Chapter II

UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS INDO-CHINA
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR
It was not until the spring of 1940, that Indo-China emerged on the front pages of the American press and the leading American news agencies began giving it regular coverage. In June 1940, the French resistance against Germany collapsed in Europe, and consequently against Japanese pressure in Asia. This threw the future of the French colonies into doubt, thus making developments in Indo-China, of considerable concern to the military planners of Britain and the United States.

Until now, little was known in the United States of the history and problems of Indo-China. This was due chiefly to the fact that, as a French-speaking area, Indo-China was less known to the Americans than the British colonies. American economic interest in this area had never been great and hence, even though Indo-China was very close to the American-administered Philippines, there was very little intercourse between the two areas. Moreover, the Americans heard little of the region's problems from the Metropolitan French, as the French themselves were reluctant to publicize those problems. It was little wonder, therefore, that almost until 1940 when the United States came to be closely concerned with the War, the popular view in that country of Indo-China was the same generalised conception held of all the colonies; that it was a rule of "White exploiter lording over the all good natives". (1) It was only the role assigned to Indo-China in the hemispheric plans

of Japan, the potential enemy, that caused the United States to pay serious attention to the developments in Indo-China. It was this consideration which prompted the United States to open a consulate at Hanoi in 1939, as also to protect the Haiphong-Yunnan Railway, which carried a large portion of the supplies for the National Government of China.

The Role of Indo-China in the Japanese Expansionist Plans and the US Attitude to it

The latter half of 1940 witnessed increasing pressure from an expansionist Japan on France in South-East Asia. Although France recognized the danger to Indo-China, it was not in a position to withstand these pressures, due to its preoccupation with the menacing situation in Europe. The collapse of French resistance in Europe encouraged the Japanese expansionists, who found in it an opportunity to realise their objectives of establishing a "New Order in Greater East Asia". On 20 June 1940, an agreement was signed between Japan and France, by which the latter recognized Japan's paramount interests in China. This Agreement was followed by more and more demands by Japan, all of which the French had to concede. In this the Japanese were obviously encouraged by the appraisal that there was probably little chance of the British coming to the aid of the French in the Far East. Britain and Holland were the only two European Powers which had colonial interests in this region and from whom France could have hoped for help in Indo-China. But their position was precarious and Britain had to concentrate on its own desperate struggle for survival.

The United States which could have helped France at that time, was in a state of indecision. On 2 July 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a proclamation requiring export
licences for a group of products including machine tools in which the Japanese were interested. (2) On 6 July 1940, the White House spokesman, Stephen T. Early, declared that the "Government of the United States wants to see ... an application of the Monroe Doctrine in Europe and Asia similar to the interpretation and application for this hemisphere.... For example, in the case of French Indo-China, we think the disposition should be decided among the Asiatic countries." The United States preferred to follow a policy of non-involvement in Indo-China. On 30 June 1940, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles told the French Ambassador in Washington that "considering the general situation, the Government of the United States did not believe that it would enter into conflict with Japan, and that, should the latter attack Indo-China, the United States would not oppose such an action". (3) The United States probably calculated that the Japanese who were involved with the Chinese would not take any military action in Indo-China. This is confirmed by Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, who wrote, "American policy should be confined to encouraging countries like Indo-China ... to delay and parley and hold out to the last minute against Japan's demands," and that "Japan would not dare make a


3. Telegram cited in General Georges Catroux, Deux actes du drame Indochinois (Paris, 1959), as quoted by Fall, n. 1, p. 41. William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, however, give the date as 20 June 1940. No record of this conversation between the US Under Secretary of State and the French Ambassador could be traced in the State Department files, though reference to it has been made in many French sources. See William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation 1937-1940 (New York, 1952), p. 598.
military attack at this time". (4) As a manifestation of this approach of avoiding immediate non-involvement in Indo-China, the US Government turned down on 15 September 1940, a request made by General Martin, the French Commander in Tongking, to the Commander of US Naval Forces in the Philippines, for a naval demonstration in the Gulf of Tongking. The US Government had also forbidden delivery of any equipment to Indo-China and thus frustrated the efforts of General Catroux, the French Governor-General in Indo-China, who sent a purchasing mission to the United States to acquire 120 modern fighter aircraft and modern anti-aircraft artillery to be supplied out of the sizeable orders that France had already placed with American manufacturers. (5) The Vichy Government of France once again pleaded for further aid from the United States before coming to an agreement with Japan on Indo-China.

