Chapter V

THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION AND THE VIETNAMESE CRISIS
The Republican Administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated on 20 January 1953 in the midst of a war which the United States was still waging in far away Korea. It was widely believed that the change in the Administration might have significant implications for American foreign policy in general and the Korean war in particular. In fact the 1952 presidential campaign had centered around foreign policy issues and was dominated by the great debate as to how to bring the Korean war to an honourable end. While there was general approval of the need to check Communist expansion, the Eisenhower-Dulles plank had questioned the effectiveness of the containment policy of the Truman Administration. It had instead talked in terms of liberation of the people under Communist rule — a positive policy to create and invite resistance and rebellion behind the Iron Curtain and to promote disintegration from within by diplomacy and by means of propaganda.

The hot war with the Communists in Korea made this new approach particularly relevant to the Asian situation. The campaign helped to focus public attention on the Asian situation especially in the Far East and Southeast Asia. The Republican campaign put forward, in this context, another slogan "Let Asians fight the Asians". It was interpreted to mean that a Republican Administration would oppose the use of American ground troops in Asian wars, but would work toward strengthening Asia so as to enable it to defend itself. The new Administration, when it was
inaugurated, appeared to have been committed to a forward policy in Asia even if it meant playing down Europe.

The return of the Republican Party to the White House after a lapse of two decades was interpreted as a "mandate for change" in American foreign policy rather than as just a personal triumph of General Eisenhower. It was viewed as supporting an end to the existing war and a new and more positive approach to "International Communism". The choice of John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State showed that the new President was serious about the implementation of the election platforms.

However the election of Eisenhower who not long ago was the Supreme Commander of NATO forces and had an indirect hand in the formulation of Truman's foreign policy, as the President, and that of Dulles an erstwhile consultant to the Department of State as the Secretary of State, meant a continuity rather than a change. One cannot discern anything but a broad agreement between the policies pursued by the two Administrations, both towards the European problems like the European Defence Community (EDC) as well as the Korean and the Vietnamese Crises. The differences were those born naturally out of the differences in the personalities of those who occupied the White House and the Department of State and differences in policy implementation rather than in policy formulation.

THE REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATION AND
THE VIETNAMESE ISSUE

Such a continuity was discernible in the new Administration's outlook towards Viet Nam. It was content to continue with the preceding Administration's line of thinking and its military and
economic aid programmes. This was possibly one reason why there was no significant reference to the Vietnamese war during the Presidential campaign of 1952 even though it had assumed importance as a second front against Communism in Asia.

The Truman Administration, as it was preparing to leave office, had come to view the problem of Viet Nam as an "urgent matter" - one where the most important feature was the weakening of the French military effort. This could be traced to two broad factors: 1) The strong body of opinion in France which demanded a withdrawal from the war leading to a lessening of an aggressive attitude on its part, and 2) the neutral attitude of good many Vietnamese who would not join one side or the other until they were reasonably assured of its victory and the security of their own interests. (1) To help the French in their plight, the Truman Administration had extended military aid and, towards the end of its term, had started military conversations with the United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand in order to "devise agreed military solutions against the contingency of overt Chinese intervention in Indo-China". (2)

The Eisenhower Administration broadly agreed with this course. It felt that the French should be helped to defend themselves both "politically and militarily within the proper limits". (3) While viewing Indo-China as a very important issue

1. Secretary Acheson in his review of Southeast Asian situation to the President-elect Eisenhower, as reported by Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope (New York, 1956), p. 519.

2. Ibid.

which deserved immediate attention, the new Administration was faced with a dilemma that it inherited from its predecessor. The colonial nature of the war and the French reluctance to assure publicly the right of the Vietnamese to determine their own political future, had weakened the American efforts to interpret the war as one of "Freedom" versus Communism. It had made the American task of extending moral and greater material support to the French considerably difficult, by subjecting it to a domestic controversy. Despite this, the Republican Administration, like the preceding Democratic one, resolved the dilemma by recognizing that the need to stop the Communist advances was more important than the granting of complete independence to the Vietnamese and it set out to devise plans for "strengthening the defenders". (4)

The United States under President Eisenhower, viewed the problem of Indo-China as only one of the problems of the Far East, closely linked with the other problems of the area. Whereas the Truman Administration had drawn a parallel between France in Indo-China and the United States in Korea, the new Administration found a "definite relationship" between the two wars. It viewed them as part of the fight against Communism in Asia and related to other problems in the region like the British war against the Communist guerillas in Malaya and to even the Western stand against the spread of Communism in Europe. In the course of his Inaugural Address, the new President described the soldiers of the various Western powers in these fronts in Europe and the Far East as "defenders of freedom" on whom their fighting conferred "a common  

