of the negotiations was due to U.S. advice or pressure, thus making the U.S. in some way morally obligated to intervene militarily in Indochina. Dulles stated with respect to this last point that the U.S. was "not prepared at the present time to give any commitment that it will intervene in the war if the Geneva Conference fails. . . ." 26/ This decision, of course, remained unknown to the communists at Geneva, who continued to speculate on U.S. intentions.

h. Smith's Presence Reinforces Western Position

Coming soon after the Dulles-Bidault talks in Paris (13-14 July), Smith's return was apparently interpreted by the Chinese, and doubtless by the Russians as well, as a sign of a united Western front at the Conference. 27/ When taken in conjunction with what Mendès-France had already publicly told the National Assembly of his intentions to ask for conscripts in the event his 20 July deadline passed without a settlement, and with what the Premier told Malenkov about not intending Geneva to "turn into a Panmunjom," 28/ the return of Smith gave the French negotiating position the appearance of real strength. The communist delegations, therefore, were presented with an option. They could call France's bluff -- by refusing further concessions or by making a settlement contingent on a U.S. guarantee 29/ -- or they could seek to gain French agreement that, hopefully, would obviate a U.S.-U.K.-French alignment in Asia. As the Conference ground on toward Mendès-France's 20 July deadline, major concessions from the communist side brought the settlement essentially in line with the seven points.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. A. 3.

FOOTNOTES

1. Johnson priority tel. SECTO 557 from Geneva, July 3, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
2. Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954 (SECRET).
3. Smith tel. DULTE 193 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
4. Dulles to Smith tel. TEDUL 196, June 14, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
5. Dulles priority tel. TEDUL 212 to Smith at Geneva, June 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. Dulles "eyes only" tel. TEDUL 222 to Smith at Geneva, June 18, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
7. Smith from Geneva priority tel. DULTE 195, June 18, 1954 (SECRET).
8. Smith from Geneva tel. DULTE 202, June 19, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
9. Dulles to American Consulate - Geneva tel. TOSEC 478, June 24, 1954 (SECRET).
10. In Dulles to American Embassy - Paris tel. No. 4852, June 28, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
11. New York Times, June 29, 1954, p. 2.
12. Anthony Eden, Memoirs: Full Circle (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 149.
13. Dulles to American Embassy - Paris "eyes only" for Dillon priority tel. No. 52, July 3, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
14. Ibid.
15. Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 50, July 6, 1954 (SECRET).
16. Dulles to American Embassy - Paris tel. No. 77, July 7, 1954 (SECRET). Regarding the U.S. view of a Ho Chi Minh electoral victory, we not only have the well-known comment of Eisenhower that Ho, at least in 1954, would have garnered 80 per cent of the vote, but also the privately expressed view of Livingston Merchant (Dept. of State) that Ho would be the likely winner. See the latter in Dept. of State Memorandum of Conversation of May 31, 1954, at which Merchant reportedly "felt their [the Associated States'] status was sufficiently independent so that they could freely express their will on a point of this type, although he recognized the possibility that in Viet Nam Ho might win a plebiscite, if held today." (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

17. Dillon priority tel. No. 118 from Paris, July 9, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
18. Dulles "eyes only" tel. NIACT 101 to Aldrich in London, July 7, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
19. Dulles priority tel. to Dillon in Paris No. 85, July 8, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
20. Dulles to Dillon tel. No. 127, July 10, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
21. Dillon from Paris priority tel. No. 134, July 11, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
22. "Memorandum of Points Referred to in Paragraph 2 of the France-United States Position Paper," July 14, 1954 (SECRET).
23. Annex A to Dulles letter to Smith of July 16, 1954, signed July 14 by Dulles and Mendès-France (SECRET).
24. Dulles priority tel. No. 179 from Paris, July 14, 1954 (SECRET).
25. Ibid.
26. Dulles letter to Smith, July 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
27. In a talk between Huang Hua (of the CPR delegation) and Seymour Topping of the New York Times, as reported in Smith's tel. SECTO 661 from Geneva, July 19, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
28. Dillon priority tel. No. 118 from Paris, July 9, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
29. This threat was transmitted through Seymour Topping by Huang Hua near the end of the conference. See Smith's tel. SECTO 639 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

B. ROLE AND OBLIGATIONS OF
THE STATE OF VIETNAM

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. THE ROLE AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE STATE OF VIETNAM

SUMMARY

One principal controversy over the Geneva Accords of 1954 stems from the view that Vietnam under the Bao Dai regime was actually still a French colony, and hence was obligated by the agreements reached by France at Geneva. Specifically, it is argued, Article 27 of the agreement signed by the French fixed responsibility for observance on the signatory governments "and their successors." The answer to the charge that the State of Vietnam thereby became a guarantor of the Accords is partly a matter of international law -- a contentious point of law, given the relatively new phenomenon of former colonial states assuming full sovereignty. But it is also a matter of fact and of declaratory policy. In fact, the GVN was an independent state before the Accords were signed, and was treated as a separate state throughout the conference. It signed nothing at Geneva. To the contrary, in its declarations it clearly repudiated the Accords, and declined to accept any responsibility for observing or enforcing them.

The GVN had been given full independence from France on 4 June 1954, and was accepted as an equal by the other governments at Geneva. Therefore, the GVN was not automatically obligated by the July agreements between the Viet Minh and France. From the beginning of the conference, the GVN interests clashed with French desires. The French wanted to end the Indochina fighting even if disengagement entailed serious concessions to the Viet Minh. Hard-line GVN counterproposals, running against the prevailing spirit of compromise, were rejected by both the communist powers and the West. The final wording of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities was drawn up as the French and the Viet Minh would have it. The U.S., intent on promoting some constructive outcome of the conference, offered little support to the GVN. The U.S. did refuse to act on France's behalf to pressure the GVN, and did urge the French to be more receptive to the GVN delegates. But since U.K. and French delegates were ready to make substantial accommodations with the communists to achieve a quick end to the fighting, and with little U.S. backing, the GVN negotiating position was foredoomed (Tab 1).

France, the dominant Western power in the disputed area, and the Viet Minh were the designated executors of the Accords. Neither the armistice agreement nor other aspects of the settlement were practicable without DRV and French compliance. The GVN delegates at Geneva were emphatic in their repeated refusal to accept GVN responsibility for accords signed by France, especially with reference to partition and elections. No precipitate withdrawal of French military and diplomatic power from Vietnam was foreseen, so that the Accords embodied the anomaly of ignoring the sovereign GVN, even with respect to enforcing the Accords on its territory (Tab 2).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

DISCUSSION

- III. B. Tab 1 - GVN Status and Negotiating Position at Geneva
Tab 2 - French and GVN Responsibilities after Geneva

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 1.

GVN STATUS AND NEGOTIATING POSITION AT GENEVA

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>GVN is Independent Before Geneva</u>	B-5
a. Status of GVN Changes.....	B-5
b. Talks Lead Toward GVN Independence.....	B-5
c. GVN Independent After 4 June 1954.....	B-6
d. GVN and DRV Status at Geneva Differ.....	B-6
2. <u>GVN Unable to Forestall Partition</u>	B-7
a. GVN Requests Written Assurance Country Will Not be Partitioned.....	B-7
b. France Assures GVN it Will Not Seek Partition.....	B-8
c. DRV Admits Feasibility of Partition.....	B-8
d. French Opposition to Partition Collapses.....	B-9
3. <u>GVN Refuses to Accept French Leadership</u>	B-9
a. Vietnamese are Stubborn and Unyielding.....	B-9
b. GVN Consistently Opposes Partition.....	B-10
c. GVN not Informed of French-DRV Agreements.....	B-11
d. Note to French Delegation Rejects Partition.....	B-12
e. Vietnamese Register Opposition to Elections.....	B-12
f. GVN Rejects Draft of Final Declaration.....	B-13
g. GVN Presents Counter-Proposals.....	B-13
h. GVN Unable to Influence Outcome.....	B-14

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
4. <u>U.S.-GVN Relations at Geneva</u>	B-15
a. U.S. Refuses to Influence GVN for France.....	B-15
b. French Disregard U.S. Requests, Remain Aloof from GVN.....	B-15
c. U.S. Declines to Support Final GVN Position.....	B-16

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 1. GVN STATUS AND NEGOTIATING POSITION AT GENEVA

1. GVN is Independent Before Geneva

a. Status of GVN Changes

The sovereign independence of Vietnam was a constant source of irritation and contention between France and the U.S. From the conclusion of World War II until the Geneva Conference, Washington continually urged Paris to follow the nationalist winds and establish an independent State of Vietnam. Coupled with pressures from Vietnamese nationalists, France did move in this direction -- albeit as slowly as possible.

In June, 1948, Bao Dai was persuaded to become political leader of a "State of Vietnam," incorporating Cochin China, Tonkin, and Annam, which would be "independent...within the French Union." A treaty to this effect, the Elysee Agreements, was drawn up and approved by both sides in March, 1949, but was delayed in ratification by the French Assembly until 29 January 1950. There were a number of qualifications on the meaning of "independence" in the French Union, including complete freedom of movement of French military forces throughout the countries of the Union and legal immunity for French enterprises on the territory of other Union nations. On 3 July 1953, the French were pressured into announcing plans to negotiate and redefine Franco-Vietnamese political relations. But it was not until March, 1954, that these negotiations began, producing on 28 April a joint declaration recognizing what it called "total independence" for Vietnam. Buttinger calls this "a shabby independence." The country became fully sovereign on 3 June 1954.

It is important to remember that French procrastination, among other reasons, on setting the demands for full Vietnamese independence led to hesitancy on the part of the U.S. to intervene militarily in support of the French. With all, the status of the Bao Dai government did begin to change prior to the conclusion of the Geneva Conference -- too late to figure in Franco-American deliberations about "united action," but soon enough to make Vietnam an independent state before the Conference agreed to a settlement of the war.

b. Talks Lead Toward GVN Independence

Between July, 1953, and April, 1954, French and Vietnamese representatives had a series of talks on ways to complete the independence of Vietnam promised in France's 3 July 1953 declaration. On 8 March 1954, the final round of talks began in Paris, and at a meeting on 28 April, agreement was reached by a Franco-Vietnamese political committee on the text of separate treaties of independence and association, with the latter (consisting of seven articles) to be spelled out in subsequent conventions. Premier Lanuel and Vice President Nguyen Trung Vinh signed a common declaration that same day which specified that the treaties would come into force

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

upon ratification by the two governments. But, the ratification process was delayed for over a month. The U.S. Mission in Saigon was clearly annoyed that the long-awaited break in the Franco-Vietnamese deadlock did not lead immediately to ratification. The Mission speculated that the French were delaying to keep a free hand at Geneva by making no commitments on Vietnam until the outcome of the conference could be known. The Mission noted that in so doing, the French were only feeding the doubts and suspicions of the Vietnamese about future French intentions toward Indochina. 1/ Washington, for its part, refused to consider the 28 April initialling of agreements as satisfying its pre-condition on complete Vietnamese independence. 2/

c. GVN Independent After 4 June 1954

Not until 4 June, did the French National Assembly finally ratify the two treaties. 3/ By the Treaty of Independence, Vietnam was recognized "as a fully independent and sovereign State invested with all the competence recognized by international law." Vietnam agreed to replace France "in all the rights and obligations resulting from international treaties or conventions contracted by France on behalf or on account of the State of Vietnam or of any other treaties or conventions concluded by France on behalf of French Indochina insofar as those acts concern Vietnam." In other words, the GVN assumed responsibility for all agreements executed prior to ratification of the independence treaty. Under the accompanying Treaty of Association, Vietnam's status as an equal in the French Union was acknowledged for the first time, and with it the right (subsequently re-confirmed) to determine its extent of participation in the Union. The State of Vietnam was, therefore, a fully independent entity by 4 June 1954. France's international obligations in or for Vietnam as of that date were freely taken over by the GVN. This was in contrast, it might be added, to the DRV's abrogation of agreements concluded in Vietnam's behalf by France when Ho's regime took power on 2 September 1945. 4/

d. GVN and DRV Status at Geneva Differ

The final communique of the Berlin Conference (18 February 1954) specified that the Indochina phase of the Geneva deliberations would be attended by the United States, Great Britain, Communist China, the Soviet Union, France, "and other states concerned." Invitations to participants, it was further agreed, would be issued only by the Berlin conferees (U.S., UK, USSR, and France).

There had been some doubt as to the status of the DRV at the upcoming Indochina convention, but subsequent talks between Molotov and Bidault in April clarified the position of the DRV. 5/ Although the DRV was still considered a rebel group by the West, rather than an interested State, admission of the Viet Minh to the conference was never a serious problem. As one of the principal combatants whose consent to a cease-fire was considered indispensable, the Viet Minh could hardly be

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

ignored. Moreover, the Soviet Union indicated to the French that it would not accept the presence of delegates from the Associated States unless the DRV were admitted to the conference. 6/ The principal Western objection concerning the DRV was that the invitation had been tendered to the Viet Minh not only by the Soviet Union but also by Communist China, a move admitted by Molotov at the first plenary session on 8 May and protested by France and the United States. 7/

Word of the DRV's admission naturally angered the Bao Dai government. When informed of Franco-Soviet Agreement on the DRV's admission, the Bao Dai government decided that Vietnam would go to the conference only upon invitation of the Western Big Three -- that is, only if the SVN status differed from that of the DRV. On 2 May the invitations arrived with the Soviets being informed that GVN participation would in no way confer de jure recognition on the DRV. 8/ Although the Bao Dai government could not bar the DRV from the conference table, it did not accord Ho's regime anything more than the status of a belligerent.

There was, then, a distinction between the status of the DRV and the GVN at the Geneva Conference. Whereas all the major powers implicitly or explicitly recognized the full status of the GVN as a state, the Western powers conceded only belligerent status for the DRV/Viet Minh. In practice, however, the Viet Minh were much more a part of the negotiating process, particularly as regards military arrangements. The GVN, in its own right, pursued a consistent public line, emphasizing its independence and its hope for the continued political unity of Vietnam -- under Bao Dai.

2. GVN Unable to Forestall Partition

a. GVN Requests Written Assurance Country Will Not be Partitioned

At the time the Conference began, the State of Vietnam was concerned and suspicious about the possibilities of a partitioning of the country. Mindful of past instances of partition in Korea and Germany, and deeply in doubt of French willingness to stand firm against Viet Minh territorial claims, the GVN urged the French government to give written assurance that Paris would not seek a division of Vietnam. On 25 April, Bao Dai had served notice on the French that his government would not tolerate partition. GVN representatives in Paris issued a communique in the name of Bao Dai's cabinet which noted various plans in the air for a partition of Vietnam. The communique stated that a partition "would be in defiance of Vietnamese national sentiment which has asserted itself with so much strength for the unity as well as for the independence of its country. Neither the Chief of State nor the national government of Vietnam admit that the unity of the country can be severed legally..." In calling for French assurances that they would not negotiate a sacrifice of Vietnamese interests with the "rebels," the communique implied that the Vietnamese government would not sign the April treaties until such assurances were received. And, the GVN cabinet warned that a compromising agreement would never receive Vietnam's approval:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"...neither the Chief of State, nor the Vietnamese Government, will consider themselves as bound by decisions running counter to the interests, i.e., independence and unity, of their country that would, at the same time, violate the rights of the peoples and offer a reward to aggression in opposition to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and democratic ideals." 9/

b. France Assures GVN it Will Not Seek Partition

In response to this clear-cut statement, the French came forward with both oral and written promises. On 3 May, Maurice Dejean, the Commissioner General for Indochina, said in Saigon:

"The French government does not intend to seek a settlement of the Indochina problem on the basis of a partition of Vietnamese territory...Formal assurances were given on this subject last April 25 by the French minister for foreign affairs to the minister for foreign affairs of Vietnam, and they were confirmed to him on May 1." 10/

Written assurance came from Bidault on 6 May, when he wrote Bao Dai that the task of the French government was to establish peace in Indochina, not "to seek here [at Geneva] a definitive political solution." Therefore, the French goal would be, said Bidault, to obtain a cease-fire with guarantees for the Associated States, hopefully with general elections in the future. Bidault continued:

"As of now, I am however in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing would be more contrary to the intentions of the French government than to prepare for the establishment, at the expense of the unity of Vietnam, of two states having each an international calling (vocation)." 11/

c. DRV Admits Feasibility of Partition

In their talks with the Viet Minh, however, the French found their adversary as stubborn at the bargaining table as on the battlefield. The negotiations during most of May made insignificant progress; but toward the end of the month, the Viet Minh made their first major concession when they strongly hinted that, given the right conditions, they might lift their demand for a united Vietnam. This, it can be speculated, was seen by Paris as a way of getting itself off the hook. While it may have been unacceptable to negotiate all of Vietnam away, half of Vietnam could be sold to the U.S. as a realistic compromise.

