Chapter IV

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS THE VIETNAMESE CRISIS FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF THE KOREAN WAR
The Korean War which broke out on 25 June 1950 between South Korea and North Korea marked a turning point in the politics of South East Asia and the Far East. It had many implications for the United States both from the point of view of the Communist strategy in Asia and in Europe, and of the shaping of an American policy in Asia. The West looked at the North Korean aggression primarily as a part of the global strategy of the Communist world. It was interpreted as an indication that the Soviet Union was willing to force a military showdown in order to win independent and neutral countries, and that its tactics were no longer confined to relatively more peaceful but effective means like internal subversion, propaganda and peripheral warfare and nibblings. The Korean War was interpreted as an attempt by the Communist world to test the strength and validity of the Western promises to come to the support of smaller nations, and the extent to which the West might go in order to protect its own interests. The Korean War, it was viewed, also showed that the Communists chose to adopt a different strategy in Asia than the one in Western Europe. The strengthening of the nations in Western Europe, economically through the Marshall Plan and militarily with the help of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) made a Communist expansion in this region difficult. On the other hand the American reluctance to strengthen the economy of the Asian countries and their hesitant and incoherent approach to Asian problems had made the latter easy victims of Communist propaganda.
It had also helped the Communists/hope that an aggression on a far-away Asian country might not provoke the United States to commit itself in a big way.

The Communist action in Korea was also interpreted as a Russian attempt to use the Chinese as an instrument for the former's expansion in Asia, themselves confining to merely furnishing arms and equipment. (1) The American opinion, both official and unofficial, believed broadly and firmly that the Korean crisis was inspired by the Soviet Union and executed by Communist China, the latter exploiting its proximity and huge manpower. It is however doubtful whether this view of the Soviet aims and strategy stood the test. In the course of the war, especially after the Chinese intervention in November 1950, the United States began having second thoughts about the Chinese objectives and the pressures behind the Chinese intervention. The extent of Chinese participation by way of men and material, had far surpassed the estimate as warranted by the above calculation of Soviet strategy. (2)


2. Dean Rusk, then Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, gave expression to these various doubts and conjectures in a speech on 15 November 1950.
Whatever were the speculations on the aim and role of the various Communist Powers in the Crisis, the United States found in it the first opportunity to deter an open Communist aggression in Asia. It viewed that only a deterrent military action, preferably one co-ordinated among the Allies, would help in containing Communism not only in Asia but in other parts of the world too. Hence came the prompt American reaction of appealing to the United Nations and taking up arms under the auspices of the international body.

The American action in the Korean crisis had its immediate implications for the American policy in more than one direction. For the first time it integrated the European policy of the United States with its Far Eastern policy and presented a global approach to the problem of containing Communism. Thereby it led to an increased emphasis on the military considerations in its relationship with European nations. It led to a strengthening of the North Atlantic Alliance and increased the military aid to the Western European nations. A major portion of the American aid to Europe under the Marshal Plan came to consist of military equipment, as contrasted with the earlier policy of stipulating that it could not be used for military purposes. The United States also sought to strengthen the defences of Western Europe by inspiring and encouraging proposals like Schuman Plan and Pleven Plan. (3) This need to strengthen Western Europe had its impact on the American attitude

3. The Schuman Plan put forward by the French Foreign Minister M. Schuman on 9 May 1950, sought to integrate the coal and steel industries of France and Germany as the first step towards a European economic federation. In the latter half of 1950 was put forward the Pleven Plan, another French proposal to form a strong European Army with German participation. It is dealt with in greater detail later.
to colonial problems. The American authorities found themselves unable to bring any pressure on the European Powers, in the latter's policy towards their Asian and African colonial possessions.

THE KOREAN CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE VIETNAMESE ISSUE

The issue which received the most urgent and immediate attention following the Korean War was that of Viet Nam where a war was going on and a serious situation had developed. On the one hand it heightened the importance of the war by tying it up with the crusade against Communism. On the other hand it emphasized the need to find a settlement to the problem, both in its political and military ramifications, if a similar involvement of the United States were to be prevented. It was in this context that on 27 June 1950, President Harry S. Truman declared that he had "directed an acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indo-China and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces." (4) With this direction, it appeared, the United States had decided to open another front in Viet Nam in its war against Communism in Asia.

On 15 July a military survey mission headed by John Melby of the Department of State and Major-General Graves Erskine arrived in Saigon. Its tasks were to determine the military build-up possible in each of the countries it visited, to recommend priorities for arms shipments and to discuss the composition of the

4. Ibid., p. 5.
American military advisory groups which could be assigned to each country. (5) In a statement issued on 20 July, Major-General Erskine declared that "thanks to the presence of the French Army, Indo-China is the country of S.E. Asia with the most solid military framework" and that "this fact would be taken into consideration by the U.S. Government in its allocation of military aid." (6) Perhaps it was on the basis of these recommendations that in August the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) headed by Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, was despatched to Indo-China to supervise the distribution of supplies. The first instalment of American military aid itself consisting mainly of military vehicles reached Indo-China on 19 August.

It was at the same time that Donald R. Heath assumed charge as the Minister Plenipotentiary of the American Legation in Viet Nam. One of his first acts was to hand over equipment for 12 Vietnamese battalions at a formal ceremony in Saigon on 6 September. In August had also arrived Robert A. Blum as the head of the first Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) of the Economic Cooperation Administration.

The United States besides undertaking economic and military measures, also sought to win the Vietnamese in a psychological warfare. On 5 August, the Department of State announced the inauguration of a Vietnamese programme by the Voice of America with a view to propagate, among other things, "The American

relations with the Far East". (7) In a message to the Program, on its inauguration on 13 August, President Truman explained the objectives of the American economic and military aid and said the United States "looked with sympathy upon the desires of the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for self-government within the French Union." (8)

Reaction at Home on Increased Military Aid

The American policy of increased military aid to Indo-China was supported by the New York Times which called it a welcome change from the "small" assistance given to Viet Nam hitherto and that too with "grave doubts and many reservations". (9) The U.S. News & World Report, a rightist weekly too pleaded for more aid to Bao Dai, who in its opinion, was not a puppet but one who fought a hard bargain for independence with the French. In its view, the war in Viet Nam was an anti-Communist one and as such deserved lot more help from the United States. (10)

The American decision to extend military aid was upheld by the military opinion too. General MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea stressed the need for such aid to Indo-China. He told Averell Harriman in August 1950 that the United States should be more vigorous in strengthening Burma and Indo-China so as to prevent Chinese infiltration in those

9. Ibid., 3 July 1950.
areas. He even suggested a Marshall Plan for Asia. (11)

The policy of extending military aid to the Bao Dai government was, however, opposed by many others. Harry B. Ellis writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, thought such an aid would not really help the cause of the West as both the United States and the French were on weak grounds politically. In his view, as Bao Dai had been rejected as a leader by his own people, France and the United States should find some one better than him as their symbol and the recipient of their aid. He also stressed that only an increase in economic aid and support to the Vietnamese aspirations for independence would win them for the West. (12)

The progressive opinion in the United States too believed that the American fight against Communism could succeed in Viet Nam only if it divorced itself from the French colonialism. The American support to Bao Dai Government had not only cost the United States the Asian goodwill and hindered in rallying the nationalist opposition to Ho Chi Minh, it had also nullified whatever credit the United States might have derived by working through the United Nations in the Korean Crisis. The *New Republic* pleaded for complete independence for Viet Nam, aided and guaranteed by the United Nations. (13) This plea was supported


by Harold R. Isaacs who believed that an American military involvement in Indo-China would be more difficult than in Korea. He viewed that the United States could win the support of the non-Communists in Asia, if it committed itself to put an end to the French rule in Indo-China. He also proposed an American-Asian joint initiative to prevent the extension of the war by UN participation and sanction and for a UN supervised peace, followed by a "free and supervised election" for the Vietnamese to choose their own government. (14) The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) pleaded for American efforts towards putting an end to colonialism in Indo-China, and to refrain from any military action.

