Chapter VII

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS VIET NAM
DURING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE
The Geneva Conference of 25 April on the two Far Eastern issues of Korea and Indo-China could not have started under more unfavourable circumstances for the West. It came just a day after France made a desperate but vain attempt to get American help in a last bid to hold Dien Bien Phu. The failure of this attempt which led to a loss of French nerves, highlighted the disunity among the Big Three in the Western camp on the issue of "united action" in Viet Nam. To this disunity among the Big Three were added the continuing strained relations between France and the Associated States on the issue of independence. These factors had already forecast the shape of things to come. This was heightened by the fall of Dien Bien Phu on 1 May. Though not unexpected, it cast a shadow on the Conference proceedings when the discussions on Indo-China started the next day.

US APPROACH TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

The United States approached the Conference in a mood of resignation. It was clear that the United States did not expect anything much out of the Conference by way of a permanent settlement or solution to the problem. The American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles himself mentioned this clearly when he said on 11 May in reference to the unification of Viet Nam, "we never thought that there was a good chance of accomplishing those results". (1) The Administration was reconciled to the best

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available settlement in the existing circumstances, one which would be "on terms which do not endanger the freedom of the people of Vietnam" nor "provide a road to a Communist aggression". (2) Its main aim was to see that the Viet Minh did not gain more than what they actually held and it would be quite satisfied as Dulles put it, "as long as they don't lead us to make any costly concession which we do not intend to make." (3)

With this aim which was obviously a limited one, the United States chose for itself a comparatively minor role in the Conference. The United States repeatedly stressed that it was "playing primarily the role of a friend which gives advice when it is asked for...", the primary responsibility for the negotiations being carried by the countries participating in the fighting in the area, viz., France and the Associated States. (4) With the United States abdicating its leading role and the French eager for a quick settlement, the British delegation led by Anthony Eden came to assume an important role on the Western side.

This attitude of detachment from the Conference was also demonstrated by the casual manner in which the United States participated in the Conference proceedings. Secretary Dulles left the Conference after five days of its start and his place was taken by Under Secretary Bedell Smith, while all other member nations continued to be represented by their foreign ministers. Even this participation was withdrawn on 21 June and the American

2. Secretary Dulles in a broadcast to the Nation on 7 May. Ibid., 17 May 1954, p. 746.
delegation was "downgraded to an observer mission" under a diplomat of lesser rank. It was only on 17 July that Bedell Smith returned to Geneva.

This posture of indifference to what was happening in Geneva could be traced to a shift in the American official thinking on the strategic importance of Indo-China. The United States no longer believed that Indo-China was essential to the security of the free world - a reversal of the Domino Theory. While it was important to save the Dien Bien Phu fortress, a defeat at the battle would not mean the loss of Indo-China. From this the next step was easier; that if the Indo-Chinese States were to be lost for the West this might not mean the loss of entire Southeast Asia. Secretary Dulles explained this viewpoint on 11 May as follows: "... what we are trying to do is create a situation in Southeast Asia where the domino situation will not apply." "But", he added, "I do not want to give the impression either that if events that we could not control and which we do not anticipate should lead to their being lost, that we would consider the whole situation hopeless, and we would give up in despair." (5) Continuing in the same vein, he said the purpose of collective security was "to save all of Southeast Asia if it can be saved; if not, to save essential parts of it." Explaining this further, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were not "essential parts" as they were poor and thinly settled. (6) Speaking on the same day, President Eisenhower affirmed the same point when he said that the United States was

5. Ibid., 24 May 1954, p. 782.

6. New York Times, 13 May 1954. This latter portion which was a part of his original statement was deleted later in the press conference transcript distributed by the Department of State and printed in the Bulletin.
engaged in trying to create a situation in Southeast Asia where the domino situation will not apply. (7) Through united action, he added the next day, "the United States was seeking to build a row of dominoes strong enough to withstand the fall of one." (8) This meant the United States continued with its efforts to get a Southeast Asia collective security system formulated, though now with a slightly modified purpose.

At the same time, however, the United States could not publicly display its reconciliation with a compromising settlement at Geneva. It had to keep up its interests in the developments which were taking place in Indo-China. The fall of Dien Bien Phu, by weakening the French position, led to a revival of the demand for intervention among the conservative Republicans and the "China lobby". This section of public opinion had already been criticizing the Administration on its decision to participate in the Geneva Conference. Any settlement at Geneva short of a total victory over the Communists - even a fairly favourable and compromising one - might be denounced by this section as appeasement. The Administration and the nation at large, were especially sensitive to the criticism that any agreement with the Communists would lead to a recognition of Communist China. Hence the Administration while reconciled to a settlement at Geneva, had to keep up the appearance of being opposed to it.

The United States also found the need to bolster the French morale and strengthen their hands in Geneva. With the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the possibility of a French withdrawal from the war became nearly certain. Hence American actions were now

8. Ibid., 13 May 1954.
directed to help the French keep up the fighting until the Conference might reach a honourable settlement. Another French defeat (as it looked dangerously imminent in the Red River Delta) would mean a French surrender and a complete Communist victory, both politically and militarily. The United States in order to keep the Communists in Geneva guessing and the French in Viet Nam fighting, pursued a militant diplomacy with its allies and maintained a high-pitched debate at home, by authentic rumours, on the likelihood of active intervention.

These two purposes which led to an aggressive posture on the part of the Administration had to be, however, reconciled to another equally strong political pressure at home, namely the one which was opposed to any involvement in an Asian war. This necessitated a series of public statements from the President, Secretary of State and other officials of the Administration qualifying and limiting intervention. It was stated from time to time that the United States would not intervene unless certain publicised conditions were fulfilled. On 12 May, in a closed session with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Dulles expressed the view "unless full independence was assured to the Associated States and unless the United Nations could be brought into the picture to clarify the moral issues, the issues would not be those on which the United States could be asked to send troops". (9) These conditions were confirmed by Dulles himself in a news conference on 25 May when he said "such an intervention (a) should be in defence of liberty and freedom and not colonialism, (b) it should have the participation of other states who had an

9. As reported by Senator Alexander Wiley, the Chairman of the Committee. Ibid.
important stake in the area, and (c) it should have the moral sanction of the U.N." Dulles stressed that these conditions had been "stable and unchanging over a considerable period of time". (10) To these were added two more conditions by 11 June viz. 1) an invitation from the present lawful authorities and 2) an assurance that France would not itself withdraw from the battle until it is won. (11) Over and above all of them was the need to get the Congressional approval. Thus as the Conference was being prolonged and the military situation intensified, the American conditions for involvement also increased. This clearly demonstrated that the United States was keen to avoid any contingency of an active involvement. Since the possibility of all these conditions being fulfilled was remote, it looked, as if the American aim was more to prevent a hasty involvement than to really save entire Indo-China for the Free World.