On May 24, Hoang Van Hoan, DRV Ambassador to Peking and spokesman of the DRV delegation, informed a special envoy of the French newspaper Le Monde (Jean Schwoebel) that a military settlement through a cease-fire

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

need not, as the Viet Minh had previously insisted, be preceded by a political settlement. Hoan reportedly stated: "It is first necessary to have a cease-fire. We do not pose a single prior political condition. If, in the plan of M. Dong, political proposals precede those which concern the cease-fire, it is solely a question of presentation..." 12/ Hoang Van Hoan's statement was confirmed the next day when Pham Van Dong, speaking at the sixth restricted session, referred for the first time to territory under Viet Minh control. Dong's proposals included specific reference to areas under the control of each Vietnamese state; in regrouping forces of the two sides, he suggested that territorial readjustments also be made so that each side would be able to have complete economic and administrative, as well as military, control. So as not to be misunderstood, Dong further urged that a line of demarcation be drawn that would be topographically suitable and appropriate for transportation and communication within each state. 13/ Thus, quite contrary to French and Vietnamese expectations, the Viet Minh had opened the way toward partition, and appeared willing to contemplate the creation, albeit temporary, of separate zones of political control.

d. French Opposition to Partition Collapses

French support of GVN opposition to partition, which Bidault upheld privately to Smith and Eden at Geneva, 14/ collapsed once the new government of Pierre Mendes-France took over in mid-June. Mendes-France, keenly aware of the tenor of French public anti-war opinion, was far more disposed than his predecessor to make every effort toward achieving a reasonable settlement, and he quickly foresaw that agreement with the Viet Minh was unlikely unless he accepted the concept of partition. His delegate at Geneva, Jean Chauvel, and the new Commissioner General for Indochina, General Paul Ely, reached the same conclusion. 15/

At a high-level meeting in Paris on 24 June, the new government thoroughly revised the French negotiating position. The objectives for subsequent talks, it was decided, would be: (1) the regroupment of forces of both sides and their separation by a line at about the 18th parallel; 16/ (2) the establishment of enclaves under neutral control in the two zones, one for the French in the area of the Catholic bishoprics at Phat Diem and Bui Chu, one for the Viet Minh at an area to be determined; (3) the maintenance of Haiphong in French hands in order to assist in the regroupment. At this same meeting, it was also decided that, for the purpose of psychological pressure on the Viet Minh, if not military preparedness for future contingencies, France should announce plans to send a contingent of conscripts (later determined as two divisions) to Indochina. 17/

3. GVN Refuses to Accept French Leadership

a. Vietnamese are Stubborn and Unyielding

The State of Vietnam delegation at Geneva was determined to be intimidated neither by the DRV and its communist allies, nor by the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Western powers. The GVN representatives continually referred to their sense of responsibility to the Vietnamese people and to national aspirations for unity and freedom. The obvious dependence of the GVN on the military power of the West was not mirrored by an accompanying political spirit of accommodation: the GVN attitude at Geneva must be characterized as stubborn, unyielding, and idealistic. The GVN was the one nation at Geneva that remained completely unmoved by the spirit of compromise.

b. GVN Consistently Opposes Partition

The attitude of GVN toward the Geneva Settlement was the product not only of its non-recognition of the DRV, but also of its hostility to partition and its opposition to national elections held in a divided country. Evidently quite independent of American instigation or pressure, the Saigon government concluded well in advance of the Conference termination on 21 July that it could not accept what it regarded as a set of agreements contracted in defiance of Vietnamese aspirations and without GVN consent. Nguyen Quoc Dinh, speaking for the GVN in the third plenary session (12 May) at Geneva, first read into the record in detail the new treaty guaranteeing GVN independence, then laid down his country's unyielding opposition to any agreement which would tend to split the country either geographically or politically. Any document tabled for consideration, said Quoc Dinh, "Must not lead to partition, either direct or indirect, final or provisional, de facto or de jure, of the national territory." Free elections can be held, he asserted, "as soon as the [UN] Security Council has decided that the authority of the State has been established in the whole of the territory, and that conditions of freedom have been obtained." 18/ In the fifth restricted session, on 24 May, Quoc Dinh again stressed the GVN's total independence from France:

"...the problem of the independence of Vietnam dominates all events in Indochina whether considered from the point of view of the independence which the state of Vietnam [has] secured as a result of negotiations with France, or from that of the independence which Vietnam must defend from all foreign invaders." 19/

On the following day, Quoc Dinh repeated, in the Sixth Restricted Session, that the GVN "would not agree to any plan which would result in the partition of Vietnam." Any partition, he said, would incur "the grave danger one would gradually move down a path which would lead to what his people feared most." 20/ On the 27th of May, Quoc Dinh once again spoke on partition. He reminded the other delegates that the GVN had finally achieved independence, the first of its aspirations. The second aspiration, also achieved, was territorial integrity. The GVN could not now accept partition "without betraying its own people":

"With reference to Vietnam, the Vietnam delegation wished to warn the conference against any measures tending to divide the national territory. If a division

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of Vietnam were to be sanctioned, the result would not be peace but only a pause before fresh hostilities... Partition would therefore mean sooner or later -- probably sooner -- a renewal of war." 21/

On 29 May, speaking in rebuttal to the DRV delegation, Quoc Dinh stated, "it is impossible for a people to accept of its own free will a mutilation of its country...No Vietnamese patriot could accept partition." This marked the fourth successive meeting in which the GVN delegate emphasized his country's point of view on partition, elections, or both subjects. This emphatic repetition continued. In the Seventh Plenary Session, on 10 June, speaking of a statement made by Molotov, Quoc Dinh accused the USSR of laboring under certain misunderstandings of the GVN and, for the fifth time since tabling his proposals, he repeated the DRV position:

"I noted in his statement...what I suppose was a mistake of inadvertent omission. He said that only the Viet Minh delegation had proposed that a free general election should take place in Vietnam. I'm sorry that I must contradict. The Delegation of the State of Vietnam also had the honor to propose such elections; the difference being that, whereas the Delegation of Viet Minh proposed that there should be no international supervision which, in the present circumstances, means that elections could not possibly be honest and true, the Delegation of the State of Vietnam has proposed that elections should take place under international supervision." 22/

Quoc Dinh then reasserted the complete independence of GVN from France, referring to the treaty of 4 June 1954. A week later, the Vietnamese delegate was again pushing his case on the floor of the conference:

"As regards the independence of our country, it is a well-known fact that we have indicated the contents of two treaties we had with the French on that...As regards the elections, we ourselves, in our proposal of May 12, have taken the initiative of proposing elections in Vietnam. These elections must be free, sincere, and supervised. The best control would be exercised by the UN." 23/

The GVN insistence on territorial integrity and on elections only after full control was pressed with great energy -- almost with vehemence -- up to the very last moment of the Geneva Conference.

c. GVN not Informed of French-DRV Agreements

The evidence suggests that it was not until sometime in early July that the Bao Dai government learned of France's readiness to partition the country, given an acceptable demarcation line. According to a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

CIA source, based upon the report of a nationalist southern Vietnamese with "extensive" political contacts, Diem was greatly troubled in early July over France's apparent inclination to abandon the North rather than seek to retain a foothold there. 24/ Diem was said to be convinced that partition would be suicidal, since it would put an end to active anti-Viet Minh resistance. Moreover, Diem was convinced that the French intended to maintain a hold on the South only through manipulating independent irregular forces, such as the armed sects to whom the French allegedly were providing rifles.

d. Note to French Delegation Rejects Partition

GVN anger at hints of a possible French sellout on the partition issue was reflected in a note handed the French delegation (and, without France's knowledge, to the U.S. delegation also) by Nguyen Huu Chau of the Vietnamese delegation on 17 July 1954. The note maintained that not until 16 July did Vietnam learn that at the very time the French High Command had ordered the evacuation of troops from important areas in the Tonkin Delta, the French had also "accepted abandoning to the Viet Minh all of that part situated north of the eighteenth parallel and that the delegation of the Viet Minh might claim an even more advantageous demarcation line." The Vietnamese delegation protested against having been left "in complete ignorance" of French proposals, which were said not to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people." Disparaging the regroupment plan and the "precarious" nature of the cease-fire being considered, the note again urged that a cease-fire be accompanied by the disarmament of "all the belligerent forces in Vietnam." This would be followed by provisional United Nations control of all Vietnam "pending the complete re-establishment of security, of order and of peace...which will permit the Vietnamese people to decide their destiny by free elections." UN control of a unified Vietnam, the note stated, was preferable to "its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery." 25/

e. Vietnamese Register Opposition to Elections

The long-standing GVN hostility to partition, expressed well in advance of final agreement to that arrangement, was paralleled by a wariness of a national plebescite on unification. In June, 1954, the Saigon Mission cabled Washington that a national election:

"...to which Department quite rightly attaches importance...is now of less significance in Vietnam than before owing to general feeling of panic and anxiety lest entire country be lost through unfortunate armistice terms. Press has announced that decrees will presently be signed by Bao Dai providing for municipal elections and, with exception of Saigon-Cholon, for direct election of mayors. This should

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to some extent meet Department's requirement in this regard although it is far less than national elections or preparations for National Constituent Assembly." 26/

The GVN protest note to the French of 17 July asserted that a cease-fire without disarmament was incompatible with a plebiscite. They held further that the regroupment of the armed forces of the belligerents into separate north-south zones compromised in advance the freedom of any future elections. Moreover, in the GVN view, elections could be considered only after internal security and peace had been re-established, thereby excluding a set time-frame. 27/ In short, the GVN argued strongly against any scheduled post-settlement national election, and warned that a plebiscite to determine a government for a unified Vietnam could hardly be envisaged with the northern zone controlled by communist armed forces.

f. GVN Rejects Draft of Final Declaration

On 18 July, GVN, in a conference session, Foreign Minister Tran Van Do spoke out against the draft Final Declaration of the Conference which had been circulated among the delegations. He said that Vietnam could not associate itself with the declaration, and pointed in particular to the conditions for a cease-fire, which stipulated a division of the country, and to Vietnam's lack of an opportunity to present its own proposals. Tran Van Do requested the right to offer Vietnam's own draft declaration at another plenary session. 28/

g. GVN Presents Counter-Proposals

The next day, 19 July, the Vietnamese delegation offered its proposals, an elaboration of the ideas contained in the note to the French delegation. The proposal warned that the French, Soviet, and Viet Minh drafts all spoke of a provisional partition, whereas the inevitable result would in fact be "to produce in Vietnam the same effects as in Germany, Austria, and Korea." The proposal went on: "It would not bring the peace which is sought for, deeply wounding the national sentiment of the Vietnamese people; it would provoke trouble throughout the country, trouble which would not fail to threaten a peace so dearly acquired." The delegation then renewed its plan for a cease-fire in small regroupment zones; the disarming of irregular troops and, after a fixed period, of all Viet Minh troops; the withdrawal of foreign troops simultaneous with disarmament of the Viet Minh; and UN control of the cease-fire, the regroupment, the disarmament and withdrawal, the elections which would follow the restoration of order, and national administration. 29/

Tran Van Do's proposal did not receive consideration at the final plenary session of the Geneva Conference on 21 July. 30/ The delegation head protested this as well as the "hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Viet Minh High Commanders only..." Furthermore, Tran Van Do protested the abandonment of national territory

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to the Viet Minh even though still occupied by Vietnamese troops, and the setting up of a date for national elections by a military command without Vietnamese agreement. He concluded: "...the Government of the State of Vietnam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom." After other delegation leaders had indicated consent to the military agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities and Final Declaration, Tran Van Do spoke again. He requested the Conference to incorporate in the Declaration the following text:

"The Conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Vietnam undertaking: to make and support every effort to re-establish a real and lasting peace in Vietnam; not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the cease-fire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Vietnam has expressed, especially in its final statement." 31/

Tran Van Do's final effort was dismissed by Eden (as chairman), who urged that, the Final Declaration having already been printed, the conferees take note of Do's statement. Nevertheless, Do's comments then and previously clearly established his government's opposition to the Geneva Accords. That the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed by the French and Viet Minh military commands, the main belligerents, accommodated the fact that the GVN did not recognize the political existence of the DRV. The French, correctly anticipating adverse reactions from the GVN, avoided seeking GVN official consent to the armistice. The French also knew that the GVN would never accede to a partition arrangement, and formal approval of the armistice by the military commands removed the possibility of GVN obstruction of a cease-fire.

h. GVN Unable to Influence Outcome

The French had good reason for avoiding communication with the Vietnamese during the last days of the Geneva Conference: scheduled elections were prominent among the concessions that France had to make in order to obtain a settlement at all; and the reunification of Vietnam was deferred by the device of the promised plebiscite. As the Conference drew to a close, and time was running out for the French, they traded on the Viet Minh desire for the future "integrity of the Vietnam state" in order to salvage what they could from their own tottering situation. The French finally agreed to Vietnam-wide elections within two years. As in the partition agreements, the GVN was not able to influence that decision to any appreciable degree. In the larger sense, GVN aspirations were sacrificed to the position of France versus its Communist antagonist. Each side was determined not to allow all of Vietnam to fall into the hands of the other. France agreed to elections, knowing -- as the USSR and China also knew -- that elections might never be held. 32/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

4. U.S.-GVN Relations at Geneva

a. U.S. Refuses to Influence GVN for France

French readiness to accept a divided Vietnam -- a disposition which before the end of June culminated in abandonment of the enclave alternative in favor of a north-south partition -- was not communicated to the GVN. To the contrary, then and throughout the conference, the GVN delegation and government were informed of shifts in position, if at all, as faits accomplis. During June, for instance, Chauvel on several occasions approached the U.S. with news of the "underground" negotiations with the Viet Minh and with the hope that, once partition had been fixed, the U.S. would "sell" that solution to Saigon. 33/ In the same month, Chauvel, evincing understanding that the U.S. would prefer to disassociate itself from a partition settlement, nevertheless asked if the U.S. would soften Bao Dai opposition by indicating it was the best solution obtainable. Chauvel described Diem and Buu Loc as "difficult," unrealistic, and unreasonable in their opposition, and likely to upset the delicate negotiations. 34/ The U.S. consistently reacted negatively to these approaches, in the undoubtedly correct belief that the French were merely attempting to identify the U.S. with the partition concept in Vietnamese eyes. For example, Secretary Dulles instructed the U.S. Ambassador on 2 July concerning Diem as follows:

"It seems to me that the new Vietnamese Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, who has the reputation of uncompromising nationalist, is quite in the dark about developments critically affecting country he is trying to lead. We fear that if results of French negotiations with communists are revealed to him as a fait accompli, the very reaction French wish to avoid will result. You should therefore indicate our concern to the French and ascertain their own intentions with respect to consulting him or minimizing his resentment and their views with respect to plans and prospects for maintaining order in South Vietnam." 35/

By refusing to act as intermediaries for the French, the U.S. in turn kept free of entanglement in a "French solution" to the Vietnam problem.

b. French Disregard U.S. Requests, Remain Aloof from GVN

French aloofness from the GVN continued into July. Despite U.S. requests of the French delegation that the GVN be kept informed of developments, the French remained wary of contact for fear of provoking a GVN reaction that, in turn, might fracture the delicate French discussions with the Viet Minh. Chauvel consequently informed U. Alexis Johnson that "he was handling this [liaison with the GVN] through members of his staff and was avoiding direct contact with Vietnamese in order not to have to answer their questions." 36/ When Offroy, another member of the French

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

delegation, suggested that the U.S. placate the Vietnamese with assurance of free world political, economic, and military support after the settlement, U. Alexis Johnson replied that this was a matter which the French had to handle. 37/

c. U.S. Declines to Support Final GVN Position

When the penultimate session of the Conference recessed, Tran Van Do and another member of his delegation, Tran Van Chuong, explained Vietnam's position to U. Alexis Johnson. Even though they admitted that they recognized the impracticality of the GVN proposals, the GVN delegation felt that "they must make the moral position of their government clear to the world and to the Vietnamese people. If the other side rejected it, the position of their government would have been improved." U. Alexis Johnson observed that time was short for another plenary session; he suggested that they ask Mendes-France for an extension of his self-imposed deadline for concluding the negotiations. After some hesitation, they did so, and Mendes-France, although he urged the Vietnamese to circulate their proposal, stated he definitely could not ask the French National Assembly for more time at Geneva. Johnson at this point "reminded Mendes-France of the U.S. position on GVN concurrence with any agreement. Mendes-France [said] he was very conscious of this and was asking De Jean [sic] immediately to go to Cannes to see Bao Dai." 38/ Nothing came of this exchange.

In summary, however, it must be said that while the GVN attained none of its major objectives, and while it received little support from the U.S., it continued to exist. Its territorial and political integrity below the 17th parallel was assured, after a fashion, for at least two years by the Geneva Accords.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 1.