THE CAO DANG DISASTER AND INCREASED AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

Besides increasing the aid to Viet Nam, the United States also held frequent conversations with France on the situation in Viet Nam.

In September (12-14) the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain and France met in New York to discuss the international situation. The political, military and economic development of Viet Nam too figured in these discussions. But as the exchange of views were taking place, the Viet Minh launched a strong offensive against the French troops in the district of N.E. Tongking. The battle marked the beginning of a long and sustained operation by the Viet Minh compelling the French to abandon in the following months, their strongholds in the area.

This was one of the severest setbacks yet received by the French in the hands of the Viet Minh and led to the evacuation of Cao Bang by the French on 3 October. The following weeks witnessed a series of defeats for the French. On 8 October came the surrender of Cao Bang or what has come to be known as the Cao Bang Disaster - one of the greatest defeats in the history of the French colonial warfare. This was followed by a series of withdrawals from other vital strategic bases, including Thatke and Langson, abandoning a huge amount of food and ammunitions to the Viet Minh, in fact enough to equip a whole Viet Minh division. As a result of this month-long offensive the Viet Minh now controlled virtually the whole of northern half of North Viet Nam. Describing this French defeat Bernard Fall wrote, "The French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec." (15) In his opinion, "for the French, the Indo-China war was lost then and there". (16)

The Cao Bang disaster gave rise to serious disquiet and anxiety in France. The French cabinet, therefore, decided on 11 October that Prime Minister Pleven should instruct M. Moch, the French Minister of Defense who was then in Washington in connexion with a discussion on American technical and financial aid for the French rearmament programme, to impress upon his American counterpart the urgency of the French situation. The French Defence Minister was instructed to stress the need for


American military help for the French in Indo-China, if France were to play its expected part in the defence of Western Europe. (17) In the midst of the continued French reverses in Indo-China, Franco-American conversations took place in Washington between 13 to 15 October. At the conclusion of these conversations, the Department of State announced on 17 October a speedy shipment of arms aid to France and Indo-China. The Press Release pointed out that out of the sums allotted by the Congress under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act for fiscal years 1950 and 1951, about 5 billion dollars had been earmarked for military equipment to be delivered to the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Out of this latter amount, France had been assigned by far the largest single portion. It said in addition to this, one-half billion dollars had been appropriated for the Far East as military assistance. The major part of this sum would be used to provide military equipment including high bombers for the armed forces both of France and of the Associated States of Indo-China. The Press Release also mentioned that deliveries of equipment were being expedited and a "particularly high priority" had been assigned to Indo-China. (18) In addition to this, the United States also agreed to provide the French on an interim basis, a financial assistance of $200 million for their own increased military production. (19) It was also agreed that the future American

19. Ibid. According to a French statement, this would amount to 40 per cent of the total sum voted by the Congress under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act.
assistance to the defence of France would be determined by discussions among the NATO members. (20) The MAAG in Indo-China too arranged to send everything the French had requested for Indo-China. Besides these assistance programmes concluded with the French, the United States also signed a military aid agreement on 23 December in Saigon with Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED AMERICAN DECISION TOWARDS INCREASED AID

The manifold increase in the American commitment "to the defence of Indo-China against Communist colonialism" (21) in the winter of 1950 could be traced to many factors. The most important of them was, of course, the rapid deterioration in the French military situation. The Viet Minh could not have chosen a better time to inflict defeats on the French than now when the United States had come to give a priority to Indo-China next only to Korea where a large scale war had been going on. The French failures at the battle fronts presented a discouraging picture in the Free World's war against Communism in Asia. The United States was not only compelled to increase its aid to France, but it also had to encourage the French to continue the war.

This anxiety about a French defeat and even withdrawal increased further as a result of the public reaction in France to the war after the Cao Bang Disaster. The war in Viet Nam had come to be called the dirty war - la sale guerre. Important

20. Ibid.
21. Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State in a statement on 27 November. Ibid., p. 940.
political sections in France opposed a continuation of the war and advocated negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. In a debate in the French National Assembly on the military situation in Indo-China on 19 October, the war was described by the Communists as "anti-constitutional". The Progressists demanded immediate negotiations with the Viet Minh as the only realistic approach. Mendes-France of the Radical Socialist Party pleaded for negotiations with Ho Chi Minh as the only alternative to a complete victory over the Viet Minh which, in his opinion, was impossible without "three times more troops and three times more expenditure". On the other hand, the French defeat was deplored by the PRL and the Gaullists as a betrayal of the French forces by the French Government. (22) The resulting political demoralisation and despair in France had to be arrested if the war should go on. The United States' conceding promptly to all the French requests for assistance and its acceptance of the French conditions that contributions to the NATO should in the future be made not on a bilateral but on the multi-lateral basis, were born out of this anxiety to please the French opinion. The United States was also interested in sustaining Pleven's Government which faced many interpellations and three debates on the Indo-Chinese war alone in the National Assembly within October. In its eagerness to help the Pleven Government face the crisis, the United States Administration chose to override other considerations such as the state of French fiscal affairs, its solvency for a rearmament programme or even the

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(22) Keesing's Contemporary Archives, n. 6, p. 11047.
question of French opposition to German rearmament. (23)

The American moral and military support to the French, and the anxiety that the war should be stepped up seemed to have been born of other considerations in the Asian political scene too. In the first week of November, General MacArthur confirmed rumours of Chinese intervention in the Korean War which had been widespread for more than two months. This intervention had intensified the war and introduced a new element into the Korean crisis. The war there looked like expanding from a limited engagement into a full scale war in Asia. It was the same period which also witnessed the Chinese occupation of Tibet. On 28 October the Chinese troops entered into Tibet and soon occupied Lhasa by force. This further demonstrated the Chinese expansionist motives in South and Southeast Asia and enhanced the need to contain Communist China.

As for Indo-China, the Chinese help to the Viet Minh by way of food supplies, training camps and provisions of arms and ammunitions had been reported from January onwards. In the course of the October fighting, the French admitted that "for the first time we have had to do with an enemy perfectly armed and equipped, who have an excellent radio network and know how to co-ordinate their movements, (24) thereby proving an increased Chinese collision and assistance in the war. The Viet Minh too calculated that if the French had to be eliminated, it should be done at a time when the US forces were engaged elsewhere and before large scale American


help could reach the French troops in Viet Nam. This made it necessary for the United States to strengthen the French resistance to the Viet Minh.

However in providing this increased military help the US Government faced a dilemma - that of reconciling the aid to Indo-China through France, to its claims of supporting complete independence for Indo-China. The Pau Agreements, concluded on 27 November between France and the three Associated States of Indo-China, helped the United States in resolving this dilemma. (25) However imperfect and unsatisfactory the results were to the Vietnamese nationalists, the United States found in it the necessary justification for extending aid to the French army in Indo-China. It meant that an issue which strained the relations between Washington and Paris viz. the granting of more and more independence to the Vietnamese government was getting resolved, thereby facilitating an increased American military commitment. Hence the prompt welcome which Washington granted to the Pau Agreements (26) - an instance of what Joseph Buttinger calls an "almost intentional ignorance" on the part of the United States. (27) All these various factors brought the problem of Viet Nam to a head and helped the United

25. The Pau Conference started on 23 June 1950 to negotiate details of Indo-Chinese independence and to discuss a variety of "technical problems". Among other things, it agreed on the creation of a native army for Vietnam. The details of the agreement and the reaction of the Vietnamese are dealt with in Chapter I.


States to formulate a policy of military aid to Viet Nam. But as it did so, the policy which it followed was not an American policy but a French one.