In its reluctance to come to the help of the French resistance to Japan in Indo-China, the United States even seemed to become reconciled to the Japanese extortion of concessions. On 22 August 1940, Sumner Welles, the Under Secretary of State, informed Vichy that the United States was unable to come to the aid of Indo-China, but that it "appreciated the difficulties with which the French Government was faced and did not consider that it would be justified in reproaching France if certain military facilities were accorded Japan". (6) The coming months witnessed far-reaching demands by the Japanese on the Indo-Chinese

5. Fall, n. 1, p. 42.
6. Ibid., p. 43.
authorities. These were followed by a Japanese military attack towards the middle of September 1940. The US Government was still hesitant and limited its action to proclaiming itself against the Japanese invasion. Cordell Hull confined himself to pronounce that this was "upsetting" the status quo under duress", and that the United States disapproved of such action. (7) The United States also refused to revise its decision not to permit the Hanoi government to purchase American arms. Apart from its unwillingness to get involved, the United States was also afraid that these arms might fall into German hands, due to the ties which the Hanoi authorities had with the Vichy Government.

The American reluctance to intervene in the situation with any active help might also be explained by its strained relations with the Vichy government of France at this time. The United States was quite annoyed with the collaboration of the Petain Government with Hitler and was angered by the Montoire meeting of 24 October 1940 between Marshal Petain and Hitler, in which the former promised to help Germany, in defeating England. (8) In a letter to Petain, President Roosevelt sternly warned France that such an agreement would wreck the friendship of the United States with France and would "permanently remove any chance that this Government would be disposed to give any assistance to the French people in their distress.... If France pursued such a policy ... the United States


could make no effort when the appropriate time came to exercise its influence to insure to France the retention of her overseas possessions." (9) This also showed that to some extent the United States was being influenced in its Asian policy by the European situation.

William Langer, the noted American historian, however, defends the US inaction as that the United States was not sufficiently prepared in the summer of 1940 to accept the challenge thrown by either Germany or Japan, even if American public opinion had been favourable. (10) The prevailing mood of public opinion made the American Government refuse to be drawn into an outright opposition to the Japanese moves. These latest Japanese moves had undoubtedly shocked the public, but not enough to support any intensification of the American commitment in that area, especially at a time when Hitler's victories in Europe were alarming. The view which generally prevailed in the Press was that the United States could not afford to become involved in the Far East and that some Japanese successes would have to be accepted.

This reluctance of the public assumed even more significance as it happened to be a Presidential election year. Isolationism or at least non-interventionism was still dominating the Congress and formed the main plank of the Republican campaigns. The President was constrained to move with the greatest caution. American aid to Britain had come to assume No. 1 priority in the governmental policy and hence, it was enough for the moment that

10. Ibid., p. 73.
the nation followed the government lead to the extent of declaring itself on the side of Britain and against the Axis.

The Japanese invasion of Indo-China in July 1941, resulted in Indo-China emerging as an important front in the Far Eastern war and led to a worldwide realignment. According to some writers like Griswold and F.C. Jones, this open attack accelerated the development of American-Japanese antagonism on the one hand, and the Japanese adherence to the Axis on the other, thus contributing towards the merging of the European and Far Eastern conflicts. (11)

The earlier part of 1941, had also witnessed an intensification of the war in Europe. By December 1940, following the fall of France, the danger to England seemed most acute, and this, in turn, made the position of a neutral United States too anxious. The United States was compelled to take various steps, in complete disregard of its neutral obligations, to offset the German military conquests. The passage of the Lend-Lease Act on 11 March 1941, reduced still further, the gap between the United States' non-belligerency and open participation in the War on the side of the Allies.

