

IV.A Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

U.S. MAP for Diem: The Eisenhower Commitments,
1954-1960 (5 Vols.)

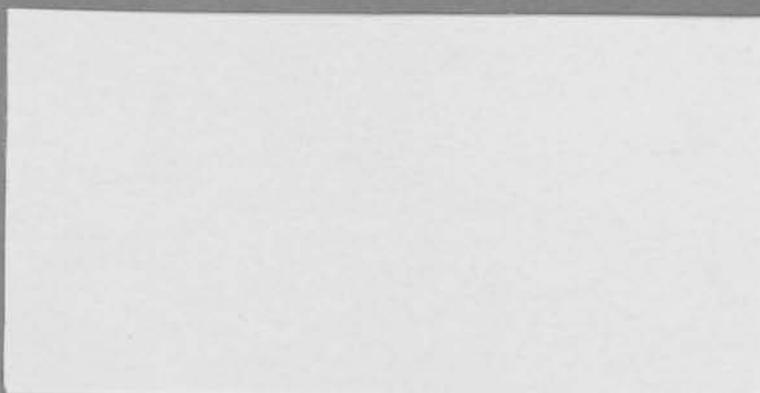
3. U.S. and France's Withdrawal from Vietnam, 1954-56

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1945 - 1967



==== VIETNAM TASK FORCE =====

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IV. A. 3.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM
1954 - 1956

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THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM,
1954-1956

Foreword

This section of the study traces chronologically relations among France, the U.S. and the State of Vietnam in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. The following are tabbed:

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THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM
1954-1956

SUMMARY

Vietnam was the crucible of contemporary France. Military defeat by the Viet Minh -- unprecedented victory of Asian over European -- was but one political reagent: there was also intense frustration and disappointment among French of Rightist-colon convictions that sneaker-shod Asian peasants could undo a century of costly labor at France's "civilizing mission," and jeopardize the largest investment of French capital in the Far East. The Tonkin Delta region represented in a special way all that Vietnam meant to France. Tonkin, of all Vietnam, was where French economic stakes were highest, where the culture of France most completely overglossed indigenous ways, where stood educational focus of Vietnam -- the University of Hanoi, with its French faculty -- and where Catholicism flourished among the rural folk. Thus, evacuation of Tonkin per the dictates of the Geneva Settlement stung less from a sense of humiliation over Dien Bien Phu than from a sense of abandonment: an epoch had closed, France was demeaned.

Had the Geneva Settlement been fulfilled, France might have retained a presence and influence in Vietnam that would have mollified both the Right and Left. After all, no significant body of opinion in France held the French should continue to mold Vietnamese politics or that the French Expeditionary Corps should remain there undiminished -- the reality of the DRV and the exigencies of North Africa rendered such a position untenable. The Left and the Center were quite willing for France to withdraw under the Geneva formula; even the "Indochina" clique within the army recognized the priority of Algeria. But France in the end, at American instance, had to accept withdrawal without the cover of general elections, and to accede to a second, further, more final abandonment.

The supplanting of France by the U.S. in South Vietnam, and the failure of the Geneva Settlement, both well advanced by mid-1956, denied the French Left its prospects for cooperation with Ho Chi Minh in a precedent-setting experiment in coexistence. It disappointed moderates who had hoped to preserve French cultural influence and salvage French capital. It enraged Rightists who interpreted American policies in Vietnam invidiously. None of these factions was prepared to take a stand for France's staying, but all attempted to draw political sustenance from acerbic treatment of the U.S.

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The whole episode of French withdrawal from Vietnam, in fact, soured the Western alliance. It is possible that France's rejection of the European Defense Community on August 30, 1954, may have been in part payment for Soviet good offices on behalf of France at Geneva. But it is certain that many French were persuaded that the U.S. and the UK furnished inadequate support to France during the latter phases of the war, and at the Conference. And it is equally certain that American policy in the aftermath of Geneva widely alienated affection for the U.S. in France, and created that lack of confidence which the Suez crisis of summer, 1956, translated into outright distrust.

After the Geneva Conference, all the governments involved in the Accords, with one significant exception, anticipated that France would remain in Vietnam. The exception was the State of Vietnam, whose Premier, Ngo Dinh Diem, was determined to uproot French influence as a concomitant to the establishment of a genuinely independent nationalist government. The policy of the United States was initially directed toward a partnership with France, a joint sponsorship of Diem and the newly independent nation he headed.

Almost at once, however, U.S. policy began to respond to military urgency, and this in turn caused the U.S. to move beyond partnership to primacy. In September of 1954, SEATO was brought into being, its protection extended to Vietnam by a protocol to the Manila Pact. The U.S. resolved through SEATO to balk further expansion of communist dominion, and looked to transforming Vietnam into a key redoubt in the line of containment. The U.S. was determined that Vietnam would become politically sound, economically self-sufficient, and militarily capable of providing for its own internal security, coping with invasion from North Vietnam, and contributing to the deterrent strength of the SEATO coalition. France, then beset with internal political divisions, and plagued with Algeria, evidenced doubt, indecision, and occasional reluctance in aiding Vietnam toward the foregoing objectives. The U.S. was not prepared to wait. In late September 1954, the U.S. cut out the French as middle-men in all its assistance for Vietnam, and began to deal directly with Diem, his government, and his armed forces.

France did not readily accept this enlarged American role, nor was there complete agreement with the U.S. Government that the

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United States should pursue a further shouldering aside of France. Through the fall of 1954, France-U.S. relations worsened, and a policy debate developed in Washington. Once again, military considerations emerged as paramount. The JCS were originally opposed to the United States assuming responsibility for training the Army of Vietnam. They took the position, however, that if political considerations dictated such a U.S. involvement "the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training mission." On October 26, 1954, the Secretary of Defense, acting on behalf of the President, instructed the JCS to prepare a "long-range program for the organization and training of a minimum number of free Vietnam forces necessary for internal security." The development of this plan and an appropriate working relationship with the French continued into 1955, and necessitated the dispatch to Vietnam of General J. Lawton Collins, with Ambassadorial status, to obtain a tri-partite agreement acceptable in Saigon, in Paris, and in Washington. During November 1954, the JCS expressed serious reservations about the success of such a combined undertaking. Nevertheless, the NSC considered the policy sound, and this judgment was confirmed from the field by General Collins. Collins reported that:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps would be withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could be enacted.

Collins recommended that the United States continue military aid to France to "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces." In the meantime, events in Vietnam seemed to support those who, like the JCS, continued to entertain strong reservations about the future of Ngo Dinh Diem and his government. Diem managed to survive attempted coups by army leaders, and succeeded in maintaining an unhappy peace with the several armed factions of Cochinchina. But his political future remained questionable at best. At the same time, the French mission in Hanoi pressed hard to preserve French economic and cultural prerogatives in North Vietnam, and certain French political leaders in Paris spoke grandiloquently of a cooperative modus vivendi with the DRV becoming a model for east-west relations -- a disquieting message for the U.S. Secretary of State and those who shared his convictions within the Administration. Finally, parallel to these developments, the Emperor Bao Dai, retaliating for Diem's vituperative political campaign against him, actively sought to supplant Diem.

All the foregoing tension resolved to two central issues between the United States and France. The first was the question of how and by whom Vietnam's armed forces were to be trained. The second, and more far-reaching, was whether Ngo Dinh Diem was to remain at the head of Vietnam's government, or whether he was to be replaced by another

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nationalist leader more sympathetic to Bao Dai and France. The first issue was resolved relatively quickly. General Collins struck an agreement with General Ely in Vietnam by which, despite serious misgivings in Paris, France agreed to turn over the training of the Vietnamese army to the U.S. and to withdraw French cadres. On February 12, 1955, the U.S. assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces, and the French disassociation began.

But the political controversy over Diem was less easily resolved. Diem exacerbated matters with increasingly vehement stricture against the French and Bao Dai. The United States on its part was insensitive to the impact within France of Diem's militant anti-communism -- frequently directed at the French Left -- and of the rancor aroused by U.S. statements portraying America as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. The U.S. did alert, however, to French statements that Diem was categorically incapable of unifying Vietnamese nationalists. French advice to the U.S. that Diem should, therefore, be replaced was seconded by Ambassador Collins from Vietnam. Throughout the winter and spring, Secretary Dulles and the Department of State in general seemed disposed to consider favorably suggestions that an alternative leader for the Vietnamese be placed in power. However, despite an ostensibly thorough search, no nationalist leader with qualities competitive with Diem's was identified.

Both the U.S. and France were then caught up in the sweep of events. The armed sects directly challenged Diem's authority, and he responded with force. An uneasy truce ended the first clash in March, and amid the mounting tension in April 1955, the U.S., France, and Bao Dai all sought actively to bring about a change in the GVN. On 28 April, Diem, against U.S. advice, against French advice, and against the advice of his cabinet, moved again against the sects. When Binh Xuyen resisted in Saigon, he committed the Vietnamese army to battle. Diem's forces won an immediate military victory, and simultaneously Diem's brother, Nhu, co-opted a committee of nationalist figures who called for Bao Dai's removal, and transfer of civil and military power to Diem.

Encouraged by Diem's success, the U.S. declared its unequivocal support for him as opposed to Bao Dai. The U.S. choice presented acute difficulties for France. The French Government was convinced that Nhu's "Revolutionary Committee" was under Viet Minh influence, and was strongly resentful of a renewed GVN campaign against French presence. In May 1955, France, the U.S., and Britain met in Paris to discuss European defense, but France promptly made Vietnam the principal agenda item. France maintained that the U.S., in backing Diem, forced upon France the necessity for withdrawing altogether from Vietnam. The French Foreign Minister Faure held that Diem was "not only incapable but mad . . . France can no longer take risks with him." Secretary Dulles in reply indicated that the U.S. was aware of Diem's weaknesses, but stressed

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Diem's recent successes as indicating redeeming qualities. But, Dulles pointed out "Vietnam is not worth a quarrel with France," and offered U.S. withdrawal in preference to allied disunity. No decision was taken immediately, and during a recess Secretary Dulles received advice from the JCS that Diem seemed the most promising avenue to achievement of U.S. objectives, and that while withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," a precipitate withdrawal was to be prevented since it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual loss of South Vietnam to communism. Secretary Dulles then proposed to the French that they continue to support Diem until a national assembly were elected. British support for Diem seems to have swayed Faure, and he accepted Dulles' proposal. The tri-partite meeting ended on a note of harmony, but the undertones were distinct: the days of joint U.S.-French policy were over; thereafter, the U.S. would act independently of France in Vietnam.

Backed by the United States, Diem refused to open consultation with the North Vietnamese concerning general elections when the date for these fell due in July 1955. Pressing his military advantage against the sects, he moved to consolidate his position politically within South Vietnam. In October, he won a resounding victory in a popular referendum in which voters were given a choice between Diem and Bao Dai. As Diem's political strength grew, his relations with Paris deteriorated. In December 1955, Diem suddenly terminated the existing economic and financial agreements with France, and called upon France to denounce the Geneva agreements and break relations with Hanoi. Soon thereafter, he withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

On January 2, 1956, general elections in France produced a government under Socialist Guy Mollet, a third of the members of which were communists or avowed neutralists. In early March, Mollet's Foreign Minister, Pineau, declared in a speech to the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris that France would actively seek policy position bridging East and West, and that there was no unanimity of policy among the U.S., UK, and France. He cited UK Middle East policy and U.S. support for Diem as contrary to French interests, and condemned both powers for stirring up the Moslem world to France's distinct disadvantage in North Africa. A few days later, at a SEATO Council meeting in Karachi, Pineau proclaimed the end of the "era of aggression," and called for a "policy of coexistence."

Action followed Pineau's line. On March 22, 1956, France agreed with Diem to withdraw the FEC altogether. On April 26, 1956, the French High Command in Saigon was disestablished. On the due date for the general elections agreed to at Geneva, France possessed no military forces in Vietnam. And the date for the fulfillment of the political portions of the Settlement, July 1956, coincided with the inception of the Suez crisis.

CHRONOLOGY

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THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL
FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 Jul 54	Diem appointed Premier of South Vietnam	Urged by America and France, Emperor Bao Dai named Ngo Dinh Diem premier of South (Free) Vietnam. Bao Dai remained legal, constitutionally recognized Chief of State.
21 Jul 54	Geneva Accords signed	France became guarantor of Vietnamese sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7); with the PAVN, guarantor of armistice agreements (Geneva Agreements, Articles 22, 23), and all-Vietnam elections (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7) France agreed to withdraw the French Expeditionary Corps at the request of local governments (Conference Final Declaration, Article 10, Unilateral Declaration, France)
8, 12 Aug 54; 20 Aug 54	National Security Council meetings; NSC 5429/2	US policies toward post-Geneva Vietnam. Economic: disassociate France from levers of command, integrate land reform with refugee resettlement, work with the French but "encourage" them to turn over financial, administrative, economic controls to the Vietnamese. Give aid directly to the Vietnamese -- not through France. Military: work with France only insofar as necessary to build up indigenous military forces able to provide internal security. Political: France must grant total independence (including right to

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withdraw from French Union) to South Vietnam and support a strong indigenous government. Diem must broaden the governmental base, elect an assembly, draft a constitution and legally dethrone Bao Dai. French support and cooperation for these policies was necessary; retention of the FEC was essential to South Vietnamese security.

Aug 54

Sainteny Mission

Jean Sainteny was sent to Hanoi to find ways to protect French economic and cultural interests in the DRV. Political overtones of the mission annoyed the US and General Paul Ely, High Commissioner in the South. Ely received firm assurance from Mendes-France that France was not playing a "double game", has not sent Sainteny for political bridge-building purposes. Mendes-France reaffirmed French support for an independent, strong South Vietnam.

8 Sep 54

Manila Pact Signed

Dulles' anti-communist military alliance was realized in SEATO. The Associated States of Indochina were covered by separate protocol ensuring collective defense by SEATO nations in case of subversion or aggression.

27-29 Sep 54

Washington Conference

France agreed to support Diem (against the French belief that Diem would prove unable to unify or stabilize the country); agreed to keep the FEC in South Vietnam but received no indication of possible US financial aid for the French forces. France knew economic and military aid would be given directly to Vietnam but was led to believe she would have a hand in its distribution by ambiguous US-drafted statements. The US military role in Vietnam was

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		not discussed because of a State-JCS split (Dulles wanted to assume training responsibilities; JCS did not because of political instability, presence of French troops and Geneva restrictions).
22 Oct 54	NSC Action Program	The US decided to take firmer steps to strengthen Diem, to tell Paris that French support had been inadequate. An earlier JCS concession to consider a training program for the NVA opened the way for the decision to inaugurate a "limited" US role in military affairs.
24 Oct 54	Eisenhower letter to Diem	Announced direct economic aid and military assistance from the US; demanded no Vietnamese moves as reciprocation for aid. France called it a <i>carte americaine</i> , said it violated the principle of joint action adopted in September.
8 Nov 54	Collins Mission	General J. Lawton Collins, given broad authority to coordinate all US programs and -- with French support -- get things moving, arrived in Vietnam.
13 Dec 54	Collins-Ely Minute of Understanding	France will grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1955, the US will assume training responsibilities, the US MAAG, Indochina, will direct the training program -- under General Ely's overall authority. French and US instructors will be phased out as VNA efficiency increases. Washington approved the Minute; Paris objected, particularly to the phase-out of French trainers. France did not relent and consent until 11 February 1955.