The Franco-American Relations and the Increased American Aid

The outbreak of the Korean War had a mixed reception in the French political circles. While it was welcomed by some Right and non-Communist Left intellectuals as demonstrating the American firmness to fight aggression it was opposed by others on many grounds. The fear that it might develop into a full scale Far Eastern war was quite widespread in France. This would threaten the security of the French possessions still further. This section opposed increased American involvement in the Vietnamese war too. The Communists and pro-Communist Leftists found in the American action an exploitation of the French interests for the latter's purpose of stalling Communism. The moderate and Right-wing Frenchmen foresaw in the American aid, an attempt to replace France in Indo-China. These Frenchmen looked at the American aid to Indo-China in October 1950, as a part of the American overall strategy of the Korean crisis. Hence towards the end of the year, the Leftists' and Moderates' opposition to the American action of intensifying the Korean War came to be combined with their opposition to the continuation of the French War in Viet Nam. This section asked for American withdrawal from Korea and negotiations with the Communists, as much as they pleaded for a French withdrawal from Viet Nam and negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

However, the French authorities themselves found in the Korean War and in the increased American aid to Indo-China, a
last chance to fight out their war in Viet Nam and hold on to their possessions. Hold on they did for another four years thanks to the massive American aid, though this aid could make no difference to the eventual outcome of the war. It is doubtful whether France could have continued the war, especially in the prevailing French mood, beyond 1952 but for the American aid.

One of the immediate effects of the aid was to make France more and more dependent on the United States. It was the American inspiration if not insistence, that made the French step up its military efforts after the debacle of October 1950. Paris moved more promptly than usual and sent a survey team to Indo-China consisting of General Juin, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in North Africa and M. Letourneau, Minister for the Associated States, to report on the situation created by the Viet Minh offensive. A state of emergency was also proclaimed throughout Tongking on 18 October. Following this, the French Government sought to strengthen the military and political situation by replacing the present High Commissioner and the Commander-in-Chief of the French forces, and combining the two posts in General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, one of the triumvirate of French military forces, who had achieved fame in the Second World War. General de Lattre was given considerable latitude in the conduct of operations.

This dependence on the United States for both Indo-Chinese and European situation was demonstrated by subsequent events. The renewed offensive in Indo-China starting from 23 December made the French seek more and more American assistance. The French were also worried about the American attitude to the war in Viet Nam in view of the increasing pre-occupation of the latter with
Korea. They were keen to know what the United States would do in Asia in general and in Viet Nam in particular, if the Chinese intervened in Korea.

The French were also afraid that their involvement in the war in Viet Nam and the consequent military weakness were costing them their central place in Western European defence. They believed, of late the United States preferred Germany as its more reliable ally in Europe. The French Government also resented its absence in the Attlee-Truman talks in December 1950 as it viewed its presence to be necessary in any major discussion on Europe or Asia.

There was also a widespread criticism in the United States at this time, of the French will to fight Communism either in Europe or Asia. It was felt in official circles that in case there was a Russian invasion in Europe, very little could be expected from France by way of deploying any effective force. Hanson Baldwin, a frequent critic of French military policy, wrote that it was the French military and political policy in Viet Nam which was responsible for the deteriorating situation there. He put the blame for the French failures there on the "left-handed effort" of Paris. (28)

Hence with a view to convince the American authorities of the French intention to resist Communism both in Indo-China and Europe and also to stall the domestic criticism of not restraining the United States in Korea (for which purpose the British Prime Minister dashed to Washington in November-December), the French Premier Pleven undertook a trip to Washington in January 1951.

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This was preceded by intense efforts to make a good impression on the United States and to get more aid for Viet Nam. From Saigon General de Lattre was also clamouring for more aid. He had even threatened that if the Americans did not send much help it might be necessary to invite part of the French conscript army to Indo-China.

Prompted by the anti-American feeling and intense criticism at home on the one hand and the need for American aid for Indo-China and for France's own economy on the other, Pleven's visit achieved a limited purpose. It cleared, to some extent, the American "misunderstanding" and even secured more aid to Indo-China; though only in return for the French agreeing to support the American motion in the Security Council of branding China as an aggressor. Pleven had also succeeded in convincing the US Government of the French decision to stay on in Viet Nam and fight the Viet Minh. During the visit Pleven made a request for American and British aircraft-carriers to act in conjunction with the French forces. He succeeded in getting certain assurances from President Truman on this point. (29) Pleven also made use of his visit to expedite the delivery of end items and to expand it. The United States subsequently shipped under forced draft a great deal of equipment, mainly air equipments. In fact, virtually all heavy fighting equipment used in the Vietnamese war came from the United States. The MAAG in Viet Nam also acquired equipment and assistance from the American headquarters in Tokyo. This included barbed wire, napalm, ammunition and more and faster

29. The Hindu (Madras), 1 February 1951.
deliveries of aircraft. (30)

Pleven's visit, followed by a visit by another French dignitary, President Vincent Auriol in March-April 1951, helped in healing the strain in the Franco-American relations to some extent. This was further helped by the limited French successes in the battle fronts in Viet Nam under the new and inspiring leadership of General de Lattre. On 6 February, the Viet Minh were foiled in their attempt to capture Hanoi and this defeat made them resort to their guerilla tactics at least for some months to come. Coming as they did on the eve of the various hearings on Mutual Security Program, Mutual Security Act and Assignment of Ground Forces to the European Area, these events helped the spokesmen of the Department of State in facing the Congressional criticism. The US officials could now talk boldly of a "French will to resist" and claim that there was "no substantial support for a policy of neutralism" in France. (31)

Rumours of Active Chinese Help to Viet Minh, as a Factor

To this appreciation of the French efforts were added the rumours of active help to the Viet Minh from Communist China. It was known for quite some time that the Chinese were supplying

30. General H.J. Malony, Department of Defense Representative, S.E. Asia Policy Co-ordinating Committee, in a testimony, U.S., House of Representatives, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, The Mutual Security Program (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 900. This aid, though not much, helped considerably in the French victory in Vinh Yen when the napalm bomb was used for the first time in this war. This aid was specifically acknowledged by General de Lattre, New York Times, 26 January 1951.

the Viet Minh with war materials and equipment. However by the
beginning of 1951, it was reported that the Chinese had mobilized
a sizeable force of regular troops to fight in Indo-China at short
notice. This was estimated variously; a New York Times report
estimated this at 80,000 stationed on the Indo-Chinese border and
more than double this number further back at points in Yunnan,
Kwangsi and Kwangking provinces. (32) These rumours gained
additional strength by the reports of a Sino-Viet Minh Conference
at Nanking in January. In this Conference the Russian advisers
were supposed to have counselled a general Chinese offensive and
encouraged an intervention by the Chinese 'volunteers' in Indo-
China. The fears of a possible Chinese intervention increased
further as the prospects of a ceasefire and armistice in Korea
became brighter. Not only would the Chinese direct their troops,
from the Korean theatre to Indo-China, but might also tighten their
stand in the latter as a "face saving device". This lent an
urgency to the Vietnamese situation and stressed the need, more
than ever, for building up a native army and rallying the political
forces in Viet Nam.

On the other hand the willingness of China to abandon the
war in Korea and participate in negotiations were viewed as
marking a change in its attitude and policy. It was interpreted
that China had decided to give up, at least for the present, open
warfare in Asia. This would mean the Chinese might not increase
their degree of military participation in the Vietnamese war but
might wage a more intense psychological and political battle. To

counteract this it would not be enough if the French military effort was strengthened, but it should be accompanied by more and more Vietnamese participation both in the political and military sphere. The United States believed that only the infusion of new blood could save the Bao Dai Government in drawing the popular support away from Viet Minh. A native army with trained Vietnamese officers to lead them in the battle would, more than anything else, help in this process. General de Lattre believed that only the training of a native army could help in saving the situation.

The Pau Conference of 1950 had arrived at a decision regarding the strength of a native Vietnamese army. It had also resolved that the Vietnamese Emperor would assume the Supreme Command, assisted by a High Military Committee composed of French and Vietnamese political and military advisers. Hence the way was now clear for General de Lattre to undertake the task of creating such an army. A target figure of 100,000 men was fixed for 1951. On 15 July 1951, the Vietnamese Government introduced compulsory training.