4. Ibid.
dignity". (5) The Address made no distinction between the purposes for which these Allies fought in these wars.

This clubbing together of the various issues in Southeast Asia was a part of the new Administration's policy of co-ordinating the efforts of the various Western Powers in this region. The Republican Administration was keen to avoid "going it alone" in Indo-China as the United States, by and large, was compelled to do in Korea - a point for which the previous Administration had come in for severe criticism. In fact even before the new Administration was inaugurated, this was emphasized in the conversations between the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who visited Washington in the first week of January and President-elect Eisenhower. According to one report, as a result of this meeting, the British aid in the form of ammunition to the French in Indo-China which started after the NATO resolution of December 1952, were proposed to be increased and were to be accompanied by further help from the United States. (6) The United States also agreed to become a member of a five-nation military liaison group along with Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand to exchange military information and defence plans for Southeast Asia and to make policy recommendations for the same. (7) Under this new defence grouping of the five powers, Australia offered to place its entire surplus military equipment at the disposal of the French Union forces fighting the Viet Minh. (8)


The new Administration also inaugurated a programme by which staff officers from Korea visited Viet Nam, and French and Vietnamese staff groups visited Korea. This exchange aimed at developing a greater co-ordinated programme between the two forces and better training facilities for the Franco-Vietnamese forces. (9) With this purpose in view Marshal Juin of France visited General Mark W. Clark of the United States in Tokyo on 21 February. At this meeting were discussed the measures to be taken in case of a Chinese intervention. (10)

Closely allied to this co-ordination of the various fronts in Asia was also the American eagerness to get the Western Powers to withdraw their fighting forces from the Far East and Southeast Asia. The United States believed the wars in Asia were only part of a wider Communist strategy and that the Russian intention was to disperse the Western armed forces in various theatres of war in Asia. Apart from weakening the Western European security, it would also immobilize the Western forces, while Russia itself was utilizing only its satellites to do the fighting. Hence the United States believed that indigenous forces should take over the fighting. Asians should be trained and equipped to look after themselves. This new approach of the Administration, to be equally applicable to Korea and Viet Nam, was a continuation of the Republican platform


of "Asians fighting the Asians". The United States believed that France should try to extricate itself from the Vietnamese conflict and help the Vietnamese to gradually replace the French troops; the released French troops should be kept as a "mobile reserve". Towards this purpose the new Administration chalked out a programme of giving more and faster aid to the French in Viet Nam in order to help the latter in raising about two new Vietnamese divisions trained in guerilla warfare.

It was with the same aim of withdrawing the American forces from another Asian front viz., Korea, that President Eisenhower announced on 2 February in his State of the Union Message, his Order to withdraw the Seventh Fleet from the Chinese waters. The withdrawal was aimed at introducing a new element and thereby breaking the deadlock in the Korean truce talks. The announcement which gave rise to much controversy over the aims and moves of the Republican Administration, was interpreted as putting pressure on the Chinese Communists to come to terms in Korea and to convince the latter that the alternate to stalemate would be powerful American attacks on two or three other fronts. This move was also interpreted as seeking to help the French in the Indo-Chinese War. Secretary Dulles subsequently revealed that it was part of a campaign to end the Vietnamese war by preventing an intervention by the Chinese. He explained the new scheme of a co-ordinated strategy for the Far East, in these terms:

Korea and Indo-China are two flanks. There is a large force in Communist China in the center. If that force in the center can be without danger shifted to one flank or then the other flank it is

very difficult to see how any satisfactory peace can be established either in Korea or in Indo-China. It is necessary, I believe, to create some sort of a threat in the center to hold and pin them down and then there is a better chance of getting some success of the two flanks. (12)

The US action then aimed to forestall a Chinese shift to the South once a truce had been signed in Korea.