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16 Dec 54	Collins recommends Diem be replaced	Diem's failure to include Dr. Quat in the cabinet as Defense Minister confirmed Collins' doubts about Diem's capacity to stabilize the government, or rally support for his regime. He recommended Bao Dai's return be considered, but if this were unacceptable, recommended the US withdraw from Vietnam.
19 Dec 54	Trilateral Meetings, Paris (U.K., U.S., France)	Mendes-France insisted the time had come to consider an alternative to Diem. Recommended Collins and Ely study the problem and come up with suggestions for a change by mid-January. France felt Bao Dai should be involved in an alternative plan. Dulles: Diem is the only suitable leader but we will consider alternatives and will allow Collins and Ely to consider the matter. But Dulles made it clear that Congress would probably not appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. U.S. study of alternatives was cursory, however; Dulles was sure Diem could succeed, with proper direction; he was more sure that no other possible leader existed.
20 Jan 55	Collins' report to NSC	December's despair over Diem had dissipated; Diem had acted well on a few matters. Collins recommended continued support for Diem because without it South Vietnam will surely fall to communism and the rest of other Southeast Asia will soon follow. The NSC approved Collins' report.
12 Feb 55	Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) opens	General O'Daniel, under Ely's general supervision, took charge of programs to train and reorganize the VNA along American lines. Despite friction between French and Americans in Saigon and despite Paris-Washington disputes, officers

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22 Feb 55	United Front announced	in TRIM seemed able to rise above differences and initiate sound programs for the VNA.
21 Mar 55	United Front "ultimatum"	French subsidies to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect armies -- about 40,000 men -- ended in February. When Diem refused to meet sect requests for financial aid, integration of forces into the VNA and recognition of spheres of influence, previous sect cooperation with Diem ceased. Representatives of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dan Xa (Ba Cut), Lien Minh (Thinh Minh The) and Binh Xuyen (Bay Vien) forces met at Tay Ninh, agreed to work together against Diem. Cao Dai Pope Tac headed the group.
29-30 Mar 55	Diem attacks central police headquarters	Claiming to speak for the popular will, the United Front asked that Diem form a government of national union and make other political, economic, military reforms. Diem called this an ultimatum and refused to consider the request. The Front then sent an emissary to Bao Dai asking him to intervene on its behalf. Bao Dai refused.
		Brewing for months, the fight finally broke between Diem and the Binh Xuyen (a coalition of gangsters and river pirates which ran gambling and prostitution in Cholon, and the Saigon-Cholon police, paid Bao Dai for his protection and enjoyed some French support). A company of paratroopers took over the central police station, driving the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Diem then wanted to go after Police Commissioner Sang and end Binh Xuyen control. Defense Minister Minh resigned when Diem refused to consult the cabinet over this. However, French representations

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		dissuaded Diem from taking on Bay Vien's 6000-man force at this time, and the French then negotiated a truce between Diem and the Binh Xuyen.
7 Apr 55	Collins and Ely agree Diem must go	Collins says Diem has proved himself incapable of inspiring unity, and must be replaced. Dulles demurs, then agrees to consider a change if Collins will fly to Washington for consultations.
23 Apr 55	Diem proposes to broaden the government	Diem calls for a national referendum and elections for a national assembly within six months. The Front scores the proposal.
26 Apr 55	Diem fires Sang	(Collins had left Saigon for Washington.) Diem replaces Sang with a man loyal to his regime but Sang refuses to resign saying only Bao Dai had the legal authority to remove him.
27 Apr 55	Dulles agrees to a change in Saigon	Collins met with Dulles in Washington. Dulles agreed to consider an alternate to Diem but was determined to keep this from the French until their purposes were clear and their promise to unequivocally support a new regime firm. Saigon was informed of this new policy.
28 Apr 55	Diem hits the Binh Xuyen	Diem struck at the Surete--and Sang--after fighting erupted between the VNA and Binh Xuyen forces in Cholon. The French said Diem instigated the fight; Americans supported Diem's version that the Binh Xuyen began firing first. Whatever its origin, the fight ended with a VNA victory. The Binh Xuyen were driven out of Cholon into the Rung Sat swamps.

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30 Apr 55	Revolutionary Congress Announced	Diem's brother Nhu had a hand in organizing this broad amalgam of political interests behind a program calling for support of Diem against the Binh Xuyen, sects and Bao Dai, in favor of broad representation in the government. Generals Thé and Phuong, tired of the "weak" Revolutionary Congress, formed a Revolutionary Committee whose outlook was more anti-Bao Dai and anti-French than the Congress. Present and former Vietminh supporters were members of the Congress and Committee.
1 May 55	Bao Dai's ultimatum	Bao Dai summoned Diem to replace the Army Chief of Staff with his own man. Diem ignored the summons and orders.
1 May 55	The US: back on the track behind Diem	Because of Diem's victory -- superficial though it may have been -- over the Binh Xuyen, because of VNA support for Diem, Dulles canceled the cable of 28 April: again, the US will support Diem.
8 May 55	A National Campaign launched	Diem announced a national campaign to regain "wayward" provinces and unify the country. Or: he declared war on the sects. The VNA fought over a year against Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen forces, but finally established control over them, over areas of sect influence and control.
8-11 May 55	Tripartite Talks, Paris	Faure: We cannot support Diem -- but Vietnam is not worth a split in Franco-American relations. Therefore, France offers to withdraw from Vietnam. Dulles: We must support Diem. But if a US withdrawal would prevent discord, the US will consider it. Then, after hearing JCS and Collins' arguments against either precipitate French withdrawal or a US withdrawal, Dulles urged Faure to accept a new proposal: support

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Diem a while longer on the grounds that he will broaden the government and call for elections. Faure agreed -- against his own wishes and against strong popular pressure and on several conditions (most of which required action from Diem and which Dulles could not guarantee). Dulles then suggested France and the US apprise each other of policy and actions but pursue them more independently than in the past. The days of joint policy -- of togetherness in Vietnam -- were over.

July 1955

Diem refuses to meet with the DRV about elections

France and Britain urged Diem to hold consultations with Hanoi for all-Vietnam elections, as stipulated in the Geneva Accords. The US suggested consultations but also suggested Diem request firm guarantees (for secret ballot, UN or international supervision) which the DRV was expected to reject. But Diem refused to meet with the North Vietnamese. He had not signed the Geneva accords and denied being bound by them in any way.

24 Oct 55

National Referendum

With 98 percent of the vote, Diem became President of the Republic of Vietnam--and Bao Dai was dethroned.

Aug-Dec 1955

Franco-Vietnamese Conferences

Diem wanted renegotiation of economic and financial accords reached in 1954; transfer of Vietnamese affairs from the ministry of the associated states to the Foreign Office; abolition of Ely's former post of High Commissioner; termination of the military High Command and Vietnamese authority over remaining French troops in Vietnam. (The FEC now numbered about 35,000 -- vice the 150,000-man force which France spoke of retaining in Viet-

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nam during the September 1954 Washington Conference). France could not accept Diem's last demand; had difficulty satisfying the others, but finally made major concessions. Diem's response was to withdraw Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

26 Apr 56

French High
Command abolished

Only about 5,000 French troops remained in Vietnam; most French instructors had left TRIM. A French liaison mission with the ICC still functioned, however, and France still served on the Joint Armistice Commission with DRV military representatives.

July, 1956

All-Vietnam
elections

Diem had refused to consult with the DRV about elections in 1955; he refused to hold them in 1956. Diem did agree to take over the French responsibility to support the ICC; France would continue to finance ICC operations. The Joint Armistice Commission gradually died of inactivity.

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KEY AMERICAN PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

20 Jan 53 - President: Dwight D. Eisenhower
20 Jan 61 Secretary of State: John Foster Dulles
Secretary of Defense: Charles E. Wilson
Ambassador to Vietnam: Donald R. Heath (25 Jun 52-20 Apr 55);
Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Special Mission (8 Nov 54-6 May 55);
G. Frederick Reinhart (20 Apr 55-14 Mar 57)
Chairman, JCS: Arthur W. Radford, Adm., USN (14 Aug 53-15 Aug 57)
Chief MAAG, Indochina:
John W. O'Daniel, Lt. Gen., USA (31 Mar 54-23 Oct 55);
Samuel T. Williams, Lt. Gen., was 1st Chief of MAAG to
Vietnam (24 Oct 55-31 Aug 60)

KEY FRENCH PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Jun 54 - Prime Minister: Pierre Mendes-France
Feb 55 Foreign Minister: Georges Bidault
Minister for Associated States: Guy La Chambre
Minister for National Defense: Rene Pleven
High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Paul Ely

23 Feb 55 - Prime Minister: Edgar Faure
31 Jan 56 Foreign Minister: Antoine Pinay
Minister for Associated States: M. La Forest
Minister for National Defense: General Pierre Koenig
High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Ely's post abolished
after his departure, June 1955. (Gen. Jacquot assumed
military responsibilities until April, 1956)
Ambassador, Vietnam: Henri Hoppenot (July, 1955)

31 Jan 56 - Prime Minister: Guy Mollet
16 Apr 57 Foreign Minister: Christian Pineau
Minister for National Defense: Maurice Bourges-Maunouvry
High Commissioner, Vietnam: (General Jacquot - military
responsibilities until April 1956)
Ambassador, Vietnam: M. Payart (November, 1956)

KEY SOUTH VIETNAMESE PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Mar 49 - Head of State: Bao Dai, Emperor
26 Oct 55

12 Jan 54 - Head of State: Bao Dai
16 Jun 54 Premier: Prince Buu Loc
Minister for Foreign Affairs: Nguyen Quoc Dinh

7 Jul 54 - Head of State: Ngo Dinh Diem (President: 23 Oct 55)
1 Nov 63 Premier: Ngo Dinh Diem
Minister for Foreign Affairs: Tran Van Do (Jul 54 - May 55)
Vu Van Mau (Jul 55 - Nov 63)
Minister for National Defense: Ngo Dinh Diem (General Minh
served temporarily, early 1955).

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IV. A. 3.

THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

A. Introduction: Post-Geneva Expectations

1. France Will Stay in Vietnam

After 100 years of investment, interest and influence, France got out of Vietnam in less than a year after the Geneva Conference of July 1954. And France did not want to leave. On July 25, three days after signing the Geneva Accords, Prime Minister Mendes-France said France would maintain cultural and economic ties with North Vietnam and would assist the development of Free (South) Vietnam. 1/ The predecessor Laniel Government had recognized "Vietnam as a fully independent and sovereign state in possession of all qualifications and powers known in international law" on June 4, 1954; Mendes-France pledged to uphold and further that treaty. 2/ In August he announced a three-phase formula to implement it. Economic, administrative and financial ties with the Associated States would be terminated as fast as possible. 3/ By December 1954, the last vestiges of the French colonial apparatus had been eliminated. 4/ However, Mendes-France's formula viewed membership in the French Union as compulsory -- indicative of French desire to stay in Vietnam but inimical to demands lodged by Diem and the United States for independence which included the right to withdraw from the French Union. 5/

Also in August, General Paul Ely, French High Commissioner in Vietnam, reaffirmed French support of Vietnamese independence and French readiness to further Vietnamese development. That the French had a role to play was clear: French economic investment, cultural institutions, military, political and administrative operations were already part of South Vietnamese life. That France must play a role was also clear. Under the Geneva Accords, France had pledged to guarantee all-Vietnam elections in 1956, guarantee execution of the armistice agreement, guarantee Vietnamese sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, pledged to maintain the French Expeditionary Corps until Vietnam requested its removal. General Ely had been delegated extensive political and military authority to enable him to meet these obligations. He worked sincerely to persuade both Vietnamese and French that mutual cooperation would be mutually beneficial, to erase the colonialist tinge of French presence, to both speed and smooth the French transition from master to equal partner of Vietnam. 6/

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2. Diem: France Will Leave South Vietnam

In this endeavor, Ely received qualified support from French officials, "colons" and military officers in Vietnam. He received sporadic support from Paris. He received almost no support from the Vietnamese. France was not welcome in Vietnam for many reasons, a major one being Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. A Francophobe of the first order, Diem wanted full independence for South Vietnam and wanted France out of the country as soon as possible. Many shared Diem's sentiments. France had just lost a long, devastating and demoralizing war against Vietnamese communists as well as Vietnamese nationalists. French colonial rule had been tight, previous French promises of independence had been broken. Why believe professions of French good intentions in 1954 were any different from those of the past? Added to this was the problematical relationship of France vis-a-vis South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. Some South Vietnamese expected France to actively work toward accommodation with the Viet Minh and reunification of North and South under Viet Minh direction. Many more felt the fact of continued French presence alone compromised South Vietnamese independence. "To convince the people of Vietnam that the administration was independent, it became a political necessity to be anti-colonial and specifically anti-French." 6a/

3. The U.S. Will "Join" France in South Vietnam

Finally, France was not alone in Vietnam. More than Diem, more than the psychological damage done by colonial years, the United States made life in Vietnam difficult for France. The U.S. was eager to strengthen Vietnam, needed and demanded French cooperation, but offered little in return. U.S. policy insisted upon an immediate and dramatic transformation of French policy. But the U.S. little understood what this meant to France, what problems it created for French domestic and foreign policy or what U.S. concessions might help effect the transformation.

Although remnants of the French Expeditionary Corps remained until 1956, France was out of Vietnam to all intents and purposes by May 1955, ten months after Geneva. These months are characterized by professions of Franco-American cooperation but demonstrations of Franco-American division, characterized by conflict of word and action on several levels. Paris said one thing but did another, Paris said one thing and French officials in Saigon did the opposite; Washington activities were not always in line with Washington pronouncements and the gulf between the thought and deed of Ngo Dinh Diem only compounded an already sensitive situation. It is during this period that Diem established his rule, against French advice and

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best interests but with almost unwavering support from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. And it is the period during which the anti-communist moralism of Dulles and Diem rejected any rapprochement with the North, ultimately ensuring that the temporary military demarkation line would become a permanent division of Vietnam.

B. Initial U.S. Policy Toward Indochina

The U.S. began revising policy toward Indochina as the Geneva Conference closed. The exercise was marked by urgency dictated by the belief that Geneva had been a disaster for the free world. Geneva gave Communist China and North Vietnam a new base for exploitation of Southeast Asia; it enhanced Peking's prestige to Washington's dismay and detriment; it restricted free world room to maneuver in Southeast Asia. And its grant of Vietnamese territory above the seventeenth parallel to the communist Ho Chi Minh was a painful reminder of the scarifying French defeat by the Viet Minh, the first defeat of a European power by Asians (Asian communists at that), a defeat shared by the United States to the tune of more than \$1.5 billion in economic and military assistance granted France and the Associated States of Indochina. 7/

1. SEATO: The New Initiative?

The first step toward countering this disaster had been discussed with Britain and France since the spring of 1954, and Walter Bedell Smith's comment as Geneva closed, "We must get that pact!", heralded its inauguration. 8/ The Southeast Asian Collective Defense Treaty was to be a "new initiative in Southeast Asia" to protect the U.S. position in the Far East and stabilize "the present chaotic situation . . . to prevent further losses to communism" through subversion or overt aggression. 9/ But the Manila Pact, signed on September 8, 1954, proved to be neither the new initiative nor the strong anti-communist shield called for by Secretary Dulles. Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, deputy assistant secretary and Defense Department representative at Manila, reported the Pact left Southeast Asia "no better prepared than before to cope with Communist aggression." 10/ The failure was largely of American making. While Dulles wanted to put the communists on notice that aggression would be opposed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted the United States must not be committed financially, militarily or economically to unilateral action in the Far East and that U.S. freedom of action must not be restricted. 11/ The two objectives conflicted and one cancelled out the other. Thus, Article IV of the treaty, the mechanism for collective action in case of enemy threat, did not pledge automatic response with force to force. Instead, each signatory promised to "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." The United States,

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particularly Mr. Dulles, tried to put teeth into SEATO through unilateral declarations of U.S. readiness to act. Dulles defined the obligations under Article IV as "a clear and definite agreement on the part of the signatories, including the United States, to come to the aid of any member of the Pact who under the terms of this treaty is subjected to aggression." 12/ However, Dulles failed to instill the same dedication to instant intervention in the other SEATO members.

The obligation assumed at Manila emphasized the importance attached to Southeast Asia by the U.S. Government. U.S. refusal to pledge unqualified support to Indochina emphasized the need for indigenous strength and stability in the area to counter communist power, to make infiltration and aggression less appetizing to the enemy. Of the three Indochina states, most important yet least stable and least strong was South Vietnam. Thus, the second step in policy development was to decide what the U.S. could do to change the situation, a decision which turned on what France could or would do in South Vietnam.

2. Alternative French Policies

That France and the United States would eventually part company over Vietnam might have been predicted in August 1954, when U.S. policy toward Vietnam was drawn. Formulae for economic, military and especially political courses of action were different from -- often antithetical to -- French objectives and interests.