These months also saw a greater anxiety in Washington of the danger of Japan to the American Far Eastern possessions. On 11 February 1941, President Roosevelt for the first time referred, though indirectly, to the possibility of the United States getting involved in a Far Eastern War. On 20 February, it was revealed in

11. F.C. Jones, especially, holds the view that it was the inflexible attitude which the United States took towards this Japanese invasion, that was responsible for the failure of Hull-Nomura talks in Washington. He also felt, the US refusal to make any compromise made Japan attack Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. F.C. Jones, Japan's New Order in East Asia 1937-45 (London, 1954).
Washington that latest types of American bombers were being flown across the Pacific to Singapore, and that the United States was also speeding reinforcements of aircraft to its Pacific Fleet. These American moves were denounced by Japan, which described them as encirclement of Japan. The acuteness of the situation only increased Japan's drive to strengthen its position in the Far East.

Following Hitler's attack on Russia in June 1941, Japan proceeded to occupy Southern Indo-China. On 24 July 1941, the Japanese-Vichy agreement was announced; by this agreement the Japanese armed forces were given authority to occupy all vital airports and strategic bases in French Indo-China.

Japan's successive moves began to have their impact on American opinion and the Administration found it possible to take a stronger public stand than previously. The United States, as has been pointed out, disapproved of and deprecated the French concessions. Sumner Welles, contrary to an earlier statement of his own, denied having approved any French concessions to Japan at any time. (12) In fact, even before the agreement was concluded, in an attempt to prevent its conclusion, the American Ambassador to France, William D. Leahy transmitted to the French, an oral message from President Roosevelt, that "if Japan was the winner, the Japanese would take over French Indo-China, and if the Allies won, we would take it." (13) The United States and especially its Ambassador Leahy, seemed to be convinced that Germany was a party

(12) As quoted in Andrew Roth, Japan Strikes South (New York, 1961), p. 73.

(13) William D. Leahy, I Was There (New York, 1950), p. 44.
to the Agreement. The repeated assurance of the French Government to the contrary, did not convince the United States, which found it, "too difficult to swallow". The United States interpreted this agreement as an effort by Germany to get the former involved in the Pacific. (14) The United States was also afraid the Japanese-Vichy agreement might encourage the Germans to demand French Africa from the Vichy Government, which the latter would find very difficult to refuse. One could thus say that July 1941 marked an important turning point in Vietnamese history. It could perhaps be called as the dividing line between a period of comparative peace and active war in the Pacific.

As a retaliatory step, the United States ordered the freezing of all Japanese assets in the United States. (15) It also suspended the conversations that were being held between Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles and Admiral Nomura of Japan in Washington.

14. One comes across frequent references to this view in the "Diaries of William D. Leahy" (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington).

15. For the text of the Executive Order issued by the President on 23 July 1941, see Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941, pp. 236-7. Doubts have been expressed by various writers both as regards the effectiveness of this step, as also the purpose behind it. Both Jones and Ambassador Grew have noted clearly, that the Japanese action did not come to the United States as a surprise. Grew viewed that an earlier warning to Japan of the possible economic sanctions, consequent to her invasion, would have prevented any such invasion by Japan. This casts doubt, incidentally, on the sincerity of Roosevelt's proposal to Japan for a settlement of the Indo-Chinese issue. On the other hand, Jones writes that Roosevelt was warned even on 19 July, by the War Plans Division of the Navy Department, that such an embargo would precipitate war. According to Jones, the purpose of the embargo was more to provoke Japan, than to settle Indo-China problem. Jones, n. 11, pp. 283-4; Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years 1904-1946 (London, 1953), vol. 2, pp. 1347-8.
The United States also sought to help the Indo-Chinese authorities, in their border troubles with Thailand, by calling the attention of the Thai authorities to American pronouncements to preserve the status quo in Indo-China and by revoking licences for shipping ten military planes to Thailand. (16)