The President's Order was also interpreted as allowing the Nationalist Chinese raiders to attack the big railways running from Manchuria in the North to Canton and Indo-China border in the South - the railway line through which the Russians and the Chinese Communists had been moving their strategic materials to Korea and Indo-China. This would have been an important military target for the French forces. (13) This point of view was held among others, by Senator Alexander Wiley (Republican, Wisconsin), Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. (14) On the other hand, Senator Mike Mansfield (Democrat, Montana) while welcoming the Order, did not think its effect would be good on the war in Viet Nam. The Senator who in the coming years was to take an increasing interest in the war, believed "a counter-move will be made to offset the psychology of the Order affecting the Seventh Fleet and that its locale will be in French Indo-China." In his view, the Russians were greatly interested in Viet Nam and hence might step up assistance to the Viet Minh. (15)


The United States also contemplated a major contribution in money and munitions to the war in Viet Nam, as one of the steps to help the French. According to one report, the United States was prepared to furnish $42 million to help build—the Vietnamese troops but wanted to have its own military observers with such troops. The French High Command was, however, opposed to the idea of having such observers. (16) They were ready to accept aid only if the United States did not insist upon the presence of American instructors with the Vietnamese Army. (17)

American aid to the French in Indo-China found considerable support in the United States. The New York Times pleaded for increased American aid and praised the French strategy and efforts in Indo-China. It particularly appealed for an increased supply of motor vehicles. (18) Hanson W. Baldwin, its military columnist even suggested a Southeast Asia Command for better exchange of intelligence and operational data among the interested nations. (19) American aid to Viet Nam was also supported by Senator Mansfield who believed the United States should considerably step up military shipment to that area.

The American eagerness for an early French withdrawal was also born out of European considerations. The Eisenhower Administration inherited from its predecessor, a commitment both to see through the European Defense Community and to continue with the

17. Ibid., 7 March 1953.
aid programme to the French in Indo-China. Eisenhower himself firmly believed EDC to be absolutely essential for the defence of Western Europe. Such a defence would be weakened if the French moved a part of its contingent of NATO to reinforce its troops in Viet Nam. (20) Hence the two questions of the French contribution to the war in Viet Nam and its ratification of the EDC treaty continued to be closely linked together. One of the first acts of the new Administration was a visit by Secretary Dulles and Harold Stassen, Director for Mutual Security Programs to seven European capitals to observe and listen to the European views on EDC. The visit which coincided with the French National Assembly session of 29 January on the ratification of the EDC, had the main purpose of stressing the need for unity and bringing the French and the German opinion together. The Dulles-Stassen visit and Dulles' warning that if France rejected or delayed the treaty the United States might have "to give a little rethinking" (21) to its own foreign policy, helped in saving the EDC at least temporarily. The eagerness of the Rene Mayer Government to secure American goodwill and to prevent a serious crisis in Franco-American relations was mainly responsible for the survival of the Treaty. The United States kept up the pressure on France by sending another mission under David Bruce, a former ambassador to France, on the heels of the Dulles-Stassen visit. The EDC continued to be the basis of a prolonged ideological and political debate throughout the next eighteen months. Into it were dragged many other issues like Franco-American relations and the war in Viet Nam.

20. Eisenhower, n. 3.

American impatience with the French delay in ratifying the EDC and the intense pressure which it brought to bear on the French Government and political circles, brought a new strain in the Franco-American relations. This was contrary to the hopes which the French Government had been entertaining, during and after the presidential campaign. The right wing in France had welcomed Eisenhower's victory as marking an end to what it regarded as Truman's anti-colonialist policy. Eisenhower was a man who knew France and whom France was familiar with. The election slogan of liberation of areas under the Communist rule was welcomed in France as this might help in the French policy of holding on to its possessions and might even enable it to win over the Viet Minh. However, the new toughness of the Republican Administration over the EDC and its approach to solving the Asian situation had disappointed the French. The defence strategy of the Eisenhower Administration, of making the "Asians fight the Asians" by raising native armies and giving them more control, was also unpalatable to France. There was also evidence of American dissatisfaction with the delay in granting independence to the Associated States. All this came at a time when the French were in need of additional aid from the United States for both their own fiscal affairs and for the war in Viet Nam.

The French were also concerned with President Eisenhower's announcement in deneutralizing Formosa. It gave rise to fear and uneasiness both among the Vietnamese and the French about the
American intentions and possible future moves in the Far East. The French even doubted whether the United States was "qualified to give the free world the kind of leadership which it needs at this critical moment." (22) It was feared, in case of a civil war in China between the Nationalists and the Communists, the Chinese Communists would hit back in Viet Nam, where it was particularly easy for them to intervene. Though the presence of Dulles in Europe at this time helped to dispel any fears of a unilateral action by the United States, the French were left with a lurking anxiety about the American Far Eastern policy.

The spring of 1953 also witnessed a marked improvement in the outlook for a Korean armistice. For that very reason, it gave rise to doubts whether an American disengagement from Korea might not mean a greater help from the Chinese Communists to the Viet Minh leading to an intensification of the war. The French were keen to get more aid from the United States, and anxiously sought to find out what the American attitude to Viet Nam would be once a truce was arrived at in Korea.