The U.S. intelligence community felt if France "acted swiftly to insure Vietnam full independence and to encourage strong nationalist leadership . . . anti-French nationalist activity might be lessened (and) with French military and economic assistance -- backed by U.S. aid -- the Vietnamese could proceed to develop gradually an effective security force, local government organization and a long range program for economic and social reform." 13/ But there were three other routes or combinations of routes open to France in post-Geneva Vietnam. France could work to maintain French Union ties, indirect French political control and economic domination rather than grant full independence to Vietnam. Or, France could try to reach an agreement with the Viet Minh, expedite elections and achieve a unified country in which French cultural, economic and political interests could be maintained. A fourth possibility, thought likely only if the situation deteriorated to the point of hopelessness, was a French decision to withdraw all military, economic and administrative support from Indochina. 14/

Of the four courses of action open to France, three were rejected by the Eisenhower Administration. Continuation of French Union ties plus indirect French controls would be impossible under Diem,

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whose anti-French feeling ran deep, who had not in the past and would not now accept anything less than complete freedom from France. And Diem had American backing. Dulles believed "the kind of thing he stands for" is the "necessary ingredient of success" and called the Diem government the "nucleus for future efforts." 15/ Accommodation with the Viet Minh was anathema to both Diem and the U.S. Although American policy spoke of taking steps to prevent the complete absorption of the DRV into the Soviet bloc, those steps amounted to nothing more than maintenance of a U.S. consulate in Hanoi. 16/ Dulles in particular could not see Ho Chi Minh as Asia's Tito and refused to deal with him, thereby crushing Mendes-France's hope that Vietnam could become an experiment in peaceful coexistence. 17/ The U.S. was equally determined to prevent the quick withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam. It was believed:

in the last analysis, Vietnamese security will be determined by the degree of French protection and assistance in the development of a national army,

plus Vietnamese energies and the will of other powers to guarantee Vietnamese security. 18/

Thus, United States policy required France to grant full Vietnamese independence quickly and to support a strong indigenous political regime, to maintain French military presence but reduce military, economic and political controls. Basic guidance determined at National Security Council meetings on August 8 and 12 became NSC 5429/2, issued on August 20.

3. U.S. Objectives in Vietnam: Political, Economic, Military

The American formula for government in free Vietnam rested on three legs. Independence was first and more important. France must treat South Vietnam as an independent sovereign nation and the U.S. would deal with it on that basis. Full independence was the only way to win nationalist support away from the Viet Minh, and nationalist support was thought to be essential to successful government in South Vietnam. Secondly, the U.S. would urge Ngo Dinh Diem to establish a government of national union representative of dominant elements on the political scene. After bringing some stability to the nation, a Constituent Assembly would be called and a constitution drafted to herald the legal dethroning of Emperor Bao Dai and inauguration of democracy. 19/ Finally, the formula demanded firm French and U.S. support for Diem. Despite his rigidity, his penchant for a one-man show and his inability to communicate or deal with people, Diem was a nationalist untainted by past association with either Viet Minh or French. This quality, plus full independence, plus Franco-American

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backing and encouragement for broad reform ultimately would result in a strong anti-communist South Vietnam. Or so the U.S. thought.

U.S. determination to back Diem was made with the knowledge that French support for him was hardly enthusiastic. Guy La Chambre, Minister for the Associated States, faulted Diem on three essential points: Diem would oppose a representative government, oppose agrarian reform and refuse to depose Bao Dai and create a republic. La Chambre expected a new government would be necessary to give South Vietnam a chance of winning the 1956 elections. 20/

America's economic policy for South Vietnam was designed to yield immediate political advantage, cope with the staggering distortion of Vietnamese economic life and ease France out of economic affairs. U.S. planners believed integration of land reform measures with refugee resettlement would fill a triple bill: surplus land distributed among the thousands of refugees would invite their political support, facilitate assimilation of Tonkinese with Cochinese and bring the land to full productivity. Aid would be given directly to Vietnam as befitting its independence and as a means to accelerate the "disassociation of France from (economic) levers of command." 21/ French domination in this area, it was thought, stifled Vietnamese efforts and contradicted Vietnamese independence. It also inhibited American economic interests. Militarily, the U.S. would build up "indigenous military forces necessary for internal security . . . working through the French only insofar as necessary." 22/ Exactly how indigenous forces would be developed was not decided until December 1954, because France had some ideas about what to do and the Joint Chiefs of Staff differed with State Department opinions as to the kind of U.S. involvement required.

4. The U.S. "Chooses" Policy for France

In effect, these policy decisions of August 1954 asked Mendes-France to overcome "French traditional interests and emotions which have in the past governed the implementation of policy in Indochina." They asked for -- or demanded -- a "dramatic transformation in French policy" because policy makers believed this was necessary to "win the active loyalty and support of the population for a South Vietnamese Government." 23/ The U.S. asked France to stay in Vietnam militarily, to get out of Vietnamese economic and political life, but at the same time Washington asked for French support and cooperation in implementing U.S. programs. This was probably asking too much.

By December, the U.S. no longer asked for French support but demanded it. By December, the qualified U.S. commitment to Diem had hardened, U.S. involvement in Vietnam had deepened and U.S.

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activities there either dominated or simply excluded the French. Several forces converged to produce this change in U.S. policy. Resolution of differences within the Eisenhower Administration on military issues opened the way for U.S. assumption of responsibilities in what had been an exclusively French preserve. The belief that Diem for all his failings and weaknesses was the only available leader for South Vietnam, and that he needed stronger U.S. and French support to quell opponents and speed development led to the creation of programs designed to provide that strong support.

Finally, the U.S. believed France had not done enough for Diem, believed the schizophrenic French policy of professing support while acting to undermine Diem's regime was largely to blame for Vietnamese difficulties. This resulted in demands that France live up to her promises. It made unilateral American efforts more attractive -- French assistance might not be available in any case -- and it inspired a feeling that Americans had to do more because the French were doing so little.

C. Tentative U.S. Involvement Becomes Deeper, Firmer

1. Adoption of Military Responsibilities

Authorization for General John (Iron Mike) O'Daniel, Chief of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, to take up the task of training the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) was long in coming. General O'Daniel and French General Ely had discussed U.S. participation in training in June 1954; O'Daniel drew up a comprehensive plan for advisory assistance at all levels of the military establishment and in July begged the U.S. to beef up the MAAG staff before August 11, when the Geneva prohibition against introduction of new military personnel went into effect. ^{24/} But the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected.

a. The JCS Arguments Against U.S. Training the VNA

Early in August, the JCS listed four preconditions essential to the success of a U.S. training effort in Indochina, preconditions which should be met before training obligations were assumed. First:

It is absolutely essential that there be a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control. It is hopeless to expect a US military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of armed forces.

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Secondly, that government "should formally request that the United States assume responsibility for training . . . forces and providing the military equipment, financial assistance and political advice necessary to insure internal stability." The Chiefs saw no role in training for the French; the third precondition called for complete French withdrawal from the country:

Arrangements should be made with the French granting full independence to the Associated States and providing for the phased, orderly withdrawal of French forces, French officials and French advisors from Indochina in order to provide motivation and a sound basis for the establishment of national armed forces. The United States from the beginning should insist on dealing directly with the governments of the respective Associated States, completely independent of French participation or control.

Finally, both "local military requirements and the over-all US interests should dictate the size and composition of indigenous forces."

25/

b. Dulles' Views

Of the four preconditions, only the second presented no problem. The State Department, notably Secretary Dulles, Walter F. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, and Kenneth T. Young, head of an interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force, objected to the other three stipulations. Dulles outlined his thinking in a letter of August 18 to Defense Secretary Charles Wilson. Agreeing that the Diem government "is far from strong or stable" Dulles pointed out that reorganization and retraining of the army was "one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong." Calling this "the familiar hen-and-egg argument as to which comes first," Dulles made his preference clear. He saw two courses of action open to the United States:

one, to strengthen the government by means of a political and economic nature and the other, to bolster that government by strengthening the army which supports it.

Dulles wished to adopt both courses.

As for the question of French presence or absence, Dulles said:

It would be militarily disastrous to demand the withdrawal of French forces from Vietnam before the creation

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of a new National Army. However . . . there would seem to be no insuperable objection to the U.S. undertaking a training program . . . while at the same time the French Forces commence a gradual phasing out from that theater. 26/

c. The NSC Backs Dulles

Adoption of NSC 5429/2 indicates the U.S. Government found Dulles' views more persuasive than those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But while it was agreed to "work through the French only insofar as necessary" to build up indigenous forces, the program for bolstering the Vietnamese army was not developed for several months.

d. JCS-State Split on Force Level, Mission for VNA

On September 22, in a memorandum recommending establishment of a MAAG, Cambodia (if "all French advisors ultimately" are withdrawn, if the U.S. deals directly with Phnom Penh and if these caveats are written into a bilateral agreement with Cambodia), the JCS recommended against assignment of training responsibilities to the Saigon MAAG because of the "unstable political situation" in South Vietnam. 27/ Instability was noted "with concern" by the JCS in a second September 22 memorandum dealing with development of forces in Indochina, as was the cease-fire agreement (called "a major obstacle to the introduction of adequate US MAAG personnel and of additional arms and equipment"). 28/ Because of these factors, the Chiefs considered "this is not a propitious time to further indicate United States intentions with respect to the support and training of Vietnamese forces."

But the JCS had been directed by the NSC to address the question of Vietnamese force levels; against their best wishes, one supposes, this memorandum forwarded their views. A 234,000-man army was proposed for Vietnam; the annual cost of training and maintaining this force -- assuming France turned over to the VNA arms and equipment furnished under the U.S. Military Development Assistance Program since 1950 -- was put at \$420 million. Another \$23.5 million would be needed to train and equip the Navy and Air Forces. Further, the JCS wanted speedy relinquishment of French over-all command of the VNA and speedy withdrawal of French forces as the Vietnamese "are capable of exercising command of an effective force." Finally, the JCS requested "a definite agreement . . . be obtained from the French Government with respect to the timing of their programmed phased withdrawal" before U.S. assumption of training responsibilities. 29/

Dulles objected to these proposals:

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It seems to me that the mission of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces should be to provide internal security. The manpower and cost estimates (of the JCS) would seem to be excessive in the above context.

The Secretary called a French request of \$330 million to support the French Expeditionary Corps, then expected to number 150,000 men through 1955, and the Vietnamese plan to keep 230,000 men under arms " . . . beyond what the United States should consider feasible to support for maintaining the security of free Indochina at this time." Instead, he called it "imperative" that the U.S. Government -- e.g., the JCS -- "prepare a firm position on the size of the forces we consider a minimum level to assure the internal security of Indochina."
30/

A week later the Chiefs in turn objected. The idea of training the VNA for internal security contradicted NSC 162/2 which "envisages reliance on indigenous ground forces to the maximum extent possible" in territorial defense. Citing the threat from "considerable numbers of Viet Minh guerrillas and sympathizers . . . known to be or suspected of being within the territory of free Vietnam" and the GVN "intention of requesting the phased withdrawal of the French forces by 1956" the Chiefs said:

This would result in a complete military vacuum unless the Vietnamese are adequately prepared to take over progressively as the French withdraw.

The force levels recommended on September 22 were reaffirmed as "the minimum required ultimately to carry out the . . . objectives" of the VNA, which should be "to attain and maintain internal security and to deter Viet Minh aggression by a limited defense of the Geneva Armistice demarkation line." The JCS pointed again to the unstable political situation in Vietnam, the 342-man MAAG ceiling and concluded:

Under these conditions, US participation in training not only would probably have but limited beneficial effect but also would assume responsibility for any failure of the program. In light of the foregoing and from a military point of view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the United States should not participate in the training of Vietnamese forces in Indochina. However, if it is considered that political considerations are overriding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG, Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training effort. 31/

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e. Again, the NSC Backs Dulles, Recommends a U.S. Military Program in South Vietnam

Political considerations were overriding. The JCS concession to consider training the Vietnamese for internal security alone coincided with deliberations in the Operations Coordinating Board over possible ways in which to strengthen the Diem regime. A crash program had been outlined by State, part of which was a limited interim training program recommended by the OCB. Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed this would set in motion the long-range training program proposed by General O'Daniel in June; he still believed that program should not be adopted. But before the JCS could consider or suggest revisions to the OCB proposal, the National Security Council met on October 22 and approved a joint State-Defense message to Saigon authorizing Ambassador Donald Heath and O'Daniel to "collaborate in setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese Forces." 32/ The JCS were directed to recommend force levels necessary to "accomplish the military objective merely of the maintenance of internal security." 33/

Responding on November 17, the JCS proposed a force of 89,085 at an estimated cost of \$193.1 million for Fiscal Year 1956 and approximately \$100 million for the remainder of FY 1955. To provide internal security and "in an attempt to stabilize the Diem government" the JCS suggested prompt reduction in force and prompt reassignment of selected personnel and units to maintain "the security of the legal government in Saigon and other major population centers," execute "regional security operations in each province" and perform "territorial pacification missions." Later, military centers would be established for reorganization and training of the military.

The Chiefs expressed serious reservations about the probability of Vietnamese -- and American -- success. First,

the chaotic internal political situation within Vietnam is such that there is no assurance that the security forces visualized herein can be developed into loyal and effective support for the Diem Government, or, if developed, that these forces will result in political and military stability within South Vietnam. Unless the Vietnamese themselves show an inclination to make individual and collective sacrifices required to resist communism, which they have not done to date, no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay complete Communist victory in South Vietnam.

Secondly, "the cooperation and collaboration of the French MAAG" is vital to effective execution of the program -- and the JCS doubted that support would be readily offered. Finally, the Chiefs cautioned,

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the above program does not provide adequate security for the Associated States against external aggression after the withdrawal of the French forces. With the Viet Minh increasing the size and effectiveness of their forces and with no forces in being committed to mutual defense under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the above long-range program would be insufficient to provide more than limited initial resistance to an organized military assault by the Viet Minh. 34/

f. Collins Agrees with the NSC

Another memorandum of November 17 indicated how quickly the United States had moved to inaugurate the crash program approved at the October 22 NSC meeting. Secretary Dulles outlined for President Eisenhower the recommendations of General J. Lawton Collins, special envoy sent to Vietnam to over-see all U.S. operations, coordinate them with French programs and get things moving. Collins recommended the the "Vietnamese National Army...be reduced by July 1955 to 77,000. It should be placed under Vietnamese command and control by that date.... The cost to the U.S. would be two hundred million dollars annually.... The United States should assume training responsibility...by January 1, 1955, with French cooperation and utilizing French trainers."

Collins insisted that French forces be retained in Vietnam:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps were withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could act.

To "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces," Collins urged U.S. financial support of at least \$100 million through December 1955. General Ely concurred. 35/

2. Conditions in Vietnam Invite Firmer Action

The situation in Vietnam during the autumn of 1954 invited an action program of some kind -- any kind. Premier Diem barely controlled Saigon; he was opposed by his army's chief of staff, by powerful sect politicians guarding significant special interests with powerful sect armies; he was at least tacitly opposed by many French in Vietnam. The countryside had been devastated by the war; communications, administration and financial operations were stalled; an already prostrate economy was threatened by the deluge of some 860,000 refugees from the north. Over all hung "an atmosphere of frustration and disillusionment" created by the Geneva Accords and imposed partition, "compounded by widespread uncertainty as to French and US intentions." 36/ U.S. policy in August set out to correct the uncertainty: Diem was to be supported by both America and France. But U.S. policy could not eliminate Diem's opposition.