AMERICAN EFFORTS FOR A COLLECTIVE SECURITY PACT

These mutually incompatible pressures on the Administration towards conflicting aims, resulted in apparently contradictory statements and activities during this period. It presented a confusing picture of American diplomacy. In this confusion, one thing stood out very clearly. The Administration was convinced that the formation of a coalition of forces or even serious discussions on it, was the only way out of the situation. If such a collective security pact could be arrived at, it could be

presented as a proof that the interests of the Free World had not been sacrificed in Southeast Asia. This explained to some extent, the American eagerness to conclude such an arrangement even during the Conference, whereas the British viewed that any such pact would lead to a break in the negotiation and therefore could be discussed only after the Conference.

The United States resumed its efforts in this direction during the very first meetings at Geneva. Dulles' efforts to persuade the British yielded some fruit, and on 30 April the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden delivered to Dulles an eight-point memorandum on Southeast Asia defence. The eighth point of this memorandum suggested "immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for Southeast Asia, namely, (a) nature and purpose, (b) membership and (c) commitments." (12) This British concession, meant more as a gesture of reconciliation than a policy decision, did not satisfy the United States. The British suggestion was for a Five Power Staff Agency of the "White" nations, while the United States desired a political coalition of Southeast Asian countries. However, Washington interpreted this as a change in the British position and was encouraged to go ahead with its proposal of a coalition of forces. Hence, following the fall of Dien Bien Phu to the Communists in the beginning of May, the American Government spelt out the conditions under which such an intervention could take place. These conditions were substantially the same as those publicised by Dulles on 11 June. The only two additional points in the American instructions to its Ambassador in France were - and

these were important - a) agreement be reached on American participation in training native troops and working out a command structure for united action, and b) all these conditions should not only be accepted by the French Cabinet, but also by the French National Assembly. (13) The United States was prepared even to meet a counter-intervention by Communist China as well as to intervene even without the British co-operation if necessary. (14)

According to Eisenhower's account, it was the French reluctance to grant complete independence to the Associated States and to let the United States involve its ground troops substantiably, that defeated the American proposal for united action at this time. The French believed that a change in the military command in Viet Nam with a token help of one or two divisions of American ground troops would help in preventing the rest of Indo-China, more especially the Red River Delta from being over-run. On the other hand the United States insisted on the political atmosphere being first improved. (15)

The French whose anxiety to arrive at some settlement increased in proportion to the deteriorating military situation, felt that a fulfilment of American conditions would not only prolong the war but might even expand it by inviting Chinese intervention. The apparently tough attitude of Washington, its apparent willingness to risk a Chinese participation and its

13. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change 1953–1961 (London, 1963), p. 359. For the other conditions, see Bulletin, n. 11. It is surprising how the United States could have ever expected the last condition to be fulfilled even if all others were accepted.
15. Ibid., pp. 360–2.
decision to adopt an offensive strategy in case of such a contingency had made the political leadership in France hesitant to respond to American conditions.

This French reluctance, in a way, helped the United States in avoiding any action on its own decisions. The United States was not eager to commit itself, especially when, according to the information it was receiving, the war situation was very discouraging. In the first week of June, the Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson had returned from a three week tour of the Far East and his report on Indo-China was not very encouraging. (16) This was confirmed by General Van Fleet who toured Indo-China at this time as the President's personal representative with the rank of Ambassador. He however recommended that the United States should be prepared to enter the Indo-China war. (17) On the other hand, the Army Chief of Staff General Ridgway, on the basis of the report by a team of experts whom he had sent to Indo-China, had concluded that any American action would mean a major military commitment.

At the same time the United States continued its pressure on the French to hold on to the Red River Delta which looked like being vacated by them soon. It was under the American pressure that the French Cabinet decided on 29 May to request the National Assembly's approval to send conscripts to Indo-China - a decision politically most distasteful in France. It was, however, welcomed by the United States. (18) The United States also welcomed the

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appointment of General Paul "ly to the dual post of French Commissioner-General in Indo-China and Commander-in-Chief of French Union forces in that area. In Eisenhower's opinion, "ly was in favour of a strong stand in defence of the Red River Delta". (19)

In the absence of any serious consideration of an American involvement, Franco-American conversations could be interpreted as an attempt to pressurize the British to agree to an early formation of the proposed defence pact. This is evident from the fact that these talks which were meant to be secret and were possibly unknown to even Bedell Smith, were leaked to the Press. Newspapers carried the reports on these talks on 16 May. (20) The United States also kept the British in the dark on not only the nature and content of these talks but their very existence. According to Anthony Eden's account the British came to know about it only through newspapers. (21) The United States also intensified the pressure by proclaiming openly that if the British were not willing to go along with the formation of the defence pact, the United States would proceed without Britain. In a news conference on 19 May President Eisenhower said that with Australia, New Zealand and several other Asian countries, an effective Southeast Asia pact could be built without the support of Britain, even if it were not as satisfactory as he would desire. (22) The American Administration probably believed that it could use the ANZUS Pact to obtain the consent of Australia and New Zealand to join the

19. Ibid., p. 365.
new pact. With this in view, Eisenhower had asked France to formally request the ANZUS powers for help in the Indo-Chinese war. (23) The United States hoped with the participation of Thailand and the Philippines who had already expressed their willingness, as also the ANZUS Powers "the United Kingdom would either participate or be acquiescent". (24)

It is doubtful, however, how far this "diplomacy by fait accompli" was successful. Not only did Britain and other Commonwealth countries deny any rift among them, it also led to a widespread resentment in Britain with the American tactics and the defence pact. The British reiterated that its position remained unchanged. This led to further strains in the Anglo-American relations and a greater disunity in the Allied ranks.