FOOTNOTES

1. McClintock from Saigon tel. No. 502, May 4, 1954 (SECRET).
2. Dulles to Paris tel. No. 4398, June 4, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
3. The treaties are published in U.S. VerbMin/3 (May 12), pp. 99-101.
4. See the DRV's Declaration of Independence, in Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), III, 20.
5. Memorandum from Heath to Dulles and Smith: "The Indochina Phase of the Conference," May 1, 1954 (SECRET).
6. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 122.
7. The U.S. objection was based on long-standing opposition to any move that would accord China the status of a major power equivalent to the fifth member of a "Big Five." See, e.g., Dulles to American Embassy - Canberra tel. No. 158, April 1, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
8. Lacouture and Devillers, pp. 122-23.
9. G. McMurtrie Godley (First Secretary) from Paris tel. No. 2757, April 29, 1954 (UNC).
10. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 123, n. 3.
11. Ibid., pp. 123-24.
12. Ibid., p. 187.
13. U.S. VerbMin/IC Restricted 6, p. 7 (CONFIDENTIAL).
14. Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 217, May 15, 1954 (SECRET).
15. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 234.
16. French insistence on the 18th parallel originated in the recommendation of General Navarre, who was asked several questions by the French delegation at Geneva regarding the likely impact of the then-existing military situation on the French negotiatory position. Navarre's responses were sent April 21. On the demarcation line, Navarre said that the 18th parallel would leave "us" the ancient political capitol of Hue and Tourane (Da Nang), and permit the retention of militarily valuable terrain. See General Ely's Memoires: l'Indochina dans la Tourmente (Paris: Plan, 1964), p. 112, and Lacouture and Devillers, p. 126.
17. Ibid., pp. 235-36.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

18. U.S. VerbMin/3, pp. 104, 105.
19. I.C. Restricted/5, p. 16 (C). Records of the Restricted Sessions are summaries rather than word-for-word quotations, for the most part.
20. I.C. Restricted/6, p. 16 (C).
21. I.C. Restricted/7, p.13 (C).
22. U.S. VerbMin/7, p. 344.
23. I.C. Restricted/14, p. 26 (C).
24. CIA Report CS-42198, July 14, 1954, from Saigon (SECRET). Lacouture and Devillers hold that Diem was stupefied when he learned of partition for the first time from Ambassador Heath via a personal letter from Eisenhower, July 12 (pp. 256-57).
25. Reported in Smith's priority tel. SECTO 633 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
26. McClintock from Saigon tel. No. 2656, June 4, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
27. Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 633, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
28. Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 654, July 18, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL); Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 655, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).
29. Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 673, July 19, 1954 (SECRET).
30. U.S. VerbMin/8, pp. 347-48.
31. Ibid., p. 355.
32. Hans Morgenthau, "The 1954 Geneva Conference: An Assessment," in A Symposium on America's Stake in Vietnam, New York: American Friends of Vietnam, 1956, pp. 64-70.
33. Dulles to Smith at Geneva priority tel. TEDUC 212, June 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
34. Smith from Geneva priority DULTE 195, June 18, 1954 (SECRET). In an aide-memoire delivered by Henri Bonnet, the French ambassador to Washington, to Dulles and Eden on June 26, the French government urged the U.S. not to encourage an adverse Vietnamese reaction to partition. The U.S. was also asked "to intervene with the Vietnamese to counsel upon them wisdom and self-control and to dissuade them from refusing an agreement which, if it is reached, is dictated not by the spirit of abandoning them, but on the contrary by the desire to save in Indochina all that can possibly be saved, and to give the Vietnamese

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

state, under peaceful conditions, opportunities which have not always been possible heretofore because of the war." See Dulles' tel. No. 4852 to American Embassy - Paris, June 28, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

35. AmEmbassy Paris 39, July 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
36. Johnson from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 560, July 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
37. Johnson from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 574, July 8, 1954 (SECRET).
38. Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 655, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 2.

FRENCH AND GVN RESPONSIBILITIES AFTER GENEVA

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>French Presence Does Not Imply French Sovereignty</u>	B-21
2. <u>France Is The Executor Of The Geneva Agreements</u>	B-21
a. <u>GVN Does Not Inherit French Responsibilities</u>	B-21
b. <u>GVN Position is Anomalous</u>	B-27

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 2. French and GVN Responsibilities After Geneva

1. French Presence Does Not Imply French Sovereignty

The fact that French Union forces were still in Vietnam at the time the Geneva military agreements were signed, and that they remained there during and after the Conference, need not be interpreted as evidence of lack of Vietnamese sovereignty. French Union forces could hardly have left the country immediately without surrendering all Vietnam to the communists, and without inviting the slaughter of the Vietnamese National Army. French officers and noncommissioned officers led the latter troops. Clearly, only a gradual withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps was reasonable in view of the prevailing military situation. The GVN accepted these realities and recognized the need for continued French presence. The French government, in granting the GVN independence had agreed that the Expeditionary Corps would be pulled out of Vietnam at the request of the GVN -- although no doubt it hoped to delay that day. In fact, the French moved swiftly after Geneva, under American urging, to relinquish to the GVN the full trappings of the sovereignty granted in June, 1954. By mid-September, the turning over of the civil service, police, and other public administration in South Vietnam was formally completed. By February, 1955, the Vietnamese Army was placed under the command of Vietnamese leaders, and the French accepted American primacy in advising, training, and equipping GVN armed forces.

2. France Is The Executor Of The Geneva Agreements

a. GVN Does Not Inherit French Responsibilities

Article 27 of the Armistice agreements signed by France states in part: "The signatories of the present Agreement and their successors in their functions shall be responsible for ensuring and observance and enforcement of the terms and provisions thereof..." That clause seemed to obligate the State of Vietnam in the event France abrogated its responsibilities -- but even if construed thusly, the obligation extended only to "the present military Agreement," and not to the political provisions included in the unsigned Final Declaration. It is also possible to construe the reference to "successors" as a binder on the procession of French governments likely to follow Mendes-France. In any event, the State of Vietnam explicitly denied responsibility for all the agreements concluded by France at Geneva, although it pledged not to interfere with the cease-fire. 1/ The declarations of Vietnamese disavowal were early, repeated and specific. Moreover, these declarations included warnings that the partition and elections provided for by the Geneva Conference would lead to renewed violence. Examples of these statements follow:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
2	12 May 54	Geneva Conference "must not lead to partition, either direct or indirect, final or provisional, de facto or de jure, of the national territory."	Elections can be held "as soon as the <u>UN</u> Security Council has decided that the authority of the State has been established in the whole of the territory, and that conditions of freedom have been obtained..."
3	25 May 54	State of Vietnam "would not agree to any plan which would result in the partition of Vietnam." Partition involved "grave danger."	
4	27 May 54	"...The Vietnam delegation wished to warn the Conference against measures tending to divide the national territory. If a division of Vietnam were to be sanctioned, the result would not be peace, but a pause before fresh hostilities: There was no example of a country torn physically apart which had not endeavored to recover its unity and its historic frontiers. Partition would therefore mean sooner or later -- probably sooner -- a renewal of war."	
5	29 May 54	"We do believe that there are certain principles which should guide us. Among these principles is the political and territorial integrity of the Vietnamese country. When it was agreed that representatives of Vietnam should attend this conference, it is obvious that one could not ignore the consequences of this attendance. It is impossible for a people to accept of its own free will a mutilation of its country... No Vietnamese patriot could accept partition."	
6	10 Jun 54		"The delegation of the State of Vietnam...had the honor to propose...elections;...whereas the Delegation of Viet Minh proposed that there should be no international supervision which, in

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN
(Continued)

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
6	(Continued)		the present circumstances, means that elections could not possibly be honest and true, the Delegation of the State of Vietnam has proposed that elections should take place under international supervision."
7	16 Jun 54		The GVN, "In our proposal of May 12, have taken the initiative on proposing elections...these elections must be free, sincere, and supervised. The best control would be exercised by the U.N."
8	17 Jul 54	"The de facto partition...does not take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people...Vietnam would prefer...provisional control by the United Nations over a truly unified and independent Vietnam to its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery."	"Regroupment...reinforces the threat that they constitute to the free expression of the will of the people. Therefore not only does such a cease fire not lead to a durable peace, since, ignoring the will for national unity, it provokes the people to 'unify' the country, but, by the consolidation of the armed forces now facing each other, it violates in advance the liberty of the future elections...The cease fire...far from leading to peace, makes peace improbable and precarious."
9	18 Jul 54	"In order to avoid any misunderstanding <u>Tran Van Do</u> wished to state firmly that Vietnam delegation could not associate itself with any discussion of this <u>Final Declaration</u> ...Vietnam does not agree to conditions advanced for cessation of hostilities...Delegation of Vietnam can only protest the idea of partition...Vietnamese delegation flatly rejects both drafts submitted to the conference ...Vietnamese delegation cannot accept declaration or agreement where Vietnam, which <u>was</u> invited to the conference as <u>an</u> existing state, <u>is</u> not even mentioned."	

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN
(Continued)

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
10	19 Jul 54	"French, Soviet and Viet Minh drafts all admit the principles of a partition of Vietnam in two zones, all of North Vietnam being abandoned to the Viet Minh. Although this partition is only provisional in theory, it would not (repeat not) fail to produce in Vietnam the same effects as in Germany, Austria, and Korea. It would not bring the peace which is sought for, deeply wounding the national sentiment of the Vietnamese people, it would provoke trouble throughout the country, trouble which would not fail to threaten a peace so dearly acquired."	"The Vietnamese Delegation therefore proposes: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A cease fire on present positions.2. Regroupment of troops in two zones which would be as small as possible.3. Disarmament of irregular troops.4. After a period to be fixed, disarmament of Viet Minh troops and simultaneous withdrawal of foreign troops.5. Control by the United Nations<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. Of the cease fire.B. Of the regroupment.C. Of the disarmament and the withdrawal.D. Of the administration of the entire country.E. Of the general elections, when the United Nations believe that order and security will have been everywhere truly restored.

This proposal made on the formal instructions of His Majesty Bao Dai, and of President Ngo Dinh Diem, shows that the Chief of State of Vietnam once more places the independence and the unity of his country above any other considerations, and that the national government of Vietnam would prefer this provisional UN control over a truly independent and United Vietnam to its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN

Note Date

On Partition

On Elections

11 21 Jul 54

"Mr. Tran van Do (State of Viet-Nam) (Interpretation):
Mr. Chairman, the Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam when it tabled its proposal, saw an armistice without a partition, even provisional, of Viet-Nam through disarmament of all belligerent forces after their withdrawal into perimeters as limited as possible and by the establishment of a provisional control by the United Nations on the whole of the territory, while the re-establishment of order and peace would enable the Vietnamese people to decide its fate through free elections.

"The Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam protests against the fact that its proposal has been rejected without an examination, a proposal which is the only one to reflect the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. It requests urgently that the demilitarization and neutralization of the Catholic communities, the Bishoprics of the Delta in North Viet-Nam be at least accepted by this Conference.

"It solemnly protests against the hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Vietminh High Commanders only, whereas the French High Command does command Vietnamese troops only through a delegation of powers given by the head of the State of Viet-Nam, whereas especially many provisions of this Agreement are of a nature to be seriously detrimental to the political future of the Vietnamese people.

"It further solemnly protests against the fact that this Armistice Agreement abandons to Vietminh territories some of which are still occupied by Vietnamese troops and which are, nevertheless, fundamental to the defense of Viet-Nam against a greater Communist expansion, and results practically even in depriving the State of Viet-Nam from its right to organize its defense by other means than by the maintenance of the foreign army on its territory.

"It also solemnly protests against the fact that the French High Command was pleased to take the right without a preliminary agreement of the Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam to set the date of future elections, whereas we deal here with a provision of an obviously political character. Consequently, the Government of the State of Viet-Nam requests that this Conference note that it does protest solemnly against the way in which the Armistice has been concluded and against the conditions of this Armistice which have not taken into account the deep aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

"And the Government of the State of Viet-Nam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

* * *

"...as regards the final Declaration of the Conference, the Vietnamese Delegation would request the Conference to incorporate in this Declaration after Article 11, the following text:

'The Conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Viet-Nam undertaking:

'to make and support every effort to re-establish a real and lasting peace in Viet-Nam;

'not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the cease-fire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Viet-Nam has expressed, especially in its final statement.'"

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

It has been held that, the declaratory policy of the State of Vietnam disassociating itself from the Geneva Accords notwithstanding, Vietnam was obligated by the Treaty of Independence (4 June 1954) to accept France's action on its behalf at Geneva. Yet, the reference in the Treaty of Independence to Vietnam's observance of treaties and conventions signed for it by France is in the past tense; no provision is made for France to conclude binding agreements after 4 June on Vietnam's behalf. The passage of Article 27 of the Geneva Agreements in question charges France with the responsibility of insuring Western compliance with the terms of the agreements, as far as the southern part of Vietnam was concerned. Indeed, throughout the conference, France was one of the two principal protagonists, shaped the final position accepted by the West, and signed the cease-fire agreements (the final declaration was not signed, an oral declaration of assent being substituted when it became clear that the U.S. would not sign -- the U.S. refrained also from joining in the oral assent). French forces and political elements were present in South Vietnam and were not required, under the agreements, to be removed. It was not at this time envisioned by any of the Geneva Convention nations that France would precipitately withdraw its armed forces from Vietnam.

b. GVN Position Is Anomalous

It was generally recognized at Geneva that the position of the GVN was, at best, contradictory. The GVN asserted its desire for international status by demanding concessions which the other nations considered impossible. The GVN also was severe in criticism of the French, while at the same time acknowledging a debt to France for its very existence in the face of Viet Minh military and political pressures -- which even France, at that time, could barely sustain. The unsupported opposition of the GVN was understood by the other nations as a small country's fight for survival.

Partition, regroupment, and cease-fire conditions intended to lead to a final political settlement at Geneva, were all imposed on Saigon. While it is true that the alternatives offered by the GVN were impractical and unacceptable given the extent of Viet Minh territorial and population control, the salient fact is that the GVN, speaking from what it regarded as an independent position, held fast against every proposal that departed from its concepts of national unity and self-determination. The limitations on the GVN's role as an independent participant at the Conference stemmed from French determination to conclude a settlement in line with French interests. France commanded the power to attract Conference support; the GVN did not. However, the GVN was neither obligated by previous commitment, by its legal status, nor by the Accords themselves to abide by the Franco-Viet Minh agreements which emerged. This anomaly ultimately made France, and French presence in Vietnam, pivotal to the fulfillment of the Geneva agreements.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. B. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S. VerbMin/8, 355
2. U.S. VerbMin/3, 104-105
3. I.C. Restricted/6, 16
4. I.C. Restricted/7, 13
5. I.C. Restricted/8, 8-9
6. U.S. VerbMin/7, 344
7. I.C. Restricted/14, 26
8. SECTO 633, July 17, 1954 (SECRET)
9. SECTO 654, July 18, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL)
10. SECTO 673, July 19, 1954 (SECRET)
11. U.S. VerbMin/8, July 21, 1954, 347-348, 354-355

C. THE VIET MINH POSITION
AND SINO-SOVIET STRATEGY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. THE VIET MINH POSITION AND SINO-SOVIET STRATEGY

SUMMARY

It has been charged that Ho Chi Minh was robbed at the conference table of what he had won on the battlefield, that the Geneva Accords were prejudicial in content and implementation to legitimate Viet Minh interests, and that, therefore, the subsequent actions of the Viet Minh are understandable in light of these disappointments. While it is fair to state that the immediate implications of the Accords did not reflect (even according to CIA reports) Viet Minh strength and control in Vietnam at the time of the conference, it is equally important and revealing to understand why. Viet Minh ambitions were thwarted, not so much by Western resistance or treachery, as by Sino-Soviet pressures on them to compromise. If the Viet Minh were to look for villains at the Geneva Conference, in honesty they would have to admit that their interests were compromised by their own communist allies, not the West.

Viet Minh ambitions were broad. The Viet Minh were not only interested in gaining rights to the three-quarters of Vietnam they claimed to have controlled, but in extending their authority throughout Indochina into Laos and Cambodia. Although their offshoots, the Pathet Lao and the Free Khmers, controlled little territory in Laos and Cambodia, the Viet Minh pressed for their full representation in these countries. Arguing that they spoke for all the Indochinese people, the Viet Minh wished to compel or persuade the French to leave the area and then to settle directly with the indigenous and weakened non-communists. They were pressing for a political settlement prior to a military armistice, or, in other words, they wanted to fight while talking. Their specific objectives were: partition at the 13th parallel, a deadline for complete French withdrawal from the North, and nation-wide elections to be held six months after an armistice (Tab 1).

The source of DRV disappointments with the Accords can be traced not so much to Western strength and unity or Western "treachery" as to efforts by the Soviet Union and Communist China to make the conference a success; that is, to bring stability to the area and a settlement to the fighting. Together and separately, Moscow and Peking pressed concessions on the Viet Minh. Invariably, the two principal communist delegates, Chou En-lai and Molotov, played major roles in breaking deadlocks with conciliatory initiatives. While the exact motives of the Soviet Union and Communist China must remain a matter of speculation, the most acceptable explanation for their behavior is that both sought to achieve their objectives in Southeast Asia without triggering U.S. intervention. "Peaceful co-existence" was the hallmark of their diplomacy. The Chinese,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in particular, were interested in border security, buffers, preventing the formation of a U.S. alliance system with bases in the region, and reconstruction at home. The two big communist powers did not hesitate in asserting the paramountcy of their interests over those of the Viet Minh (Tab 2).

DISCUSSION

III. C. Tab 1 - DRV Negotiating Position

2 - Sino-Soviet Objectives and Strategy

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. 1.