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a. The Military Threatens Diem

General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese National Army, was the first coup-plotter to rise and first to fall. September threats of a military revolt were first staved off by the mediation of U.S. Ambassador Donald Heath and General Ely (who doubted Diem's capacity to lead but worked to prevent his violent downfall). Then Diem uncovered a coup plot, arrested some Hinh supporters, removed the general from command and ordered him out of the country. ^{37/} Hinh refused to leave and continued his machinations against the government. Plans for one coup in October were dropped when Hinh was told revolt would mean automatic termination of U.S. aid. ^{38/} Another scheduled for October 26 was foiled when Colonel E. G. Lansdale, head of the Saigon Military Mission and chief CIA man on the scene, lured two key subordinates out of the country. Lansdale invited Hinh and staff to visit the Philippines. Hinh unhappily declined but his supporters -- one of whom allegedly was a French agent -- could not resist the chance to see the inner workings of the Magsaysay-led, U.S.-supported operation against Huk insurgents. ^{39/} Finally, in November, Bao Dai was persuaded by America and France to intervene on Diem's behalf. He did, ordered Hinh to report to Cannes, and on November 19, the general left the country. ^{40/} General Hinh enjoyed some French support in his anti-Diem activity. Ambassador Heath reported he received "quiet encouragement if not unofficial support" from many French officers and officials in Saigon and "at the working level in Paris." ^{41/} Hinh was also aided initially by the sects, later by the Binh Xuyen.

b. The Sects Threaten Diem

The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, basically religious groups with important political controls and interests as well as private, French-subsidized armies, worked with Hinh through early September. Then, spurred by the knowledge that precipitate action would jeopardize American aid, the sects agreed to work with Diem. ^{42/} Last minute threats and "heavy pressure" from French officials against coalition left sect leaders "dizzy" but they recovered sufficiently to accept cabinet positions on September 24. ^{43/} Shaky to begin with, the coalition never worked: Diem refused to delegate responsibility to his eight new ministers and they soon tired of trying to work through the government.

c. And the Binh Xuyen Oppose Diem

The Binh Xuyen, too, considered joining the coalition but pulled out when Diem refused to name Binh Xuyen leader, "a colorful brigand named Le Van (Bay) Vien" Minister of the Interior. ^{44/} Bay Vien had forged a motley group of small-time gangsters into a fairly sophisticated organization of 6000 big-time gangsters and river pirates, and

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had been helped in this endeavor by Bao Dai and French colonial administrators. The Binh Xuyen controlled prostitution and gambling in Cholon and the Saigon-Cholon police force -- reportedly because Bay Vien paid Bao Dai some 40 million piasters for these privileges. ^{45/} Still-dissident sect leaders such as Ba Cut, whose 5000 Hoa Hao adherents denounced Geneva and refused cooperation with Diem, and Frenchmen opposed to Diem abetted Binh Xuyen intrigues against the government.

3. French Laxity Demands Strong U.S. Programs

More than the Vietnamese power struggles and Diem's inability to consolidate his rule, French activities during the autumn of 1954 galvanized the United States. From acquiescence to U.S. demands in September, American policy makers felt France had moved toward opposition to U.S. demands by November. That this assessment of French actions was either objective or fair is questionable.

a. The Washington Conference, September, 1954

After Franco-American discussions in Washington in late September -- the first in a progression of monthly meetings on Vietnam -- the United States seemed to have scored highest. France promised to support Diem, to grant independence to Vietnam quickly. ^{46/} The transfer of financial, administrative, economic and other functions to the Vietnamese had begun and would be completed by December 1954. That France balked at U.S. demands for an immediate grant of independence outside of the French Union is not surprising: French cultural, economic and political interests in Vietnam were still strong; the Frenchman's belief in the validity of the French Union was deep. No French government dared defy public opinion by seeming to hasten the end of the French Union. ^{47/} France felt the U.S. had an "almost psychological attachment to 'independence' without giving sufficient thought and attention to the practical problems and risks involved." ^{48/}

Secondly, the U.S. had been able to defer a commitment to finance the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam although an indication that aid would be resumed, if not resumption itself, had been the first order of French business at the Washington Conference. ^{49/} France agreed to maintain the Corps in Vietnam but was told no aid figures would be available until December. ^{50/}

Both France and the U.S. thought their respective economic aims had been won. France objected strongly to the idea of direct American aid to Vietnam on the grounds that it violated the Geneva Accords, would needlessly provoke Communist China, promote graft and corruption in Vietnam, and intensify the political struggle. Plus, "past (French) sacrifices on behalf of Vietnam and their obligation as a member of the French Union" made French supervision of aid essential. ^{57/} To France, a compromise agreement drafted by Walter Bedell Smith meant the U.S.

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accepted these arguments and was willing to give France a hand in disbursing aid to the Associated States. 52/ The U.S. chose not to interpret the agreement this way. The State Department said the U.S. merely indicated willingness to consult on such matters. 53/ On 29 October, Dulles told Mendes-France that the U.S. alone would disperse aid; by late November Mendes-France finally tired of arguing an obviously lost cause and dropped the matter. 54/

b. The U.S. Faults French Support for Diem

Despite apparent agreement at Washington to back Diem, Secretary Dulles met with Mendes-France three weeks later in Paris about the same subject. "For...ready reference" Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover quoted for Dulles part of the 29 September Minute of Understanding in which the

...representatives of France and the United States agree that their respective governments support Ngo Dinh Diem in the establishment and maintenance of a strong, anti-Communist and nationalist government. To this end France and the United States will urge all anti-Communist elements in Vietnam to cooperate fully with the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem in order to counter vigorously the Viet Minh and build a strong free Vietnam....While Ely seems to have attempted honestly to carry out this agreement, the fact that many French elements have never accepted Diem solution must have weakened Ely's efforts and encouraged Hinh camarilla in its recalcitrance.... Unless Diem receives unreserved US and French support, his chances of success appear slight. With such support, his chances are probably better than even, repeat even. 55/

c. Accommodation Between Paris and Hanoi?

Apart from the quiet backing given Diem's opponents by French officers and officials in Saigon and persistent Paris proposals for a change in government (Prince Buu Hoi, whose "political ideologies" were repugnant to Dulles, was a French favorite at this time), the U.S. found in French accommodative gestures toward Hanoi ample proof that French backing for Diem was reserved at best. 56/ Ambassador Dillon felt Mendes-France found in Vietnam a "situation ideally designed to test (the) bases of his fundamental political philosophy of 'peaceful coexistence'" and that his government grew more and more "disposed to explore and consider a policy looking toward an eventual peaceful North-South rapprochement." 57/ French insistence on strict legal interpretation of the Geneva Accords was one example of accommodation thinking. France objected to anything which could possibly delay or destroy elections in 1956; Dillon predicted Paris would accept the results of elections "however academic that exercise may eventually prove to be." 58/

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But the most worrisome example to those at the State Department who lined up against any kind of accommodation was the Sainteny Mission to Hanoi.

d. Sainteny or Ely?

Jean Sainteny, credited with reaching short-lived independence accords with Ho Chi Minh in March 1946, was sent back to Hanoi in August 1954 to find ways to protect French business and cultural interests in Tonkin. 59/ Sainteny's past success at rapprochement gave the mission definite political overtones. General Ely wished Paris had sent a "stupid type of consular official" not a man of Sainteny's "active stripe"; he was disturbed enough to fly to Paris to tell Mendes-France he would resign if French policy was to play a "double game" in North and South Vietnam aimed at backing whichever side ultimately won. Mendes-France assured Ely that French policy was to give maximum support to the anti-Communist elements in South Vietnam and do everything possible to assure their victory in 1956. Ely was placated and returned to Saigon. But Sainteny remained in Hanoi and maximum support for Diem did not materialize. 60/

From another source came word that Ely was not "au courant" with French policy. French Union Counsellor Jacque Raphael-Leygues, reportedly a member of the Mendes-France "brain trust" on Indochina, told Ambassador Dillon that Sainteny had convinced Paris that South Vietnam was doomed and the "only possible means of salvaging anything was to play the Viet Minh game and woo the Viet Minh away from Communist ties in the hope of creating a Titoist Vietnam which would cooperate with France and might even adhere to the French Union." Raphael-Leygues said France deferred to U.S. wishes over which government to support in Saigon to get money for the French Expeditionary Corps and to fix responsibility for the eventual loss of South Vietnam on the U.S. 61/

In December 1954, Sainteny won Ho Chi Minh's agreement to permit French enterprises to carry on without discrimination. But if the contract pleased Paris it did not assure French businessmen in Tonkin. Viet Minh legislation would regulate their operations; profits could not be transferred outside the Communist orbit. Most French concerns decided potential benefit was not worth the risk of doing business with the DRV and despite Sainteny's efforts to establish mixed government-private corporations, most withdrew from the North. 62/ Sainteny remained as a "general delegate" to the DRV.

e. The Mansfield Report

A final spur to U.S. action was the Mansfield Report. After a fact-finding trip to South Vietnam, Senator Mansfield concluded

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his old acquaintance Diem was the only man for the job in Saigon. He said the issue "is not Diem as an individual but rather the program for which he stands." That program "represents genuine nationalism,... is prepared to deal effectively with corruption and...demonstrates a concern in advancing the welfare of the Vietnamese people." The Senator felt it "improbable" that any other leadership "dedicated to these principles" could be found and recommended the Government "consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union Forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in Free Vietnam" if Diem fell. 63/

The Mansfield Report elated Diem (who proceeded to react with even more intransigent self-righteousness to suggestions of change), subdued the French and annoyed Paris. For those Frenchmen who favored conciliation with the Viet Minh, Mansfield's analysis proved the validity of their policy. Obviously, they said, if Diem falls the U.S. will heed Mansfield and withdraw from Vietnam. Equally obviously, they said, Diem will fall. Ergo, France should start "betting on Viet Minh to win war." 64/ To French officials willing to back Diem the Report and Washington's endorsement of it was a violation of the Franco-American agreement to support another government if Diem fell. When Mendes-France reminded Dulles of this and spoke of the need to lay plans for "another structure of government" which both France and the US could support, Dulles was noncommittal. 65/

4. NSC Action Program of October and Eisenhower Letter to Diem

President Eisenhower's letter to Diem of 24 October (written August and shown to the French at that time; held up until the political situation in South Vietnam settled somewhat; finally approved for transmission at the October 22 NSC meeting) was called a direct violation of the principle of cooperative action agreed upon in September by Minister La Chambre. 66/ French Ambassador Bonnet told Secretary Dulles that "it was felt (the letter) had given Diem full rein without requiring of him as a preliminary condition that he should first succeed in forming a strong and stable government, even though this preliminary condition had been a part of the basis of the Washington agreements." Bonnet added that the letter might be a violation of the armistice and the Viet Minh might take advantage of it. 67/ Then, when Ambassador Dillon suggested to the Quai d'Orsay that French support for Diem had not been all that it might have been, La Chambre was inflamed. Not only was this a false allegation, it was a direct slur on General Ely, the government in Paris and the glory of France. M. La Chambre said he was personally convinced Diem was leading South Vietnam to disaster but would still support him:

We prefer to lose in Vietnam with the US rather than to win without them...we would rather support Diem knowing he is going to lose and thus keep Franco-US solidarity than to pick someone who could retain Vietnam for the free world if this meant breaking Franco-US solidarity. 68/

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In response, Secretary Dulles formally told Mendes-France that both the Eisenhower letter and the stronger U.S. action were "in furtherance of the understandings reached at Washington." The U.S. had not "the slightest idea of questioning the good faith of the French government" but "many French officials have not concealed their belief that Diem has failed...and...should be replaced." This attitude produced an "impasse in Saigon" necessitating firmer action. 69/ La Chambre received this with "little comment" other than to suggest appointment of Nguyen Van Tam (General Hinh's father, Premier during 1952-1953 and a strong-even oppressive-administrator) to the Interior Ministry. La Chambre called this a "way out of the mess...(for) here is a man who knows how to fight Communists." 70/ As in the past, the U.S. rejected the proposal.

5. More Action: The Collins Mission

The initial U.S. action program rested on three assumptions: that Diem could be persuaded to accept U.S. proposals, that Hinh would obey the government, that the French at all levels would cooperate. None proved immediately valid. So the U.S. adopted yet another tactic. General J. Lawton Collins, U.S. Representative to the NATO Military Committee, was dispatched to Vietnam on November 8 with the personal rank of Ambassador (Heath returned to the State Department). As President Eisenhower described it, Collins' mission was:

to coordinate and direct a program in support of (Diem's) government to enable it to: (a) promote internal security and political and economic stability; (b) establish and maintain control throughout the territory; and (c) effectively counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the demarkation line. 71/

After initial resistance to the Collins mission (seen as a precursor to complete U.S. take-over of Indochina), General Ely established a close working relationship with Collins. A seven-point program for political, military and economic action was quickly designed. On December 13, Ely and Collins signed a Minute of Understanding agreeing that France would grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1, 1955 and that the U.S. would assume training duties in January. They agreed the French Expeditionary Corps must remain in Vietnam and the level of financial assistance suggested by Collins (\$100 million through December 1955 after which assistance was not contemplated) was adopted by the Foreign Operations Administration and subsequently announced to Paris. Aid was contingent upon consultation with Congress and "subject to Ely and Collins and the two governments mutually agreeing on what is to be done in Indochina." 72/

6. France Objects to Collins-Ely Agreements

Paris was unhappy about the aid figure -- a third of what France requested. Consequently, withdrawal of French forces was speeded: of the 150,000 troops scheduled to remain in Vietnam through 1955, all but 35,000 were phased out. Monetary reasons were said to be

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paramount but political and psychological pressures for the pull-out were probably more important. There was strong sentiment in France for sending the FEC to North Africa where it could serve the interests of France and the French Union. In Vietnam, French soldiers served the free world but were hated by the Vietnamese and ignored by the very powers they aided, powers which did not care enough to properly defray French expenses. 73/

Paris was more upset by the Minute of Understanding. During November discussion with Dulles, Mendes-France had said he doubted full autonomy could be assumed by the Vietnamese by July 1955 and believed a readjustment of MAAG personnel for the new training mission might violate the Geneva Accords. These arguments were reiterated at December Trilateral meetings. But Mendes-France's real trouble was agreeing to phase out French instructors. Neither the French people nor French soldiers would understand why France was denied influence while required to support such a heavy burden in Vietnam. Mendes-France and General Ely insisted that if French instructors were eliminated the U.S. automatically would have assumed primary responsibility for free world policy toward Indochina. 74/ (Dulles and General Collins rejected that line of reasoning but convinced neither the French nor others that it was fallacious.)

Collins compromised in the Minute of Understanding by agreeing to softer language (both French and American instructors would be removed as Vietnamese efficiency increased), hoping to assuage Paris. He failed. When the Minute was forwarded for final approval Mendes-France stalled. First he had to study it closely to ensure no conflict with Geneva was involved. Then on January 7, the French submitted a redraft of the Minute which omitted reference to General O'Daniel's authority over French personnel. 75/

Collins was already annoyed by hedging in December, tantamount to a slap in the face of Ely to whom full authority to negotiate the agreement had been delegated. 76/ He refused to "agree to (the redraft) unless specifically instructed by higher authority" because lines of authority were not spelled out. 77/ Yet Ely thought Paris had approved the original agreement. He urged Collins to continue negotiations with the Vietnamese on the basis of the first Minute, advice Collins followed despite the Paris-Washington snafu. On January 19 and 20 a formal exchange of letters finalized the agreement for U.S. assumption of training duties and financial support (\$214.5 million) for the Vietnamese forces. The forces would be scaled down to 100,000 by December 1955. Both cost and force levels were raised from Collins' November recommendations in deference to Vietnamese arguments. 78/ The U.S. and France remained deadlocked until February 11, 1955, when the terms -- but not the form -- of the original agreement were finally accepted. The next day, General O'Daniel assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) went into operation. 79/

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D. Franco-American Impasse Over Diem

Resolution of military problems within the U.S. Government and between the U.S. and France was a fairly major accomplishment. Political differences were not similarly resolved. To support or not to support Ngo Dinh Diem was the issue over which France and America split.

1. Paris: Diem Is Ill-Suited for Rule

As noted above, France acquiesced in the retention of Diem as Prime Minister in deference to U.S. insistence and French concern for U.S. financial assistance for the FEC during the September Washington conference. In mid-November, Mendes-France reaffirmed the 29 September agreement but said an alternative form of government had to be considered unless Diem implemented an energetic program within the next two months. By December, when Mendes-France, Dulles and Eden met in Paris, the French Premier made it clear he thought the time had come for a change. Two ways to accomplish change were suggested. Bao Dai could name a Viceroy and give him full authority to use the powers of Chief of State to unify the warring political factions. Tran Van Huu, Nguyen Van Tam or Dr. Phan Huy Quat were possible candidates for this job. 80/ Or, Bao Dai himself could return to Saigon and form a government with Huu as Premier, Tam as Interior Minister, Quat in Defense. 81/

France wanted Diem out of power for several reasons. U.S. policymakers did not seem to fully appreciate how galling Diem's Franco-phobia must have been, nor did the U.S. seem to understand -- or allow for -- the divisive effect Diem's militant anti-communist stance had within the French Government. Little consideration was given to charges that the U.S. was undermining France by portraying itself as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S. could appreciate the validity of French arguments that Diem had not been and perhaps would not be able to unify and stabilize South Vietnam.