In the subsequent months, the Japanese drive to self-sufficiency gained more momentum, especially in the face of their fear that the United States might intervene in the Far East. This apprehension was reflected in the Japanese drive to rapidly influence the economy of Indo-China, through the military and diplomatic pressure which it brought to bear on the French authorities in Indo-China. The Japanese demands were met by the Vichy Government, as passed on to them by the Germans. (17)

This confronted the United States with two hard options. The first one was to enter into a two-ocean war against both Germany and Japan, in defence of its western Allies and protect Indo-China, Singapore, Burma, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines from Japanese occupation. Or on the other hand, it could try to reach a broad-based agreement with Japan for the entire Pacific area, and concentrate its attention primarily across the Atlantic. This might also help in separating Japan from Germany. The United States chose the latter one, and throughout the year 1941, Cordell Hull engaged himself in "exploratory conversations" with Japan. It was in this context that President Roosevelt proposed to the


17. F.C. Jones, however, does not seem to hold this view. He argues, that Japan was even ready to withdraw from Indo-China, if that could lead to an agreement with the United States. He felt that Japan was keen to keep away from the Indo-Chinese scene. Jones, n. 11.
Japanese Government on 24 July 1941 the neutralization of Indo-China. He put forward the offer that

if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indo-China with its military and naval forces, or, had such steps actually been commenced, if the Japanese Government would withdraw such forces, the President could assure the Japanese Government that he would do everything within his powers to obtain from the Governments of China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States itself a binding and solemn declaration, providing Japan would undertake the same commitment, to regard Indo-China as a neutralised country in the same way in which Switzerland had up to now been regarded by the powers as a neutralized country. (18)

The United States Government repeated the proposal on 25 November 1941, as one of the bases for agreement, in what was called the "Hull Note". Even on 6 December 1941, on the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Roosevelt addressed a message to the Japanese Emperor offering a non-aggression guarantee in exchange for the evacuation of Indo-China. The United States' proposal, however, did not get a favourable response from the Japanese Government who in a note handed over a few hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, called the "Hull Note" as "unacceptable" to them being and as/only an extension of the open-door policy to Indo-China. (19)

While the United States was engaged in all these negotiations and peace proposals, it also tried to halt the movement of the Japanese expeditionary force to the South. When towards the end of November 1941, the Japanese moved further South in Indo-China, the United States viewed it as a serious threat to the Philippines, Burma and Singapore, and felt that this had to be halted. Under Secretary Sumner Welles sent a query on 2 December 1941, as to what

19. Fall, n. 1, p. 46.
Japan intended by their new occupation of Southern Indo-China. (20) With the attack of Pearl Harbour, however, the issue of Indo-China got merged in the broader issue of the Pacific War between Japan and the Allies, more especially, the United States.

**US ATTITUDE TO THE ISSUE OF COLONIALISM IN INDO-CHINA**

Despite/somewhat general acceptance of the idea that all peoples had the right to govern themselves and the frequent assertions on the part of orators concerning America's concern for liberty, the United States had consistently avoided any involvement in anti-colonialist movements. American governmental leaders tended to regard colonial areas from the point of view of economic, commercial, and military considerations and their direct relevance to the United States. Since relations with the metropolitan states on these issues were regarded as of greater importance to American interests, the United States had not chosen to take an anti-colonialist posture as long as such a state of affairs prevailed. Broadly speaking, this was the situation as far as the evolution of American policy on Indo-China was concerned.

It has been pointed out that the American leaders and people had shown very limited interest in Indo-China till virtually the fall of France. It was the looming conflict with Japan that induced American leaders to pay close attention to the land and its resources and to the temper of its people and rulers. The United States recognized the importance of the region to Japan, as a valuable source of economic resources like rubber and rice.

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20. Reference to this can be found in the Official Papers of Henry L. Stimson, 1940-1945 (Stimson Collection, Historical Manuscript Archives, Yale University, New Haven).
realized Indo-China could be used as a spring board by the Japanese to attack the British possessions and the areas from where the United States procured important primary commodities.