This disunity which came to be widely reported by the Press in both Britain and the United States defeated the other American objective too. In the face of the Western disunity, the Communists had increased their collective strength, could successfully prolong the negotiations and gain time to better their military positions. In the first week of June, the Viet Minh mounted attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong rail line. This also brought into clear focus the possibility of a partition in favour of the Communists being accepted.

The American talks of intervention with the much publicised conditions attached to it, also led to defeat of American aims in a third direction. The US activities became the principal ground for the Opposition attacks in the French National Assembly during

24. Ibid.
the month of May and led finally to the defeat of Laniel's Government on 12 June. It was replaced by a Government led by Mendes-France who pledged himself to a negotiated settlement by 20 July. With the formation of Mendes-France's Government the American offers of intervention had an automatic death. On 18 June, the American President renewed the offer in a letter to President Rene Coty of France. In it he had stated "I want to assure you that the pledge of support embodied in my message of April 16 to Monsieur Laniel still stands, and will continue (sic) available to his successor." (25) This offer was, however, rejected by Mendes-France who was keen on immediate negotiations and preferred to follow his own judgement. This rejection finally closed the doors on American intervention in Viet Nam, in unison with its allies or unilateral.

Churchill-Eden Visit to Washington and the Anglo-American Relations

As the American offer of an immediate intervention in the Vietnamese war was being given up, the proposals for a defence pact received a boosting by the announcement on 15 June of a visit by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden to Washington. The visit had the main purpose of smoothening Anglo-American relations which had become strained in the recent past. Coming in the midst of a stalemate in Geneva with even the likelihood of a break-up, the announcement sounded as though the British admitted that the Americans were right all along. It was interpreted that Eden was reaching the end of his patience with the negotiations and might even be prepared to talk

on unified action. (23) Dulles remarked in a news conference on the same day that "there seems to be some indication that the British feel that the possibilities of Geneva have been exhausted and that the result is sufficiently barren so that alternatives should now be considered." He implied that this might lead to taking decisions on the collective security pact. (27)

These American hopes looked like being confirmed by a letter from Churchill to Eisenhower in mid-June. The British Premier had recommended in this letter the formation of a South East Asia Treaty Organization, corresponding to NATO. (23)

At the end of the Washington visit of the two British statesmen (25-28 June) two communiques were issued. The communiques primarily reflected an Anglo-American rapprochement on the many issues which had strained their relations. Indo-China happened to be one of them and the reports showed that an overall agreement could not be reached on this question. The joint communiqué issued on 28 June mentioned only one area of agreement between the two, viz., that the two parties had agreed "to press forward with plans" to meet the situation of either agreement or non-agreement at Geneva. (28) It was, however, reported that the unwritten part of the agreement upheld the British viewpoint that no action would be taken towards this before 20 July.

Both Eisenhower and Eden have, however, mentioned in their memoirs the formulation of a seven point position jointly arrived

by the two nations with regard to the final settlement which the French might arrive with the Communists in Geneva. While the British had "hoped" that these points would be considered by the French, the American authorities insisted that these should form the minimum basis for the settlement. (30)

The seven points included an agreement that Laos and Cambodia would be left as independent states while Viet Nam might be partitioned South of the 18th Parallel, that an ultimate reunification of Viet Nam by peaceful means would be possible and that an effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement be provided for.

This memorandum indicated that the United States had come to a definite conclusion on its stand on some of the proposals before the Geneva Conference. The Administration put forward those seven points as the irreducible minimum if the United States had to "respect an armistice agreement on Indo-China" that might be arrived at Geneva.

THE PROPOSALS BEFORE THE CONFERENCE AND AMERICAN REACTION TO THEM

The United States unlike the other countries did not have any particular proposal when it entered the Geneva Conference. It was disposed to give the French the backing they needed without entering into excessive or unfulfillable commitments. Hence the United States confined itself to merely responding to the positions taken by Britain and France.

The American posture of not taking any initiative could be traced to the fact that it was least prepared for a discussion at this stage. The United States had believed that the Conference would be divided into two phases and that it would be the Korean issue which would come up in the first phase. It had desired that the Conference should pin down the Communists to Korea and that the opening statement of Dulles should be directed to achieve this. It had hoped once the specific problem of Korea was settled, it would enable the other problems to be solved more easily. With this in view, Dulles in his statement on 28 April at the third plenary session confined himself to Korea and made no reference to Indo-China at all. The United States perhaps also hoped that this would give enough time for the French to strengthen their military position. However, contrary to American expectations, the Korean issue was soon overshadowed by the Indo-Chinese question, following the defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May.

In actual practice even the mere presence of the United States had become sufficiently vital for its allies to let it dissociate itself from the Conference proceedings. The American response was important not only because of its aid for the continuation of the war but also because of the fact that without a strong American backing, the position of the West vis-a-vis the Communists at Geneva would be considerably weakened.

The Various Proposals Before the Conference

As the Conference started discussions on Indo-China on 8 May, it was faced with a flood of proposals, counter-proposals and compromising formulae. The discussions were inaugurated with
a comprehensive set of proposals by the French Foreign Minister Bidault. These were responded by the Viet Minh delegate Pham Van Dong on 10 May, with his own counter-proposals. Two days after this, the South Viet Nam delegation submitted a third set of proposals for the consideration of the Conference. (31) The following were some of the important points which formed the core of the various proposals relating specifically to Viet Nam.

1) The question of ceasefire being connected to a political settlement and an armistice agreement. While the French did not link the two, the Viet Minh made a ceasefire dependent on the acceptance of terms for a political settlement.

2) The regrouping of the forces into two zones as put forward by the French. The USSR and Communist China seemed to favour this while the Viet Minh wanted the lines to be drawn in such a way that they would be free to operate throughout Viet Nam. The Vietnamese government, on the other hand, opposed any military division of the country.