With a view to sorting out the various details and to dispel the American dissatisfaction with the French delay in both ratifying the EDC and in granting independence to Viet Nam the French Premier Mayer, accompanied by the Foreign Minister Bidault, Finance Minister Bourges-Maunoury and the Minister for the Associated States Letourneau visited Washington towards the end of March. The EDC and the Vietnamese war were the two important

22. Referred to earlier. Secretary Dulles himself referred to this fear in his address to the Nation on 12 February after his return from the European trip. Bulletin, 23 February 1953, p. 239.
issues discussed during the French delegation's meetings with the Department of State. As for the former, the French failed to convince the United States that there must be a settlement of the long standing Franco-German quarrel over the Saar territory before France could ratify the EDC. Dulles found such an argument had no valid legal basis. (23) On its part France evaded any firm commitment for an agreement on the EDC. Referring to the French attitude to this question, President Eisenhower wrote that "On E.D.C., Bidault continued to talk on both sides of the question." (24)

The talks on the Vietnamese situation, however, went on better. The French Government pledged "to do its utmost to increase the effectiveness of the French and Associated States forces in Indo-China, with a view to destroying the organized Communist forces and to bringing peace and prosperity to her free associates within the French Union, Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam." (25) It also agreed to prevent shipment of war materials to Communist China. The French in their turn, succeeded in getting the United States to endorse publicly, what perhaps had been privately recognized, viz. that the struggles in Korea and Indo-China were "parts of the same pattern" and that they were interdependent. (26) Though no specific figures were mentioned as having been arrived at, the Communique clearly indicated that such aid would be forthcoming as soon as the French military plans had been given "an intensive study". In fact

26. Ibid.
the French had brought with them a plan hastily drawn up by their Commander-in-Chief Raoul Salan. The plan which would need aid to the tune of $900 million and was approved by the United States, was believed to envisage a scheme to bring the war to a close in two years' time. (27) The French had agreed that if the United States would finance 65 per cent of the cost of the war for a year, all American military aid to continental France would be terminated after a year. (28)

The discussions also sought to dispel the French fears of the consequences of a Korean truce on the Vietnamese War. The Communiqué issued a warning to Communist China "not to take advantage of such an armistice to pursue aggressive war elsewhere in the Far East". In case of any such intervention in Viet Nam, the United States promised to the French, it would withdraw from the peace efforts in Korea and might consider it as even conflicting with the understanding on which any Korean armistice would be based. (29) Such a pledge to even resume the Korean War carried the United States much farther in its commitment to Viet Nam than the previous administration was ever prepared to go.

The French also succeeded in another context, viz. in evading any definite commitment to move faster to grant complete independence to the Associated States and in overcoming any


American pressure in this regard. As Eisenhower wrote subsequently: "On Indo-China he [Bidault] evaded, refusing to commit himself to an out-and-out renunciation of any French colonial purpose." (30) No wonder the Washington talks were hailed as a great success in Paris. The French Government were satisfied that at last Washington understood the French stand and agreed with the latter that it was advantageous to let the war continue. The French even came to believe that the war might be won "with American help". (31)

This French reluctance to grant complete independence to Indo-Chinese States was a problem which worried the United States. It handicapped the Republican Administration in implementing its new defence plans for Southeast Asia. It obstructed the United States from committing itself to further material support to the French in Indo-China. The United States was faced, in the Spring of 1953, with the task of convincing the American public opinion and even Vietnamese nationalism that the war which the French were waging, was not a colonial one but a fight against the aggressive moves by the Communists to subjugate the whole area. President Eisenhower has pointed out such a task had become a "real necessity", if the war was to be won. (32) A mid-year report prepared by the Department of State laid importance on this aspect of the problem. It stated that political discontent with the French, impeded the "development of fighting spirit among the indigenous forces and slowed down rate of formation of the Vietnamese army". It was also responsible for the "failure of

important elements of the local population to give a full measure of support to the war effort". (33) This dissatisfaction with the French, perhaps, was partly responsible for the United States' not conceding immediately to the latter's request for material and financial support. The United States not only postponed any decision on this but had made such a support conditional on the French devising plans for military action and placing them before the United States for an "intensive study". Secretary Dulles confirmed this in a speech delivered on 18 April. He said, the US Government has told the French that it "would be favorably disposed to giving increased military and financial assistance to plans realistically designed to suppress the Communist inspired civil war...." (34) The United States also was not satisfied with the military situation there. It believed the situation might improve if the French supplied more arms to its Vietnamese allies and convincingly assured them of political independence. (35) The United States, pending the receipt of such steps had postponed any decision on the quantity of aid until the NATO Council meeting of 23 April. It, however, had indicated that it might grant a larger aid than before.