This consideration of Indo-China, as a strategic area in Japanese-American relations and the need to preserve it from Japanese occupation was of key importance to American policy-makers. The issue of self-determination in Indo-China hardly figured in their calculations at the time. Hence, the United States favoured the preservation of the status quo and the continuation of French control. This was expressed by Cordell Hull, in a Press Conference on 23 September 1940. (21) Again, the protest by the US Government against the surrender by the Petain Government of the Indo-Chinese bases to Japan seemed to indicate that the United States was keen that Indo-China should remain under French rule, even if it were that of the Vichyites. President Roosevelt in the course of his proposal for neutralizing Indo-China offered to procure a guarantee from the "pertinent powers" that "so long as the present emergency continued, the local French authorities in Indo-China would remain in control of the territory and would not be confronted with attempts to dislodge them on the part of de Gaullist or Free French agents or forces." (22)

The Change in American Attitude to the French colonial rule

The Vichy-Tokyo agreement of July 1941 conceding the Indo-Chinese bases, however, made the US authorities rethink on the wisdom of allowing the French to continue to rule over Indo-China.

22. Ibid., p. 629.
Viewing the agreement as a further evidence of Vichy-Axis collaboration, the United States, as Ambassador Leahy recalled in his memoirs, interpreted it as "the end of the French colonies in Asia". (23) It also demonstrated to them the need to preserve intact the French colony from the Japanese.

The American dissatisfaction with the French action of yielding to Japanese demands also woke them up to the colonial conditions in Indo-China and the local opposition to the French rule. Awareness that popular dissatisfaction against colonial rulers had made the area fertile ground for Japanese propaganda, led American policy-makers to appraise more critically than earlier the performance of the colonial power. It was, however, the military debacle of the Allies in Southeast Asia after Pearl Harbour that led American policy-makers to face the question whether France should be permitted to regain Indo-China after the war. French misrule, Roosevelt believed, had made Indo-China the springboard for Japan's attack on the Philippines, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. (24) In Roosevelt's eyes, according to Bernard Fall, the Indo-Chinese situation became the "scapegoat for all America's woes in the Pacific". (25)

The US President also indicated his scorn for the French rule in Indo-China by ignoring France completely in his proposal to Japan for neutralizing Indo-China. The Roosevelt proposal as also "the Hull Note" later on, simply overlooked the fact that there still existed in Indo-China a French administration, getting

23. Leahy, n. 13, p. 58.
25. Fall, n. 1, p. 50.
its orders from the Vichy Government - a fact that was noted by the Japanese in their reply to the Hull Note.

President Roosevelt eventually came to the strong conclusion that Indo-China should not be returned to the French but should be placed under an international trusteeship. In a letter to Cordell Hull, dated 24 January 1943, he expressed his contempt for the way the French had ruled the country. "France has had the country ... for nearly one hundred years and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning", he wrote. "France has milked it", he went on, "for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that." (25) The President also contrasted the French rule, with the US rule over the Philippines, and described the latter as a "pattern of what men of goodwill look forward to in the future". (27)

The official policy of the United States, during these years, came to be based on the belief that countries with colonies should begin to plan and prepare for the self-government of the colonial peoples and give them independence, when they become ready for and worthy of it. (28) With President Roosevelt himself, the problems of the colonial areas, had become a "favourite topic", (29) thus "underscoring the differences between himself and his respected friend, Winston Churchill on the extension of the principles of the Atlantic Charter to such areas as Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands,

27. In a speech on 21 October 1944; Leland M. Goodrich, and Marie J. Carroll, eds. Documents on American Foreign Relations, July 1944 - June 1945 (Boston, 1947), vol. 7, p. 4.
East Indies and Indo-Chinese." (30) The President expressed this view to the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, during the Washington Conference of March 1943. He made it clear that he would not like a commitment to be made in advance that all the colonies in the Far East should go back to the countries which owned or controlled them prior to the war. The President, as Harry Hopkins had recorded, referred especially to the cases of Timor and Indo-China. (31)

Under this policy the President instructed Hull to present the idea of trusteeship for Indo-China to the Soviet Union at the Moscow Conference of October 1943, and he himself spoke of it to the Turkish and Egyptian representatives at Cairo in November 1943. Roosevelt, at this juncture, seemed to have entertained the idea of a trusteeship for Indo-China under three Commissioners — an American, a Chinese and a Briton. (32) He himself pleaded for support to his plan of trusteeship for Indo-China, at the various Conferences, in Cairo, Teheran and Yalta. (33) At the Yalta Conference of 1945, however, Roosevelt modified his plan so as to include one or two Indo-Chinese and even a French, a Filipino, a Chinese and a Russian.