However, the halting way in which the Pau Agreements came to be implemented disappointed the United States. Though efforts to raise a native army had been undertaken, they only made a slow progress. This was not only due to the lack of sufficient trained officers among the Vietnamese but also due to the fact that a good number of people were not willing to participate in the war. They were not even willing to concede that it was a Vietnamese war. The periodic trickling in of concessions by the French had not helped in removing the image of Bao Dai as a "French puppet". To this was added the French fear that it was dangerous to train and
build a whole Vietnamese army as it might defect en masse to the Viet Minh. This fear, which was shared even by Bao Dai, made the French reluctant to raise the Vietnamese cadres beyond the rank of major. As Dr. Dan, a friend of Bao Dai, wrote "The Vietnamese Army is without responsible leaders, without ideology, without objective, without enthusiasm, without fighting spirit, and without popular backing." (33) Gullion, the then American Consul General in Saigon, pointed out later a native army which was commanded by French officers and non-coms did not evoke much of enthusiasm and nationalist ardor among the population. (34) The war continued to be one between the Viet Minh and the French Army, the latter backed by non-Asiatic officers and men, with the reinforcements coming from France.

Nor was the United States very satisfied with the progress made towards the granting of a meaningful degree of independence to the Vietnamese in the foreign and domestic affairs. Though by the Pau Agreements the Indo-Chinese States were allowed to conduct their foreign relations freely, this right was severely restricted when it came to their discussions and negotiations with other countries, more especially with the United States. In the domestic sphere too, as Gullion wrote, "the French were still unable to state unequivocally that the Indochina states would be completely independent." (35) "If only they had handled the question of

34. Ibid., p. 85.
35. Ibid., p. 77.
membership in the French Union the way de Gaulle finally handled it in regard to Algeria later on ...", observed the then American diplomat in Saigon, "and not made it obligatory for the Associated States either to join the Union or to stay in it once they joined." The United States viewed that the Vietnamese would not be drawn to the Bao Dai Government by the dilatory approach on the part of the French and that only a well equipped native army would inspire the Vietnamese against the Viet Minh. The American Government also resented the fact that the French kept exclusive responsibility for training the Vietnamese units and were reluctant to provide complete report on the progress and performance of the Vietnamese battalions both in training and in battle. The United States while offering aid to raise a Vietnamese unit could not have any contact with it except through the French.

The French authorities who were, possibly, well aware of the American dissatisfaction now sought to allay this. The military successes in the first half of 1951, sufficiently increased the French morale and strengthened General de Lattre's plea for more American aid. In order to impress on the American authorities that France had given the substance as well as the forms of independence to Vietnam and also to accelerate American deliveries of equipment, General de Lattre visited the United States in September 1951. The General was also keen to discuss the possible repercussions of an armistice in Korea and of the American withdrawal from there. The French General also stressed that the French were fighting only to save Indo-China from Peking and Moscow and that they had abandoned all their colonial positions there.
General de Lattre, the United States and Vietnamese Crisis

The discussions at the White House, the Department of State and at the Pentagon in which besides General de Lattre, the French Foreign Minister M. Schuman too participated, seemed to have yielded successful results. On 16 September President Truman said that the French stand in Viet Nam was the same as that of the United Nations in Korea. (36) On 23 September, the Departments of State and Defence in a joint statement declared that "the successful defence of Indo-China is of great importance to the defence of all Southeast Asia", and promised a re-examination of the military aid programme and a considerable improvement in deliveries. (37) It was also rumoured that a major portion of $1,000 million allocated towards military and economic aid programme for the Far East for 1951-52 might be given to Indo-China. Apart from these material achievements, the visit of de Lattre had helped in making Viet Nam replace Korea as the most important theatre in the American eyes. It helped in making the latter view the French war there sympathetically. The joint statement even recognized that the policies of the United States and of France in Viet Nam were not at variance. (38)

De Lattre's visit had its implications for the American attitude to the French war in Viet Nam. By focussing the American attention on the war, the visit of de Lattre and of the other French dignitaries after him, made the United States give a serious consideration to the course of the war and its future. It made the

38. Ibid.
United States re-think about the role of France in Viet Nam and the need to reconcile with and to even advocate the continued presence of the French there.

The United States, following de Lattre's visit, resigned itself to a secondary role in Viet Nam. Any hope that the United States might make an independent effort to save the Vietnamese situation both from the point of view of nationalism and Communism was given up. Robert Shaplen called this "an abdication" by the United States to the French General. The persuasive and dynamic personality of General de Lattre whom Guillon compared to General MacArthur, was partly responsible for this. A man of conviction who believed himself to be a crusader against Communism, de Lattre found it easy to convert the Pentagon, the Department of State and even the American press to his own view of the French role in Indo-China.

As a Frenchman who resented any interference by the Americans in the Indo-Chinese affairs, de Lattre found a supporter in the pro-French, staunchly anti-Communist American Minister Heath, who was keen not "to rock the boat" in Indo-China at this juncture.

The American decision not to disturb the political balance in Viet Nam was perhaps born due to the developments taking place in another Asian theatre (too). Following the cease-fire in Korea, the talks for a negotiated peace there had been started by now and the United States had given up, at least temporarily, any idea of unifying Korea. The war in Korea had ended without a complete victory for the United States, though it had succeeded in its aim of driving the North Koreans away from South Korea. The United States had therefore come to believe it would be better to allow the French fight the war to victory with the United States itself continuing to back the French efforts by military support, rather
than put any pressure on the latter and weaken their efforts. A weakening of the French efforts might mean a complete over-running by the Viet Minh or at least a partition on the Korean model.

**Increased Military Commitment in East Asia**

The importance of military against political considerations in Viet Nam assumes significance when one remembers that this period witnessed considerably increased American commitment to the defence of Southeast Asia and the Pacific region. Following the signing of the Japanese Peace Treaty in early September, the United States had signed a bilateral security treaty with Japan on 8 September. On the same day, the United States also signed a tripartite security pact with Australia and New Zealand which came to be known as ANZUS Pact. A week earlier i.e. on 30 August, the United States had also signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines which formalised the existing understanding of security ties between the two countries. Though none of these treaties, except the last one to some extent, dealt directly with the defence of the Southeast Asian region, it clearly demonstrated that the United States was rethinking on its commitments for the security of Pacific region. It also showed that the United States was stressing the military defence, almost to the complete exclusion of any economic measures.

**Reduced Emphasis on Economic Aid as a factor**

This last factor namely the overshadowing of economic aid by increasing military assistance, became apparent in the American policy towards Viet Nam in the latter half of 1951.
Following the American recognition of the Bao Dai Government in February 1950, the United States had extended economic aid with a view to help in stabilizing the government. A Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) was established as a part of the Economic Assistance Act of 1950. This Agency with Robert Blum as its head, administered the ECA aid to Indo-China from spring of 1950 to the latter half of 1951. Overlapping the activities of this agency were those of the Technical Co-operation Administration (TCA) which was established in September 1950 within the Department of State. It was a special agency to supervise all Point Four activities in their programmes in Southeast Asia. In October 1951 was created the Mutual Security Administration (MSA) by the Mutual Security Act of 1951. By this Act the American economic and technical assistance programmes in Southeast Asia came to be linked to military aid, and essentially economic objectives came to be closely aligned with military and political objectives like collective security and defence of the Free World. Consequently the MSA succeeded the ECA and the latter's branch in Southeast Asia viz. STEM, except in Burma and Indonesia. It even absorbed partially the activities of TCA.

The American economic aid to Indo-China especially in the period between May 1950 and October 1951, strained the relations between the United States and France. The debate on the mode of distribution of this aid was a long and bitter one. The United States when it extended the aid, was aware of various criticisms that might come up. If it extended the aid through the French, it would be criticized as amounting to support of French colonialism. On the other hand, it was also apprehensive that the
governments of the Associated States would not be in a position to administer this aid effectively, if it were channelled to them directly. However, the United States had hoped to act as an intermediary between the French and the Vietnamese. It had also hoped that by extending the aid, it could show to the Vietnamese population that the United States stood behind them in their fight against Communism and was interested in their welfare. It was with this view that the American aid was directed to such spheres as social welfare, distribution of cloth and medicines, building of rural irrigation wells and improvement of roads. The U.S. had also concerned itself with airlifting supplies to the refugees from the war zones. The United States, by these programmes which dealt directly with the people at the village level, tried to create a better understanding with the Vietnamese people and to remove the suspicions of a population which questioned the motives of any action by a westerner.