3) All the three sides agreed on an international authority to supervise the armistice agreements, though they differed in its composition and terms of reference.

4) The question relating to an international guarantee of the settlement.

5) The proposals for the internal political arrangement in the Indo-Chinese States viz., the proposals for election in all the Associated States with a view to forming a single Government in each one of them. This proposal was put forward by both the

Viet Minh and the Vietnamese delegations, though each one had its own purpose to serve.

American Reaction to the Varied Proposals

The initial reaction of the United States to most of these proposals was stiffer than those of Britain and France. It opposed the French proposal for a simple ceasefire without any definite political conditions attached. It believed that any ceasefire should be preceded by "an acceptable armistice agreement, including international mechanisms for enforcement". The United States was convinced that any agreement with the Communists was not worth the paper it was written on, unless it contained its own self-enforcing procedures. It however concurred in the initiation of negotiations towards an armistice agreement itself. (32)

The United States also opposed the French plan for military regrouping in delimited zones. It believed that such a regrouping would mean nothing but partition. And the partition itself as a proposal had been opposed by the United States as early as 1 April when the British put it forward in response to Dulles' call for "united action". The US Government had rejected the suggestion as it viewed such a solution to be only a temporary palliative and that it would lead to a Communist domination of Southeast Asia. Despite this the British had come to the Conference with a plan for partition. It was now put forward in the form of a military regrouping by the French. The United States conveyed its objections to the French accordingly. This was perhaps responsible for the French objection on 25 May along with the Vietnamese, to a

proposal by the Viet Minh for a partition of the country into two large segments. (33) It is, however, doubtful whether the French really preferred a "patchwork" form of division to a "single-line" idea. It looked as though the French support for the Vietnamese position was only formal and was prompted by the American opposition. (34) The Americans, like the Vietnamese, seemed to have believed it possible to preserve the territorial and political integrity of Vietnam. It was not until the meeting with the two British statesmen at Washington, that the United States was prepared to concede that there was no possibility of preventing this territorial arrangement. It was then that the United States accepted a plan for partition.

The United States had equally strong views on another proposal before the Conference, that of the composition and powers of the Commission to supervise the armistice settlement. This question had occupied the Geneva Conference for the first three weeks of June. On 30 May, the Russian proposal was put forward for a four member Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission consisting of India, Pakistan, Poland and Czechoslovakia, with the decisions to be arrived at collectively. It also proposed that these members be given the power of veto. This would be similar to the one in Korea. The United States objected to this on the ground that even

33. New York Times, 26 May 1954. The Vietnamese had believed that the regrouping should consist of a number of "pockets" leading finally to a patchwork of stabilised Viet Minh and French Union areas. This would naturally have less of an air of lasting partition. However such a partition would be much more difficult to supervise than the single-line arrangement which would lead to just two big segments.

34. Such a line of argument is given by Coral Bell, Survey of International Affairs 1954 (London, 1957), pp. 48-49.
In the case of Korea such a Commission consisting of two neutrals and two Communists had proved ineffective and not very impartial. Instead, the United States supported a Vietnamese proposal for supervision by the United Nations. This was however opposed by Communist China which warned that any attempt to bring in the United Nations would wreck the Conference.

On the other hand, Eden's proposal that the Commission should consist of the Colombo Powers (35) was accepted by France and the United States, but was opposed by Russia which believed that there should be at least one Communist member. The United States not only opposed the inclusion of any Communist member but also the veto proposal of the Soviet Union. It held the view that all decisions should be arrived at by a majority. (36) The deadlock between the two parties on this issue was responsible for Eden's warning that the discussions might be broken off unless an agreement was reached soon. Following this, on 16 June, Molotov showed himself willing for a more flexible arrangement. He not only accepted a three member commission with one Communist and two neutral nations, but also gave up his insistence on the veto.

It was at this time that Thailand, backed by the United States, requested the UN Security Council to send observers to

35. The term Colombo Powers referred to the five Asian nations of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia, whose Prime Ministers met in Colombo on 28 April to consider the international situation. The Geneva Conference and relations with Communist China were two important problems that were discussed in this conference. The views of this group carried considerable weight with the British Foreign Secretary and influenced appreciably the Soviet and Chinese stands.

Southeast Asia on the ground that the situation in Viet Nam threatened its own security and international peace. This move was interpreted as an American effort to bring the Vietnamese question before the United Nations by the back door, thereby fulfilling one of the conditions for American intervention. The United States while working for a ceasefire in Geneva, was eager to turn the problem of a political settlement over to the United Nations. Thailand's proposal was, however, vetoed by the Soviet Union on 18 June when the prospects for a settlement in Geneva looked brighter.

With this, the US objections to this proposal died. It disapproved of the results and disassociated itself from the agreements. The *New York Herald Tribune* even called it an unprecedented French-British-Russian-Chinese agreement over the heads of the American delegation. (37)

**American Attitude to the Proposals for Guaranteeing Geneva Settlement**

More than all these, it was with the question of guaranteeing the Geneva settlement that the United States was most concerned. In fact, the prospects of its becoming a guarantor was responsible for the American objections to the agreements which did not agree with the imperatives of its policy in the Far East. On 23 June, on the eve of his departure for Washington, Eden set forth a plan for the international guarantee of the agreements. In it he proposed that "... we could have a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides take part, such as Locarno. We could also have a defensive

alliance such as N.A.T.O. is in Europe". (38)

This mention of Locarno in passing, evoked widespread reaction in the United States. As Times put it, "Almost overnight Locarno has joined Munich and Yalta as an unmentionable word." (39) It was interpreted as a British move to introduce Communist China into the United Nations, just as the Locarno Pact of 1925 paved the way for the entry of Germany into the League of Nations. Eden's suggestions were denounced as a "sell-out of the Free World" and as a betrayal of the American cause. It was interpreted in the United States as an indication by the British Foreign Office of a separate and independent approach of being neutral in a Russo-American conflict. The United States resented that the Five Power guarantee proposed by Eden was sought to be incorporated into the Geneva settlement while the collective defense pact proposed by Dulles should have been postponed "as a future safeguard but ... not a present panacea". (40)