DRV NEGOTIATING POSITION

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>The DRV is Determined to Press a Very Hard Line</u>	C-4
a. The DRV Recognizes Its Own Strong Position.....	C-4
b. The DRV Attitude is Defiant.....	C-4
c. The DRV Outlines Its Proposals.....	C-4
d. The DRV Proposals Demand a Political Settlement Before a Cease-Fire.....	C-6
e. The DRV Indicates Ambitions for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer.	C-7
f. The Initial DRV Demands are Excessive.....	C-8
2. <u>Later DRV Positions Represent a Compromise</u>	C-8
a. The DRV Begins to Soften Its Position.....	C-8
b. A Weak Laniel Position Delays DRV Concessions.....	C-9
c. The DRV Presents a New Series of Proposals.....	C-9
d. The DRV Agrees to a Separate Solution for Laos and Cambodia.....	C-10
e. The DRV Reluctantly Accepts Partition.....	C-10
f. The DRV is Disappointed on Elections.....	C-12
g. The DRV Does Not Achieve Its Goals at Geneva.....	C-12

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. 1. DRV NEGOTIATING POSITION

1. The DRV is Determined to Press a Very Hard Line

a. The DRV Recognizes Its Own Strong Position

The victory at Dien Bien Phu cost the DRV 21,000 men. Ho realized he had paid dearly for this psychologically crippling stroke against the French, and he was determined to make the most of his advantage at Geneva. The effect of Dien Bien Phu on the Western delegations at the conference was evident not only in the initial shock, but also in the continued sensitivity to military developments in Indochina. Thus, of primary importance to the DRV negotiating position was the goal of making political capital from battlefield supremacy. Closely allied with this sense of military invincibility was the Viet Minh belief that France was in political turmoil and, therefore, psychologically weak.

b. The DRV Attitude is Defiant

To the DRV, the victories of their troops and the impending collapse of France in Indochina were quite clear. Less clear was the possibility that the U.S., either unilaterally or in some form of united action might intervene. The DRV gambled, however, on the French struggling on alone. In the opening phase of the conference, the Viet Minh released a communication that indicated there was no need to hasten the conclusion of the war:

"We still remember the Korean lesson which taught us that one could negotiate and fight at the same time..." 1/

This attitude of mild defiance was intended not only for consumption in the West but also for the communist countries. The DRV was resisting early pressures of the USSR and the PRC who feared U.S. intervention and a wider war to move quickly to a solution. Instead, the DRV moved rapidly to increase its own forces in the Tonkin Delta, 2/ to compress the French forces there to a smaller territory, and they apparently instructed their delegation to continue pressing a hard line on political concessions. The goal was to delay a settlement until they bettered the military position even further. The DRV was determined to gain every inch that the French could be forced to concede.

c. The DRV Outlines Its Proposals

The initial Viet Minh gambit came at the second plenary session of the Conference on 10 May. 3/ Pham Van Dong stated that the DRV was the "stronger" force in "more than three-fourths of the country." He went on to describe the successful administration of this territory by his government, which he said "represents the will of the entire Vietnamese nation..." The opposition, characterized as "the government of the tempo-

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

rarily occupied zone," did not enjoy popular support, he said, and was merely a tool of the French. Pham Van Dong did not, however, propose that France recognize "the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam," a statement which amounted to a rejection of the Franco-Vietnamese treaties approved on 28 April by Laniel and Nguyen Trung Vinh. He instead offered an eight-point proposal for a political settlement and a cease-fire:

1. Recognition by France of the sovereignty and independence of Viet-Nam throughout the territory of Viet-Nam, and also recognition of the sovereignty and independence of Khmer and Pathet Lao.
2. Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory of Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao within the time limits to be agreed upon by the belligerents. Pending the withdrawal of troops, the dislocation [sic] of French troops in Viet-Nam shall be agreed upon -- particular attention being paid to limit to the minimum the number of their dislocation points. Provision shall be made that the French troops should not interfere in the affairs of local administration in the areas of their dislocation.
3. Holding of free general elections in Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao with a view to constituting a single government in each country, convening of advisory conferences of the representatives of the governments of both sides in Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao -- in each of the States separately and under conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations; the preparation and the holding of free general elections to establish a unified government in each country. Interference from outside should not be permitted. Local commissions will be set up to supervise the preparation for and the carrying out of the elections. Prior to the establishment of unified governments in each of the above-mentioned States, the governments of both sides will specifically carry out the administrative functions in the districts which will be under their administration, after the settlement has been carried out, in accordance with the agreement on the termination of hostilities.
4. The statements by the Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam on the readiness of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam to examine the question of the entry of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam into the French Union in conformity with the principle of free will, and on the conditions of this entry corresponding statements should be made by the Governments of Khmer and of Pathet Lao.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

5. Recognition by the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam as well as by Khmer and Pathet Lao, of the economic and cultural interests of France in those countries. After the establishment of unified Governments in Viet-Nam, Khmer, Pathet Lao, the economic and cultural relations of these States with France should be subject to the settlement in conformity with the principles of equality and mutual interest. Pending the establishment of the unified governments in the Three States, the economic and cultural relations of Indochina with France will temporarily remain without a change such as they exist now. However, in the areas where communications and trade ties have been broken off, they can be re-established on the basis of understanding between both sides. The citizens of both sides will enjoy their privileged status to be determined later in matters pertaining to domicile, movement, and business activities on the territory of the other side.
6. The belligerent sides undertake not to prosecute persons who collaborated with the other side during the war.
7. There shall be mutual exchange of prisoners of war.
8. Implementation of measures that are referred to in paragraphs one through seven should be succeeded by the cessation of hostilities in Indochina, and by the conclusion to this end of appropriate agreement between France and each of the Three States which should provide for a complete and simultaneous cease-fire throughout the whole of the Indochinese territory by all armed forces of the belligerent sides, ground, naval, and air force. Both sides, in each of the Three States of Indochina, for the purpose of strengthening the armistice, will carry out a necessary settlement of territories and of the areas occupied by them, and it should also be provided that (a) both sides should not hinder each other during the passage, for the purpose of the above mentioned settlement, by the troops of the other [sic] side over the territory occupied by the other side; (b) the complete termination of transportation into Indochina from abroad of new ground, naval, and air units of personnel, or of any kind of arms of ammunition; (c) to set up control over the implementation of the terms of agreement on the cessation of hostilities, and to establish, for this purpose, in each of the Three States, mixed commissions composed of the representatives of the belligerent sides. 4/

d. The DRV Proposals Demand a Political Settlement Before a Cease-Fire

The meaning of Dong's list of proposals was clear. A political settlement would precede a military agreement (cease-fire) rather than

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the reverse, which the French preferred. Elections would take place under the supervision of local commissions, and the DRV preference was for holding them country-wide and soon. By first removing the French, and then by dealing directly with the non-communist Vietnamese on the issues of control and supervision of the cease-fire, regroupment, and general elections, the Viet Minh could legitimately expect a quick take-over of power from the relatively weak Vietnamese National Army. As Dong well knew, the relocation of French forces in the Tonkin Delta into a tighter perimeter was having, and would continue to have, major repercussions on Vietnamese army morale. 5/ Once the French were persuaded to withdraw, the VNA would undoubtedly collapse under Viet Minh military pressure. Moreover, inasmuch as Dong's plan made no allowance for the disarming, much less the regrouping, of indigenous forces on either side, the Viet Minh would be militarily in a virtually unassailable position to control any general election that might be held (if, in fact, the political process were ever to advance that far). Dong's proposal, then, amounted to a request that the French abandon Vietnam.

e. The DRV Indicates Ambitions for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer

In the same speech, Dong evidenced that the DRV's ambitions extended beyond Vietnam. Acting as spokesman for the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer -- whose representatives had formally come under Viet Minh direction with the announcement on 11 March 1951 of formation of a Viet Minh-Free Khmer-Pathet Lao "National United Front" -- Dong argued that these two movements enjoyed widespread popular support and controlled most of the territory of their respective countries. With considerable distortion of history (subsequently corrected by the Laotian and Cambodian delegates), Dong sought to demonstrate that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were de facto governments carrying out "democratic reforms" in the areas their armies had "liberated." The negotiating objective was to gain the status of lawful governments for the Pathet Lao and the Free Khmer. Dong seemed strongly to imply that the DRV spoke not only for itself, but for all the Indochinese peoples.

Dong included the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in his settlement plan. He demanded that France recognize the "sovereignty and independence" of those movements no less than of the DRV:

"...the Peoples of Khmer and Pathet Lao have liberated vast areas of their national territory. The governments of resistance have exerted all their efforts in creating a democratic power and in raising the living standards of the population in liberated areas. That is why the government of resistance of Khmer, as well as that of Pathet Lao enjoy the support of and warm affection of the population in liberated areas and they enjoy great prestige and influence among the population of both countries.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"These governments represent the great majority of the people of Khmer and Lao, the aspirations of whom they symbolize..." 6/

French forces alone were to withdraw from Cambodia and Laos; the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were not "foreign" troops. As in Vietnam, elections then would be held -- but, without neutral or international supervision. During these elections, Dong insisted there must be "conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations..." agreement to which would have guaranteed the functioning with impunity of various communist fronts.

f. The Initial DRV Demands are Excessive

Viet Minh ambitions in Indochina, it must be concluded, were not simply oratorical gestures intended strictly for the establishment of a bargaining position. In the absence of Sino-Soviet pressure and the threat of U.S. participation, it seems clear that the DRV would not have reduced their demands. Viet Minh ambitions were extensive and partially realized. They were, however, excessive and contrary to the compromise mood of their communist allies and to the relatively firm Western position.

2. Later DRV Positions Represent a Compromise

a. The DRV Begins to Soften Its Position

The implacable DRV position ran contrary to Chinese and Soviet desires to forestall American intervention in Indochina, and after an early gesture of unity, it was soon evident that the large communist powers were bringing pressure to bear on the DRV. By 17 May, Pham Van Dong was ready to withdraw from his strong position requiring a political settlement before a cease-fire, and also to give up his demands for seating Khmer and Pathet Lao delegations, although he still insisted that recognition of these two movements was a part of the Vietnam solution:

"As regards procedure, [Dong stated that] his delegation was in full accord with the Soviet proposal that both political and military questions be dealt with together. He also agreed to treating the military questions first not because they were more important but more urgent. The questions of Khmer and Pathet Lao were closely linked to that of Vietnam and could not be separated. He did not see any real question [sic] for considering first the question of Khmer and Pathet Lao." 7/

This softening of the DRV position at Geneva was not reflected in the military operations in Indochina, where the Viet Minh were still determined to achieve control of as much of the Tonkin Delta as possible; in fact, the Viet Minh were planning heavier operations in the Tonkin Delta. A captured document in the last days of May directed Viet Minh commanders

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in that area to continue their harassing and guerrilla activities for an unspecified period "pending commitment of the battle corps." 8/

b. A Weak Laniel Position Delays DRV Concessions

The Viet Minh were considering further concessions in late May and early June when it became evident that the Laniel government was cracking at the seams, and that a harder communist line might force either the fall of Laniel or some significant concessions from France. Either of these results would be profitable, since any government replacing Laniel's would certainly be more willing to end the Indochina war. For this reason, the DRV hard line once more came to the fore, to the point that Pham Van Dong was able to reverse himself on some points he had been ready to concede. On 8 June, he insisted once again on the necessity for a political solution prior to discussions of the cease-fire. As a psychological inducement, he added the hint that, whatever the outcome, France would remain influential in cultural and economic fields, and even suggested that some vestige of the French Union concept would continue to exist:

"To this effect, finally, the Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam invites the conference to embark without delay upon the consideration of political questions such as the recognition by France of the sovereignty and of the real independence of Viet-Nam and of the other countries of Indochina, the organization of general elections in Viet-Nam, the relations of Viet-Nam and of France; that is, the question of the economic and cultural interests, as well as the question pertaining to the association of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam to the French Union, and the conditions under which such associations should be effected, and so on and so forth." 9/

Possibly the words "and so on and so forth" give a truer indication of the environment in which this projection of future ties was made. The main point was a demand for immediate general elections in exchange for a cease-fire.

c. The DRV Presents a New Series of Proposals

The USSR backed the DRV at this time, insisting on independence for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, free elections in these states, and withdrawal of all foreign troops. 10/ With the continued demand by the DRV for even more territory than its units held on the ground, and with General Ely stating privately in the field that the French Union troops were "very, very tired," 11/ the Laniel government staggered, lost a vote of confidence, and fell on 12 June. It was replaced, on 18 June, by the government of Mendes-France, pledged to end the war in Indochina by 20 July or step down. While the new French government was being formed, the DRV brought forth a new position, embodied in six points to be agreed on prior to a cease-fire:

1. Complete and real sovereignty and national independence of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

2. Free general elections by secret ballot throughout the territory of Vietnam.
3. No prosecution of collaborators.
4. Establishment of economic and cultural relations between France and the DRV.
5. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to respect the independence, unity and internal regime of the other states.
6. Other political questions concerning Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia must be settled at a later time in the interests of consolidating peace and the guarantee of democratic rights and national interests of the peoples of Indochina. 12/

d. The DRV Agrees to a Separate Solution for Laos and Cambodia

The speech by Chou En-lai at this meeting seemed to support the DRV view, although it was more mildly stated. In retrospect, however, it appears that this meeting marked a turning point, at least for the DRV on their insistence for including the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in a settlement. Chou's proposals, contrary to Pham Van Dong's, implied the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces from Laos and Cambodia and also suggested the postponement of a political settlement for those two states:

"I have stated, on several occasions at this conference, that the situations in the three states are not completely alike. That is to say, that the situation in Vietnam is not completely the same as that in Laos, while the situation in Laos is not completely the same as that in Cambodia. Therefore, the concrete situations in Laos and Cambodia should be taken into consideration in working out solutions for the problems of these two countries." 13/

Two days later, Pham Van Dong, in the fifteenth restricted session, announced the decisive termination of efforts to include all of Indochina in the political agreement:

"...I would like to say there have been Vietnam volunteers which fought on the side of the resistance elements of Laos and Khmer. They have been withdrawn. Today if there are such forces they will be withdrawn." 14/

e. The DRV Reluctantly Accepts Partition

In its early proposals, the DRV did not recognize the possibility of partition, aiming instead at a unification of all Vietnam. In conjunction with their demands for immediate elections, this was calculated to give them control of the whole country. Lacking support from

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Peking and Moscow, the DRV was forced to give in on this point. Molotov, on 17 May, opened the door by agreeing that military solutions should precede political solutions, and Eden, on 25 May, moved to include on the agenda the question of "regrouping areas for Vietnam." Pham Van Dong, in reply, accepted this concept of including a demarcation line and made the following points:

1. There should be a recognition of the principles of readjusting the areas under control of each state;
2. Readjustment would mean an exchange of territory taking into account actual areas controlled including population and strategic interests;
3. Each side would get territory in one piece to include complete control of the area both economic and administrative;
4. A line of demarcation should be established following the topographical line of territory so that it is easy to follow and would make transportation and communications possible within each state. 15/

The subsequent discussions of a cease-fire and partition were stymied initially by the DRV demand for a demarcation line at the 13th parallel. After two weeks, by 16 June, the DRV reduced this demand to "all of Tonkin and the entire delta area." The French, "without agreeing," said if such an arrangement were made, they "would demand a free hand in the South, indicating area south of the line starting approximately 18th parallel..." 16/ Discussions continued through the rest of June. The French Ambassador, Bonnet, commented on 28 June that the Viet Minh disposition to negotiate arose, in the French opinion, from a fear that the conflict might expand to include the U.S.; 17/ in other words, the DRV had come around to the view of China and the USSR. From this time on, the French increasingly threatened the DRV with the possibility of U.S. intervention, even though, ironically enough, the U.S. was moving further away from such a position:

"Chauvel reports that he spoke most firmly to Dong regarding military discussions. He said French have accepted Viet Minh proposal that Viet Minh receive Tonkin area, including Capitol, but that further Viet Minh proposal for demarcation line is unacceptable. Chauvel reiterated in strongest terms fact that French proposal for demarcation line just north of Dong Hoi would be acceptable to conference and would thus eliminate danger of extension of war." 18/

By 6 July, Pham Van Dong was almost willing to accept the 17th parallel. His attitude indicated that he, personally, was ready to compromise and that he felt his government was coming around:

"Chauvel had seen Dong this morning. On question of demarcation lines, Dong again referred to status of popu-

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

lations sympathizing with Viet Minh who would be left south of demarcation line proposed by French. He said this question would be easier for him if he could get some general political assurances regarding eventual status these people. Chauvel said Dong indicated that with such assurances he might be able to accept Dong Hoi line." 19/

f. The DRV is Disappointed on Elections

In Pham Van Dong's 10 May plan, a take-over of all Vietnam by the DRV was almost certain. "Foreign" troops would be withdrawn and elections would take place as soon as possible. "Local government" would fill in during the interval. Supervision of the elections themselves would be by locally composed commissions. The French and the GVN vehemently opposed both immediate elections and elections unsupervised by some kind of international commission. There was no movement in this impasse until 16 July when Molotov opened new possibilities by suggesting that a decision on elections be left up to the GVN and DRV after a military settlement was made. The Chinese were willing to concede that elections might not take place for two or three years. Even under these pressures, there was no progress until very near the time set by the French for termination of Geneva talks. On 19 July, at an extraordinary meeting attended by Molotov, Eden, Mendes-France, Chou En-lai, and Pham Van Dong agreement was reached on postponing elections for two years. 20/ This, of course, represented a severe setback for the ambitions of the DRV.

g. The DRV Does Not Achieve Its Goals at Geneva

The DRV, by the end of the conference, had moved a long way from its initial position on every important consideration. The cease-fire was considered ahead of the political decisions. The country was partitioned, giving the GVN about half the total territory, which was probably much more than it deserved on the basis of France-GVN military strength. Elections were put off for two years instead of being held immediately, and control of the elections was to be international rather than local. The Pathet Lao and Free Khmer movements were not represented at the convention, and the DRV had drawn its Viet Minh troops out of Laos and Cambodia. Bernard Fall's comment that the DRV was forced "to accept conditions far less favorable than the military situation warranted" 21/ is reinforced by a detailed analysis of the French military position in the Tonkin Delta by Lacouture and Devillers in La fin d'une guerre, in which the French situation is described as on the verge of collapse. 22/ The DRV, according to Kahin and Lewis, probably expected, however, that the concessions they had made were only temporary:

"...in evacuating its military units from the South, the Viet Minh was not being called upon to abandon its struggle for power, but only to transfer the competition from the military to the political plane. And whether in a military or an exclusively political contest, the Viet Minh confidently expected victory." 23/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

This, as Victor Bator points out, was a serious mistake:

"...there must have been some miscalculation at that time on the part of Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They must have thought that South Vietnam Government would never be able to assert its independence and become strong enough to demand the French withdrawal. They underestimated the American interest in South Vietnam and expected to exploit the chaotic conditions in the South for gaining their political ends. However, as has already been observed, the events took a different turn in the South." 24/

Ho commented much later on his personal feelings about the results of the Geneva Conference, and from these comments comes an indication of his feelings on later situations:

"We thought we had achieved something with the French by compromising and it turned out to be shaky. Only through full and unconditional independence can we achieve stability...We are determined to continue to fight until we achieve total victory, that is, military and political..." 25/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. I.