The trusteeship plan continued to interest Roosevelt till his death in April 1945.

It is noteworthy that President Roosevelt opposed the idea of a French military mission being attached to the Southeast Asia

30. Ibid., p. 81B.
31. Ibid., p. 71B.
Command for consultations regarding military operations affecting Indo-China. He instructed that no American approval should be given to such a mission and that no American representatives in the Far East, whether civilian or military, were authorized to make any decisions on political questions with the French mission or anyone else. (34) The United States also turned down the repeated requests from the French military authorities to participate in the Far Eastern war against Japan, and for representation in Pacific War Council. The French were anxious to get assistance in retaking Indo-China from the Japanese. They felt, that if the United States could get two divisions of French troops to Indo-China in addition to the 50,000 already there, (35) the French would be able to recapture Indo-China, with the help of the secret resistance groups. The United States interpreted the French request as implying assistance in the return of Indo-China to French control, and giving France a right to participation in lend-lease after the defeat of Germany.

Roosevelt was disinclined to respond favourably to the French request. The Joint Chiefs and the Combined Staff who studied it were also of the view that the transportation to the Pacific of two French divisions would involve an expenditure not justified by any assistance that could be expected from the French in the accomplishment of the main Allied war objective of the total defeat of Japan. (36) General Eisenhower, the Allied Supreme

35. President Roosevelt mentioned this request from de Gaulle in his conversations with Stalin at Yalta on 8 February 1945. Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta, 1945, p. 770.
Commander in Europe, took the view that French participation in the
Far Eastern War would detract the latter from its main effort in
southern France. Hence the United States rejected the French
request on the plea that Indo-China was not at that time included
within the sphere of American Staff.

The President also ruled out any US material assistance to
the Resistance forces, French and native, engaged in guerilla
operations against the Japanese on Indo-China territory. In reply
to a proposal from the Office of Strategic Services, he wrote that
"the United States should do nothing in regard to resistance groups
or in any other way in relation to Indo-China". In a memorandum to
the Department of State he stated, "he did not want to get mixed up
in any Indo-China decision nor did he want to get mixed up in any
effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese."
Action at this juncture, he thought "was premature from both the
military and civil point of view". (37) Not until February 1945,
would he modify his position somewhat and agree to help the French
underground in Indo-China. And even then such aid would be extended
provided it did not interfere with planned operations in the area,
that it would be limited to what was necessary for the defeat of
the Japanese forces and that it would not be construed as an
official US recognition of the French interests in Indo-China. (38)
As a consequence, when the Japanese attacked Saigon on 9 March 1945,

37. Memorandum, Stettinus to Forrestal, 11 January 1945, as
quoted in, Office of the Chief Military History Department
of the Army, United States Army in World War II, Special
This source gives a detailed account of the various French
offers and United States replies to them. Ibid., pp. 391-9.

38. Ibid., p. 395. Leahy too confirms this Order.
the United States made no move to use its air power based in China in support of the French. The French came to depend on the British who supplied them equipment from Calcutta. It was only when all the organized units of the French had been destroyed, that the President permitted the release of the 14th Air Force under General Claire L. Chennault, for support missions in Indo-China. (39)

PRESIDENT TRUMAN AND THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TO INDO-CINA

Following the death of President Roosevelt Vice President Harry S. Truman became the President on 12 April 1945. The change in the presidency not only marked a change in the temper of the Administration, but also began a slow but sure drift in a new direction. The prospects of an end to the war altered the international situation further and contributed to this shift in American policy.