2. Collins: Diem Cannot Lead South Vietnam

General Collins had been skeptical about Diem from the outset; by December he was convinced an alternative to his government should be urgently considered. Diem's refusal to name Dr. Quat as Defense Minister triggered Collins' recommendation. Both Collins and Colonel Lansdale had urged Diem to accept Quat, agreeing Quat alone was strong enough to unify the Vietnamese armed forces behind the Saigon government. On December 13, Collins suggested five reasons for Diem's adverse decision:

- (1) unwillingness to delegate control of Vietnam armed forces to any strong man;
- (2) fear of Quat as potential successor;
- (3) opposition of sects (who also feared a strong man in the defense post);
- (4) influence of brothers Luyen and Nhu (anxious to neutralize the power of any potential successor);
- (5) desire to retain Minh (acting defense minister; loyal to Diem) in government. 82/

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According to Collins,

Whatever the reasons, the failure to utilize Quat epitomizes lack of unity among Vietnamese and lack of decisive leadership on part of Diem...Acceptance of status quo with Minh elevated to Defense Ministry and sects reinforced in veto power over government is simply postponing evil day of reckoning as to when, if ever, Diem will assert type of leadership that can unify this country and give it chance of competing with hard, effective, unified control of Ho Chi Minh. 83/

Three days later, General Collins communicated his "final judgment" on the situation. He made four recommendations:

- A. Continue to support Diem along present lines for short while longer but without committing US to specific aid programs;
- B. Consider urgently, as possible alternative, the early return of Bao Dai;
- C. If after short period of further test Diem Government fails to achieve substantial progressive action and if return of Bao Dai is acceptable to US Government, to support his prompt return;
- D. If return of Bao Dai is not acceptable to US Government, assuming Diem Government continues to demonstrate inability to unite free Vietnam behind an aggressive program, I recommend re-evaluation of our plans for assisting Southeast Asia with special attention (to an) earlier proposal. 84/

The earlier proposal, made by General Collins on December 13, was that the U.S. gradually withdraw from Vietnam. Collins said this was the "least desirable (but) in all honesty and in view of what I have observed here to date this may be the only sound solution." 85/

3. State Department: Diem Is the Only Available Leader

The State Department went along with Collins' suggestion to avoid specific assistance commitments at the present time but could not see salvation in Bao Dai. A memorandum from Ambassador Heath, then working in the Far East Bureau is indicative of State Department thinking. Heath first called attention to "massive opposition" faced by Diem and French unwillingness to firmly support him -- implying that all Diem's problems were not Diem's fault. He then spoke of General Collins' "attempt to achieve a rapid solution," said Collins' "recommendations are now based on the circumstances of a satisfactory settlement prior to January 1" -- thereby suggesting that one not looking for a rapid solution might not arrive at similar conclusions.

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The memorandum closed with Heath's interpretation of Secretary Dulles' policy and his own thoughts as to what ought to be done:

In our view, General Collins' recommendations ignore the basic factor that we would assist a Communist takeover by a withholding of our aid, even if it must necessarily be given to a government which is less than perfect. The Secretary has analyzed the situation as one in which we are conducting a time buying operation. If we withhold our support to Vietnam, it will be taken over sooner than if we extend smaller aid, at a figure of about a third of last year. In the meantime, we will proceed to do what we can to strengthen Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. This is my understanding of the Secretary's policy.

I recommend we inform the Secretary and General Collins that we recognize the dangers posed by the above policy, but that in the lack of more useful alternatives that we will continue to support Diem, because there is no one to take his place who would serve US objectives any better. This includes the Bao Dai solution which is opposed by the facts of Bao Dai's lack of support in Vietnam and his past demonstrations of inability to govern. The fear that a fiscal commitment of over \$300 million plus our national prestige would be lost in a gamble on the retention of Free Vietnam is a legitimate one, but the withholding of our support at this juncture would almost inevitably have a far worse effect." 86/

The substance of the memorandum was cabled to Secretary Dulles, then in Paris for the Tripartite French, U.S. and British discussions. 87/

4. December Tripartite Talks

a. France Proposes Alternative to Diem, Dulles Seems to Acquiesce

On 19 December, Mendes-France opened the Indochina talks by calling Diem's approach "wholly negative," said "not a single reform suggested (by Franco-American working groups advising the government on all matters) had been accepted by Diem," that the "French Government now considered...a strong approach would have to be made to Diem." Reaffirming his past agreement with Dulles' "thesis that we must do our maximum to permit Diem Government to succeed" Mendes-France added:

now...he was not longer sure that even maximum would help. He said we must now have alternate formula in mind. Without varying from our stated purpose of supporting Diem Government as long as it exists we must now prepare in our minds for alternative. 88/

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Dulles agreed the

task in South Vietnam was difficult (but) regarded basic factors as favorable. People were opposed to communism and had great natural resources...they received greater aid from abroad than North...situation was much improved now that there was full cooperation between French and American authorities. The problem must not be approached in spirit of defeatism. Only serious problem we have not yet solved is that of indigenous leadership. We cannot expect it to be solved ideally because there is no tradition among indigenous people for self-government. We must get along with something less good than best....(The US was not repeat not committed to Diem in any irrevocable sense. We have accepted him because we knew of no one better. Developments have confirmed our fears as to his limitations but no substitute for him has yet been proposed. Those suggested in past varied from month to month. Now it is claimed that only Bao Dai can save situation. If that is case, then we must indeed be desperate....We should continue to back Diem but exert more pressure on him to make changes we consider necessary. 89/

Mendes-France suggested the U.S. and France approach Bao Dai and mentioned the French Viceroy plan to replace Diem. Dulles countered by saying the U.S. and French might use Bao Dai but "we must go to him prepared with our own ideas and not...simply accept his." Dulles did not expect any Viceroy to be able "to decide on alternate to Diem and to set up machinery to implement our ideas...our job (is) to create this machinery." He added,

We must exhaust all our pressures on Diem to get things done before considering alternate solutions....He asked Mendes not to think we had obstinately closed our minds to possible alternate solution. We had not repeat not, but our investigation of alternate must be done on careful basis and we must for present support Diem. 90/

Mendes-France agreed. He summarized his position as follows:

First, to support Diem; second, to study alternatives. Collins and Ely should be instructed to explore further possibilities including Bao Dai with great discretion... third point was that Ely and Collins should be requested to investigate matter of timing. How much further delay can be tolerated?...We must set deadline.... 91/

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Then Dulles agreed -- but added a fourth point:

If the US should decide that there is no repeat no good alternative to Diem we will have to consider how much more investment we will be prepared to make in Indochina. Our policy would have to be reappraised. Congressional committees...would have to be consulted. Mansfield believes in Diem...Even slight chance of success in Vietnam was worth considerable investment. US had also to think of what happened in adjacent countries -- in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Malaya. US situation was different from that of French. French had an investment in lives and property in Vietnam while ours involved effect that fate of Vietnam would have on rest of Southeast Asia. 92/

b. But Dulles Reports, No Other Suitable Leader Can Be Seen

After the Tripartite meetings, Dulles reported his assessment of their outcome to Saigon. He said he had agreed with Mendes-France on four points concerning Diem but had not agreed to a deadline for Diem's replacement. Rather, "Collins and Ely would report late January on overall situation."

Dulles called the "investment in Vietnam justified even if only to buy time to build up strength elsewhere in area" and concluded:

We are going to have to maintain flexible policy and proceed carefully by stages in Vietnam...Under present circumstances and unless situation (in Vietnam) clearly appears hopeless and rapidly disintegrating, we have no choice but continue our aid Vietnam and support of Diem. There no other suitable leader known to us. 93/

France believed Dulles had in fact committed the United States to consider a change with which Bao Dai would be associated by mid-January. Washington denied it and Paris protests were unable to budge the State Department. The U.S. and France did agree that the Tripartite talks had given Collins and Ely a mandate to study alternatives, however. 94/

c. The U.S. Looks at Alternatives

Having told Paris the U.S. was not committed to either a deadline or an alternative involving Bao Dai, the U.S. proceeded to study alternatives. Secretary of Defense Wilson asked the Joint Staff to assess the impact on military commitments to Southeast Asia of the loss of South Vietnam, of continued but reduced assistance to that nation and of a range of actions in between. 95/ The JCS responded by calling Wilson's alternate options incomplete, that consideration of increased aid, and institution of a unilateral program of direct guidance to the GVN through an "advisory system" should be among U.S. considerations. If these programs were insufficient to insure the retention of South

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Vietnam to the free world the U.S. might deploy "self-sustaining forces to South Vietnam either unilaterally or as part of a Manila Pact force" or the U.S. could withdraw all U.S. support from South Vietnam and concentrate on "saving the rest of Southeast Asia."

No specific course of action was recommended but the JCS predicted the loss of Cambodia and Laos would follow a communist take-over of South Vietnam; they felt a greatly expanded aid program would be necessary to retain a friendly government in Thailand. In any event, the chance that U.S. armed forces would be required to support American policy in Southeast Asia would be greatly increased if South Vietnam fell. The Chiefs concluded by saying "a firm decision at the national level as to the implementation of US policy in Southeast Asia is mandatory, recommended...against a 'static' defense for this area and ...recommended adoption of a concept of offensive actions against the military power of the aggressor." 96/

5. January 1955: U.S. Backing for Diem is Reaffirmed

General Collins' recommendations to the National Security Council on January 20, 1955 underscored the crucial position South Vietnam held within the context of American policy toward Southeast Asia. Like Dulles and the Joint Chiefs before him, Collins said:

In view of the importance of Vietnam to all of Southeast Asia, I am convinced that the United States should expend the funds, material and efforts required to strengthen the country and help it retain its independence. I cannot guarantee that Vietnam will remain free even with our aid. But I know that without our aid Vietnam will surely be lost to Communism. If the chances of success are difficult to calculate, the results of a withdrawal of American aid are only too certain not only in Vietnam but throughout Southeast Asia. Such a withdrawal would hasten the pace of Communist advances in the Far East as a whole and could result in the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism. In my opinion the chance of success is not only worth the gamble; we cannot afford to let free Vietnam go by default. 97/

Collins was more sanguine about Diem than he had been a month before. Diem had shown some progress: General Minh was named Minister of Defense and seemed to be doing an adequate job; Diem had launched an anti-corruption drive (and in closing the Grande Monde Casino, Diem threw down the gauntlet before the Binh Xuyen) and had made some advances in land reform. Collins recommended continued U.S. support for him:

On balance I believe that Diem's integrity, strong nationalism, tenacity and spiritual qualities render him the best available Premier to lead Vietnam...against communism....Considering all factors, although the situation

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in Vietnam is not bright, I believe that if Diem has firm US support and guidance and active French cooperation, or at least acquiescence, his government has a reasonable prospect of success.

98/

As a result of Collins' recommendations the NSC endorsed a strong policy in Vietnam: the US would continue to support the Diem government and continue to press France to carry out its commitments under the Smith-LaChambre agreement. The NSC approved in principle the programs of military and economic aid to implement Collins' recommendations (about \$500 million) and determined to seek reaffirmation of the Manila powers' determination to react under the SEATO treaty if hostilities were resumed. 99/ Dulles decided to "take the plunge" and begin direct aid to Vietnam on January 1, 1955. The aid program was to be flexible and fluid, adjusted according to circumstances and subject to discontinuance at any time, as at present. 100/

E. Crisis of the Spring, 1955

With strong United States backing, Diem went into the sect crisis of the spring, 1955. Different from the military coup crisis of Autumn 1954 and the Quat cabinet crisis of December, the sect crisis was resolved by Diem's taking firm action and was not followed by another. It was followed by the end of any real French presence in Vietnam.

1. The Problem of the Sect Armies

The sects had been quiescent but not quiet since Cao Dai and Hoa Hao ministers had joined the cabinet in September 1954. The end of French subsidies for sect armies in February shook them out of complacency. Diem agreed to pay a part of what the armies had received from the French to ease the transition of some 40,000 soldiers to civilian life. But transition it was to be: he would not tolerate armed bands separate from VNA command and separate from Saigon's political guidance. Sect leaders had different objectives, however. They wanted to preserve their military forces by integrating, intact, as many units as possible into the National Army. (With a VNA force level of 100,000, few could be accommodated; in January only 6,000 sect troops had been absorbed.) Secondly, the sects wanted substantial government assistance for soldiers forced to leave the military. Most important, they wanted recognition of their areas of influence and Diem's assurance that he would not encroach on their territories. Diem would countenance no part of this third request. 101/

Since December, a Franco-American group headed by Col. Lansdale and directed to "come up with a peaceful solution" to the problem had worked furiously, found a solution and urged its prompt adoption. Generals Collins and Ely decided to give the matter further study. Lansdale's reaction:

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We warned them that time was extremely short, that the sects were about to take action by arms and that a peaceful solution would have to be introduced immediately or the opportunity would be lost. The opportunity was lost. 102/

2. The United Front Challenges Diem

Lost because Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect leaders joined with Bay Vien in February, put down hostilities among themselves and joined in a United Front of Nationalist Forces. In March, the United Front demanded Diem form a government of large national union. The eight sect cabinet members resigned (although Cao Dai Generals The' and Phuong soon changed their minds). A United Front delegate tried to convince Bao Dai to withdraw Diem's powers as premier but the timely arrival of a personal letter from President Eisenhower outlining US objectives and progress in Vietnam proved more persuasive. The letter either reassured Bao Dai that the US had not written him out of the political picture or made him think twice about joining with the sects and thereby incurring US wrath. Whatever the reason, he refused to intervene on behalf of the Front. 103/ Diem called the Front Program an ultimatum and would not budge.

France wanted Bao Dai to mediate between Diem and the United Front. The US wanted to issue a joint declaration telling the sects both America and France opposed violence and warning them that the French Expeditionary Corps would block any movement of Hoa Hao troops into Saigon to reinforce the Binh Xuyen. Ely and Paris refused the warning clause: French troops would act only in protection of the lives and property of French and foreign nationals. 104/

3. Diem Challenges the Binh Xuyen

During this time, Lansdale was meeting almost nightly with Diem. He reports Diem

was desperately trying to get French and US help to remove the Surete from the control of the Binh Xuyen. French and US reactions to the problem were in the form of advice to proceed slowly, to act with caution. Events would not permit this. 105/

Before dawn on the 28th of March, a paratrooper company loyal to Diem attacked and overcame the Binh Xuyen-controlled central police headquarters. The next day, Diem told Defense Minister Minh he planned to oust Binh Xuyen Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang that afternoon -- March 29 -- and replace him with someone loyal to his regime. Minh insisted Diem at least consult the cabinet before taking action. Diem refused and Minh resigned. Representatives of General Ely were able to persuade Diem to defer any move against the Surete, however. 106/

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On the night of March 29-30 the Binh Xuyen struck back. Mortar shells fell on the palace grounds and Binh Xuyen troops tried to regain the prefecture. They were repulsed by National Army troops. The VNA then moved to attack the Surete' itself in retaliation but French officers apparently cut off their gas and ammunition supplies temporarily to keep the National Army on the defensive. Fighting ended by 3:30 in the morning of March 30. 107/

General Ely opposed a VNA offensive against the Surete' headquarters, not because it might fail but because it was irrelevant. Relevant was Diem's inability to defeat the sects rapidly and decisively throughout the country. If force were used to prove a minor point, a long, bloody and major civil war would surely ensue. Ely was outraged at Diem's attitude. He felt the premier verged on megalomania and was ready to "put the city to sword and flame to establish his authority." 108/ Collins sympathized with Ely, but also felt if Diem did not prove he could control Saigon he would be forced to accede to sect demands. 109/

4. Truce - But No Calm

On March 31, a 48-hour cease-fire was won by General Jean Gambiez, trusted by both the National Army and the Binh Xuyen. The truce was extended into April but failed to cool tempers or ease tensions. (Cao Dai forces which had broken with the United Front were integrated into the National Army on March 31, however -- one happy note for Diem.)

a. Lansdale's version

Lansdale, whose account of this and later developments is not at all flattering to the French, says Ely decided to impose a cease-fire and won Collins' concurrence. French officers then moved in and stopped the fighting. Lansdale "saw Ambassador Collins...explaining that only the Binh Xuyen would gain by the cease-fire." But it continued:

Ambassador Collins was sincerely convinced that the Binh Xuyen could be induced by French negotiations to withdraw from the Surete' and police control of the metropolis.... 110/

Lansdale reports the French had long been working against Diem through the Vietnamese National Army (they used its G-6 as an arm of French intelligence) and that French soldiers under his command in the National Security Division of TRIM tried to sabotage the Diem regime and US programs designed to strengthen it.