FOOTNOTES

1. CIA Study 0017/66, "Asian Communist Employment of Negotiations as a Political Tactic" (S), p. 42.
2. CIA Study 0017/66 (S), p. 43.
3. U.S. VerbMin/2, pp. 58 ff.
4. Ibid., pp. 65-66.
5. After Dien Bien Phu and the withdrawal of most French forces to the Tonkin Delta, Viet Minh strength in and around the Delta was reported as 94 infantry battalions, 1 artillery division, 110 district companies, and from 40,000 to 50,000 militia. French-Vietnamese strength stood at 109 battalions (of which some 60 percent was VNA) and about 80,000 auxiliary troops and militia. Despite this manpower advantage for the French Union forces, an intelligence estimate for the period said they faced possible defections on a mounting scale which could become very large if the Viet Minh scored major victories or if the French were believed about to abandon Hanoi and portions of the Delta. See NIE-63-4-54, "Probable Military and Political Developments in Indochina over the Next 30 Days (15 June-15 July)," June 15, 1954 (SECRET). In General Valluy's report to the five-power military staff conference on June 4, moreover, he stated there were no southern Vietnamese who could oppose northern Vietnamese once the Tonkin Delta was lost and defense of the South became necessary. See Dulles' tel. TEDUL 171 to the American Consul - Geneva, June 7, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. U.S. VerbMin/1, pp. 15-16.
7. IC Restricted/1 (C), p. 8.
8. CIA Study 0017/66 (S), p. 43.
9. U.S. VerbMin/5, p. 198.
10. U.S. VerbMin/5, pp. 216-228; U.S. VerbMin/7, pp. 333-342.
11. CIA Study 0017/66 (S), p. 44.
12. IC Restricted/14 (C), pp. 18-19.
13. IC Restricted/14 (C), p. 9; CIA Study 0017/66 (S), p. 45.
14. IC Restricted/15 (C), p. 16.
15. IC Restricted/6 (C), p. 7.
16. DULTE 187, Geneva to SecState, 16 June 1954 (TOP SECRET)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

17. SECTO 489, translation of aide memoire, Bonnet to State, 28 June 1954 (TOP SECRET).
18. SECTO 557, Geneva to State, 3 July 1954 (TOP SECRET).
19. SECTO 560, Geneva to State, 6 July 1954 (TOP SECRET).
20. Lacouture and Devillers, La fin d'une guerre, p. 268.
21. Fall, Viet-Nam Witness, p. 135.
22. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 284.
23. Kahin and Lewis, The United States in Vietnam, pp. 47-48.
24. Bator, Vietnam -- A Diplomatic Tragedy, p. 17.
25. CIA Study 0017/66 (S), p. 49.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. 2.

SINO-SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>USSR and China are Motivated by Different Objectives</u>	C-18
a. Atmosphere at Geneva is Different from Panmunjon.....	C-18
b. Soviet Objectives.....	C-18
(1) USSR Seeks to Avert a Major International Crisis	
(2) USSR Wishes to Prevent French Support of EDC	
(3) USSR Seizes the Opportunity to Create a New Communist State	
c. Chinese Objectives: The Need for Border Security.....	C-19
(1) China's Policy Calls for Assistance to "Wars of National Liberation"	
(2) China Wary of U.S. Intervention	
(3) China Wishes to Prevent Laos and Cambodia from Becoming U.S. Allies	
(4) China Attempts to Enhance the Image of "Peaceful Co-existence"	
2. <u>USSR and China Serve as Moderating Influences on the Viet Minh</u>	C-21
a. Opening Position of Both Countries Supports DRV Hard Line.....	C-21
b. Shift to Support of Bilateral French-DRV Discussions is Apparent Early.....	C-22
c. USSR and China Change DRV Approach to Cease-fire.....	C-22
d. DRV Responds to Sino-Soviet Pressure on Partition.....	C-22
e. Molotov Proposes Compromise on Elections.....	C-23

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
f. DRV is Pressed to Give Up Claims for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer Representation.....	C-23
g. Chinese Play a Major Role in Pathet Lao-Free Khmer Exclusion.....	C-24
h. USSR and China Agree to a Control Commission.....	C-25
i. Sino-Soviet Influence Has Significant Effect.....	C-25

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. 2. SINO-SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

1. USSR and China Motivated by Different Objectives

a. Atmosphere at Geneva is Different from Panmunjom

During the Korean War, the initial communist move toward negotiations came at a time of fairly clear-cut military stalemate. Discussions at Panmunjom extended over two years while UN and communist armies fought over small parcels of strategically valuable terrain. In Indochina, to the contrary, the first communist indications of willingness to negotiate came in September 1953 (from both Peking and Moscow), while the Viet Minh were preparing for the "general counteroffensive," and with the French Union forces constricting their defensive perimeter and desperately seeking to prevent large-scale desertions by the Vietnamese. Moreover, a final settlement was reached after only two months of bargaining. The reasons for this unexpectedly rapid and compromise settlement lie in Moscow and Peking. For reasons that were either the same or complementary, these two communist powers created an atmosphere for serious negotiations.

b. Soviet Objectives

Unlike the Chinese, the Soviet Union was never explicit about its motivations for working toward a settlement. Nevertheless, there are strong grounds for believing that the Soviets had these goals in view: (1) averting a major war crisis over Indochina that would stimulate Western unity, provide the U.S. with support previously lacking for "united action," and conceivably force Moscow to help defend the Chinese; (2) reducing the prospects for successful passage of the European Defense Community in the French National Assembly; (3) seizing the opportunity to create a communist-controlled enclave in Vietnam which could then be expanded into a new communist state.

(1) USSR Seeks to Avert a Major International Crisis

On the first point, the Soviets were surely aware that the United States probably would be prepared, under certain conditions, to consider active involvement in the war. Newspaper reports of the time added both credence and uncertainty to American plans for "united action." The Soviets during this period were caught up, moreover, in a full-fledged policy debate over the import of Eisenhower's defense program for Soviet national security. When the debate was resolved sometime in April 1954, apparently First Secretary Khrushchev's perception of the continued danger of a new world war that might be touched off by a reckless American nuclear strike won out over the relative optimism of Premier Malenkov. Specifically, Moscow probably reasoned that a failure to settle at Geneva would lead to U.S. involvement and escalation in Indochina, that at one point there might be another direct clash between American and Chinese forces, and that the Soviet Union therefore would be called upon to come to the aid of its Chinese ally.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

As the Soviets entered the Geneva Conference, then, it seems that one of their primary aims was to diminish the possibility of U.S. intervention, either in the guise of a united action or unilaterally, in Indochina. While this outlook did not prevent the Soviets from seeking to capitalize on the change in administration in Paris from Laniel to Mendes-France, it did work in the general direction of a reasonable settlement that would be honorable for the French and generally acceptable to the Viet Minh. The Russians evidently believed, however, that so long as the French (and the British) were agreeable to a settlement, the Americans would be hard-pressed to disregard their allies and intervene.

(2) USSR Wishes to Prevent French Support of EDC

EDC was also almost certainly on Molotov's mind during the negotiations. There is no evidence to support the contention of some writers that Molotov explicitly baited Mendes-France with a lenient Indochina settlement in return for Assembly rejection of EDC, but Molotov need not have been that explicit. Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interest to pressure the DRV for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby somewhat offset the need for an EDC. Soviet interests, in short, probably dictated the sacrifice of Viet Minh goals if necessary to prevent German re-militarization.

(3) USSR Seizes the Opportunity to Create a New Communist State

Soviet efforts to gain control of Iran, Manchuria, Greece and Korea indicate a possible third objective of their diplomacy at Geneva. In these instances, the Soviet Union attempted to gain control of the target state by establishing a communist enclave in the target state itself. This enclave would become, then, "a first stage in the ultimate absorption of the whole state by the communist bloc." It may have been that, in the Soviet view, the timing for such a move in Vietnam was correct and that control of Vietnam would come without the necessity for military conquest. 1/

c. Chinese Objectives: The Need for Border Security

In contrast to the Soviet position, the Chinese made their goals at Geneva quite clear: (1) emphasizing the commitment to assist "wars of national liberation"; (2) guarding against the possibility of U.S. military intervention; (3) preventing the Indochinese states from becoming U.S. bases or joining the American alliance system; and (4) promoting the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" as part of China's effort to extend its influence across Asia. Central to each of these objectives was the need to create a zone of security that encompassed Laos, Cambodia, and the northern half of Vietnam, to insure China's southwestern flank against intrusion by the U.S. or any other large foreign power.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(1) China's Policy Calls for Assistance to "Wars of National Liberation"

From the moment Chinese troops arrived at the Sino-Vietnamese border, Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh was clearly in line with Peking's policy of assisting wars of national liberation. This theme was alluded to frequently by Chinese delegates at Geneva. The Chinese, however, carefully controlled the dispensation of that aid in support of the war, and only after the Berlin Conference did they significantly augment it to assure the fall of Dien Bien Phu. Regardless of Marxist rationale advanced by China for its policy toward the Viet Minh, China historically had acted to obtain vassal states on its periphery. China's domestic cohesion having been restored, it turned, consistent with centuries of policy towards Vietnam, to projecting its influence into Southeast Asia via Vietnam.

(2) China Wary of U.S. Intervention

In providing less assistance than it could have, Peking may very well have been wary of prompting American intervention and a wider war. In this respect, U.S. warnings to China during 1953 from an American Administration which publicly vowed a very hard line toward the communist bloc could not be ignored by Peking. The Chinese by 1954 had evinced, moreover, greater concern than previously over the military effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Having been through a costly war in Korea, and having decided as early as the fall of 1952 to give priority to "socialist reconstruction" at home, Peking was in no position to risk provoking the United States. Its willingness to work for a settlement of the Indochina war may have stemmed, in this light, from the conviction that: (a) the DRV had made sufficient military gains for China, i.e., territorial control in northern Vietnam; and (b) that the DRV should not be allowed to provoke the West (and the U.S. in particular) into a precipitous military response that would change the nature of the war and perhaps of China's commitment as well.

(3) China Wishes to Prevent Laos and Cambodia from Becoming U.S. Allies

Besides assuring that a communist state would occupy the northern portion of Vietnam, China also sought to neutralize the two other Indochinese states. Chou indicated at the Conference that he had no objection to the introduction of arms and military personnel into Cambodia or Laos after the cease-fire; 2/ nor did he object to their monarchical form of government, 3/ to their independent handling of internal political problems, 4/ or to their joining the French Union. 5/ Surprisingly, Chou asked no concessions from the French on these counts, although the French had half-expected Chou to press for better trade relations, support for a CPR seat in the United Nations, or French diplomatic recognition of Communist China. 6/ Instead, Chou made clear that China was concerned preeminently about the establishment of U.S. bases in Cambodia and Laos for potential use against the mainland. Concessions to the French may

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

have been seen by Peking as a way of keeping the French "in" and the Americans out. The rapid collapse of France could create a vacuum into which the U.S. would be forced to move.

The Chinese were disturbed about the prospect of Cambodia, Laos, and the State of Vietnam becoming members of the proposed U.S. security treaty system for Southeast Asia. 7/ When, for example, Chou met with the Cambodian Foreign Minister (Nong Kimny) on 17 July, the Chinese Premier implicitly warned against Cambodian participation in a Southeast Asia pact or acceptance of foreign bases. The consequences of either move by Cambodia, Chou said, would be very serious for Cambodian independence and territorial integrity. And he specifically stated that his remarks applied equally to Laos and Vietnam. 8/ Peking was not interested in new territorial acquisitions; but neither would it tolerate an American military threat close by.

(4) China Attempts to Enhance the Image of "Peaceful Coexistence"

A final Chinese objective was to enhance China's image as an Asian power sincerely dedicated to peaceful coexistence. The policy of "peaceful coexistence" was framed in terms of the five principles: mutual friendship, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, non-aggression, equality and mutual respect for territorial integrity. The Chinese invested much time and travel in convincing their Asian neighbors of Peking's sincerity. Seen in this larger context, the Indochina settlement, for which Chou must be credited with a major share, bolstered Peking's image as a dedicated worker for peace whose voice had to be heeded in Asian councils. Not inconsequentially, China's stock in the communist bloc must have risen as well.

2. USSR and China Serve as Moderating Influences on the Viet Minh

a. Opening Position of Both Countries Supports DRV Hard Line

For a variety of reasons the Soviets and Chinese found it in their respective interests to work for a peaceful settlement of the Indochina War. Although giving the impression, at first, of being fully behind the Viet Minh negotiating position, Molotov and Chou En-lai gradually moved toward accommodation with the French. The two chief communist delegates were in fact instrumental in gaining concessions from the Viet Minh and in proposing acceptable alternatives to the French. At the outset of the Conference, Molotov and Chou outwardly supported without qualification Pham Van Dong's proposal for a political settlement to be followed by a cease-fire. When it became clear that the French were not going to accept that proposal, they evidently agreed that further progress required a separation of military from political discussions. Molotov's suggestion at the first restricted session of 17 May along these lines, and Chou's remark to Eden on 20 May that a cease-fire should have priority, represented real breakthroughs and probably were the cause of Pham Van Dong's willingness to engage in private military discussions with French General Delteil.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

b. Shift to Support of Bilateral French-DRV Discussions is Apparent Early

The Soviet and Chinese delegations -- much more than the Viet Minh -- were more anxious for direct Franco-Viet Minh discussions. The fact that Soviet officials on 30 March and again 5 May told Western officials that bilateral talks would be the most profitable form of negotiations for a cease-fire 9/ suggests that the communists' initial backing of Pham Van Dong's proposal may have been simply a trial balloon. Once the French, supported by the U.K. and U.S., refused to budge from their call for an immediate, closely inspected cease-fire, Chou and Molotov were left free to initiate talks in the direction of compromise.

c. USSR and China Change DRV Approach to Cease-fire

The pressure that the Chinese and the Soviets were able to bring to bear apparently forced the DRV to acquiesce in a cease-fire prior to a military settlement. Pham Van Dong had argued for a plan which would have made a cease-fire throughout Indochina contingent on the satisfaction of Viet Minh conditions for general elections and the formation of three united governments. But at the first restricted session of the Conference on 17 May, Molotov pointed out that French proposals up to that point had dealt only with military matters, and proposed therefore that these be dealt with before going on to political arrangements. 10/ The Chinese agreed with this approach. In a conversation with Eden, Chou En-lai concurred in the separation of military from political matters, with priority to a cease-fire. 11/ When, therefore, Hoang Van Hoan reportedly told Le Monde on 24 May that the DRV posed "not a single prior political condition," he was reflecting the views of the Soviets and Chinese as much as paying the way for Dong's initiative of the next day.

d. DRV Responds to Sino-Soviet Pressure on Partition

There is evidence to believe that both the Chinese and the Soviets were instrumental in bringing about a series of Viet Minh concessions on the issue of where to draw the demarcation line between North and South Vietnam. The possibility of partition had been suggested initially to U.S. officials as early as 4 March by a member of the Soviet Embassy in London, apparently out of awareness of Franco-American objections to a coalition arrangement. 12/ The partition line mentioned at that time was the 16th parallel, which would have placed Tourane (Da Nang) in the hands of the Viet Minh (the 16th parallel crosses a few miles south of the port). It was also the Soviets who, on the opening day of the conference, approached the U.S. delegation on partition -- this time averring that the establishment of a buffer state to China's south would be sufficient satisfaction of China's security needs. 13/

In late June, after several rounds of secret Franco-Viet Minh military talks had failed to make headway, Ta Quang Buu (Vice Minister of National Defense) was still insisting on the 13th parallel, which strikes the coast just south of Tuy Hoa, as the partition line. 14/ As suggested

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

by Lacouture and Devillers, the Viet Minh may have been seeking to capitalize on Mendes-France's reputation as a man of peace, and on the ongoing withdrawal of French Union forces from the southern Delta. 15/ This Viet Minh position underwent a drastic change by the middle of July; and the change can be traced to a meeting between Chou En-lai and Ho Chi Minh at Nanning near the China-Vietnam border. According to CIA reports, Chou applied pressure on Ho to accept a partition line much farther to the North, probably the 17th or 18th parallel. 16/ Pham Van Dong's subsequent compromise position indicating a willingness of the Viet Minh to discuss partition at the 16th parallel seems to have originated in the talks between Chou and Ho. 17/

The French, however, refused to budge from their opposition even though Molotov argued that the 16th parallel represented a substantial Viet Minh concession and demanded a French quid pro quo. 18/ The Soviet delegate then came forward with a new proposal to draw the demarcation line at the 17th. 19/ Precisely what motivated Molotov to make this proposal is not clear. Speculatively, Molotov may simply have traded considerable territorial advantage to the French (much more than was warranted by the actual Tonkin military situation) for some progress on the subject of elections. The Western negotiators, at least, recognized this possibility: Eden considered a line between the 17th and 18th parallels worth trading for a mutually acceptable position on elections; 20/ and Mendes-France observed in a conversation with Molotov that the election and demarcation questions might be linked in the sense that each side could yield on one of the questions. 21/

e. Molotov Proposes Compromise on Elections

The French had consistently held out for general elections in Vietnam, but without a time limit. (Election dates for Laos and Cambodia were already set by their constitutions as August and September 1955, respectively.) Molotov, however, reflected Viet Minh thinking in proposing that a date be fixed, offering June 1955, but suggesting that elections might be agreed upon for 1955 with the exact date to be decided between Vietnamese and Viet Minh authorities. 22/ The Chinese proved much more flexible. In a talk with a member of the British delegation, Li K'o-nung argued for a specific date, but said his government was willing to set it within two or three years of the cease-fire. 23/ Once again, the compromise was worked out on Molotov's initiative. At a meeting on 19 July attended by Eden, Mendes-France, Chou, and Dong, Molotov drew the line at two years. 24/ In view of the DRV demand for six months, the French compromise position of 18 months, and the Soviets' own one-year plan, the West had good reason to accept Molotov's offer.

f. DRV is Pressed to Give Up Claims for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer Representation

A third instance in which Viet Minh ambitions were cut short by the diplomatic intrusion of their comrades concerned the status of the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Pathet Lao and Free Khmer. Throughout the month of May, the DRV had demanded that representatives of these movements be invited to the Conference to sit, like the Viet Minh, as belligerents wielding governmental power. These demands were consistently rejected by the non-communist side, which argued that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were creatures of the Viet Minh, guilty of aggression against the Cambodian and Laotian governments (in contrast to the "civil war" in Vietnam), and not deserving status which they had in no way earned. When Molotov, on 17 May, recommended that "military matters" should be considered first, the question of seating the Pathet Lao and Khmer delegations was dropped.