It was this very purpose which was looked at askance by the French Government. The French viewed the American aid to Viet Nam as a direct threat to their own economic and political interests in this region. The French businessmen whose monopoly in Vietnamese business enterprises came to be broken by the American aid, especially in import and export activities, accused the ECA as changing the trade patterns within the French Union. A French English daily Correjour called it a "peaceful conquest of Indo-China by the Americans". The French were keen on American aid but without the American personnel to administer it or without it leading to any American influence there. The French regarded the presence of even 200 Americans in Viet Nam to administer the
aid, a little too many.

Hence the French from the beginning tried to resist any curtailment of their own effective control over Viet Nam. In May 1950 when the original aid agreements were drawn up, the French had wanted a quadrilateral arrangement among the Three Associated States and themselves, with the United States playing only the role of an adviser. But the United States insisted on bilateral agreement between the United States and the governments of the three Associated States, as any American aid programme sent under the French label would have defeated the very purpose of the aid. The United States succeeded ultimately in extending the aid on a bilateral basis although it took almost 18 months to negotiate the agreement.

Again, the French also sought to hamstrung the actual distribution of this aid in various ways. They sought to control all the counterpart funds as they controlled the foreign exchange of Viet Nam. There was also much of wrangling over the working of the agreement, which held up the initial negotiations for a formal agreement for more than two months in the summer of 1951. General de Lattre also believed no economic aid would do any good to the Indo-Chinese unless it was co-ordinated with the French military effort. It was finally in September 1951 that the Agreement was formally signed between the United States and the Indo-Chinese states, but by now the United States Administration had already decided on a Mutual Security Program which sought to co-ordinate the economic aid schemes to the military assistance programmes, and de Lattre could cable to Bao Dai from Washington that "he had persuaded the Americans to see the light". (39)

The continuing strain in the Franco-American relations on the nature and distribution of economic aid frustrated the efforts of Robert Blum, whom de Lattre described as "the most dangerous man in Indo-China". Blum who returned to Washington in winter 1951, expressed his doubts as to whether the American aid achieved anything in "almost two years of active American participation in the affairs of Indo-China". On the one hand, he wrote, the United States was not able to reconcile the two allies, i.e. the French and the Vietnamese in a common fight against Communism. On the other hand, the American actions in Indo-China had only helped in strengthening the French military position. The United States was content to let the French continue to have primary responsibility and was disposed not to get embroiled directly, beyond giving advice. Hence the American presence had only disappointed the Vietnamese who felt the United States was not prepared to make any undiluted effort to support their point of view. (40) Whatever little results the direct economic programme could have achieved psychologically was also nullified by the simultaneous military aid that the United States extended to the French. Blum wrote later in 1965, "on balance we came to be looked upon more as a supporter of colonialism than as a friend of the new nation." (41) The return of Blum to Washington could be regarded to some extent, as marking a change in American policy, viz. the dilution of economic aid and its being overshadowed by the military programme as the more effective way of combating Communism in Viet Nam.

40. In a private memorandum, as cited by Chaplen, Ibid., pp. 90-91.
41. Ibid., p. 89.
The Impact of EDC on American Attitude to Viet Nam

The increasing American military commitment to Viet Nam in the fall of 1951, could also be traced to the developments in Europe, more especially to the formation of the European Defense Community.

In the later part of 1950, the United States began viewing that Western Europe could not be defended from a Communist expansion except with West German help and participation. This would not be possible without a rearmament of West Germany and restoration of normalcy to that State. This conviction of the United States, as opposed to the doubts and misgivings of England and France of the wisdom of rearming Germany, was further affirmed after the outbreak of the Korean War. In September 1950, the United States succeeded in securing the reluctant consent of Britain and France which adopted the policy in principle. Towards the end of October the French Prime Minister Pleven, put forth a proposal, which came to be known as the Pleven Plan, for the creation of a European Army to which Germany would contribute relatively small units. The Pleven Plan sought to reconcile the French fears of a rearmed Germany with the American insistence of making the Germans participate in the defence of Western Europe. The whole of 1951 witnessed a series of parallel conferences to discuss the two sets of proposals - one by the Pleven Plan to create an European Army and the other to discuss the extent and mode of German rearmament so as to contribute to the defence of Western Europe. The two parallel discussions led in July 1951, to a proposal to form an European Defence Community with a constitution providing for a Defence Commissioner, a Committee of Ministers, an Assembly and
army of 20 divisions. The size of national units to be contributed by the members, however, could not be agreed upon. During the rest of 1951, discussions continued on formulating the details of EDC. In the process, the Pleven Plan had not only been considerably altered but the whole French diplomatic position came to be undermined and overshadowed by the American moves. By the end of 1951 the governments of principal Western allies were inescapably committed to Germany’s rearmament. This could be done only through an European army as a part of the EDC. The conclusion of EDC thus became a keystone of the Western policies.

The EDC was an issue which created violent reactions in the French political scene. It lay dormant during the French elections in June-July 1951 but got revived after August 1951. Public opinion grew restive as the American pressure on France became more insistent. While it divided the Socialist ranks, the Rightist Parties like the R.P.T. viewed the EDC as leading to the creation of a German Army. They criticized the Government’s "slavish" policy vis-à-vis the United States. In this they were joined by the Communists who opposed the building of American air bases in France and started a virulent anti-American campaign.

This French scare of a rearmed Germany and their opposition to an American dominated European Army came to be linked up with the war in Viet Nam. The anti-American propaganda in France at this time was intensified by the Henri Martin affair. Henri Martin was a French sailor who, revolted by what he had seen in the Viet Nam, had joined the Communists. When/French Government arrested him, his cause was taken up by the Communists who exploited it in their propaganda against the war in Viet Nam.
There were others like Mendes-France who continued to voice their opposition to the war. In a famous speech on 30 December which received nation-wide attention, he argued that so long as France continued to fight the war in Viet Nam, it would not be able to organize national defence in Europe. He accused the French Government of promising to the United States, to build a strong French Army and make its contribution to the European defence, without looking into its resources. This would result in heavy military expenditure and inflation. Mendes-France who believed Europe should be given priority over Asia, argued that the situation could improve only if France put an end to the war in Viet Nam and negotiated with the Viet Minh.

This speech of Mendes-France which was approved generally in France inaugurated a serious debate on negotiations with the Viet Minh. It had thrown open an alternate to solve the present economic and military crisis in France. An anonymous French General writing in Le Monde pleaded for a halt in the war as the only way to save the French position in Europe and Africa. He argued if the United States could arrive at guarantees by negotiating on a national basis with the Communists in Korea, why should France not adopt a similar strategy. (42) The French were also convinced that the United States and other allies of France could not be expected to extend anything more than an indirect support, even if the war were to intensify or the Chinese intervene. Nor did the hope of a native Vietnamese army relieving the French forces, seem to be materializing in the near future. In the face of the popular restiveness even the MRP leaders, who were responsible for the

42. As cited by The Hindu, 17 March 1952.
Indo-China policy, now had to keep the doors for negotiation open. In January 1952, Robert Schuman, a former Prime Minister, declared at a meeting of MRP supporters that "if an armistice can be concluded on honourable terms, France will not hesitate to make peace." (43)

On the other hand there were other Frenchmen who welcomed the American interest in the Vietnamese war and their insistence on the French participation in the European Army. In their view the war was a diplomatic asset for France as the latter came to be treated with some regard in all international discussions. France was fighting a war for the "Free Democracies" as against the Communist Viet Minh and hence would have to be consulted in all political and military considerations of the West. It also gave France considerable leverage in resisting the American pressure especially in matters like European Army and German rearmament.