The French had daily fed us the latest French propaganda line (Diem was weak, Diem was bloodthirsty, the VNA had low morale ...was unable to fight, Americans didn't understand the Vietnamese, all whites must encourage only selected Vietnamese loyal to the French because the remainder would turn against

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all whites in another "night of the long knives" similar to that of 1946.)

Now the French had been insistent that the National Army was a hollow shell, that its officers would refuse to fight...that morale was so bad the troops would desert rather than follow "bloody Diem." 111/

Lansdale implies Collins fell for this "propaganda" but he, Lansdale, did not.

On the cease-fire, Lansdale reports:

The French told Diem that if he tried to take over Surete headquarters which was now included in the French zone, French troops would open fire on the Vietnamese Army. The US advised Diem to be patient, that the French were really being helpful by negotiating with the Binh Xuyen. The cease-fire limit was extended...Sizeable sums were being offered (by French) to Army officers and to sect leaders who were remaining loyal to Diem and to entice them into being at least neutral. Those who refused were subjected to character assassination attacks... 112/

b. Ely and Collins' Decision: Diem Must Go

On April 7, Collins and Ely discussed Diem. Ely said Diem could be maintained only by overcoming enormous difficulties. After a full day of "soul-searching," Ely had been forced to conclude Diem had to go to preserve Vietnam for the free world. He would accept anyone but Diem as premier. 113/ Collins had been nearing a similar conclusion. On March 31 he told the State Department it was necessary to consider alternatives to Diem. 114/ A week later Collins cabled Dulles to insist Diem be removed. He recommended Tran Van Do (Diem's foreign minister who also resigned from the cabinet in March) or Dr. Quat as replacements. 115/

c. Dulles' Indecision

Dulles replied as he had in December: he could not see how Diem's replacement would solve the sect problem for any successor worthy of US assistance would still have to contend with them. A change in premiers would damage US prestige throughout the Far East: the US would be charged with paying lip service to the cause of Asian nationalism, then abandoning a nationalist leader when pressured by "colonial interests." Plus pro-Diem Congressional sentiment was a problem. The Mutual Security bill was under debate and Mansfield had made it clear that Congress would be reluctant to appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. Despite these difficulties, Dulles eventually agreed to consider a change if Collins would personally come to Washington for consultation. 116/

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d. Paris: Diem's Time Is Up

At the same time Paris was fast losing patience. The time has come to form a government responsive to dominant political forces in Vietnam, to abandon the unrealistic U.S. policy of maintaining and strengthening Diem, said France. Formation of a Conseil Superieur was proposed, representative of Diem and his supporters, the sects, intellectuals, politicians and the army. The Conseil would decide policy and a cabinet of non-political technicians headed by Diem would implement it. 117/ But the U.S. rejected this plan saying Diem should be allowed to strike back at the Binh Xuyen with force and France and America should support him -- morally and logistically. 118/

Then Washington asked the Quai d'Orsay to answer a set of questions designed to elicit specific French plans for the change in Vietnamese government. Paris' rejoinder: the questions should be answered jointly or the united Franco-American effort in Vietnam would be over and France would have to say publicly that the U.S. had assumed sole responsibility for developments in Vietnam. 119/ But in mid-April, France filled-in part of the questionnaire -- leaving blank a successor to Diem (only joint consultation could decide this). Paris proposed Collins and Ely draw up a slate of acceptable candidates for major positions. The U.S. and French governments would agree on a final list, ask Bao Dai to summon representatives of various factions to Cannes and on the basis of French-U.S. recommendations, negotiate a solution to the sect-Binh Xuyen-Diem impasse. Sect support would be assured by their membership in a high council and a program of honors, indemnification and integration of sect troops into the National Army. 120/

e. Bao Dai's Plan

On April 21, Bao Dai announced his own plan for resolving the crisis, remarkably similar to that submitted by Paris. Bao Dai wanted to summon various representatives to Cannes, name Dr. Quat as premier, ask him to form a cabinet of technicians and a high council of notables. On April 26, Bao Dai said he would implement the scheme unilaterally unless the U.S. made some response by the following day. 121/

Meanwhile, Collins had left Saigon for consultations with Dulles. Lansdale reports a meeting held just before his departure:

He (Collins) told Lansdale not to be worried by newspaper rumors that the US would stop supporting Diem. Lansdale asked then if his orders were to continue supporting Diem; Collins said yes. Members of the country team privately felt that Diem should be supported by us, that the National Army was ready to support him and had the capability of defeating the Binh Xuyen. 122/

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f. Dulles' decision: U.S. Will Consider a Change in Regime

General Collins and Secretary Dulles met on April 27. Dulles agreed to consider shifting support to either Quat or Do and a message to this effect was sent to Saigon. 123/ But Dulles determined not to discuss this with France until a full and frank statement of her intentions had been received. That statement was to include an unequivocal assurance to back whole-heartedly any new political arrangements in Saigon and to resolve "certain ambiguities" in French policy toward North Vietnam. Until this declaration appeared the US would reveal no change of heart over Diem. 124/

5. Diem Acts Against the Binh Xuyen

Then the truce exploded. On 28 April, Diem told Lansdale:

The Army and people laid the blame (for the crisis between the government and the Binh Xuyen) on the French because they could see French armored vehicles and troops in the streets evidently ready for action against the Vietnamese. We (Lansdale and an assistant) told him that it looked as the Vietnamese still needed a leader, that Diem was still President, that the US was still supporting him.

That afternoon, Diem's private secretary called Lansdale. He said the palace was

under heavy mortar fire, that the President was on another line talking to General Ely, that Ely stated that he couldn't hear any explosions and the President was holding the mouthpiece out towards the explosions so Ely could hear them. Hai (the secretary) started to ask what should be done, interrupted himself to say that the President had just ordered the National Army to start returning the fire and had so informed Ely. He hung up. 125/

Against the advice of French, US and most cabinet advisors, Diem had issued a decree charging Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang with "very grave official misconduct" and named Col. Nguyen Ngoc Le to replace him. Sang refused to resign, saying only Bao Dai had authority to remove him. Binh Xuyen troops in Cholon apparently opened fire on National Army units and Binh Xuyen shells fell again on the palace. But within nine hours after Diem's order to take the offensive, the National Army had driven the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Fires raged (set by the Binh Xuyen, according to Lansdale); hundreds were killed or wounded. 126/

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6. Washington Acts: U.S. Will (Again) Support Diem

Washington responded with alacrity to Diem's success, superficial though it was. Saigon was told to forget Dulles' earlier message about US willingness to see a change in government. Policy had not changed after all: the US supported Diem. The Saigon Embassy burned the first message. 127/

7. Diem and Others Defy Bao Dai

Buoyed by his showing against Bay Vien, Diem ignored the summons from Bao Dai which appeared on April 28. The Emperor ordered Diem and General Ty to Cannes, placed Binh Xuyen sympathizer General Vy in charge of the army and dispatched General Hinh to Saigon with personal instructions from Bao Dai. 128/ Diem refused to leave Saigon, refused to allow General Vy to assume command, refused to allow General Hinh into the country. 129/

On April 30 a new development surfaced. The National Revolutionary Congress of the Vietnamese people was announced. Backed by Cao Dai Generals Phuong and The , Hoa Hao General Ngo, other attentiste politicians, it claimed to represent almost all political parties in South Vietnam. The Congress declaration repudiated Bao Dai, dissolved the present government and called on Diem to form a new government and elect a national assembly to draft a constitution. 130/

Diem was receptive to the program of the Revolutionary Congress, particularly since his brother Nhu had a hand in drafting it. He was probably not as receptive to some of the activist members of the Congress, however, most of whom joined in a Revolutionary Committee. Generals Trinh Minh The and Phuong confided to Lansdale:

The Revolutionary Committee had grown out of the Revolutionary Congress Front organization which Diem's brother Nhu had tried to organize some days earlier; they had followed (SMM's) advice and had joined with Nhu in the Front but were dissatisfied with some of the weak organizations they felt Nhu was depending on, so had organized something more dynamic to meet the threat of Vy and Bao Dai and called themselves the Revolutionary Committee. They wanted Bao Dai dethroned and wanted the French to stop interfering in Vietnamese affairs. 131/

Support, backhanded though it may have been, helped Diem politically in Vietnam and with the United States. Militarily he was never really threatened by Bao Dai or Generals Vy or Hinh (who was never able to deliver Bao Dai's special orders). The National Army was stronger than French and Americans thought and it refused to obey General Vy. The following episode, related to Lansdale by General Ty and Colonel Tran Van Don after their temporary arrest by Vy, illustrates this. General Vy bragged about being able to get anything he wanted from the French. Ty and Don asked him to prove

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it." (They)...asked him to call up the French and request the armored vehicles which the French had been holding at Bien Hoa so long without delivering to the Vietnamese Army. The French rushed these vehicles to Hinh's house (Vy's headquarters), evidently having been holding them just outside town for this emergency, where Army men took them over and drove them into the fight against the Binh Xuyen. Don said the French still hadn't caught on, still thought that Vy would use this armor to bring the Army into line to stop fighting the Binh Xuyen and be loyal to Bao Dai. Don added that the Army felt the same as the Revolutionary Committee: Bao Dai was finished." 132/ General Vy retreated to Dalat (and Bao Dai's Imperial Guards), then left the country.

During these days, General Ely had grown more convinced that Diem was not only irresponsible, he was quite mad. Ely feared fighting would spread to the European sector but was unable to win American or British support for an attempt to reimpose the cease-fire. American Charge d'Affairs Kidder felt Ely himself was approaching hysteria and that his emotional involvement compromised his usefulness to either France or the United States. 133/ Ely's premonitions of violence between Vietnamese and French forces proved unfounded. But violence did accompany Diem's final offensive against the Binh Xuyen which opened on May 2 when the VNA crossed the Chinese Arroyo and attacked Bay Vien's forces in Cholon. By the following day, most of the Binh Xuyen had been driven out into the Rung Sat swamps.

When Collins returned to Saigon he urged Diem to hold the Revolutionary Committee in check (Collins, most of the French and French intelligence thought Vietminh had infiltrated the front organization; they feared Diem would become its prisoner if he backed it too strongly). Collins wanted Diem to reconstitute the government and get on with reforms, leaving the problem of Bao Dai to an elected national assembly. 135/ Diem followed this advice. He invited some 700 elected counselors from 39 provinces to consider Bao Dai's legality. An Estates General composed of 50 counselors drew up a program demanding Bao Dai transfer all civilian and military powers to Diem who would exercise them until the assembly met -- within six months -- to draw up a constitution. 136/

8. May Trilateral Meetings

a. Dulles Backs Diem

At this same time, France, the United States and Britain met once again in Paris. The Tripartite session had been called to discuss problems of European Defense but Vietnam was the real subject. The positions of both Secretary Dulles and French Prime Minister Edgar Faure (who succeeded Mendes-France in February 1955) toward Diem had hardened. Dulles insisted he be upheld:

Diem is only means US sees to save South Vietnam and counter-act (the) revolutionary movement underway in Vietnam. US sees

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no one else who can. Whatever US view has been in past, today US must support Diem whole-heartedly. US must not permit Diem to become another Karensky.

...Bao Dai...had irretrievably lost capacity to be anything but titular head of government....Cao Dai and Hoa Hao could be used but not Binh Xuyen....With support (of France and US) Diem could sit on top of revolution. Diem is only force of moderation. FEC is certain stabilizing influence. US was giving funds to support Vietnamese army and could not see anyone else to give funds to but Diem for that purpose.

..In US view present revolution is not yet dominated or influenced by Communists to any appreciable degree....Support of Diem did not indicate US non-recognition of his weaknesses. US...had been and remained ready to support any other man who might be presented by orderly process of law. (Dulles) remarked that just before outbreak of fighting US was prepared to consider alternatives but he was not sure now that it would have been practical....If there is a better man US is ready to consider him but ...no one has been suggested. Although Collins had reached agreement with Ely in early April to change Diem he now believes we must support him. 137/

b. The French Position

French Minister La Forest had opened the meeting by pointing to consultations (scheduled for July) between North and South Vietnam about elections. He said France felt South Vietnam could win the contest if a "nationalist, stable and broadly based government" were in control and that France wanted South Vietnam to win.

There is no ambiguity in French policy between North and South Vietnam. Presence of France in North could not be erased by stroke of pen. It is French duty to protect her cultural and economic presence there. Sainteny mission is designed for only that purpose. France had given up thought of mixed companies as result (US) objections and had now surrendered coal mines...

LaForest presented the French analysis of events over the past four months. While the US could not argue his facts, the US could not accept LaForest's interpretation of them. Differences between the two nations were more fundamental than at any time in the past.

...France had loyally supported government of Diem from beginning. Any allegation to contrary is untrue...France reached agreement with US last December to persuade "or compel" Diem to

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enlarge government. It was agreed to give him until January at which time, if he had failed, we would look into matter of alternate discreetly. This was not done. Last March present government broke into open conflict with sects. United Front of sects was formed against Diem. Both December agreement and common sense told us at that time that something (had) to be done to avoid civil war....For this reason, joint Ely-Collins approach was tried. It was hoped they would arrive at joint plan for solution. Washington appeared first to welcome this concept then changed its mind. Collins left Saigon when civil war was about to break out. Untenable truces were declared. When they were about to expire Bao Dai submitted his own plan...in order to try to reconcile US and French failure to act. US failed to reply to Bao Dai. In absence of Collins from Saigon, Bao Dai acted.

LaForest continued...that new RevOlutionary Committee appeared to have control. Committee is strongly under Viet Minh influence.... There is violent campaign against French and French Expeditionary Control. Viet Minh agents make good use of it and certain Americans do not seem sufficiently aware of this. French Government does not wish to have its army act as platform for Vietminh propaganda. Army will not be maintained at any cost... 138/

c. Faure: We Will Withdraw to Save the US-France Alliance

Then M. Faure took the floor, stating France was not in agreement with the United States and that it was time to speak frankly. He said Diem is "not only incapable but mad," he took advantage of Collins' absence to effect a "coup de force which won primary victory but which has not contributed to any lasting solution" and "France can no longer take risks with him." Diem will "bring on a Viet Minh victory, focus the hostility of everyone on French" and force a break between France and the US.

Faure concluded with this significant statement.

Diem is a bad choice, impossible solution, with no chance to succeed and no chance to improve the situation. Without him some solution might be possible, but with him there is none. However, I cannot guarantee any other solution would work nor is it possible to clarify the situation. There seems to be fundamental disagreement between us. I could have claimed that since French position is predominant in Vietnam, you should accommodate your views more to ours, but I have rejected this. What should be done under the circumstances? What would you say if we were to retire entirely from Indochina and call back the FEC as soon as possible. I fully realize this would be a grave solution, as it would leave French civilians and French interests in a difficult

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position....If you think this might be a possible solution, I think I might be able to orient myself towards it if you say so. It would have advantage of avoiding all further reproach to France of "colonialism" while at same time giving response to Diem's request that France should go. Since it contemplates the liquidation of the situation and the repatriation of the FEC, would the United States be disposed to help protect French civilians and the refugees? 139/

Secretary Dulles repeated his awareness of Diem's weaknesses but did not agree with Faure's opinion. Diem "showed so much ability that US fails to see how he can be got rid of now...Diem is stronger now than when Bao Dai first withdrew his powers." Dulles said the worst aspect of the problem was the differences between France and the US: "Vietnam is not worth quarrel with France." Then he matched Faure's offer by saying the US would withdraw from Vietnam if that would solve the problem.