Nevertheless, the Viet Minh persisted in their position on an all-Indochina political settlement when the significant bargaining was reduced to "underground" military talks between them and the French beginning in early June. 25/ The first compromise of the Viet Minh's position came on 20 May when Chou En-lai, in the same conversation with Eden at which the chief Chinese delegate also agreed to separate military from political matters, admitted that political settlements might be different for the three Indochinese states. Chou thus moved a step closer to the Western position, which held that the Laotian and Cambodian cases were substantially different from that in Vietnam. Not surprisingly, the Viet Minh, at a secret meeting with the French on 10 June, suddenly indicated their preference for concentrating on Vietnam rather than demanding the inclusion of Laotian and Cambodian problems in the bilateral discussions. 26/

g. Chinese Play a Major Role in Pathet Lao-Free Khmer Exclusion

The Viet Minh's major concern, as indicated on 16 June, was that they at least obtain absolute control of the Tonkin Delta, including Hanoi and Haiphong. 27/ Neither Chou nor the Viet Minh, however, went so far as to dismiss the existence of legitimate resistance movements in Laos and Cambodia. But in ongoing talks with the British, Chou proved far more willing than the Viet Minh to push aside Pathet Lao-Free Khmer interests. On 17 June, at a time when four rounds of secret Franco-Viet Minh military talks had failed to make headway, Chou told Eden that it "would not be difficult" to gain Viet Minh agreement on withdrawing their "volunteers" from Cambodia and Laos. Eden, moreover, got the impression from his meeting with Chou that the latter earnestly wanted a settlement and was greatly concerned over the possible break up of the conference. 28/ Cambodian resistance forces were small, making a political settlement with the Royal Government "easily" obtainable. In Laos, where those forces were larger, regroupment areas along the border with Vietnam and China (Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces) would be required. Asked by Eden whether there might not be difficulty in gaining Viet Minh agreement to the withdrawal of their forces from the two countries, Chou replied it would "not be difficult" in the context of a withdrawal of all foreign forces. 29/

The Chinese, almost certainly with Soviet support, 30/ had made a major breakthrough in the negotiations by implicitly adopting the Western view that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces did not represent

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

legitimate indigenous movements and should be withdrawn. The Viet Minh volte-face came, as in the other cases, soon after. A Laotian delegate reported on 23 June that the Viet Minh were in apparent accord on the withdrawal of their "volunteers" and even on Laos' retention of French treaty bases. The Viet Minh's principal demand was that French military personnel in Laos be reduced to a minimum. Less clearly, Dong made suggestions about the creation of a government of "national union," Pathet Lao participation in 1955 elections for the national assembly, and a "temporary arrangement" governing areas dominated by Pathet Lao military forces. 31/ But these latter remarks were meant to be suggestive; Dong had come around to the Western view (now shared by the Soviets and Chinese) on the important point of removing Viet Minh troops from Laos. Later in the conference, Dong would have to make a similar retreat on Cambodia.

h. USSR and China Agree to a Control Commission

While the Viet Minh from the beginning had pressed for no outside control or supervision of either military or political agreements concerning Indochina, all other delegations quickly moved in that direction. The Soviets took the lead on the communist side. The major issue was the composition and voting procedure of the proposed International Control Commission. From the Western standpoint, the ICC should not have had a communist representative, since no communist could be considered neutral. The Soviets retorted, as expected, that Western backing of a Colombo Power (India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Ceylon, or Burma) was subject to the same objection, namely, that each of these nations always would vote with the Western bloc. As the matter evolved, a compromise settlement provided for a three-nation formula including one communist state. Both aspects of this agreement were based on Molotov's original plan. 32/

As to voting procedure, the communists not surprisingly insisted on unanimity, at least for "major questions." The West, while accepting that rule, considered pushing for acceptance of majority voting to determine whether a question was minor or major. 33/ The result (Article 42 of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam) was to specify unanimous agreement among the Commission representatives on matters pertinent to violations, or threats of violations, that might lead to the resumption of hostilities. However, minority reports could be issued where the Commission was unable to agree on a recommendation.

i. Sino-Soviet Influence Has Significant Effect

There is little doubt that the conference would not have been able to move against the initial DRV intransigence without assistance from the Soviets and Chinese. In the opening phase of discussion, both the major powers voiced complete agreement with the DRV in policy and aims, but through a series of moves both powers also made great efforts to soften the DRV hard line and to allow enough flexibility for concessions. The first problem, involving the seating of the Pathet Lao and Khmer, was solved by Soviet and Chinese agreement to postpone -- indefinitely, as it turned out -- any discussion of the question. The second stumbling block was the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Viet Minh insistence on a political solution before a cease-fire. The ability of the Chinese and Soviets to overcome DRV resistance on this point was very encouraging early in the proceedings. Russia and China were active behind the scenes on the question of partition, with Russia taking the initiative even before the conference began, and with both major powers influencing the decisions as the French and Viet Minh moved toward a mutually agreeable demarcation line. The common-sense role that the USSR and China played with reference to Pathet Lao and Free Khmer inclusion brought about a key concession that had nearly stopped the conference -- the need to separate the Vietnam question from the rest of Indochina. The final difficult question, the composition and function of the Control Commission, dragged along for several weeks, but was finally solved with no little assistance of the USSR and China.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. C. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. M. Mackintosh, Strategy and Tactics of Soviet Foreign Policy (New York: Oxford, 1963), pp. 83-84.
2. In a talk with Nong Kimny, Cambodian Foreign Minister, July 14; in Johnson tel. SECTO 616 from Geneva, July 15, 1954 (SECRET).
3. In a talk with Mendes-France, June 24; in Dillon tel. from Paris priority No. 5035, June 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
4. Ibid. and Johnson priority tel. SECTO 517, June 24, 1954, from Geneva (SECRET), reporting Mendes-France's conversation with Chou in Berne. Chou qualified this somewhat by urging that the resistance elements in the two countries be provided suitable means of re-integration into their respective societies.
5. Dillon tel. from Paris priority No. 5035, June 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. Ibid. See also Johnson priority tel. SECTO 517, June 24, 1954, from Geneva (SECRET).
7. These views were presented, e.g., to Seymour Topping by Huang Hua at a meeting described by Topping as deadly serious and devoid of propagandistic remarks. "When Huang spoke of possibility American bases in Indochina or anti-communist pact in Southeast Asia, he became very agitated, his hands shook, and his usually excellent English broke down, forcing him to work through interpreter." See Smith's tel. SECTO 661 from Geneva, July 19, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Johnson priority tel. SECTO 517 from Geneva, June 24, 1954 (SECRET); Smith priority tel. SECTO 463 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (SECRET); and Smith tel. SECTO 636 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
8. Smith tel. SECTO 635 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (SECRET). Interestingly, at this same conference, Chou indicated it would be acceptable for the Cambodians to have French or British military instructors, but not Americans.
9. Central Intelligence Agency, Memorandum: Asian Communist Employment of Negotiations as a Political Tactic, RSS No. 0017/66, p. 40 (SECRET/No Foreign Dis/Controlled Dis.).
10. U.S. VerbMin/Indochina Restricted 1, pp. 4-5 (CONFIDENTIAL).
11. In Smith tel. SECTO 267 from Geneva, May 20, 1954 (SECRET).
12. CIA Memorandum RS 0017/66 (cited previously), p. 39 (SECRET/No Foreign Dis/Controlled Dis.).
13. Ibid., p. 41.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

14. Lacouture and Devillers, pp. 238-39.
15. Ibid., pp. 239-40.
16. CIA Memo: "Asian Communist Employment of Negotiations as a Political Tactic" (SECRET), RSS 0017/66.
17. Lacouture and Devillers, pp. 257-58.
18. Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 632, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
19. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 268.
20. Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 638, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).
21. Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 632, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
22. Ibid.
23. Smith from Geneva tel. SECTO 645, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).
24. Lacouture and Devillers, p. 268.
25. See, e.g., Lacouture and Devillers, p. 213.
26. Ibid., p. 215.
27. This was the demand made by the Viet Minh in secret talks with the French. Reported in Smith's priority tel. from Geneva DULTE 187, June 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
28. Smith from Geneva tel. DULTE 193, June 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
29. Smith tel. DULTE 193 from Geneva, June 17, 1954 (TOP SECRET). See also Lacouture and Devillers, pp. 217 and 219.
30. In a talk with Smith June 19, Molotov discussed the Laos and Cambodia resistance movements and said he saw the possibility of agreement so long as neither side (i.e., the French or the Viet Minh) "adopted one-sided views or put forward extreme pretensions." Molotov said about 50 percent of Laotian territory was not controlled by the royal government (a curious way of putting it), with a much smaller movement in Cambodia. The tone of Smith's report on this conversation suggests that Molotov saw no obstacles to Viet Minh withdrawal of its "volunteers." Smith tel. DULTE 202 from Geneva, June 19, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
31. Johnson from Geneva tel. SECTO 514, June 23, 1954 (SECRET).
32. See e.g., Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 637, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
33. Smith from Geneva priority tel. SECTO 638, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).

D. THE INTENT OF THE
GENEVA ACCORDS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. •

THE INTENT OF THE GENEVA ACCORDS

SUMMARY

One of the principal controversies surrounding the Geneva Conference concerns the intent of the Armistice and the Final Declaration. While it is clear that the Armistice between the French and the Viet Minh was designed to end the actual hostilities, the political intent of the belligerents, and that of the Conference participants expressed in the Final Declaration, is in doubt. The central issue in dispute is whether or not the participants intended to unify Vietnam, and if so, whether the subsequent actions of the U.S. and the GVN in frustrating that intent make them culpable for the present war.

China and Russia were, in general, pleased with the results of the Geneva Conference, even though they had been forced to accept a settlement considerably at variance from their initial demands. Since these powers were primarily interested in attaining their political goals without triggering a massive response from a united West, cessation of the war on even minimally advantageous terms would allow them time to consolidate gains and to extend their control further into Southeast Asia with fewer risks. They recognized that the DRV did not receive concessions commensurate with its military power and political control, but the Communists, probably miscalculating the future U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, no doubt felt that they could safely transfer the combat from the battlefield to the sphere of politics. However, the final settlement severely compromised DRV expectations and objectives: the line of partition was at the 17th parallel, not the 13th; elections were envisaged after two years, not immediately; supervision was to be by an international body, not by the belligerents themselves; and Communist movements in Laos and Cambodia were denied identity and support, not sanctioned by the Conference. Yet, despite these setbacks and disappointments, the DRV apparently expected to fall heir to all of Vietnam in fairly short order, either through a plebiscite on unification, or by default when the GVN collapsed from internal disorder. (Tab 1)

For the United Kingdom as well as for France, the final outcome at Geneva was in the main satisfactory. The bloodshed had ceased; the danger of broadened conflict was averted. The U.S. understanding of the Accords is more difficult to fathom. Immediately upon the conclusion of the conference, the U.S. representative, Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, stated that the results were the best possible under the circumstances. Both he and President Eisenhower stated that the U.S. "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the [Geneva] agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." President Kennedy in December 1961 used this quote as justification for his support of South Vietnam. But the purpose of

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the U.S. declaration remains obscure. It can be argued that its intent was not a long-term U.S. commitment, but an attempt to deter the DRV from attacking the GVN in the two-year period prior to elections. According to this argument, the Eisenhower Administration would have accepted any outcome if assured that the voting were free. A counter-argument is that Smith was throwing down the gauntlet to the Communists. An NSC action immediately following the Conference considered the Accords a "major disaster for U.S. interests" and called for affirmative political action to foreclose further loss. In other words, while the specifics of the Accords were much in line with the U.S. negotiating position, the overall U.S. evaluation of the Conference held that territory had been yielded to the Communists. In this light, the Smith declaration marks the jumping-off point for the concerted U.S. efforts to devise a collective security system for Vietnam and all of Southeast Asia, which culminated in the Manila Pact of September, 1954 (SEATO), and the aid program for Ngo Dinh Diem. (Tab 2)

Interpretations of the spirit of the Accords are as disparate as the interests of the Geneva conferees. Yet, it is difficult to believe that any of the participants expected the Geneva Accords to provide an independent and unified Vietnam. The Communist states -- the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the DRV -- apparently assumed that the development of a stable regime in the South was very unlikely, and that the DRV would eventually gain control of the entire country. They, in any event, had sound evidence that the GVN was unlikely to last out the two years before elections. It may well be, then, that the conciliatory posture of the Communist states at the conference can be explained by their presumption that the specific terms of agreement were less important than the detente itself -- that their future successes, however slow in coming, were inevitable. Western reactions and expectations, on the other hand, were no doubt quite different. While France was interested in extricating itself from its military failure, it was no less interested in maintaining its cultural and economic position in Vietnam. Even the United Kingdom gave every indication that it wished to prevent a general Communist takeover. Hence, it would appear that these powers, like the U.S., wanted to stop the fighting, but not at the sacrifice of all of Vietnam to the Communists. Thus, the spirit of the Accords may have been much less significant than the letter of the Accords. In other words, by dividing the country at the 17th parallel, with each zone under a separate "civil administration," by providing for the regroupment of forces and the movement of people North and South, and by putting off elections for two years, the Geneva participants jeopardized, if not precluded, the unification of Vietnam. Whatever the parties intended, the practical effect of the specific terms of the Agreement was a permanently divided nation. (Tab 3)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

DISCUSSION

III. D. Tab 1 - The Outcome for the Communists

Tab 2 - The Outcome for the West

Tab 3 - The Spirit and the Practical Effect of Geneva

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 1. THE OUTCOME FOR THE COMMUNISTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>The Major Communist Powers Achieve Their Objectives</u>	D-5
a. Communists See Complete Takeover as Inevitable.....	D-5
b. Chinese Not Adverse to Permanent Partition.....	D-5
c. China Sees Creation of a Neutral Buffer Zone.....	D-6
d. China's Domestic Economy is Protected.....	D-6
e. U.S. Threat of Massive Intervention is Forestalled.....	D-6
f. Prospects of Short-Run Stability Please the Russians.....	D-6
g. Russians See Influence on French View of EDC.....	D-7
2. <u>The Major Communist Powers Perceive Certain Losses</u>	D-7
a. Communist Consolidation of All Indochina is Not Achieved.....	D-7
b. U.S. Influence in Indochina is Not Prevented.....	D-7
3. <u>The DRV Views its Gains and Losses</u>	D-8
a. Advantages are Gained, but at a Price.....	D-8
b. The DRV is Insured of Territorial Consolidation.....	D-8
c. Election Plans Point to Eventual DRV Domination.....	D-9
4. <u>The DRV is Satisfied with the Geneva Outcome</u>	D-9

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 1. THE OUTCOME FOR THE COMMUNISTS

1. Major Communist Powers Achieve Their Objectives

To judge from the public commentaries of the communist delegation leaders -- Molotov and Chou -- China and the Soviet Union were satisfied with the outcome at Geneva. The final settlement seemed to meet most of their objectives, measured not simply in terms of their narrow interests in Indochina, but more broadly in terms of their global interests. The Viet Minh, however, accepted a settlement considerably at variance not only with their initial demands and their actual military control in Vietnam, but with their compromise position as well. Yet, even the Viet Minh appeared content with the results of Geneva. The reason -- the belief that time was on their side.

a. Communists See Complete Takeover as Inevitable

At the final plenary session on 21 July, the Soviet, Chinese, and North Vietnamese delegates agreed that the Accords, if properly implemented, would end hostilities and give the DRV a territorial base in the North. The stage would thus be set for general elections in Vietnam and produce the desired communist takeover. The political situation in South Vietnam was precarious. In addition, there was a multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to the central government of Bao Dai who continually relied on the French. The communists certainly had good cause for considering that South Vietnam could not cohere sufficiently within the two-year period prior to national elections, stipulated by the Final Declaration, to pose a viable alternative to the DRV. The communists had good reason to believe that a stable regime in the southern zone would never be formed; hence the DRV would assume control of the entire country almost by default.