The reaction of the American Congress to the proposal was immediate. Representative John W. McCormack (Democrat, Massachusetts) thought Eden's suggestions showed contempt of the American policies. He suspected that the British "had made a deal with France and Red China at Geneva...". "Do they expect us", he retorted, "to enter into a Locarno agreement, so-called, which would mean at least a de facto recognition of Red China." (41) Congressman John M. Vorys (Republican, Ohio) referring to the

40. Folliot, n. 3, p. 151.
Mutual Security Program for Indo-China which amounted to $800 million asserted that "America was buying no part of a Locarno Treaty for Southeast Asia" and that the Congress did not intend to underwrite any mutual guarantee treaties arrived at Geneva. (42) Twelve members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee stated in a letter to the President that the proposal of Eden would not only accept Communist conquests but guarantee them. They warned that unless it was made clear that the United States would not follow or support Eden's proposal, the whole mutual security concept and programme should be re-examined. (43) On 30 June, the House of Representatives accepted unanimously by voice vote an amendment by Representative Vorys, to the Mutual Security Act, expressing "the sense of Congress that no part of the funds appropriated under this section shall be used on behalf of governments which are committed by treaty to maintain Communist rule over any defined territory of Asia." (44)

Equally strong were the sentiments expressed in the Senate against the British proposals for guaranteeing the Geneva settlement. Senator William F. Knowland (Republican, California) who spearheaded the attack, believed that the Geneva Agreements would lead later in the year to a major effort to bring Communist China into the United Nations. "On the day when Communist China is voted in the United Nations", he pledged, "I shall resign my majority leadership in the Senate so that ... I can devote my full efforts ... to terminating U.S. membership in that organization.

42. Ibid., p. 8699.
44. Congressional Record, 30 June 1954, p. 8892.
and our financial support to it." (45) Senator Knowland's strong views were supported by many others including Senators Alexander Wiley (Republican, Wisconsin) Chairman of Committee on Foreign Relations, Styles Bridges (Republican, New Hampshire) Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, Ralph E. Flanders (Republican, Vermont), Pat McCarran (Democrat, Nevada) and Burnet R. Maybank (Democrat, South Carolina). (46) The Minority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat, Texas) too supported Knowland's statement. He called Eden's proposal for five power guarantee a "bitter pill to swallow" and one which "smacked of appeasement at Munich". Such allied disunity would lead to the fall of Southeast Asia, he warned. (47) Senator McCarran went further and assessed the results of the Geneva Conference as a serious blow to the US prestige, a loss of face by the Western world throughout Asia, and a tremendous victory for the cause of Communism. (48)

There were, however, others who were not in favour of taking up such a strong position. Senators Wayne Morse (Independent, Oregon), Herbert H. Lehman (Democrat, New York), William Fulbright (Democrat, Arkansas), George A. Smathers (Democrat, Florida) and John J. Sparkman (Democrat, Alabama) were among those who favoured the United States continuing to work within the United Nations even if China were to be admitted. (49)

45. Ibid., 1 July 1954, p. 9018.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 2 July 1954, p. 9109.
49. Ibid., 2 July 1954, pp. 9111 and 9913 and 8 July 1954,
In the midst of this Congressional disapproval, the British statesmen could not have pursued the idea of a five power guarantee in Washington. In return for American concessions on other proposals like the partition and a postponement of the formation of the collective defence pact, the British agreed to the American refusal to sign any agreement that would imply its consent to the surrender of north Viet Nam or a guarantee of its integrity. This saved the American Administration from the charges of signing an agreement that was also signed by China. Eden, however, believed that he had succeeded in making the United States understand what he meant by Locarno and that the Administration even "seemed to like the idea". (50) This did not seem to be a correct reading of the Administration's mind. Secretary Dulles confirmed this when on 2 July he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he had no objection to the Vorys Amendment to the Mutual Defense Act of 1954. (51) This practically killed the Locarno proposal, as both Britain and France could not possibly have renounced the American aid on which their budgets were balanced.

The Geneva Decisions and the American Dilemma

Even as the United States was engaged in spelling out its minimum demands, the outlook in Geneva for an agreement had brightened following a meeting between the Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and the new French Premier Mendes-France on 23 June. The meeting increased the hopes for an agreement as it showed the Chinese Premier conciliatory to various French demands. He agreed

50. Eden, n. 12, p. 133.
to the independence of Laos and Cambodia, to the partition of Viet Nam though only as a temporary measure and even conceded the French demand that elections for the unification of Viet Nam would not be held in the near future. By the end of June there was a prospect of agreement on the various issues.

This development faced the United States with a dilemma as to whether it should continue to associate itself with the Conference. It had come to recognize that an agreement was inevitable and that it would be welcomed by all the other parties. Not to agree to its conclusion would not be desirable from the point of allied unity on which its Southeast Asia defense pact was to be based. It would also make the prospects of NIX still dimmer. The American authorities were also well aware of the widespread eagerness, and the support that such an agreement would receive both in Europe and Asia. Any attempt to prevent it would make the United States isolated and unpopular. The United States was also morally committed to both its allies to support any arrangement so long as it fulfilled the minimum terms contained in the Anglo-American communication to France.

On the other hand, the United States was reluctant, especially in an election year, to accept any responsibility for aiding, sponsoring or publicly defending a settlement which might be denounced within the nation as an appeasement of Communism. On 2 July Senator Knowland had announced his intention to sponsor a resolution in the Senate embodying his views on US withdrawal from the United Nations and to make this question an issue in the coming Congressional elections. The United States was also suspicious of Mendes-France's policy of a negotiated peace before the stipulated period. His direct negotiations with the Viet Minh,
his conversations with the Chinese Premier and his firm refusal to any American intervention as a last ditch stand, had given rise to a belief that Mendes-France might concede anything to the Communists in return for an early cease-fire. Thomas J. Hamilton of the *New York Times* mentioned that Dulles was even convinced that it would be impossible for Mendes-France to obtain acceptance of the seven points in their entirety in his negotiations at Geneva. (52) The United States was also not very happy about his attitude to FDC and the lukewarm reference to it in the course of his investiture speech. This dissatisfaction with the French had already led to the United States breaking off its major participation in the Conference and recalling its chief delegate.