Choice open to us is to have Diem supported or to withdraw... US interest in Vietnam is simply to withhold area from communists. US will give consideration to any suggestion French make but must warn that US financial support may not be expected to any solution which (Dulles) can think of as alternative to Diem. 140/

Foreign Secretary MacMillan, calling British interests "more indirect but nonetheless vital because (1) interest in area itself and (2) interest in Communist threat from any area in world," made the obvious statement that a decision on Vietnam was too grave to be taken that evening. Faure and Dulles agreed. 141/

d. Dulles: Continue with Diem - but Independently of France

By May 11, when the three ministers reconvened, Dulles had received counsel from the JCS and General Collins. As was their wont, the Joint Chiefs of Staff offered no opinion about whether Diem should or should not be continued (a matter for "resolution at the governmental level") but then stated his government showed the "greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam." Addressing the military aspects of the problem, the Chiefs found neither withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps nor withdrawal of US military support acceptable. The Vietnamese National Army was considered incapable of maintaining internal security, even less able to resist outside aggression without outside military assistance. The US was barred by Geneva from increasing its forces either to defend Vietnam or to defend French civilians, other foreign nationals or refugees. Thus, although withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," precipitate withdrawal at this time was not: it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual fall of South Vietnam to communism.

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The Chiefs felt France alone would be unable to stabilize the situation, that the VNA would fall apart without "US moral and materiel support," and that the "best interest of France as well as the United States" warranted energetic action to restore internal order and prevent South Vietnam's loss to the free world. 142/

General Collins also opposed French withdrawal for three reasons: first, the FEC was responsible under the Manila Pact for the defense of Indochina and neither the US nor Britain were prepared to take over that responsibility. Secondly, French military assistance (logistical support and training) was essential to the development of the Vietnamese forces. Third, although the presence of French troops was a source of bitterness to the Vietnamese, General Collins believed the FEC was a stabilizing influence on Vietnamese politics. 143/

Dulles' proposal to Faure on May 11 reflected these judgments. Emphasizing that Indochina, for all its importance, must not be allowed to damage Franco-American relations, that US support for Diem must not be allowed to split the alliance, Dulles proposed that France continue to support Diem until a National Assembly could be elected to determine the ultimate political structure of South Vietnam, a structure which might or might not include Diem. 144/

Against his own views, against French public opinion and on certain conditions, Faure accepted the proposal. The Prime Minister insisted the Diem government be enlarged, elections be held as soon as possible, the sect problem be resolved, anti-French propaganda cease, Bao Dai be retained as chief of state, French and American officials deemed disturbing to Franco-US harmony be removed from Vietnam (Lansdale, for one) and that the US assure him French economic, cultural and financial relations with South Vietnam would be nurtured. Agreeing to these stipulations, Dulles added Diem was not a US puppet and he could not guarantee conditions involving Vietnamese action would be met. Then, saying the problem in Vietnam did not lend itself to a contractual agreement between France and the United States, Dulles suggested each should state its policy and proceed accordingly. In effect, said Dulles, the days of joint policy are over; the US will act (more) independently of France in the future. 146/

F. The Twilight of French Presence in Vietnam

Back in Vietnam, Diem was doing well. He had dealt the Binh Xuyen a coup de grace; the Army was pleased with its success against Bay Vien, supported Diem and rather relished the chance to continue the fight against remaining sect armies. Diem launched a campaign against the sect armies on May 8, to regain control of wayward provinces and solidify Saigon's control throughout the country. The US, again, gave Diem unqualified support and the French, again, reluctantly backed him. Bao Dai was a minor

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threat; trying to overthrow Diem had been a blunder and his popularity was very low. On May 10, a relatively unknown group of "technicians" was named as Diem's cabinet, to function until elections for a national assembly (held on March 4, 1956). General Collins left Vietnam on May 14; Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt replaced him later in the month. And on June 2, General Ely's mission terminated. General Jacquot assumed military duties as Commissioner-General, duties which consisted primarily of supervising the increasingly rapid pace of the French military pull-out.

1. All-Vietnam Elections

Although political concessions made to the United States in May and economic and military actions taken before and after that time had reduced -- almost eliminated -- French presence and influence in Vietnam France still was obligated to carry out the provisions of the Geneva Accords. Under increasing pressure from French public opinion to give Hanoi no pretext for renewing hostilities as long as the French Expeditionary Corps remained in South Vietnam, the French Government urgently sought to persuade Diem to accept consultations about the elections scheduled to begin in July 1955. 146/ Britain wanted to prevent any public repudiation of the Accords and joined France in urging Diem to talk to the Vietminh. But Diem had not changed his view of the Accords: he had refused to sign them and continued to insist he was not bound by them. 147/

The United States stood between these extremes. A draft policy toward all-Vietnam elections -- finally produced in May 1955 -- held that to give no impression of blocking elections while avoiding the possibility of losing them, Diem should insist on free elections by secret ballot with strict supervision. Communists in Korea and Germany had rejected these conditions; hopefully the Vietminh would follow suit. 148/

Diem could not bring himself to sit down with the Vietminh. Consultations would give the appearance of having accepted the Geneva settlement; consultation with the Vietminh without the kind of Western backing given Rhee and Adenauer would be futile. 149/ On July 16, Diem said South Vietnam could "not consider any proposal from the Communists" without proof that they had mended their ways and were prepared to hold genuinely free elections. 150/ But another reason was Diem's belief that he could not represent a sovereign nation -- or be free of Vietminh propaganda charges of being a colonialist puppet -- until the French High Command and the French Expeditionary Corps were gone. 151/ Minister Nguyen Huu Chau was dispatched to Paris to negotiate the withdrawal of the FEC from Vietnam (except naval and air forces which Diem wanted under VNA command) and revision of economic, cultural and financial accords. 152/ Diem also wanted Vietnamese affairs transferred from the Ministry of Associated States to the French Foreign office; he insisted the post of High Commissioner be abolished and that Ely's successor (Henri Hoppenot) be credited as Ambassador.

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2. Franco-Vietnamese Differences, Autumn 1955

France was anxious to get the FEC out of Vietnam (and into North Africa); the matter of turning the High Command over to the VNA was not a problem. Placing French units under Vietnamese command was a definite problem, however and domestic politics would not allow any immediate change of Vietnam's status within the French Union. 153/ Talks stalled until July. Diem accepted Ambassador Hoppenot (whose duties, if not title, were that of High Commissioner) and things moved a bit, then stopped when Diem arrested two French officers suspected of bombing electric power stations in Saigon and said they would be tried by Vietnamese courts. In October, France refused to talk unless the officers were released. 154/ The deadlock was finally broken by the French in December. Paris agreed the Quai d'Orsay would handle Vietnamese affairs, refused to accept the assignment of a diplomatic representative from the DRV to France and made it clear the Sainteny mission was in Hanoi solely for economic and cultural reasons. France had already recognized Vietnam as a Republic after Diem's resounding -- too resounding -- victory of 98 percent of the vote in an October popular referendum. Diem finally released the officers into French custody. 155/

But these concessions produced no improvement in French-Vietnam relations. In December, Diem suddenly terminated the economic and financial accords worked out at the Paris conference of 1954; mounting US activity fast drove the former colony from franc to dollar area and stringent commercial regulations applied to French businesses in South Vietnam forced already outraged entrepreneurs out of the country in increasing numbers. Diem laid down these conditions on which he would consider renewed relations with France. France had to

denounce the Geneva Agreements, to renounce to speak about the general elections in 1956, to approve openly and without reservation the policy of Mr. Diem, to break all relations with the Vietminh and of course to call home the Sainteny Mission.

Soon after this, Diem withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly. 156/

There was little France could do. Diem spoke for a government no longer dependent on French support, no longer near collapse. By February 1956, only 15,000 French troops remained in Vietnam and 10,000 of these were to be evacuated by the end of March. The High Command was abolished on April 26, 1956. The next month, the US Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) entered Vietnam and another 350 military personnel were added to the US advisory effort. Few French instructors remained at the TRIM.

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3: What of French Obligations Under the Geneva Accords?

But an important question remained. Under the Geneva agreements France was responsible for protection and support of the International Control Commission; representatives of the People's Army of North Vietnam and France sat on the Joint Armistice Commission charged with ensuring provisions of the armistice agreement were met. France could not lightly cast off these obligations nor could France transfer them to South Vietnam: Diem denounced the Geneva accords and refused to be bound by them in any way.

In February, French Foreign Minister Pineau described the difficult French position as a result of certain conditions:

These are the independence granted to South Vietnam and the Geneva accords some provisions of which have up to date demanded and justified our presence in this country. 157/

Particularly difficult was the question of ICC support. Diem refused to associate South Vietnam openly with the ICC but did agree to assume responsibility for its servicing if France would leave a small mission in Vietnam to fulfill French obligations. 158/ Dulles liked this idea. His view was: "while we should certainly take no positive step to speed up present process of decay of Geneva Accords, neither should we make the slightest effort to infuse life into them." 159/

Eight months later, Diem finally relaxed his uncompromising stand against Geneva, agreed to respect the armistice and provide security for the ICC. In July 1956, Vietnam promised to replace the French liaison mission to the ICC. France maintained membership on the Joint Armistice Commission and continued to bear ICC expenses. 160/ But France was never able to meet Geneva obligations concerning the elections of 1956, for Diem matched his refusal to consult with the Vietminh about elections with an adamant refusal to ever hold them. Neither Britain nor the Soviet Union pressed the matter; the United States backed Diem's position.

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IV.A.3.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bator, Victor, Vietnam - A Diplomatic Tragedy, Oceana Publications, Dobbs Ferry, New York 1965; p. 177.
2. Le Monde, 5 June 1954, Bator, p. 213.
3. Paris Msg 366, 27 July 54 (S); Paris Msg 438, 30 Jul 54 (S); New York Times, 27 Aug 54, 3 Sep 54; Deptel 740 to Paris, 30 Aug 54 (S)
4. New York Times, 30 Dec 54. Bator, p. 150: When the Institute of Emission and the Exchange Office were transferred to the Government of South Vietnam (5 Jan 55) Diem proclaimed: "With the last and fundamental attribute of our sovereignty regained, henceforth complete independence of Vietnam has become a living reality."
5. Paris Msgs 366, 27 Jul 54 (S); 438, 30 Jul 54 (S)
6. Bator, pp. 175-182. (Bator quotes from the memoirs of General Paul Ely: L'Indochine dans la Tourmente, Plon, Paris 1964)
- 6a. Bator, p. 146.
7. Military Grant aid given France for Indochina under the Military Development Assistance Program from 1950 through 1954, (cut off after Dien Bien Phu) totalled \$710 million. Economic aid to the Associated States of Indochina totalled \$827 million. John D. Montgomery, The Politics of Foreign Aid (New York: Praeger, 1964), 284.
8. LaCouture, Jean et DeVillers, Phillipe, La Fin d'Une Guerre, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1960; p. 294.
9. State Department Draft Report, "Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East", 3 Aug 54 (TS)
10. Memorandum from Vice Admiral A.C. Davis for the Secretary of Defense, "Report on the Manila Conference" 12 Sep 54 (S).
11. NSC Record of Actions, 210th Meeting, 12 Aug 54; 211th Meeting, 18 Aug 54 (TS). Letter, Secretary of Defense Wilson to Secretary of State Dulles, 17 Aug 54 (TS).
12. Statement made at Bangkok meeting of Manila Pact Council members, 23 Feb 55, quote in 14 Sep 55 Memorandum for the Director, Office of NSC Affairs, Subject: "U.S. Policy in the Event of a Renewal of Aggression in Vietnam." (S) from A.C. Davis, Vice Admiral, USN, Director, Office of Foreign Military Affairs, OASD/ISA.
13. NIE 63-5-54, 3 Aug 54, "Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina".

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14. Ibid.
15. Deptel 610 to Paris, 18 Aug 54 (S).
16. NSC 5429/2, 20 Aug 54 (TS). JCS arguments against dealing with the DRV are contained in the NSC Records of Meetings 210 and 211 (8 and 12 Aug 54). Saigon Msgs 336, 27 Jul 54 (S), 518, 10 Aug 54. (Ambassador Heath also argued against dealing with Hanoi because it would lead the South Vietnamese to think the US planned accommodation with the communists).
17. Paris Msg 2080, 15 Nov 54 (S)
18. NIE 63-5-54
19. State Department Report, "A U.S. Policy for Post-Armistice Indochina", 12 Aug 54 (S).
20. Paris Msg 481, 4 Aug 54 (S)
21. Deptel 1023 to Saigon, 14 Sep 54 (S). State Department Report, "A U.S. Policy for Post-Armistice Indochina"; 12 Aug 54. State Department Report, "Other Major Political Questions", 27 Aug 54. President Eisenhower states: "On August 17, I directed that aid to Indochina henceforth be given directly to the Associated States rather than France", in Mandate for Change (Doubleday, 1963), p. 361.
22. NSC 5429/2
23. NIE 63-5-54
24. Memorandum for Record, Meeting of General Valluy and Admiral Radford 3 Jun 54 (TS). Chief MAAG IC Msg 2062A to Department of the Army, 271130ZJul54 (S).
25. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "U.S. Assumption of Training Responsibilities in Indochina", 4 Aug 54 (TS)
26. Letter, Secretary of State Dulles to Secretary of Defense Wilson, 18 Aug 54 (TS)
27. JCS Memorandum for the SecDef, Subject: "U.S. Assumption of Training Responsibilities in Indochina", 22 Sep 54 (TS). State feared France and Britain would object to the JCS conditions and were loath to disclose them; Cambodia seemed unwilling to antagonize France by accepting them. JCS insistence was firm, however, and the establishment of a MAAG in Cambodia was stalled for several months until JCS views finally prevailed. The matter of a unilateral agreement itself was at least an indirect affront to France because the US apparently agreed to French demands for a joint training venture in Cambodia.

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- during the Washington Conference of late September 1954. The agreement was loosely worded; U.S. and French interpretations differed-- but the U.S. version prevailed. Chief of Naval Operations Memorandum for Record, "U.S.-French Talks Regarding Indochina," 27 Sep 54, 10 Oct 54 (TS); State Msg 99 to Phnom Penh, 13 Oct 54 (TS); State Msg 2213 to Saigon, 1 Dec 54 (S).
28. In a study of June 1954, the JCS had estimated some 2250 advisors would be required to train the Vietnamese military forces. MAAG Indochina was limited to 342 men.
 29. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Development and Retention of Forces in Indochina", 22 Sep 54 (TS).
 30. Letter, Secretary of State to Secretary of Defense, 11 Oct 54 (TS).
 31. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Development and Training of Indigenous Forces in Indochina", 19 Oct 54 (TS).
 32. NSC Record of Action, 218th Meeting, 22 Oct 54 (TS); Deptel 1679 to Saigon, 22 Oct 54 (S).
 33. NSC Action 1250; cited in Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from H. Streuve Hensel (AID/ISA), Subject: "Development of Indigenous Forces in Indochina", 30 Oct 54 (TS).
 34. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Development of Indigenous Forces in Indochina", 17 Nov 54 (TS).
 35. Memorandum for the President from Dulles; Subject: "General Collins' Recommendations Regarding Military Force Levels in Vietnam", 17 Nov 54 (TS).
 36. NIE 63-5-54
 37. Saigon Msgs 971, 11 Sep 54 (TS); 1036, 16 Sep 54 (TS); 1076, 17 Sep 54 (TS); 1204, 24 Sep 54 (TS); 933, 9 Sep 54 (S); 953, 954, 10 Sep 54 (S).
 38. Saigon Msgs 1330, 5 Oct 54 (S); 1382, 8 Oct 54 (S); 1397, 10 Oct 54 (S); 1434, 13 Oct 54 (S); 1487, 18 Oct 54 (S); 1493, 19 Oct 54 (S).
 39. Report of the Saigon Military Mission (SMM), 1954-1955 (S).
 40. Paris Msgs 1927, 5 Nov 54 (S); 2036, 12 Nov 54 (S); 2211, 25 Nov 54 (S); 2240, 28 Nov 54 (S); 2272, 30 Nov 54 (C); 2290, 1 Dec 54 (C); Saigon Msg 1807, 12 Nov 54 (S).
 41. Saigon Msgs 1036, 16 Sep 54 (TS); 1204, 24 Sep 54 (TS).
 42. Saigon Msg 794, 29 Aug 54 (S).
 43. Saigon Msgs 1150, 1154, 21 Sep 54 (TS); 1162, 22 Sep 54 (TS); 1185,