b. Chinese Not Adverse to Permanent Partition

Interestingly, however, the Chinese accepted the notion that the Geneva Accords had, at least temporarily -- and perhaps permanently -- created two separate political entities. As early as June, Chou told Jean Chauvel that the Chinese recognized the existence of Viet Minh and Vietnamese governments. In talking of a final political settlement, Chou again stated that this should be achieved by direct negotiations between the two Vietnamese governments. 1/ So far as the CPR was concerned, partition meant not a simple division of administrative responsibility -- which is the implication of the Vietnam armistice provision (Article 14a) for the conduct of "civil administration" by the "parties" who were to regroup to the two zones -- but the establishment of governmental authority in North and South Vietnam. What still remains unclear, of course, is the permanency which Chou privately attached to that arrangement.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

c. China Sees Creation of a Neutral Buffer Zone

Beyond Vietnam, the Chinese apparently believed that the final agreements would preclude the three Indochinese states from involvement in the American security system. When Chou communicated to Eden his concern about Laotian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian participation in a Southeast Asia treaty organization, the Foreign Secretary said he knew of no proposal for those States to join. ^{2/} The next day Eden told Molotov that a security pact in Southeast Asia was inevitable and completely in line with British policy; but he added that no consideration was being given to the inclusion of Cambodia and Laos (a comment which Smith regarded as a "mistake" inasmuch as the U.S. hoped to use the threat of their inclusion to get a better settlement). ^{3/} When the conference closed, the Chinese felt sufficiently assured about the matter, it would seem. On 23 July, a Chinese journalist confided: "We have won the first campaign for the neutralization of all Southeast Asia." ^{4/}

d. China's Domestic Economy is Protected

China, at this time, was greatly concerned with her own internal problems, and anxious to consolidate at home before moving further into Asia. The Korean War had exacerbated the pressing economic and political problems within China, as had the attempts by Peking to push an economic reconstruction beyond the limits of possibility. The Chinese were satisfied that the Indochina situation after Geneva allowed, at least, temporary assurance that a major effort could be turned inward without fear of repercussions along China's southwestern border.

e. U.S. Threat of Massive Intervention is Forestalled

The USSR and China had watched warily the sporadic attempts of the U.S.; first, to keep the Indochina problem out of Geneva, and second, to gather the Western nations into united action to prevent communist consolidation of Indochina. There was an element of unpredictability concerning U.S. action in Southeast Asia, fostered purposely to a great extent by the U.S. and UK (with calculated moves such as the bilateral military talks in Washington), but also emphasized by the inordinate number and wide variety of public statements on Indochina that were made by official and semi-official Washington during the months of June and July, while the Geneva Conference sat. Peking and Moscow, then, had some reason to believe that they had pre-empted U.S. military moves by diplomacy.

f. Prospects of Short-Run Stability Please the Russians

The Soviet government was not dedicated to the furtherance of Chinese goals in Southeast Asia, nor did the USSR want to see an increase in U.S. influence in this area. For these reasons, it was greatly in the interest of the Soviets to press for the withdrawal of French power from Indochina -- but in a way calculated to inhibit any major increase in U.S. or Chinese power to replace the French. The creation, therefore,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of a neutral state in Vietnam (or even the creation of two opposed half-states) met the immediate requirements of the USSR in the best manner possible under the circumstances -- and it was the short-range solution that the Soviets, as well as the other delegations, were seeking at Geneva. The future would take care of itself.

g. Russians See Influence on French View of EDC

Whether or not the cause and effect relationship can be proved with any accuracy, the fact remains that the French did not ratify the EDC agreements when these were presented to the French Assembly a month after Geneva. The reaction in the USSR was described as "jubilant," hailing the French rejection as "an important event in the political history of Europe." 5/ This event, following closely on the termination of the Geneva Convention, was seen by the Soviets as, at least in part, influenced by the communist strategy of letting the French off the hook in Geneva.

2. The Major Communist Powers Perceive Certain Losses

a. Communist Consolidation of All of Indochina is Not Achieved

At least for the immediate future, a communist consolidation of all of Indochina was out of the question. Regardless of how inevitable the surge of communist control into the area might seem, the move had come to a halt temporarily at the 17th parallel. In effect, the communists were not prepared to take the risks in pursuing their very real superiority, if not on the battlefield, then in the psyche. The communist assertion at Geneva that the Viet Minh controlled three quarters of the area of Vietnam was close to the truth. The decision to relinquish this local control throughout Vietnam must have been viewed as a loss.

b. U.S. Influence in Indochina is Not Prevented

A major political and military objective of China was the prevention of U.S. bases in Southeast Asia. This aim, paralleling the Soviet objective of blocking U.S. influence in Europe, was an important part of overall Chinese strategy at Geneva. But, if the Chinese Government considered the Geneva provisions a first step toward Southeast Asia's neutralization, this estimate was quickly disabused. The governments of Laos and Cambodia issued declarations on 21 July, which left room for the conclusion of alliances and the stationing of foreign forces on their territory. To ease the communist outcry, both countries vowed not to ally themselves in any manner "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations," nor to permit foreign bases while their security was not threatened. 6/ Nevertheless, their delegates indicated even before the Conference that U.S. protection of their countries against aggression was desirable. The two zones of Vietnam, in contrast, were categorically enjoined from permitting the establishment of foreign military bases and from adhering to military alliances (Article 19 of the armistice agreement). The Chinese, because they were unable to obtain

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

a. U.S. guarantee of the Accords, could not prevent the U.S. from subsequently bringing Cambodia and Laos within the security perimeter of SEATO through the Protocol, a device broached by Under Secretary Smith at Geneva. 7/ Later, the U.S. spread this umbrella over SVN as well.

3. The DRV Views Its Gains and Losses

a. Advantages are Gained, but at a Price

In terms of advantages, the military accords signed 21 July by Ta Quang Buu, Vice-Minister of National Defense of the DRV, and Brigadier General Delteil, Commander of French Union Forces in Indochina, ceded the DRV full control of all Vietnamese territory north of the line set roughly at the 17th parallel. French attempts to acquire enclaves in the area of the bishoprics and around Haiphong had been rejected, and all French forces were to be withdrawn from Haiphong within 300 days. Moreover, the Final Declaration of the Conference specified that the demarcation line was provisional and, under Article 7, would be expunged by elections to be held in July, 1956. The DRV, therefore, could look forward to a possible legal victory at the ballot boxes within two years.

But, the disappointments to the Viet Minh must have weighed heavily also. National unity was specifically compromised by the creation of two zones divided by a demilitarized area at the 17th, rather than the 13th or 14th, parallel. A fast political solution in six months had to be bargained away as well; elections would not be held for two years, and even then under international, not strictly Vietnamese, supervision. Finally, the Viet Minh had been forced to yield completely on their claims advanced in support of the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces. In Laos and Cambodia, as in Vietnam, international rather than indigenous inspection teams were to be admitted. The so-called resistance forces would either have to be withdrawn (in Laos, following temporary regroupment) or demobilized (in Cambodia) on the spot. The Viet Minh could only salvage promises from the governments of Laos and Cambodia -- contained in their separate declarations of 21 July -- that "citizens" of the two countries would be able to participate as candidates or electors in elections to be held during 1955. The Viet Minh accepted these results even though they went well beyond compromise positions which they advanced through the talks.

b. The DRV is Insured of Territorial Consolidation

The Viet Minh had no desire to surrender their de facto control over considerable areas of Vietnam outside the Tonkin Delta. During June and July, according to CIA maps, Viet Minh forces held down the larger portion of Annam (excepting the major port cities) and significant pockets in the Cochin-China delta. Their consequent claim to all the territory north of a line running northwest from the 13th to the 14th parallel (from Tuy Hoa on the coast through Pleiku to the Cambodian border) 8/ was far more in keeping with the actual military situation than the French demand.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

for location of the partition line at the 18th parallel. Yet, the French would never consent to admitting communist control on the borders of both Cambodia and Laos. The final decision to partition the country at the 17th parallel was, nevertheless, a success to the extent that it provided the DRV with absolute, unchallenged political control of half of Vietnam -- a situation which the Viet Minh began then to view as the first crucial step in the series of political moves that would achieve goals commensurate with their military power: the quick political conquest ("liberation") of the rest of the country.

c. Election Plans Point to Eventual DRV Domination

In keeping with their desire for haste in achieving an "all-Vietnamese" political settlement, the Viet Minh, while agreeing to partition, wanted it to be temporary and to be followed quickly by elections. The Viet Minh delegates, therefore, had argued that elections should be held six months after a cease-fire. But, the French retorted elections should be held 18 months after completion of the regroupment process, or between 22 and 23 months after the cease-fire. 9/ The compromise, urged by the USSR and China, accomplished what was in fact the most important aim of the election talks: the fixing of a date, thus providing insurance that the elections would take place. In a very real sense, though, the two year lag gave the GVN invaluable time, and communist strategy on this issue seemed to have backfired.

4. The DRV is Satisfied with the Geneva Outcome

The Viet Minh evidently believed -- and no French authority on the spot doubted this -- that it had the capability to eliminate the French from Tonkin with one major offensive, and to drive on for further gains in the South against a weakened, demoralized Franco-Vietnamese army. Fighting and talking simultaneously was pointed to with approval by the Viet Minh as a tactic capable of being pursued for two years (like the Chinese in Korea) in order to assure greater territorial control. Whether the Viet Minh ultimately envisaged the conquest of all Vietnam before reaching agreement with the French is not known; but, like the French, the Viet Minh probably regarded maximum control of territory and population as insurance against future elections. Reporters covering the Geneva Convention quoted bitter comments of the DRV delegation after the final meeting, when the agreements were made public. There is good reason to believe, however, that, in reality, the Viet Minh were satisfied with the results attained at Geneva. This satisfaction was based in part on certain miscalculations on the part of the DRV, which underestimated the future commitment of the U.S. to the South Vietnamese and which also underestimated the survivability of Diem and his government. It is apparent that the DRV felt that its losses at Geneva amounted merely to delays that would set back the time schedules in Indochina, but that such a payment in time was well worth the territorial gains and the prevention of Western united action in Vietnam. Unlike GVN and U.S. statements during and after Geneva, Viet Minh representatives publicly supported both the military agreements and the Final Declaration without qualification.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 1.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dillon priority tel. No. 5035 from Paris, June 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
2. Smith tel. SECTO 636 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
3. Smith NIACT tel. SECTO 639 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).
4. CIA Memorandum RSS 0017/66, p. 46 (SECRET/NoFornDis/Controlled Dis).
5. Mackintosh, pp. 84-85.
6. The declarations may be found in Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents Relating to British Involvement in the Indo-China Conflict 1945-1965, Misc. No. 25, Cmnd. 2834 (London: H.M.S.O., 1965), pp. 76 (Cambodia) and 79 (Laos).
7. In a talk with the Cambodian Foreign Minister Sam Sary, Philip Bonsal suggested that it would not be possible to guarantee Cambodia's security by a Conference mechanism subject to communist veto. Bonsal said, however, that once a satisfactory cease-fire were concluded, one that did not prevent Cambodia from cooperating with other non-communist states in defense matters, "he was confident U.S. and other interested countries looked forward to discussing with Cambodian Government" the security problem. (Johnson priority tel. SECTO 627 from Geneva, July 16, 1954, SECRET.) When Sam Sary called a few days later on Smith in the company of Nong Kimny (Ambassador to Washington), the Under Secretary recommended that Phnom Penh, at the Conference, state its intention not to have foreign bases on its territory and not to enter into military alliances. At the same time, though, Cambodia would be free to import arms and to employ French military instructors and technicians. While Cambodia would thus perhaps not be free to join the contemplated SEATO, she might still benefit from it. Smith "assured the Cambodian Foreign Minister that, in our view, any aggression overt or covert against Cambodian territory would bring pact into operation even though Cambodia not a member. I took position that French Union membership afforded Cambodia adequate desirable means of securing through France necessary arms, some of which would be American, as well as necessary instructors and technicians, some of which might well be American trained." Nong Kimny "limited himself to statement that Cambodia relies heavily on U.S. for eventual protection against aggression and that Cambodia desires to emerge from current conference with maximum freedom of action re measures Cambodia may take to assure defense." Smith tel. SECTO 650 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL).
8. See Chauvel's report in Johnson's priority tel. SECTO 553 from Geneva, July 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET). Also: Lacouture and Devillers, p. 238.
9. Dillon from Paris tel. No. 32, July 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 2.

THE OUTCOME FOR THE WEST

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>U.K. Diplomacy is an Unqualified Success</u>	D-12
a. British Prestige is Heightened.....	D-12
b. Danger of a Wider War is Averted.....	D-12
2. <u>For France, The Results are Better Than Expected</u>	D-12
a. France is Extricated without Dishonor.....	D-12
b. France Retains a Significant Foothold in Indochina.....	D-13
3. <u>GVN Achieves More Than Its Situation Warrants</u>	D-13
4. <u>U.S. Attitude on Geneva is Mixed</u>	D-14
a. Initial U.S. Public View is Cautious.....	D-14
b. Public and Private Reactions Vary.....	D-14
c. U.S.-U.K. Seven-Point Program is Mostly Accomplished.....	D-15
d. Smith States U.S. Position on Accords.....	D-16

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 2. THE OUTCOME FOR THE WEST

1. U.K. Diplomacy is an Unqualified Success

a. British Prestige is Heightened

The diplomacy of the Geneva Conference can be viewed as a success for the co-chairmen -- the U.K. and the USSR. Although some have described Chou En-lai as the most influential delegate at Geneva, 1/ and though Molotov rightfully has been credited with a key role in the initiation of needed compromises, Anthony Eden's presence and leadership made a difference in the results of the conference and in Britain's world image. Eden repeatedly acted as an intermediary not only between the Communists and the West, but also among the U.S., France, and the GVN as well. He aided Molotov in seeing proposals for compromise through to agreements, but he was also capable of espousing and maintaining unyielding support for firm Western positions. In particular, he was able to keep the Soviets convinced that the U.K. would be at the side of the U.S. if Communist intransigence led to a stalemate at Geneva. One specific pay-off for the U.K. was Peking's agreement on 17 June (after four years of silence on the point) to exchange charges d'affaires with London.

b. Danger of a Wider War is Averted

Tensions at Geneva were high. The Viet Minh was forcing the initiative on the battlefield in Indochina, the French Government was unstable, and at that time it seemed to many that all of strategic Vietnam would fall into Communist hands. Convictions were strongly held by many that that fall was inevitable unless the West took some united military action, or unless the diplomacy of Geneva brought unsuspected agreement. The danger of a wider war was very real. The U.K. wanted to support France and the United States, but not at the price of British troops and money. London's goal was to terminate the war and reduce international tensions -- to do all this without acceding to a Communist victory, and without adversely affecting British interests in that area of the world. The U.K. managed to steer a course close to its goals despite the fact that the British public was against U.K. military involvement in Indochina. In the end, Eden was able to help avert the risks of a wider war and to bring the U.K. into SEATO -- presumably to help protect British gains at Geneva.

2. For France, the Results are Better Than Expected

a. France is Extricated without Dishonor

The French, probably more than any other party to the conference, had cause for satisfaction. With cooperation from the other major powers, needless to say, the French found themselves a political beneficiary at

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geneva despite France's unstable domestic politics and its poor military posture in Indochina. The settlements at Geneva were respectable enough for the French Government to stay in power. If anything, the results of Geneva provided a greater measure of internal political cohesion than France had enjoyed in a number of years. It would have been very difficult for any French Government to continue the actual fighting in Indochina -- especially when it appeared to many that France was losing.

b. France Retains a Significant Foothold in Indochina

The results at Geneva also allowed France to hold on to something very tangible -- most of Indochina itself. The Viet Minh forces and auxiliaries in Cambodia and Laos were shunted aside, preserving paramount French influence in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Moreover, in South Vietnam the French maintained clear title to their military, cultural, and economic interests; in North Vietnam, they had some prospect of salvaging their investments.

As early as 26 June, France made it privately clear that its intention was to maintain a viable Vietnamese state in the south. Thus, when in late June the Franco-Viet Minh "underground" talks were elevated to direct discussions between Jean Chauvel and Pham Van Dong, the French gave as one of their objectives the hope of arriving at an equitable territorial settlement "which will assure the State of Vietnam a territory as solid as possible..." Although aware of possible violent GVN reaction against partition, the French considered that arrangement best for the GVN inasmuch as it would enable the country "to consolidate herself in such a fashion as to create in the face of the Viet Minh an authentically national and independent force." 2/ In agreeing to partition, the French Government, like Washington, was motivated in part by a desire to assure the State of Vietnam a defensible territory within which the Saigon regime could attempt to construct a stable authority competitive with the DRV.

3. GVN Achieves More Than Its Situation Warrants

Considering the fact that the newly independent State of Vietnam was still little more than a figurehead for French authority, that the French by far were carrying the burden of the fighting against the Viet Minh, and that the French and Vietnamese together were not doing well against the Viet Minh, the GVN received much more than they could have realistically expected from the Geneva Conference. Indeed, Geneva opened new opportunity to the GVN. Though territory had been lost, a way was gained for the establishment of governmental authority in the south. Only through consolidation of territory and regroupment of population could Bao Dai have hopes of being able to meet the challenges -- whether at the polls or militarily -- that the Viet Minh were sure to provide in the future. The GVN delegation at Geneva nonetheless took the view that the Accords were a sell-out to the Communists. While the Saigon Regime did not directly disavow these agreements in the sense that they

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

rejected them altogether, or hinted at their intention of ignoring them, it clearly put a special interpretation on the agreements. For example, the GVN made it plain from the beginning that it would not countenance unsupervised elections. Moreover, it refused to contemplate elections unless and until it could secure and govern all its territory. This position was advantageous for the GVN, because it gave the DRV incentive to avoid actions south of the 17th parallel which might disrupt the election time-table, or give the GVN an excuse for refusing to hold elections. Through the concessions of the Communist countries and the firmness of its Western Allies, the GVN had been given time to consolidate itself.