However, on the whole, the French were quite weary of anything "European" and were demoralised at the fact that "everything is [was] decided in Washington". (44) To this weariness was added an anti-Americanism born out of the American criticism of the French conduct of military operations and of its reluctance to rearm and contribute its strength to the EDC. The New York Times of 10 December called France as the "worst straggler of all", (45) while Hanson Baldwin believed if there was going to be no

43. As cited by Lancaster, n. 24, p. 240.


European Army, it would be necessary to build up a German national army. (46) Such critics, however, were not ready to concede Mendes-France's plea that France could contribute more to the European defence build up only if it withdrew from Viet Nam. A more vigorous leadership, a better development and exploitation of the French military potential, in their view, were the only needs of the situation. This would not only help in waging the war more successfully but would enable France to maintain the schedule of its promised military development in Europe. (47)

The official view in the United States, however, conceded that it was a "grievous burden" on France to continue the war in Viet Nam in view of the heavy casualties and military expenditure, (48) and that this might raise some problems for the future when the need for forces in the West become greater. But this still did not imply, in the American governmental view, that the French should withdraw from the war. It considered that a French withdrawal would be a disaster. It did not want to recognize that a powerful section of French opinion was in favour of withdrawal. The United States desired a continuation of the war by the French as it was in favour of France carrying the baby, in the absence of its own willingness to fight on the continent of Asia. The United States at this time was keen to get out of its commitments even in Korea and China except, of course, Japan. (49)

46. Hanson W. Baldwin, "Troops for Indo-China", ibid., 23 March 1951, pp. 3, 47.
47. Ibid.
49. Secretary of Defence Marshal in the course of the testimony, ibid., pp. 91-92 and 118.
Hence the only course that the United States could adopt was to encourage the French to continue the fighting. This, in turn, meant an increased military assistance to the French so as to reduce, if not relieve, the military burden on the latter. This would also help in meeting the French criticism of making them fight the "American war". Hence the American keenness to get the French consent for the BIC, could be considered as another additional factor for the increasing American military commitment to the Vietnamese War in the winter of 1951-52.

DEATH OF GENERAL DE LATTRE AND THE VIET NAM WAR

In the beginning of 1952, the Vietnamese situation became grave and depressing for the French. The era of General de Lattre de Tassigny came to an end with his death on 11 January. This was a severe blow to the French morale. The French Government was faced with the task of maintaining the French resolve to continue the fighting and of reassuring the American opinion. This became especially difficult as the French forces were facing a continuing winter offensive from the Viet Minh. The fighting which had started in October 1951, was initially favourable to the French, but resulted in the French withdrawal from Hoa Binh by the end of February. This war also demonstrated, more than ever, the degree to which the French depended on the American arms and equipment. It was with the napalm bomb and aircraft supplied by the United States, that the French had fought this battle.

The task of the French also became more difficult by fears and rumours of direct intervention by the Chinese on the side of the Viet Minh. In the beginning of 1952, the Chinese regular
forces available immediately for the Viet Minh, were estimated at 200,000 to 300,000 as against 80,000 a few months earlier. It was rumoured in December 1951 that Russian, Chinese and Viet Minh military leaders met in northern Tonking, that the Chinese could be expected to intervene in January or February and that the communication links between China and Tonking were being increased. By March, the rumours had gained additional currency and it was reported that the Chinese were even fighting along with the Viet Minh in the Red River delta. Though these rumours of Chinese intervention were denied by the French Government, even the American Government seemed to have been taken in by them for some time. On 19 and 21 March, Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, and Robert Lovett, Secretary of Defense told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the Chinese were actively assisting the Viet Minh. The whole of 1952 witnessed repeated rumours of Chinese intervention and a continuing speculation of the extent of their help to the Viet Minh. The Chinese help was believed to be not only in terms of arms and equipment, but also textile and rice-milling machinery and equipment for telecommunications. They were also believed to have undertaken to train and organize the Viet Minh units. The French, however, believed that the Chinese might not intervene as this might invite American participation on the other side.

The fears of a Chinese intervention helped the French in getting the British and American sympathy and even possible support. It strengthened their argument that the Vietnamese war was not a colonial one but a part of the world-wide front against Communism. The French also used the opportunity to acquire more resources and aid from the United States and to enlarge the Western
commitment in Viet Nam. On 10 January, General Juin, Chief of the French General Staff arrived in the United States for a conference with Gen. Omar Bradley of United States and Field Marshal Sir William Slim of Great Britain. The French General sought some form of a Western alliance based on a common strategy for Southeast Asia, which would be linked to the NATO. If this were not possible, France was eager to get a military commitment from the United States on the model of the ANZUS Treaty. At any rate France was keen to get the United States to promise an intervention in case of a Chinese invasion on Viet Nam. The French also toyed, at this time, with the idea of referring the Vietnamese situation to the United Nations, if the Chinese intervened on the side of the Viet Minh. (50)

General Juin's efforts were not however very successful in getting a firm and clear commitment on the part of the United States. The United States, after its experience in the Korean crisis, preferred to continue with the bilateral basis of its aid. It was also more cautious in lending its support for an UN intervention. It felt that even in the case of a Chinese participation, it would not feel free to offer more than some air and naval support. (61)

However, General Juin succeeded in focussing the American and British attention on the movements of the Chinese on the Indo-Chinese borders and in getting expressions of solidarity not only from the United States, but from Britain too. On 11 January the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, even though more skeptical


than the French on the probability of Chinese intervention, issued a public warning to Peking. He said such a situation would invite a UN intervention on the model of Korea. (52) The United States followed suit. On 28 January Sherman Cooper the American Delegate to the United Nations declared in the General Assembly that any "Communist aggression in southeast Asia would ... be a matter of direct and grave concern which would require the most urgent and earnest consideration by the United Nations." (53) General Juin's visit also led to a closer co-ordination of the efforts of the three powers in southeast Asia. The military committee established in Washington, following the meeting of the three Chiefs of the Staff, continued to meet and co-ordinate the efforts of the Three Powers.

The French also increased their pressure on the United States for more aid, both, for continuing the war and to strengthen their own army at home. The French continued to complain of delays in the despatch of American aid promised earlier. This was, however, refuted by Brigadier-General Francis Brink. (54) The scale of the American aid in terms of various arms and equipments had increased considerably and was estimated at the value of $300 million by January 1952. (55)

The French at this stage had another opportunity to exploit the formulation of EDC for its purpose of getting increased aid

52. Ibid., 14 January 1952.
from the United States. It was at the Lisbon Conference in February
1952 that the various Powers arrived at a decision on each member
nation's contribution to the EDC. The French contribution was
fixed at 12 divisions, 27 squadrons and 456,000 tons of naval
shipping. This meant France passing a defence budget of 1,400,000
million francs of which 135,000 million francs would be covered by
American economic aid and off-shore procurements. But even with
this assistance, in accepting such a big military commitment the
Faure Government was actually playing a gamble. The French
financial position would not have permitted building this strength.
Their only hope was substantial American aid in addition to the
one which had already been pledged. On 5 February, the United
States proposed to allot to France a sum of $100,000,000 from a
total amount of $478,160,000 that was transferred from the military
assistance of the Mutual Security Act of 1951 to economic assistance
for some European countries. The counterpart funds accruing from
such assistance were to be used by the French Government for
procuring supplies for the campaign in Viet Nam. (56)

As for military assistance the United States continued its
supply of arms. On 5 March the tenth assignment of B-26 bombers
arrived in Viet Nam, thereby tripling the French air-power there.
By the end of May, the 150th shipload of American military material
had been unloaded at Saigon. (57) By June the American contribu-
tion to the war approximated one-third of the total cost of the
Vietnamese operations. (58)

57. Ibid., p. 1009.
58. Ibid., p. 1010.
Meanwhile the signing of the EDC Treaty on 26 May in Bonn complicated matters for the French Government. On the eve of its signing the French cabinet decided to make it a conditional signature; that France would not sign the treaty unless there was a greater Anglo-American guarantee against a German withdrawal and that it would not present the agreement for ratification to the National Assembly unless France obtained larger orders for off-shore purchases and more support for its efforts in Indo-China and its policies in North Africa. Hence following the signing of the Treaty, there was a tripartite meeting among the three foreign ministers of France, the United States and the United Kingdom on 28 and 29 May. The French Foreign Minister M. Schuman heading a French delegation of six of his colleagues presented the case for increased aid to Indo-China and moral support in North Africa. He argued that France would not be able to play its part in Europe if it were weakened by the war in Viet Nam. France also asked for increased off-shore purchasing on the grounds that the military credits for the coming year would be entirely absorbed by the war in Viet Nam and its own contribution to the European Army. (59) The French delegation also warned that unless these conditions were fulfilled, the National Assembly might not ratify the EDC. Though the Communiqué issued at the end of the Conference made no mention of the conclusions, it was understood that the United States and Britain recognized that "France represented a veritable pillar of defence in Southeast Asia" and that the French withdrawal would involve grave consequences not only for Malaya.

