The crisis in Viet Nam has been one of the longest and as yet unresolved issues of the post Second World War period. Begun essentially as a struggle for independence from the French control in 1945, it has today taken the form of an ideological warfare in which the military potentials of the most powerful nation of the world viz., the United States are faced with the manpower and guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese.

The post-war history of Viet Nam, for the sake of convenience and clarity could be broadly divided into two periods. During the first phase which extended from August 1945 to July 1954, it was a war waged mainly to wrest independence from the French colonial control. This phase came to an end with the Geneva Conference of April-July 1954 when the country came to be partitioned into two small independent nations along the 17th Parallel, with the promise of an early reunification. The second period i.e. since July 1954, was one which witnessed a war between the two Viet Nams — North and South. This is sometimes referred to as the Second Viet Nam Crisis. This Crisis was more of an ideological cum power struggle in which the two regimes were supported by the two Big Power Blocs.

The present thesis is based on the view that the American policy towards these two crises forms one continuous thread — starting from a gradual awakening of the existence of the Crisis to an apparently unending involvement in the same. The first
phase could properly be called the formative period of an American involvement in the Viet Nam question. It witnessed a very gradual shaping of American policy towards this issue as it came to assume wider and wider political and military dimensions. The extent of American military involvement in Viet Nam today and the loss in terms of its men and material have far surpassed those in any previous wars including the Second World War and the Korean War.

This study is an attempt to trace the origin and growth of this gradual involvement of the United States and is confined to the first phase. Many works have been attempted on the American policy towards Viet Nam after 1958; some even deal with the years 1953 onwards. However there is no work which has traced the American policy and role from the beginning of the Crisis. The present dissertation is an attempt to fill this gap and thus contribute towards a better understanding of the American predicament there.

The writer is fully conscious of the challenges in venturing to undertake this complex subject for research. I was quite aware of the fact that vital primary information concerning such a contemporary subject would not be available to scholars for a few decades. I was also faced with the task of coping up with the enormous amount of secondary material which the Crisis, in view of its current importance, has brought forth. However these very reasons have made the subject more interesting and the present writer has, to the best of her ability, tried to present a complete and objective analysis of the American policy. I did not, however, find the lack of knowledge of French as a great limitation. This was because the main focus of the thesis has been the American policy, and
the French attitudes figure only as a related subject. Also most of the French materials such as the views of the Press and Political Parties had been reproduced in the English language sources.

The present dissertation consists of eight chapters. The first two chapters deal with a brief historical background of the Vietnamese question and of the American involvement there, respectively. The third and fourth chapters deal with the policy and attitude of the Democratic Administration of President Harry S. Truman to the issue, before and after the outbreak of the Korean War respectively. The fourth chapter studies the increased importance which the Vietnamese crisis assumed following the outbreak of the Korean crisis and the steps which the United States undertook to save Viet Nam for the West.

The fifth chapter seeks to study the policy of the Eisenhower Administration and how far it marked a change from the policy of the Democratic Administration. It studies the deeper and deeper involvement of the United States, leading to a widespread debate as to whether it might result in a direct American intervention in the crisis.

The next chapter deals with this very controversy and the views of those closely associated with the policy formulation both in the Administration and the military. It also analyses the various factors, domestic and foreign that prevented such a direct intervention by the United States.

The seventh chapter deals with the Geneva Conference, and US attitude to the Conference, to the various proposals before it and finally to the Geneva Accord itself. It evaluates
the Geneva Decisions from the point of view of American aims and objectives in Viet Nam. The main focus here is on the American attitudes and policies, and the positions of the other participants have been dealt with only to the extent they were relevant to the American policies.

In the Conclusion, the writer has sought to analyse as to how far the aims and assumptions came to be fulfilled and the factors that were responsible for their failure.

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