Victor Bator gives another factor for American dilemma. He wrote, whether the Conference was going to be a failure or success, the American Administration would be blamed in either case. If it were to fail, the blame would be laid on the United States as having obstructed the Conference. If it were to succeed, it would mean a defeat not only for Dulles' pre-Geneva plans for intervention but also would disprove his thesis that no agreement was ever possible with Communists. It would also mean a certain, even though limited, recognition of Communist China as a factor in world affairs. (53)

With the recovering of the Conference on 12 July, all the chief delegates, except the American, returned to Geneva. The United States decided to remain aloof from the final stage of the


negotiations. On 30 June, the President declared, "I will not be a party to any treaty that makes anybody a slave." (54) On 8 July Dulles told a news conference that he had taken no decision on his own or Bedell Smith's return to Geneva. (55) This underlined the impression that the United States had decided to wash its hands off the Conference and disassociate itself from the final agreements.

The studied non-participation of the United States was resented both in London and Paris. The American announcement came at a time when the French Premier was making a last minute effort to extricate the maximum out of the Conference. On 7 July he had declared to the National Assembly that if there were no satisfactory outcome at Geneva, he would, as his government's last act before resignation, submit to the Assembly a Bill authorizing the dispatch of national conscripts to Indo-China. The public abstention of the United States, by displaying the western disunity, would nullify any advantage the French could gain by the above declaration and would further reduce the latter's bargaining position at this vital stage of the negotiations. Hence strong pressure was exercised by Eden and Mendes-France on Dulles to return to Geneva and participate actively in the negotiations. At long last the Secretary of State consented, not to go to Geneva, but to meet Eden and Mendes-France in Paris.

The Paris meeting (13-14 July) resulted in an announcement that the United States would resume participation at Geneva with Bedell Smith as the head of the delegation. This decision was welcomed in Paris as it would help in arriving at a cease-fire

55. Ibid., 9 July 1954.
agreement. The American acquiescence in the agreement would also discourage the Vietnamese nationalists from resisting the agreement.

Eisenhower has traced the reasons for what looked like a reversal in American stand, to Mendes-France's report that the discussions with the Viet Minh on various points had been proceeding favourably for the West. Dulles also secured an agreement from Mendes-France to a position paper similar to the Anglo-American memorandum of 29 June and was assured of the firmness of the British and French attitudes towards the various terms. It was this assurance and the French argument that without the United States' backing it would be difficult to achieve these seven points that finally made the latter change its opinion. (56)

However, more than this agreement, the American decision seemed to have been based on the practical consideration that a complete break from the Conference might wreck the EDC and split the Western coalition. Hence the United States sought to find a formula which could meet the views of its allies as also those of the opposition at home and the convictions of the American officials.

The newspaper reports spoke of such a formula as having been arrived at Paris. The United States while participating in the Conference, would not be a party to the settlement nor guarantee it. It would, however, guarantee the non-communist territory against a Communist attack, along with the other powers under the proposed Southeast Asia pact. If the Communists insisted on the neutralisation of the Indo-Chinese states, these states might not be parties to the pact, but the pact could still

guarantee their territorial integrity. Such was the formula arrived at Paris and this helped the United States out of the dilemma of association with Geneva. (57)

By the time the Conference was resumed on 12 July there was exactly a week left for the expiration of Mondes-France's self-imposed deadline. The few points that had yet to be decided were the location of the line dividing Vietnam, the date of elections to unify the country and the composition of the Supervisory Commission. The French held the position that a line should be drawn near the 18th Parallel with a French enclave in the north and that no specific date for elections should be fixed. On these points, the American delegation backed the French, though it scrupulously avoided giving any impression of being an active negotiator. On 13 July in a restricted session Bedell Smith even declared that the United States was not a belligerent and that it had not sought and would not seek to impose its views in any way on the belligerents who were the parties primarily interested. If the negotiations reached an agreement of a character that the United States was able to respect, Smith told the Conference, Washington was prepared to declare unilaterally in accordance with its obligations under the UN Charter, that it would refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb the agreement. It would, however, view with "grave concern" any revival of aggression in violation of this. (58) This invited a demand from the Chinese delegation for an American guarantee for the settlement. It declared that it would refuse to sign the settlement unless there

58. Ibid., 19 July 1954.
were the signatures of all the nine-powers. The Chinese did not, however, press it on being told that an American signature has been refused.

The Geneva Settlement and American Reaction to it

On 21 July, the Indo-Chinese armistice was finally signed and a final Conference declaration issued. Some of the salient features of the settlement which concerned Viet Nam were:

1. The demarcation line in Viet Nam should run along at approximately the 17th Parallel. This left in the French hands the city of Hue, the port and air base of France as also the only road that connected Hue with the French base at Laos and which was a major supply route for Laos. This line divided the population more or less equally between the two segments.

2. Elections were to be held throughout Viet Nam in July 1956 and the talks for organizing the same should be started by 20 July 1956.

3. The Viet Minh and the French were given ten months to withdraw their forces from their enclaves in each other’s jurisdiction.

4. An international armistice commission consisting of India (Chairman), Canada and Poland would be responsible to see that there was no build-up of military supplies by either side, during the armistice. All the decisions of the Commission should be arrived at by majority vote, though the most important decisions required unanimity.

5. There was no formal guarantee of the agreements, though the Conference Powers except the United States and Viet Nam, issued a Final Declaration taking note of the agreements. In this it was
agreed that in case of any violation of the agreement, it would be decided by the International Control Commission. In case this Commission could not reach unanimity, the issue could be referred to the Conference Powers who agreed to consult one another. (59)

6. The purpose of the agreement was to achieve purely a military settlement. The demarcation line was a military one and "would not be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary". The Agreement only sought to create the necessary basis for the achievement of a political settlement. (60) The Agreement itself was signed by the military authorities of the two sides of France and Viet Minh and was called the "Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam", though it was negotiated at the highest political and diplomatic level. Nor was the Final Declaration signed by the various participating countries.