Singapore and India, but even for Japan. (60)

The American position, however, left the French dissatisfied. The governmental dissatisfaction was augmented by public criticism of the EDC Treaty. The annual budget for the Vietnamese war also had to come up before the French National Assembly in August. The French Government, before presenting the Budget was eager to discuss an increase in the American aid. Hence the United States invited Letourneau, the French Minister for Associated States to visit Washington to discuss the American aid.

Letourneau's Visit and Its Results

M. Letourneau who arrived in New York on 11 June, had many tasks to perform in Washington. He had to dispel the fear that France was contemplating a withdrawal from the war. He had to convince the United States that the French had developed a Vietnamese army, that this army would need every kind of equipment and not merely weapons, and that France had granted real independence to the Associated States and was fighting only a selfless anti-Communist war. M. Letourneau also tried to reconcile the two apparently contradictory positions of France in Viet Nam. In Paris he had tried to placate his critics, who demanded a withdrawal from Viet Nam, on the plea that such a withdrawal "might by casting doubts on French reliability cause a change in American policy in Europe". (61) But now in Washington he sought to assure the American Administration that "any [French] government that


proposed pulling out of Indo-China would be overthrown immediately". (62)

Letourneau seemed to have succeeded on the whole, in painting an encouraging picture both of the French intentions and the military situation. The United States was convinced that "much has been accomplished toward the creation, training and equipping of the national armies" and that the Vietnamese were well on their way to control their own defence. The United States was also disposed to believe that the tide in Viet Nam was moving in France's favour, and to expect "continued favourable developments in the maintenance and consolidation of the free world bulwark in Indo-China". (63) As a result of this visit, the United States recognized that "the struggle in which the forces of the French Union and the Associated States are engaged against the forces of Communist aggression in Indochina is an integral part of the world-wide resistance by the Free Nations" and that while the United States assumed a large share of the burden in Korea, France had the primary role in Indo-China. (64) Following this recognition of the French role, the United States agreed to increase its aid to the French Union, "within the limitations set by the Congress" for the specific purpose of "assisting France in the building of the national armies of the Associated States". (65)


64. In a communique issued on 18 June. Ibid.

65. Ibid.
Though no specific figure of the proposed aid was given in this communique, one newspaper estimated it as an increase from $300 million to $450 million. (66) According to another estimate by the French Minister himself the American aid was expected to increase during the next six months until it represented 40 per cent instead of the present 33 per cent of total expenditure in Indo-China. (67) This would, according to the Vietnamese Premier, Nguyen Van Tam enable setting up two further divisions of Vietnamese army. In return the French undertook to use this additional aid to build up the national armies of the Associated States.

In spite of this success, Letourneau's visit like the earlier visit of Gen. Juin, failed in getting a definite commitment on the part of the United States to come to the help of the French forces in case of a Chinese invasion. The United States was still unwilling to form a common Western military front in Southeast Asia; nor had the United States developed any plan for meeting a Chinese intervention in Viet Nam. On the other hand, the communique clearly recognized some sort of a sphere of influence for the United States and France in Asia, and put Indo-China as "an area of specific responsibility" of France while Korea was its own. All that the United States recognized was an obligation "to help each other in their areas of primary

responsibility". (68) In the coming months even though there were increasing consultation among the representatives of the three Powers, these conferences did not lead to any pact or alliance. The utmost the French could arrive at by way of a western front was the expression by the North Atlantic Council on 17 December "of its whole hearted admiration for the valiant and long continued struggle by the French forces and the armies of the Associated States against Communist aggression." It recognized that the French "resistance" was similar to Korean war and was "in fullest harmony with the aims and ideas of the Atlantic Community" and that it deserved "continuing support from the NATO governments". (69) Even this resolution, however, did not specify the form which this support should take and was only in the nature of a concession to the repeated French appeals for recognition of the war in Viet Nam. The NATO resolution was, however, interpreted in Paris as involving some kind of a positive material aid. This caused misgivings especially in the Asian circles. It was interpreted to mean that

68. Bulletin, n. 56, p. 1010. Bernard Fall, however, talks of an agreement between the two allies that the two theatres of war were interdependent and that neither would conclude a peace without the other. The United States, under this agreement, exerted strong pressure on the French not to pursue the peace feelers extended to the Viet Minh in 1952. The French even had to hurriedly recall a delegation consisting of Raphael Leygues, a member of the French Assembly and Prince Bun-Boi of Viet Nam, which had proceeded to meet the Viet Minh negotiators in Rangoon. Fall, however, does not specify any date or occasion when such an agreement was arrived at. In this context, Fall calls the American action of concluding a Korean cease-fire in July 1953, as "a breach of faith": it "literally threw the whole burden of the Chinese war making potential on the side of the Viet Minh and against the French", he added. Fall, n. 16, pp. 122-4. The present writer, however, has not come across any information to confirm or deny the existence of such an agreement.

the NATO countries had made it their collective concern to protect the interests of any one of them in any part of the world. It meant NATO was no longer a regional pact but a global one and one which could even support a colonial power. (70)

The United States and Proposals for a Pacific Pact

The Truman Administration which had concluded various treaties concerning the Pacific region like the Japanese Peace Treaty, ANZUS Pact and the Treaty with Philippines was reluctant to enter into any Asian Pact on the model of NATO. The United States was repeatedly approached for such a Pact by some of its Western allies like France and even by some Asian allies like the Philippines and South Korea. The United States felt such a pact for Asia may not be feasible as the Asian countries differed from one another in their political, social and economic development. These countries also differed in their attitude towards Communism and their policy towards China. They further differed in their attitude to and role in the ideological struggle — a question that was fundamental to the United States. The United States felt in such a situation, there could not be a single Pacific pact similar to the Atlantic Pact. (71) The idea of a Pact, as advocated enthusiastically by the Philippines' President Quirino, was also opposed by many non-aligned nations like India, Indonesia and Burma. The United States viewed that if these Asian countries did not

70. The Hindu, 22 December 1952.

participate, the Pact would comprise only of Western Powers like the United States, Great Britain and France which had their interests in South East Asia. This would bring in criticism of neo-colonialism and play into the Communist propaganda. Besides, the United States was reluctant to get into more and more commitments in South East Asia. This was the important reason why the United States sought to keep Britain out of the ANZUS Pact, even at the cost of causing strains in the Anglo-American relations. The United States feared the British joining the ANZUS Pact might mean guaranteeing the security of Hongkong and Malaya, a commitment which the United States was reluctant to undertake. The United States was also afraid if Britain were admitted, it would be followed by a flood of applications from France, the Philippines and other Asian countries. In the absence of any neutral Asian nation joining it, it might become a "white dominated organization". (72) The United States in 1952 was unwilling to participate in such a pact, even though she did so two years later, under the Eisenhower Administration.

The United States, therefore, decided that the "time was not ripe" for a Pacific Pact, though it repeatedly avowed that it would join any such pact, if the initiative was taken by the Asian countries. Meanwhile the United States was content to have a piecemeal approach, dealing with each situation on a local basis and arriving at bilateral agreements with the countries concerned, on the various political, military and economic issues.