Even before the war in Europe came to a close, the differences between the United States and Soviet Union over the Polish question had indicated the trend for the future. The new Administration had come to realize the need for unity among the Western Powers. The Department of State viewed that in the "best interests of the United States ... every effort be made by this Government to assist France, morally as well as physically, to regain her strength and her influence." (40) The United States was also aware of the


40. In a report to President Truman on 13 April 1945, as cited in Harry S. Truman, Memoirs: Year of Decisions (New York, 1955), vol. 1, p. 15.
"unreasonable French suspicions of American aims and motives" notably in connexion with Indo-China. The Department of State was convinced of the need to remove this French fear and to treat the latter "on the basis of her potential power and influence rather than on the basis of her present strength". (41)

Hence the new Administration adopted a much more flexible position than the preceding one as regards both the French participation in the Far Eastern war against Japan, as well as the future of Indo-China. Prolonged negotiations ensued between the military authorities of France and the United States. However, not much headway could be made until at last the Japanese surrender of 2 September, brought the issue to a close.

As for the future of Indo-China, the new Administration formulated a course which was quite different from the concept of trusteeship that Roosevelt had contemplated. As Ellen J. Hammer points out, by the spring of 1945, the American Government had ruled out the possibility of "any drastic interference" with the French position in Indo-China. (42) In a cable to General Patrick J. Hurley, the American Ambassador to China, the State Department outlined the American policy as one which "would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indo-China, except under the French Government". Since this seemed to be "unlikely", the cable went on, it was President Truman's intention "at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intention in regard to the establishment of basic liberties

41. Ibid.
and an increasing measure of self-government in Indo-China...." (43)

The Potsdam decision that Vietnam should be divided along the 16th Parallel and that the north and south portions of this line be occupied by the Chinese and the British, (44) reflected this new line of thinking. Though this decision prevented an immediate return of the French to Indo-China, it also meant a discarding of the proposals for an international trusteeship. Referring to this, Joseph Buttinger concludes, "the statesmen gathered at Potsdam had in effect agreed that it was up to the French to decide how they would overcome whatever opposition the Vietnamese or the Chinese might put up against their return to Indochina." (45)

What were the circumstances that led to a reversal of the Roosevelt line? It may be stated in this connection that Roosevelt's policy towards the French in Indo-China did not find complete favour even among his close associates, both at home and abroad. Even his own Secretary of State, Cordell Hull differed from him. Hull opposed the trusteeship plan for colonies; instead he preferred a pledge by the mother country to grant eventual independence to the dependent peoples. He felt that a trusteeship administration would have great difficulty in ruling so large an area and population in terms of service and money. He advocated, instead, returning Indo-China to France on condition that the latter would restore its own

43. U.S., Senate, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Armed Services, and Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, Military Situation in the Far East (Washington, D.C., 1951), vol. 4, p. 2892.

44. The Potsdam decisions have been dealt with in greater detail in Chapter I.

popular institutions in the colony and would treat the colony "properly". (46)

The Departments of War and Navy opposed any American sponsorship of the trusteeship plan in principle. They were convinced that the United States needed the Japanese islands in the Pacific for her national defence and opposed their being passed on to the UN Trusteeship. H.L. Stimson, the Secretary for War, viewed it as nothing more than a "magnificent American gesture" to persuade Britain and France to "trustee" India and Indo-China respectively. In his view neither Britain nor France would agree to this, and the whole thing would only lead to a "tremendous row". He also opposed an open discussion of trusteeship proposal at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, before the end of the war in the Pacific. He was afraid that disagreement over the issue might have an adverse effect on the prosecution of the war in the East.