While all the other members approved the Declaration, the United States along with Viet Nam expressed its reservations on the accords. In a separate declaration made on the same day unilaterally, Bedell Smith stated that the United States took note of the agreements concluded and would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them". He, however, added that "it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Smith also supported the Vietnamese statement reserving the "right of the Vietnamese people to territorial unity, national independence and

60. Ibid., p. 313.
freedom" (61) and added, "the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join in an arrangement which would hinder this. Nothing in its declaration just made is intended to or does indicate any departure from its traditional position." (62)

On the same day in Washington President Eisenhower dis-associated himself from the Geneva decisions. He declared that the agreement contained features which the United States did not like and that it was not a party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference. However, the United States hoped, he added, that it would lead to the establishment of peace and was willing to wait and see how the agreements worked in practice. He also declared that the United States would pursue the organization of collective defence in Southeast Asia and announced its intention to establish direct diplomatic relations with Laos and Cambodia with separate Ambassador or Minister to be resident at their respective capitals. (63)

The Geneva settlement received varied types of reactions all over the world. There was generally a relief that the long drawn out war had at last come to a close. It brought the first moment of peace, even if only nominal and temporary, since the early 1930s. Even the American Administration seemed to derive some comfort from the settlement. This was reflected in the spirit in which the American declaration on 21 July was couched. President Eisenhower, while not giving his whole-hearted approval to the

61. Ibid., pp. 315-16.
62. Ibid., p. 317.
63. Ibid., pp. 317-18.
Agreements, did not disapprove or criticize it either; he was even willing to see how they worked in practice. In retrospect, he was convinced that "by and large, the settlement obtained by the French Union at Geneva in 1954 was the best it could get under the circumstances." "It ended", he added, "a bloody war and a serious drain on France's sources. More important, it saw the beginning of development of better understanding between the western powers and the nations of Southeast Asia. It paved the way for a system of true co-operation between both in the never-ending struggle to stem the tide of Communist expansionism." (64)

Under Secretary Smith, in defending his role at Geneva, echoed the same view. "It will be well to remember", he said, "that diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield." (65) This view has been confirmed by Donovan too. He believed the United States gave its "tacit support to the French in their settlement". By the statement that it would not stand by if the Reds violated the ceasefire, Donovan goes on, "Washington was helping itself materially ... to get the best of a bad bargain and thus played an important part in keeping the domino from going all the way over with a crash." (66)

On the other hand Sherman Adams who was then ---Assistant to the President, and who was the source of information to Donovan, reported that the truce caused no satisfaction in Washington.

64. Eisenhower, n. 13, pp. 374-6.


According to him, Eisenhower as well as many others in government "felt that the Communist aggression in Indo-China had paid off in victory, even though a partial one". As a result of this truce, Sherman Adams added, "the weakness of the Southeast Asia states was pathetically evident." (67) Eisenhower himself expressed this dissatisfaction when he wrote: "... there was an element of tragedy in an agreement that put great numbers of people under Communist domination." (68)

Public Reaction to the Geneva Settlement

The immediate Congressional reaction to the Agreements was equally mixed. The general outlines of the agreement had been known in advance, and many Senators like Pat McCarran and Mike Mansfield had already called it a victory of Communism and a blow for American prestige. (69) Senator Knowland called it "one of the greatest victories for the Communists in a decade." (70) Senator William B. Jenner (Republican, Indiana) asserted that the United States had, in fact, guaranteed Communist gains. "The United States has been outthought, outtraded, and outgenerated..." he said. "It does no good to say we did not physically sign the Geneva agreement", he added. "That is the old excuse of Pontius Pilate who washed his hands to keep his conscience clear." (71) On the other hand, many other Republican and Democrat Congressman agreed with the view that

69. U.S., Congressional Record, 8 July 1954.
it was the best of a bad bargain. Senator Mansfield himself thought the Viet Minh had strength and power enough to have demanded a dividing line farther down the peninsula, and failing agreement could have won it, by force of arms. (72) He asked the fellow democrats not to make political capital out of a national misfortune. (73) Even Adlai E. Stevenson while criticising the Administration's indecisive policy as leading to "the sorry sequel" in the Geneva Agreement, placed the principal blame for the "disaster" not on the Republican Administration but on the French colonial policy. (74)

The American Press generally described the agreement as a setback or disaster for the Western powers and another major Communist victory in the battle for the world. (75) Hanson Baldwin called it a "peace of defeat". (76)

The New Republic believed the Geneva Conference to be "a great diplomatic defeat for the non-Communist world". It was of the view that it would not be very long before the Viet Minh would unify the entire country under their control. The least they could hope would be a coalition government heavily dominated by Communists. However, the journal opposed the American decision not to sign the truce. At a time when the Communists were coming closer to the non-Communist Asians, it viewed, the United States was moving

73. Ibid., 14 August 1954.
steadily away from them. (77) The *Nation* too believed that the agreement was a tragedy for the Americans. "... the United States suffered the greatest loss of all". "It was not a loss in terms of legal rights or Indo-Chinese territory", it added further, "... but in the measure of its position in the North Atlantic Alliance, its prestige in Asia, and its contact with the aspirations of the Asian peoples." "America's loss may also prove the greatest over the long period", it forecast, "and it is not to be repaired with dollars and guns." (78) It however did not believe it was a "Munich". (79) On the other hand, the *New York Times* itself agreed with the Administration's viewpoint that it was the best the United States could have hoped for. (80)

Among the writers on Viet Nam Frank N. Trager agrees with this view. He believes that the Geneva Agreements "were written in haste and ended in compromise with, and excessive concessions to the Communist powers". (81) These agreements which "added up to political folly ... helped Communist North Viet Nam to initiate further struggle against South Viet Nam and prevented any objective peace-keeping machinery from performing its assigned function". (82) In his view, the American disassociation from the Final Declaration did not really mean much of a success as it did not wholly relieve...
it from observing the provisions of the Agreements and Declarations as long as all others who were parties to them abided by them. (83)
Trager finds fault not so much with the US lack of foresight or blind reliance as much as with the political pressure brought upon by Mendes-France for a settlement of any kind, so long as it was a quick one. (84)