4. U.S. Attitude on Geneva is Mixed

a. Initial U.S. Public View is Cautious

The U.S. viewed the Conference results with mixed emotions. Publicly, the American position was that the Accords represented the best that could have been obtained from a bad situation. The President, at a 21 July news conference, declined to criticize the Accords. He said they contain "features which we do not like, but a great deal depends on how they work in practice." He announced the U.S. intention to establish permanent missions in Laos and Cambodia, and said the U.S. was actively "pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area." 3/ Under Secretary Smith took the same line two days later. Denying that Geneva was another "Munich," Smith said: "I am . . . convinced that the results are the best that we could possibly have obtained in the circumstances," adding that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield." 4/ Finally, Secretary Dulles, also on 23 July, made a statement to the press oriented toward the future. Referring to "the loss in Northern Vietnam," Dulles expressed the hope that much would be learned from the experience toward preventing further Communist inroads in Asia. Two lessons could be culled, the Secretary observed. First, popular support was essential against Communist subversion; "the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions." Second, collective defense should precede an aggressive enemy move rather than occur as a reaction to it. A collective security system in Southeast Asia, he concluded, would check both outright aggression and subversion. 5/

b. Public and Private Reactions Vary

These initial public U.S. reactions to the Conference results were at considerable variance with what was being said within government councils. The fact that another piece of territory had been formally ceded to the Communists obviously weighed heavily on the Administration. When papers were drawn up for the National Security Council in August, the Geneva Conference was evaluated as a major defeat for Western

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

diplomacy and a potential disaster for U.S. security interests in the Far East. The Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) stated that the Final Declaration of the Conference "completed a major forward stride of Communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia. It, therefore, recorded a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC 5405 and a serious loss for the free world, the psychological and political effects of which will be felt throughout the Far East and around the globe." 6/ In a separate report, the NSC was somewhat more specific concerning the extent of the damage: the Communists acquired "an advance salient" in Vietnam for use in military and non-military ways; the U.S. lost prestige as a leader in Asia capable of stemming Communist expansion; the Communist peace line gained at America's expense; Communist military and political prestige was enhanced as the result of their ability to exploit unstable situations in Southeast Asian countries without resort to armed attack. 7/

c. U.S.-U.K. Seven-Point Program is Mostly Accomplished

The provisions of the Accords, however, should have furnished the U.S. grounds for some satisfaction. Comparing the U.S.-U.K. seven-point memorandum of 29 June with the final settlement nearly one month later, the Conference had very nearly satisfied the minimum U.S. objectives -- despite Washington's apprehension over faltering British or French support.

(1) The integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia were preserved, and Viet Minh forces were, in the main, withdrawn from those two countries.

(2) Southern Vietnam was retained (although without an enclave in the North), and the partition line was drawn somewhat south of Dong Hoi.

(3) Laos, Cambodia, and "retained" Vietnam were not prevented from forming "non-Communist regimes" (in the case of Vietnam, within the two-year pre-election period); nor were they expressly forbidden "to maintain adequate forces for internal security." Vietnam's right to import arms and other war materiel was, however, restricted to piece-by-piece replacement, and a ceiling was fixed on foreign military personnel at the number in the country at the War's close.

(4-5) Recalling Dulles' interpretation of 7 July that elections should "be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance," 8/ the Accords did not stipulate "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control... [or] exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means." Although both Dulles and Mendes-France preferred that no date be set for the elections, the compromise two-year hiatus gave the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese a significant breathing spell. The

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

U.S. priority in the aftermath was accorded to programs designed to "give democratic elements best chance" through economic assistance and political support for South Vietnam. Elections, as Dulles indicated during the Conference, and as the OCB concurred in August,^{9/} were agreeable to the U.S.; but they were two years away, and the primary task in the interim was seen as "to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam..."^{10/} The corollary objective (stated by the NSC in August, 1954, and approved by the President) "to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections,"^{11/} then did not connote U.S. determination to subvert the Accords; rather, it appears to have meant that U.S. influence would aim at assuring that the communists would not gain an electoral victory through force, deceit, or other undemocratic methods.

(6) The Accords expressly provided for the transfer of individuals desiring to move from one zone to another.

(7) The Accords did seem, at the time, to have basically fulfilled the precondition of providing "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement." Although the machinery would be the ICC's rather than the UN's, Under Secretary Smith noted that the ICC would have a veto power on important questions, would be composed of one genuine neutral (India) and one pro-Western government (Canada), and would be permitted full freedom of movement into demilitarized zones and frontier and coastal areas. Smith, on 19 July, gave this assessment:

"Taking everything into consideration, I strongly feel this is satisfactory and much better than we were able to obtain in Korea. French feel, and Eden and I agree, that with such composition built-in veto will work to our advantage. This setup is best French or anybody else could get, and I feel it is within spirit of point 7."^{12/}

d. Smith States U.S. Position on Accords

The final statement by Under Secretary Smith, setting forth the U.S. position on the Accords, provides the only public measure of the U.S. commitment to them. At Smith's urging, Dulles agreed that the U.S. delegation could take note of the Final Declaration as well as of the military agreement. But, Smith was specifically instructed not to take note of paragraph 13 of the Final Declaration. That paragraph aimed at ensuring respect for the armistice accords in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam by declaring the conferees' agreement "to consult one another on any question which may be referred to them by the International Supervisory Commission..." Dulles felt that provision implied:

"...a multilateral engagement with communists which would be inconsistent with our basic approach and which

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

subsequently might enable Communist China to charge us with alleged violations of agreement to which it might claim both governments became parties. 13/

Aside from taking note of the three military armistice agreements and paragraphs 1 to 12 of the Final Declaration, Smith, in line with long-standing U.S. policy and his instructions of 16 July from Dulles, declared on the Government's behalf that the U.S. "will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the Accords. Moreover, the U.S. "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Finally, Smith reiterated a U.S. policy declaration of 29 June 1954 positing U.S. support of UN supervision of free elections designed to reunify countries "now divided against their will..." Smith mentioned on this point that the U.S. could not associate with any arrangement that would hinder "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future ..."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hans Morgenthau, in "The 1954 Geneva Conference: An Assessment" (America's Stake in Vietnam, New York: American Funds of Vietnam, 1956), says Chou was to Geneva what Metternich was to the Congress of Vienna of 1815.
2. Aide-memoire delivered by Bonnet to Dulles and Eden June 26, in Dulles' Tel No. 4852 to American Embassy - Paris, 28 June 1954 (TOP SECRET)
3. White House press release of 21 July 1954
4. Quoted in Richard P. Stebbins, et al., The United States in World Affairs, 1954 (New York: Harper and Bros., 1956), p. 255
5. Department of State press release No. 400, 23 July 1954
6. OCB, Progress Report on United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 5405), 6 August 1954 (TOP SECRET)
7. NSC, Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East (NSC 5429), 4 August 1954 (TOP SECRET)
8. Dulles to American Embassy, Paris, Tel No. 77, 7 July 1954 (SECRET)
9. In its Progress Report of 6 August, OCB said there was need for "political action" to build a strong foundation in free Asia for the continued orientation of the countries there toward the Free World. "A test of such political action and orientation will be the elections in Laos and Cambodia during 1955, and in North and South Vietnam during 1956."
10. This objective, stated in NSC 5429/1, was approved by the President. See NSC, Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East, 12 August 1954 (TOP SECRET)
11. Ibid.
12. Smith from Geneva Tel SECTO 666, 19 July 1954 (TOP SECRET)
13. Dulles to Smith at Geneva, Tel TOSEC 576 NIACT, 19 July 1954 (TOP SECRET)

D3

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 3. THE SPIRIT AND PRACTICAL EFFECT OF GENEVA

	<u>Page</u>
1. <u>The Accords, in Theory, are Clearly Drawn</u>	D-20
a. The Primary Objective of the Accords is a Cease-Fire.....	D-20
b. Key Provisions for Partition and Elections.....	D-20
(1) Summary of the Cease-Fire Agreement.....	D-20
(2) Summary of the Final Declaration.....	D-23
2. <u>Theoretical and Practical Interpretations Differ</u>	D-24
a. The Election Provision Causes Controversy.....	D-24
b. Practical Views Vary.....	D-24
c. Official Positions are in Agreement.....	D-25
d. The Outcome Could Have Been Predicted.....	D-25

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 3. THE SPIRIT AND PRACTICAL EFFECT OF GENEVA

1. The Accords, in Theory, are Clearly Drawn

a. The Primary Objective of the Accords is a Cease-Fire

The Geneva Accords -- that is, the armistice agreements for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and the Final Declaration of the Conference -- were designed primarily to end hostilities and re-establish peace in Indochina, and secondarily to provide conditions conducive to the future independent political development of the three States of the region. The signed armistice agreements were military, the only exception being the Declaration of the Royal Khmer Government, included in the Cambodia armistice, guaranteeing the political rights of all its citizens. ^{1/} The unsigned Geneva Final Declaration deals with a political settlement, but in terms of future events -- elections to be held in Laos and Cambodia during 1955 as provided in their constitutions, and elections to reunify Vietnam following consultations within one year (by July, 1955), followed by a national plebiscite within two years (July, 1956). The goal for all of the powers at Geneva, both Western and Communist, was a cessation of the war on terms that would permit subsequent progress toward their disparate political objectives in Southeast Asia. All participants desired what might be termed a profitable suspension of the fighting: the Communists wanted an agreement providing time for reconsolidation, and also a political arrangement that would facilitate future expansion; the West was willing to barter, holding out partition and elections in exchange for disengagement of French forces, establishment of the GVN as a viable political organization, and consolidation of the non-Communist Southeast Asian nations in a collective defense arrangement against the further encroachments of Communism.

b. Key Provisions for Partition and Elections

In retrospect, the key political provisions were those that produced the partition of Vietnam, and promised elections within two years. A short summation of the 47 articles and 2 annexes of the "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam, July 20, 1954" signed only by the French and the DRV, follows below as a review of the final Geneva position to which, theoretically, all delegates agreed:

(1) Summary of the Cease-Fire Agreement

Article

1. DMZ established; "Peoples Army of Vietnam regroups north and French Union forces" south.
2. Regrouping to be completed in 300 days.
3. ICC to control joint waterways.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Article

4. The regrouping zones to include territorial waters, islands.
5. DMZ to be evacuated within 25 days.
6. Crossing of provisional military demarcation line prohibited.
7. Unauthorized entry in DMZ prohibited.
8. Rules for civil administration of DMZ.
9. ICC to have freedom of movement.
10. Military commanders of both sides to order complete cease-fire.
11. Times for cease-fire; information on planned regrouping movements to be exchanged within 25 days of Agreement's entry into force.
12. Minefields and other obstacles to be removed; regrouping moves will avoid contact.
13. Provision for air corridors.
14. Political and administrative measures in the two regrouping zones: conduct of civil administration; rules for transfer of territorial control; prohibition of reprisals; freely permitted transfer of residence by civilians.
15. Details covering disengagement and withdrawals of forces; timing, prohibition of hostilities; of sabotage; movement schedules.
16. Troop reinforcement prohibited; rotation permitted.
17. Military materiel augmentation prohibited, applicable to aircraft, naval craft, vehicles, etc; normal replacement authorized under specific ICC supervisory procedures.
18. Establishment of new military bases prohibited.
19. Foreign military bases, alliances, and hostilities prohibited.
20. Points of entry for rotation established.
21. PW liberation within 30 days of cease-fire, to include all PW's and civilian internees.
22. Commanders to insure punishment of violators of these Agreements.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Article

23. Graves registration information to be exchanged.
24. Both forces to respect DMZ, undertake no operations, engage in no "blockade of any kind in Viet-Nam"; definition of "territory."
25. Commanders to assist ICC.
26. Cost of ICC to be shared by both parties.
27. "The signatories of the present agreement and their successors in their functions shall be responsible for ensuring and observance and enforcement of the terms and provisions thereof"; Commanders to comply in full; procedural refinements permitted as necessary.
28. "Responsibility for the execution of the agreement of the cessation of hostilities shall rest with the parties."
29. ICC to insure control.
30. Joint Commission (JC) to be set up.
31. JC to have equal number from both sides.
32. President of the delegations to the JC shall hold General rank; joint sub-groups to be established by mutual agreement.
33. JC supervisory responsibilities: cease-fire, regroupment, observance of DMZ, liaison.
34. ICC to be Canada, India, and Poland; presided over by India.
35. ICC to set up mobile inspection teams; locations established.
36. ICC responsibilities: control movements, supervise DMZ, control release of PW's, supervise ports and airfields for replacements and nonreinforcement.
37. ICC to begin inspections as soon as possible.
38. Reporting procedures of ICC inspection teams.
39. ICC handling of violations.
40. ICC intermediates JC and parties.
41. Recommendation procedure for ICC.
42. ICC decisions relating to violations which might resume hostilities must be unanimous.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Article

43. ICC to inform Geneva Conference members if a recommendation is refused.
44. ICC to be set up at the time of cease-fire.
45. ICC in Vietnam to cooperate with ICC in Laos, Cambodia.
46. ICC may progressively reduce its activities.
47. Provisions effective 2400 hours, 22 July 1954.

Annexes

- I. Demarcation line.
- II. Delineation of Provisional Assembly Areas.

On 21 July, the day following the armistice agreements, the members of the Geneva Conference approved a Final Declaration (by voice vote, with the U.S. and GVN abstaining; a signed agreement was avoided in order not to emphasize U.S. refusal to approve). The declaration is essentially a comment on the armistice agreements, "taking note" and otherwise stressing certain key points. A summary of the declaration follows:

(2) Summary of the Final Declaration

The Conference:

1. Takes note of cease-fire in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.
2. Expresses satisfaction in cease-fire agreements.
3. Takes note of planned 1955 elections in Cambodia and Laos.
4. Takes note of prohibition of introduction of additional troops and materiel into Vietnam, and of declarations of Cambodia and Laos not to request foreign aid "except for the purpose of effective defense of their territory."
5. Takes note of prohibition of foreign bases in Vietnam, and declarations by Cambodia and Laos that they will not participate in any military alliances "not in conformity with principles of the Charter of the United Nations."
6. Recognizes the "essential purpose" of the Vietnam agreements is the end of hostilities, and that the DMZ is in no way a political or territorial boundary; the political settlement of Vietnam to be achieved in the near future.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The Conference:

7. Declares general elections should be held in July 1956, with mutual consultations to this end beginning on 20 July 1955.
8. Emphasizes the provision for free movement of civilians.
9. Cautions against reprisals.
10. Takes note of French agreement to withdraw troops from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam "at the request of the government concerned."
11. Takes note of French recognition of sovereignty of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
12. Agrees as a group to respect sovereignty of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam.
13. Agrees as a group to consult on questions presented by ICC.

2. Theoretical and Practical Interpretations Differ

a. The Election Provision Causes Controversy

The most serious controversy over the Accords has centered on the election provisions (Article 7) of the Final Declaration. The Declaration obviously envisaged elections to decide on a united Vietnam to be held by July, 1956. Since "the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary," the Geneva partition was a temporary, expedient measure. The Conference intended then to permit the Vietnamese people "to enjoy the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by democratic institutions," and to devise a political settlement for their country "in the near future." That settlement, the conferees declared, ought to come about (1) "on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity" and (2) through "free general elections by secret ballot...in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the Member States of the International Supervisory Commission...Consultation will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards."

b. Practical Views Vary

The difficulty with the election provisions of the Final Declaration, as with the Accords as a whole, relates not to their spirit, but to their practicality. It remains a matter of conjecture whether the members of the Convention genuinely thought that a political solution to

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

unification had been postponed by only two years, or whether they felt that partition, even with the resultant risk of renewed military confrontation was, in reality, the best and only solution that the conflicting aims and pressures at Geneva could provide. The British, like the Russians, thought partition achieved their goal of re-establishing a stability, however precarious, in Southeast Asia. The Chinese did not gain as extensive a buffer zone as they had sought, but probably were satisfied to see the territorial establishment of the DRV; they could not (at that time) have been seriously concerned over a future threat from South Vietnam, since the Accords ruled out an extensive U.S. military presence there. The U.S. viewed the loss of North Vietnam as a political disaster, and immediately set about making treaty arrangements to prevent the loss of more Asian territory to Communism; but the U.S. was willing to accept partition as all that could be salvaged from a bad military situation. The Southeast Asia policy of the U.S. in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference was focused on organizing free Asian states against further inroads of Communism. The two Vietnams faced each other across a demilitarized zone. The DRV, manipulating a Viet Minh infrastructure in the South, waited for the elections, or for voracious political forces in the South to plunge the Saigon Government into chaos before election time arrived. South Vietnam began its attempt to establish complete control over its own countryside, and constantly decried the DRV's undemocratic handling of would-be migrants.

c. Official Positions are in Agreement

On the surface, however, the parties to the Geneva Accords -- with exception of the South Vietnamese Government -- officially subscribed to the view that partition was, as the Final Declaration stated, only temporary. Moreover, and again with the GVN the exception, all the parties concluded that partition was the only realistic way to separate the combatants, meet the widely divergent military and political demands of the French and Viet Minh, and conclude an armistice.

d. The Outcome Could Have Been Predicted

But such assertions did not affect the practical import of the Geneva documents. By creating two regimes responsible for "civil administration" (Article 14.a. of the Vietnam Armistice Agreement), by providing for the regroupment of forces to two zones and for the movement of persons to the zone of their choice, and by putting off national elections for two years, the conferees, whatever their intentions, made a future political settlement for Vietnam unlikely. The separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel was designed to facilitate the armistice, but in fact it also facilitated the development of two governments under inimical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems. Thus, reunification through elections remained as remote in Vietnam as in Korea or Germany. "Elections," as Victor Bator has

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

commented, 2/ "can, indeed, decide secondary problems of coexistence in circumstances where some measurable minimum basis for political agreement exists. But they are incapable of acceptance by two opposing states, or parts of a state, when diametrically opposite philosophies are involved." If the Geneva Accords were subverted, the subverters were the Geneva conferees themselves, who postulated an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam they themselves undertook on July 21, 1954.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. D. 3.

FOOTNOTES

1. Future elections in Vietnam are mentioned in Article 14 of the Vietnam Cease-Fire Agreements almost as a political aside.
2. Bator, "One War -- Two Vietnams," Military Review, XLVII, No. 6 (June, 1967), 87.