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- 23 Sep 54 (TS); 1231, 25 Sep 54 (S).
44. Shaplen, Robert, The Lost Revolution, Harper and Row, (Colophon Edition) New York, 1966; p. 116
 45. Shaplen, p. 116.
 46. State Department Records: E/LaC D-D/1, "Establishment and Maintenance of a Stable Anti-Communist Government in Vietnam", 23 Sep 54 (S). E/LaC D-1/3, "Other Major Political Questions, Draft Minute of Understanding", 27 Sep 54 (S). E/LaC Memorandum 16, "Minute of Understanding" 4 Oct 54 (S). Deptal 1327 to Saigon, 1 Oct 54 (S).
 47. Paris Msgs 366, 27 Jul 54 (S); 438, 30 Jul 54 (S).
 48. Paris Msgs 377, 27 Jul 54 (S); 715, 20 Aug 54 (S).
 49. State Department Records: E/LaC VM-3 "Minutes of Economic Sessions of Franco-American Bilateral Talks", 20 Oct 54 (TS). Deptel Paris 737, 28 Aug 54 (TS).
 50. State Department Records: E/LaC D-31, "US Financial Assistance to French Union Forces in Indochina", 24 Sep 54 (TS). E/LaC VM-3, "Minutes of Economic Sessions of Franco-American Bilateral Talks", 2 Oct 54 (TS).
 51. Paris Msg 715, 20 Aug 54 (S); Deptel to Paris 737, 28 Aug 54 (S); E/LaC Memorandum 14, "French Position Papers re Military Aid and Economic Assistance to the Associated States", 28 Sep 54 (S).
 52. E/LaC MC-2: "Memorandum of Conversation, Smith-LaChambre Meetings", 29 Sep 54, 6 Oct 54 (TS). The statement referred to reads as follows: "Such (aid) programs will be planned and closely coordinated to assure maximum effectiveness through appropriate machinery established in agreement with interested governments." The obvious ambiguity invites conflicting interpretations.
 53. E/LaC Memorandum 20: "Report to the Secretary of State (from Robertson) on Franco-American Bilateral Talks", 8 Oct 54, 22 Oct 54 (TS). E/LaC D-1/2, "US Relations with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam", 23 Sep 54 (TS).
 54. Deptel 1565 to Paris, 29 Oct 54 (TS); Paris Msg 1898, 4 Nov 54 (S); Saigon Msg 1919, 21 Nov 54 (S); 1935, 23 Nov 54 (S); Deptel 2070 to Saigon, 22 Nov 54 (S).
 55. Paris TEDUL 11, NIACT, 21 Oct 54 (TS).
 56. Paris Msgs 2018, 1 Nov 54 (S); 1883, 3 Nov 54 (S); Deptel 1737 to Paris, 10 Nov 54 (S); NIE 63-7-54: "Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia through July 1956", 23 Nov 54. (This discusses strong sentiment in France to get rid of Diem in favor of someone less hostile to the Vietminh).

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57. Paris Msg 2080, 15 Nov 54 (S).
58. Ibid.
59. Paris Msg 646, 15 Aug 54 (S); Saigon Msg 494, 8 Aug 54 (S).
60. Saigon Msgs 795, 29 Aug 54 (S); 507, 10 Aug 54 (S); 721, 24 Aug 54 (S).
Paris Msg 646, 15 Aug 54 (S).
61. Paris Msg 1665, 29 Oct 54 (S).
62. New York Times, 11 Dec 54; Deptel to Saigon, 2413, 13 Dec 54 (C); Paris
Msg 2542, 14 Dec 54 (C).
63. 83d Congress, 2d Session, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: "Re-
port of Senator Mike Mansfield on a Study Mission to Vietnam, Cambodia
and Laos", 15 Oct 54.
64. Paris Msg 1608, 16 Oct 54 (S); Saigon Msgs 1478, 17 Oct 54 (S); 1501,
20 Oct 54 (S).
65. DULTE 5 from Paris, 21 Oct 54 (TS). Robert Shaplen, op.cit., p. 118,
reports these comments by Kenneth Young: "We realized we had to
proceed carefully with the French, so when they made clear their
position on Diem, we sent a cable to Senator Mansfield, of the Foreign
Relations Committee, who was abroad, asking him what he thought of Diem
as Premier. Mansfield was an old friend of Diem's and we knew what
the answer would be in advance, of course, but it stunned the French.
While they then dropped their open campaign to dump Diem, it became
apparent that they were still maneuvering behind the scenes toward
the same objective, and we realized that while we still had to work
with the French in Vietnam, we would have to adopt a more independent
position."
66. NSC Record of Action, 218th Meeting, 22 Oct 54 (TS); TEDUL 14, NIACT,
to Paris, 22 Oct 54 (TS); Paris Msgs 1718, 24 Oct 54 (TS); 1737,
25 Oct 54 (TS).
67. Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary of State Dulles, French Ambassador
Bonnet, Subject: "Indochina," 26 Oct 54 (S).
68. Paris Msgs 1718, 24 Oct 54 (TS); 1737, 25 Oct 54 (TS).
69. Deptel 1565 to Paris, 29 Oct 54 (TS).
70. Paris Msgs 1835, 1836, 30 Oct 54 (TS).
71. Letter President D.D. Eisenhower to General J. Lawton Collins, 3 Nov
54 (TS).
72. Saigon Msgs 1761, 8 Nov 54 (S); 1830, 15 Nov 54 (TS); FAO Washington

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- USFOTO 263 to Paris and Saigon, 24 Nov 54 (S); (Ely and Collins' strong recommendation that the FEC be maintained in Vietnam overcame reservations of military and diplomatic leaders in Washington that it be withdrawn. Washington's reasoning: civil war, not overt aggression, threatened Vietnam -- and the FEC would not be used in a civil conflict; the immediate US objectives of restoring order in Vietnam and bolstering Diem were not furthered by the presence of French troops. Therefore, the FEC is not worth the cost of its upkeep.)
73. Paris Msg 2433, 8 Dec 54 (TS).
 74. Saigon Msgs 2250 (NIACT), 13 Dec 54 (TS); 2024, 30 Nov 54 (S); 2261, 142009ZDec54 (C); Paris 2601, 19 Dec 54 (TS).
 75. Paris Msg 2270, 31 Dec 54 (TS); Paris Msg 2870 (NIACT), 7 Jan 55 (TS); Deptel 2766 to Saigon, 7 Jan 55 (TS).
 76. Saigon Msg 2455, 25 Dec 54. (TS).
 77. Saigon Msgs 2660 (NIACT), 9 Jan 55 (TS); 2663, 101230ZJan55 (S); Paris Msg 2797, 3 Jan 55 (S).
 78. Saigon Msgs 2453, 24 Dec 54 (S); 2676, 10 Jan 55 (TS); 2876, 221940Z Jan 55 (S).
 79. Paris Msgs 3064, 20 Jan 55 (TS); 3195, 28 Jan 55 (TS); Deptel 2629 to Paris, 24 Jan 55 (TS); 2726 to Paris, 1 Feb 55 (TS); Saigon Msg 3343, 111757ZFeb55 (C). Franco-American cooperation often missing in other endeavors was fairly good in TRIM. Intrigues between French and U.S. personnel and French intrigues against Diem existed--but their interference with the task of directing and developing the VNA was not as great as it might have been. Even Lansdale--hardly an avid French supporter--says: "there was a job to be done", and credits some French officers for their competence and cooperating in doing the job. (SMM Report).
 80. Paris Msg 2601, 19 Dec 54 (TS).
 81. Paris Msg 2987, 14 Jan 55 (S).
 82. Saigon Msg 2250 (NIACT), 13 Dec 54 (TS).
 83. Ibid.
 84. Saigon Msg 2303 (NIACT), 16 Dec 54 (TS).
 85. Saigon Msg 2250, 13 Dec 54 (TS).
 86. Memorandum for Walter S. Robertson (Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East) from Ambassador Donald R. Heath; Subject: "Comments on Saigon Telegram 2303", 17 Dec 54 (TS).

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87. Deptel 2274 (NIACT) to Paris, 17 Dec 54 (TS); 2487 to Saigon, 17 Dec 54 (TS).
88. Paris 2601, 19 Dec 54 (TS).
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Deptel 2585 to Saigon, 24 Dec 54 (TS).
94. Deptel 2872 to Saigon, 13 Jan 55 (TS); Paris Msg 3034, 18 Jan 55 (TS).
95. Secretary of Defense Memorandum to the JCS; Subject: "Reconsideration of Military Programs in Southeast Asia", 5 Jan 55 (TS).
96. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense; Subject: "Reconsideration of Military Programs in Southeast Asia", 21 Jan 55 (TS).
97. Memorandum for the Secretary of State from General Collins; Subject: "Report on Vietnam for the NSC", 20 Jan 55 (TS).
98. Ibid.
99. Secretary of Defense Memorandum to the JCS, et.al.; Subject: "Report on Vietnam for the NSC", 3 Feb 55 (TS).
100. Memorandum for Record: Meeting between Dulles, Robertson and Young, Subject: "Indochina", 29 Dec 55 (TS).
101. Saigon Msgs 3747, 10 Mar 55 (S); 4373, 6 Apr 55 (S).
102. SMM Report.
103. Deptel 2956 to Paris, 21 Feb 55 (S); Paris Msgs 3654, 1 Mar 55 (S); 3896, 15 Mar 55 (S).
104. Saigon Msgs 3384, 25 Mar 55 (S); 4096, 24 Mar 55 (S); Paris Msgs 4070, 24 Mar 55 (S); 4151, 26 Mar 55 (S).
105. SMM Report.
106. Saigon Msg 4192, 29 Mar 55 (S).
107. New York Times, 30 Mar 55. General Ely first denied any French interference with Vietnamese troop movements and said the VNA had been

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issued all the gas and ammunition required. A few days later, however, Ely said the French had not restricted gas or ammunition "except for a few hours" during the fighting on March 29-30. Saigon Msgs 4292, 2 Apr 55 (TS); 4349, 6 Apr 55 (TS).

108. Saigon Msg 4230 (NIACT), ~~3020~~41ZMar55 (S).
109. Saigon Msgs 4292, 2 Apr 55 (TS); 4264, 31 Mar 55.
110. SMM Report.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Saigon Msg 4382, 7 Apr 55 (TS).
114. Saigon Msg 4263, 31 Mar 55 (TS).
115. Saigon Msg 4399, 7 Apr 55 (TS).
116. Deptel 4438 (NIACT) to Saigon, 9 Apr 55 (TS); 4466, 11 Apr 55 (TS); 4575, 16 Apr 55 (TS).
117. Paris Msgs 4200, 28 Mar 55 (S); 4281, 4285, 2 Apr 55 (S); 4328, 5 Apr 55 (TS); 4395, 9 Apr 55 (TS).
118. Deptel 3510 (NIACT) to Paris, 4 Apr 55 (TS).
119. Deptel 3622 to Paris, 12 Apr 55 (S); Paris Msg 4498, 16 Apr 55 (S).
120. Paris Msg 4503, 17 Apr 55 (TS).
121. Paris Msgs 4576, 21 Apr 55 (TS); 4659, 26 Apr 55 (S).
122. SMM Report.
123. Deptel 4757 (NIACT) to Saigon, 27 Apr 55 (TS).
124. Deptels 3828 (NIACT) to Paris 27 Apr 55 (TS); 3849 to Paris, 28 Apr 55 (TS).
125. SMM Report.
126. Saigon Msgs 4860 (NIACT), 28 Apr 55 (S); 4881, 281515ZApr55 (S); 4943, 30 Apr 55 (S). Some French alleged that Diem had initiated the fighting, but U.S. officials claimed this was false, that the Binh Xuyen had started a coup.

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127. Deptel 4831 (NIACT) to Saigon, 1 May 55 (TS).
128. Paris Msg 4746, 30 Apr 55 (TS).
129. Saigon Msgs 4926, 29 Apr 55 (S); 4951, 30 Apr 55 (S); 4928, 29 Apr 55 (C).
130. Saigon Msgs 4944, 30 Apr 55 (S); 4957, 30 Apr 55 (OUO).
131. SMM Report. Colonel Lansdale recruited Trinh Minh Thé to Diem's side in the fall of 1954, a significant achievement because of Thé's prestige in Cao Dai and other circles and because of Thé's several thousand troops. Lansdale was accused of having bribed Thé to win his support but vigorously denies this. However, the SMM did secretly reimburse Thé's Lien Minh forces who moved into Saigon and acted as Diem's palace guard in October. In January, most of the Lien Minh were integrated into the Vietnamese National Army. General Phuong, another Cao Dai leader, joined Diem's cabinet in September. His support for the premier was on-again-off-again through the fall and winter but he was fairly solidly behind Diem by the spring of 1955. Phuong's troops were integrated into the VNA on March 31, 1955.
132. SMM Report.
133. Saigon Msgs 4882, 28 Apr 55 (S); 4926, 29 Apr 55 (S); 4953, 30 Apr 55 (S); 2908, 29 Apr 55 (C).
134. Saigon Msg 4039, 4 May 55 (S).
135. Saigon Msgs 5005, 2 May 55 (S); 5047, 5049, 5054, 4 May 55 (S); 4867, (NIACT), 3 May 55 (S); Paris Msg 4814, 4 May 55 (S).
136. Saigon Msg 5103, 6 May 55 (S).
137. SECTO 8 from Paris, 8 May 55 (TS).
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense; Subject: "Indochina (Vietnam)" 9 May 55 (TS).
143. Saigon Msg 5145, 9 May 55 (TS).
144. SECTO 36 from Paris, 11 May 55 (TS).
145. SECTO 42 from Paris, 12 May 55 (TS).

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146. Paris Msg 69, 6 Jul 55 (S).
147. Deptels to Saigon: 35, 5 Jul 55 (S); 53, 6 Jul 55 (S); 80, 9 Jul 55 (S); 155, 14 Jul 55 (S); 165, 15 Jul 55 (S); 179, 16 Jul 55 (S).
148. NSC 5519: Draft Statement, "US Policy on All-Vietnam Elections", 17 May 55 (TS). The JCS concurred in this draft policy with one crucial exception: the statement that a communist attack would be opposed "with US armed forces if necessary and feasible" was unacceptable. The Chiefs wanted it changed to say opposition to attack would be "by invoking the Manila Pact and taking vigorous action thereunder to repel the Communist military aggression." Obviously, unilateral U.S. action was to be avoided. (JCS Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, Subject: NSC 5519, "U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections") 19 May 55 (TS).

The NSC considered the problem of elections on 9 June and decided to shelve the draft NSC statement. Its main features had already been conveyed to Diem; it was felt no new policy toward an outbreak of hostilities was required. (Memorandum, Executive Secretary of NSC to NSC, "U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections", 13 Jun 55 (TS)).
149. Deptels to Saigon 5347, 3 Jun 55 (S); 5731, 8 Jun 55 (S); 35, 5 Jul 55 (S).
150. New York Times, 17 Jul 55.
151. Saigon Msg 5677, 6 Jun 55 (S); Deptel 5438 to Saigon 11 Jun 55 (S).
152. Saigon Msgs 5706, 7 Jun 55 (S); 5731, 8 Jun 55 (S).
153. Paris Msgs 5513, 5514, 16 Jun 55 (S); 5601, 21 Jun 55 (S); 5776, 29 Jun 55 (S); 27, 2 Jul 55 (S); 183, 12 Jul 55 (S). Saigon Msg 5969, 24 Jun 55 (S).
154. Saigon Msg 381, 23 Jul 55 (S); Paris Msg 1460, 29 Sep 55 (S); 1757, 14 Oct 55 (S).
155. Paris Msg 2889, 17 Dec 55 (C); SECTO 17 from Paris, 17 Dec 55 (C).
156. Le Monde, 14 Dec 1955; Paris Msg 2886, 17 Dec 55 (S); New York Times 1 Nov 55; Saigon Msg 2671, 5 Jan 56 (S).
157. Press Conference, 23 Feb 56, in Le Monde, 24 Feb 56.
158. Saigon Msgs 2086, 14 Nov 55 (S); 2206, 23 Nov 55 (S); Paris Msg 3783, 21 Feb 56 (S).

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159. Deptel 1901 to Saigon, 2 Dec 55 (S).
160. NIE 63-56, "Probable Developments in North and South Vietnam Through Mid-1957", 17 Jul 56; Saigon Msg 287, 24 Jul 56 (C).