On the other hand, Bernard Fall found the final terms obtained by Mendes-France well within the minimum limits set out earlier by Dulles. In his view they were definitely a diplomatic success under the circumstances. (85) He, as well as Robert Shaplen, believed that in the long run, the American refusal to sign at Geneva had beneficial consequences for the new Administration that was building south of the 17th Parallel. (86)

AN EVALUATION OF AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE AGREEMENT

An evaluation of the Geneva Agreements from the point of view of the United States, should be made in the context of the basic objectives with which the United States entered Geneva. The American expectations from the Conference and its possible outcome were limited, practical and immediate. President Eisenhower pointed out that it aimed at a *modus vivendi* - a settlement, which, while enabling the United States not to intervene actively, would not

83. Ibid., p. 92.
84. Ibid., pp. 92-94.
lead to the loss of American interests either. Looked at from this point of view, the Conference was a success for the American policy. While the proposal to organize a South East Asia defence pact took care of the American interests in the future, the disassociation with the Final Declaration, left the door open for a future American intervention if necessary. While the partition was against the American desire and a concession to the Communists, it was the best outcome the West could have hoped for.

The same could be said about the decision on the date of elections in Viet Nam for charting out its political future. The Communists had conceded to hold the elections after a period of two years while originally they had demanded it within six months. It was widely believed and even the United States was quite convinced, that had the elections been held at this time, it would have ended in a peaceful take-over of all Viet Nam by the Communists. President Eisenhower himself conceded "that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai." (87) Not only was the initial postponement for two years a benefit to the Vietnamese Government, but the subsequent continuous procrastination of the same in the future was made possible by the disassociation of the Vietnamese government from the Geneva Agreements. Hence the Geneva Agreements could be called a limited success to the American policy which was politically indecisive, militarily non-interventionist and at the Conference table indifferent.

This limited success cannot however be attributed to any deterrent effect of the American proposals for joint action with the British and the French, as Sherman Adams and Donovan seemed to have believed. (88) Dulles had also told James Shepley on 11 January 1956, that it was the American "brinkmanship" and bellicosity that deterred further "red aggression" and helped Britain and France reach a good settlement. (89) The factors which enabled such a settlement should be traced elsewhere. As some American diplomats themselves recognized, "the Reds stopped where they stopped because they felt it to be in their own best interests at that particular time to do so, hoping to take over the rest of the country by political means later on." (30) Possibly the Communists accepted this legally questionable document only because they expected that South Vietnam would collapse any way even before the expiry of the two-year period and that the settlement itself would never be implemented.

On the positive side, the credit for the Agreement should be lent to the Russian reasonableness and Chinese co-operation. It was agreed in the Western circles that the Viet Minh were dissatisfied with the partition and the postponement of the elections and would not have conceded to them, but for the pressure from Soviet Union and China. The Viet Minh could have sought better terms both in the battle field as well as on the conference table as Ho Chi Minh's balance of strength was very much more.

As Isaac Deutscher pointed out what the Viet Minh secured was "only part of the ripe fruit of their recent political and military victories." These major concessions were made by the Communists in Geneva with a view to "global bargaining", to bargain "space against time and positions in Asia against positions in Europe". (91)

The Chinese Communists aimed at an overall military and political objective of preserving Asia as their own traditional sphere of influence. They aimed to remove the physical power and prestige of the United States from Asia. This China could achieve by reaching a settlement on time to prevent an American intervention. (92) The Chinese also aimed at emerging as one of the important powers in the world and at enhancing their prestige in the Asian eyes. In this context, the Conference was a success for China as it gained diplomatic recognition as one of the Big Five Powers of the world and the foremost among the Asian countries without whose co-operation no Asian issue could be solved. It helped China to start a peace offensive and gain more friends in Asia by appearing as Asia's flexible arbiter in the face of what appeared to many Asians as Dullesian rigidity. This was confirmed by the signing of the Sino-Indian declaration of Pancha Shoola on 28 June.

The settlement owed its formulation equally to the moderating influence of Russia. More than the fears of a Sino-American collision in Viet Nam, the important factor in Russia's


92. This view has been presented by Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam Another Korea?", *Commentary* (New York), May 1952, p. 370; as also Tiber Menda, *China And Her Shadow* (London, 1961), p. 297.
conciliatory attitude seemed to be European considerations. The Russians adopted, what Morgenthau has called "a policy of transforming the cold war of position into a cold war of maneuver which was to be decided not in Southeast Asia but Europe." (93) By making concessions to France and not humiliating it to the limits of its ability, the Communists hoped to earn French goodwill. The Soviet Union could then succeed in preventing France from ratifying the F.D.C. A withdrawal from Indo-China would also mean less of French dependence on the American aid. The replacement of Laniel by Mendes-France, a firm opponent of F.D.C and one committed to a honourable truce, helped Moscow in this aim.

Above all, an early settlement could be possible because of the French keenness to get out of Indo-China within the self-specified time limit. The Geneva agreements of July 1354 could be called the result of the inter-play of all these various factors.

On the other hand it has been even argued that but for the American display of aloofness and abstention the Conference might have reached results a little more favourable to France. The Communists as they assembled at Geneva had expected complete Western unity and had even believed that they might be called upon to make substantial concessions. This was evidenced by the Viet Minh proposals to the Conference on 10 May which were quite conciliatory and reasonable. The Viet Minh were even willing to consider the question of entry into the French Union and to recognize French economic and cultural interests. (94) According

93. Morgenthau, n. 92.
94. Folliot, n. 31, p. 128.
to Ellen J. Hammer, the Viet Minh were even prepared to accept a Korean type settlement, namely partition of the country for an indefinite period. (35) However by displaying the Western disunity, Hammer argues, the United States withheld from Mendes-France whatever little bargaining strength France was left with and made it impossible for him to salvage even Southern Viet Nam in tact. Hence the negotiations revolved around not the maximum concessions which the Communists would make but the maximum demands they could get accepted. In this context, the Geneva Agreements definitely put the American diplomacy in an unfavourable light. This was heightened by the strains it led to in its relations with both Britain and France and by the defeat of VDC in the French National Assembly on 30 August 1954.