President Roosevelt also faced opposition from among his Western European Allies, in regard to his advocacy of the trusteeship plan. The President himself, in his letter to Hull, mentioned that while his proposal for trusteeship was "wholeheartedly" supported by Marshal Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, it was opposed by the British Foreign Office. The British were afraid of the effect it might have on their own possessions in the East, and those of the Dutch. (47) The United States found it difficult to induce the European Colonial Powers to adopt the American ideas towards their colonial possessions, while at the same time, the United States due to the need for close co-operation in the war, was not in a position

47. Ibid., p. 1597.
to alienate them in the Orient. The President, while repeatedly proposing his ideas, never at any time pressed the Colonial Powers to give their concurrence to the concept. He was in particular, afraid of displeasing Prime Minister Winston Churchill and once, even cautioned Stalin not to bring up the subject of the need for reforms in India, as it was a "sore subject" with Churchill. (48)

AN EVALUATION OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S ATTITUDE

The Indo-Chinese question dominated President Roosevelt's attention till the end, to the extent of giving it "an importance far out of proportion to its actual position within the scheme of things" and that "his preoccupation amounted almost to a fixation". (49) This was especially true, considering the negligible role that Indo-China played through the World War II. This naturally raises the question, as to what were the possible motivations behind Roosevelt's attitude and proposals.

Was President Roosevelt's opposition to the return of France to Indo-China, and his enthusiasm for the trusteeship proposal, born solely out of his sympathy for the independence movement in Indo-China and the poor condition of the dependent people in that colony? This naturally raises the question how far was the United States aware of the movement that was going on inside Indo-China, against the French authorities. There is no evidence to show that the United States fully grasped the significance of this struggle, though it was aware of the plight of the Indo-Chinese. For instance,

48. Sherwood, n. 29. The President also referred to this British disapproval in his conversations with Stalin at Yalta. Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta 1945, p. 770.

49. Fall, n. 1, p. 58.
the United States felt that the French conceding to the various Japanese demands was solely the result of Germany's pressure on the former in Europe, whereas the appeasement of Japan was due to reasons more than this. The material condition of Indo-China at this time in the absence of the hoped-for assistance from Britain and the United States, was too bleak to allow any resistance. Further, the local rebellions which the French authorities were confronted with at this time and the fact that the French battalions were sent to put them down had weakened the French resistance to Japan. It is doubtful, whether the United States understood this state of affairs.

It may also be noted, in this context, that the United States favoured the neutralization of Indo-China in the earlier period and a trusteeship later, but took no position on self-government, whereas the fight within Indo-China, was for complete independence. At no time, did President Roosevelt or any other Government spokesman extend any aid, moral or material, to the national movement for Indo-China's freedom. If the United States rejected the request for aid from the Vichy Government it equally opposed lending any support to the resistance or native forces, that opposed the French colonial rule in Indo-China. The United States did give assistance to the Vietnamese native forces and the OSS even armed, led and trained native guerillas behind the Japanese lines. But this material aid was not much in amount and was meant against the Japanese. (50) Hence one finds it difficult to agree with Lawrence H. Battistini who wrote that their freedom aspirations

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were sympathetically understood in Washington. (61) Instead, President Roosevelt was reluctant to get mixed up in any effort towards such a liberation from the Japanese.

It may also be noted that during this period the United States was not very much aware of the nature of the nationalistic movement in Indo-China. The question of Communist influence on the Vietnamese nationalists, in spite of their known association with Canton, did not attract any special attention in Washington. According to Joseph Ballantine, a former Director of the Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State, towards the end of the war, there was no person in the State Department who "had any experience that amounted to anything in the Far East". (52) There was also a general criticism of Roosevelt's policy, that he did not understand the implications of the Russian policy in the Far East, and that he apparently welcomed the expansion of Russia in the Western Pacific. The United States, did not, also make any effort to secure the goodwill and allegiance of the future political forces of the region.

To conclude, Roosevelt's policy towards Indo-China was governed by the exigencies of the war. He probably was sincere in his policy that colonial areas like Indo-China should attain self-government but he took no concrete steps towards hastening that development. Irritation and disappointment with the French coupled


with some concern for subject people led him to enunciate the trusteeship concept but he showed no willingness to push it with any great vigour. The end of the war confronted a new President with a situation that was very different from what Roosevelt had faced. Relations with Metropolitan France became far more important than responding immediately to the demand of Indo-China natives for freedom. The trusteeship plan, evolved in the midst of war, was set aside by Roosevelt's successor.