72. For a full discussion on this theme, see Calvocoressi, n. 60, pp. 405-9.
THE INDO-CHINESE QUESTION AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Another important aspect of the Vietnamese war which was widely discussed during this period was a possible solution to the dispute by referring it to the United Nations Organization. This suggestion had been put forward at various times by various individuals. It was first mooted by Ho Chi Minh himself as early as the beginning of 1947. But the Viet Minh proposal came to nothing due to the non-involvement policy adopted by the United States and India — the two countries whom Ho Chi Minh approached for taking the necessary initiative. (73) The French too opposed any internationalising of the issue.

With the recognition of the two Governments by the various countries in 1950, the Vietnamese dispute could not be kept any longer as a French preserve and the issue came to be transferred to an international plane. The UN action in the Korean Crisis opened the way for proposals for a similar solution to the Vietnamese war too. The slow progress of the Pau Conference in the second half of 1950 and the French attitude to the formation of the Vietnamese National Army, caused dissatisfaction and irritation among the Vietnamese. Some Vietnamese leaders advocated at this stage mediation by the United Nations in the bilateral negotiations which seemed to be leading nowhere. (74) The Cao Bang disaster once again brought up the question of involving the United Nations in solving the crisis, but now from a section of the French public opinion. The French failure at the battle front

73. The peace offers by Ho Chi Minh and the American attitude have been dealt with in the previous chapter.

led to a chorus of disapproval of the war in the nation. This was reflected in a debate in the National Assembly. Members belonging to various political parties like the Communists, Socialists, Radical Socialists and the Progressives advocated a solution to the dispute and withdrawal from Indo-China. While Mendes-France advocated direct negotiations with the Viet Minh and was opposed to internationalising the war, Daniel Mayer (Socialist) thought it had already become an international one. He suggested that France should approach the United Nations to solve it.

M. Daladier of the Radical Socialist Party recommended, on the other hand, "an internationalisation of the political problem, not of the conflict" under the United Nations. M. Paul Coste-Floret (MRP) a former Minister of Overseas France, also advocated the admission of Viet Nam to the United Nations followed by discussion of conditions of peace among the thirty-two nations which had recognized Viet Nam. This would mean "internationalizing the solution of the conflict". (75)

This increasing demand for referring the issue to the United Nations found its echo in the United States. Senator Owen Brewster (Republican, Maine) advocated such a reference, not so much to solve the question, as much as to exploit the Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh as an aggressive act that would block the former's admission to the United Nations. (76)

The Progressive opinion in the United States as reflected by the writings in the New Republic advocated a UN mediation in

75. As cited in Calvocoressi, n. 60, p. 410.

the dispute and an international guarantee for Indo-China's future. (77)

On the other hand, another section in the United States opposed any such reference to the United Nations. The New York Times which had all along pleaded for strong American action to refer the issue to the United Nations changed its view after the outbreak of the Korean War. It thought to refer the crisis to the United Nations would be "to drop it like a hot brick into the lap of the United Nations". (78) It considered the responsibility was France's alone and that the United Nations could not intervene in the struggle against Communism. It felt it was better to pin down China to one spot namely Korea by continuing and strengthening the UN action there, rather than making the United Nations fight another battle in Viet Nam. (79)

The official opinion in the United States too opposed the reference of the issue to the United Nations on more than one ground. Dean Rusk thought that the United Nations was already doing its maximum against a Communist "aggression" in Korea. To give it an additional responsibility by placing the case of Viet Nam before it, might be straining it further. It might also be resisted by many of its members. (80) The American reluctance to take any initiative in this regard was also born due to other factors. Such a move would immediately bring forth the question as to what the

77. Referred to earlier.
United States would be prepared to do within the United Nations for Viet Nam — a question which, in the American opinion, required considerable thought. The strong public reaction inside the nation to the American involvement in Korea, the opposition to sending any more troops abroad and the disillusionment of the United States regarding the allies' support in the Korean War which had practically turned out to be an American affair rather than a UN action, had deterred the American authorities from taking any initiative regarding Viet Nam. This objection had been spearheaded by no less a person than Senator Knowland (Republican, California) who thought the Korean precedent was a bad one for the United States to repeat, as the latter's contribution to the war effort was 90 per cent while that of the rest of the allies was only 10 per cent.

Nor did the Truman Administration feel that the Vietnamese question could be used to block Communist China's admission to the United Nations. In the opinion of Dean Rusk, the question of Chinese aggression in the form of assistance was "a nebulous issue ... which would be more difficult to prove". (82) The United States also viewed that due to the mixing up of the colonial issue in the Vietnamese question, many of the non-European members might react in an entirely opposite way. The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, however, did not rule out the possibility of referring the question to the United Nations at some future date. Its timing would however depend on other considerations like the nature of the proof the United States had, to brand China

81. Ibid., p. 683.
82. Ibid., p. 642.
an aggressor, and the action other members were prepared to take.

The United States was also concerned with the possible reaction its actions might create in Paris. For, while France was eager and anxious to receive all possible military assistance from the United States it was reluctant to internationalise the conflict. In spite of the heavy burden that the war imposed on its weak financial and military resources, France was keen not to let the initiative for war or peace pass on even to the international organization as this would reduce its position to a contingent or at the most an agent of the UN army. Nor did France want to be replaced, in any sense, by the United States to which the Vietnamese might be beholden in the future. Hence the United States viewed a reference to the United Nations should be made by France and/or the Associated States, rather than by the United States. Rusk expected that such a reference might come if there were "organised attacks from across the Chinese frontier". (83)

However the intense rumours of an imminent Chinese intervention in the beginning of 1952 put the question of UN action in a different light. Though France was still reluctant to internationalise the war, it modified its stand to the extent that an active Chinese invasion might make the French change their attitude. (84) France's allies too warned the Chinese on the consequences of an invasion. (85) However, these statements of both the British Foreign Secretary and the American Delegate to the General Assembly, were not followed

83. Ibid., p. 587.
85. Referred to earlier.
by any definite decision or even proposals by the Western Powers to bring the Indo-Chinese issue to the United Nations. In the absence of any such follow-up action, these various statements at the most could be interpreted only as a warning and an attempt to forestall a Chinese invasion rather than a policy decision towards the solution of the crisis by the Western Powers. (86)

CONCLUSION

The two and a half years of Truman Administration after the outbreak of the Korean War, was a period which witnessed an increasing American commitment in the Vietnamese crisis. Starting with economic assistance, it became more and more, as the year 1950 went by, one of military commitment. With the talks for armistice in Korea having been started, the Vietnamese war was the only real war which was still going on in Asia. This gave it an additional importance and helped the French in acquiring more material assistance and support. It also raised hopes of a French defeat of the Viet Minh forces.

By the time the Eisenhower Administration took over, the United States was committed to the war to the extent of 40 percent of the total expenditure. This depth of military involvement meant logically an eagerness to bring the war to a successful close.

The vagaries at the battlefront for the French forces, however, seemed to thwart this hope of the United States. This had raised the question, very frequently, of the United States' intervention in Viet Nam on the side of the French or its seeking

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the UN's help for the same. After its experience in the Korean crisis and the public opposition at home, the Truman Administration was unwilling to enter into another adventure in Viet Nam. Hence it meant more and more assistance to keep the French going and reach their objective.

The period also witnessed the interplay of three different factors in Viet Nam — the American opposition to Communism, its opposition to French colonial rule and the need to build up Western European defence necessitating an amicable relationship with France. On the whole, the need to fight Communism in both Europe and Asia gained priority over the granting of complete independence to the Vietnamese. The French presence and even the French control over military operations were recognized as being indispensable, if the French military expenditure and American assistance programmes were not to become infructuous. The need to conclude the European Defence Community at the earliest also made the United States compromise with the situation. One may conclude, the real beginnings of an American policy towards the Vietnamese crisis were made on the morrow of the Korean War. The subsequent years, either of the Truman Administration or of the Eisenhower period, witnessed only an implementation of this policy, leading to deeper and wider involvement in the Crisis.