VIET MINH ATTACK ON LAOS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TO VIET NAM

The American disappointment over the military situation and its hesitation to grant aid immediately were, however, over-

shadowed by another event which took place just at this time in the Indo-Chinese war fronts. The winter of 1952-53 had witnessed intense Viet Minh activities in the neighbouring territories of Laos. These activities indicated the possibilities of an offensive very soon. On 14 April the Viet Minh made their first attack on the Laotian paratroops of the French forces. By the thirtieth of the same month the Viet Minh columns had reached within thirty miles of Luang Prabang, the royal capital, thus leading to a general mobilization. The rebel troops which were backed by the Viet Minh, however, withdrew without capturing the capital, only to return later in the year.

The Viet Minh attack on Laos caused considerable alarm in France and abroad. More than its implications to the course of the war or its military significance, were the importance of the political objectives behind these events. This campaign demonstrated that the Viet Minh was psychologically and politically in a position to extend the war beyond its own geographical boundaries. It posed a threat of the war spreading to other neighbouring territories of Thailand, Cambodia and even Burma.

The immediate reaction of Washington to the Viet Minh attack on Laos was for the President to call upon the successors of Marshal Stalin (who died on 5 March) to conclude an honourable peace in Korea and to stop "the direct and indirect attacks on Indo-China". He warned them that any such aggression in Southeast Asia would be "met only through 'united action'." (36) However, as events showed, such a warning had no effect on the advances being made by rebels. Hence the United States had to adopt more

36. Bulletin, n. 34.
effective action. It saw in Laos a parallel to the Korean situation of June 1950. On 24 April the Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet, General Mark W. Clark, arrived in Saigon to study the war situation and met General Salan. Though the visit was claimed to be of a routine character, its political significance at this time could not be underestimated. General Clark considered the Laotian situation serious. He felt the French needed more transport planes and recommended the same to Washington. (37)

The attack on Laos also lent a sense of urgency to the issue of American help to Indo-China. On 28 April, after a session of Secretary Dulles with the Foreign Relations Committee it was decided to direct important military supplies originally intended for Europe. Following this on 2 May Dulles issued a statement in which, apart from extending the American Government's sympathy to the Laotian Government, he also announced that it had "already taken steps to expedite the delivery of critically needed military items to the forces defending Laos". (38) These military supplies included twenty-four to thirty-six troop-carrier planes of the C-119 type. (39) The United States also sent, in response to an appeal from Thailand, "certain amounts of small arms ammunition", to be followed by other military items. (40) The President sent a message to the Congress on 8 May transmitting the Mutual Security Program for 1954 in which he pointed out the need to make available "substantial additional resources" to France and the Associated

States in their military efforts. (41) This programme provided for aid of $400 million and some military end items for the French. Secretary Dulles, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 May, also stated that there may be some modest increase in aid of new and more vigorous plans. (42) It was planned to spend $400 million on the procurement of equipment, materials and services which were required by, or were necessary for the support of the forces of France and the Associated States. (43) These successive reports to the Congress from the executive branch were capped by a letter from President Eisenhower on 8 May to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, informing the latter of a grant of $60 million as "special aid" to France to support the French and native forces fighting the Communist guerilla forces in Indo-China. (44) The grant was made out of the military end items programme for Europe.

The Laotian events also brought into focus another aspect of the Indo-Chinese issue. While the military aid to the war was generally welcomed, it was also realized that arms alone would not decide the question. The Christian Science Monitor pleaded that the American aid be used to promote Indoc-Chinese independence rather than to defend the French. (45) Adlai Stevenson, the presidential candidate, on a tour to the Far East believed that

41. Ibid., 25 May 1953, p. 735.  
42. Ibid., p. 738.  
43. Harold Stassen before the Committees on 5 May. Ibid., p. 741.  
France should remove all vestiges of colonialism and grant complete independence.

The Special Study Mission of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, which toured Indo-China at this time, agreed with this view. While affirming that "the Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indo-China", (47) it believed that "clearer and firmer commitment by the French on this question of independence would be effective in exposing fraudulent Communist promises, in uniting the forces of the Indo-China area in their struggle against Communism and in the ultimate attainment of their independence". (48) It also recommended that "consideration should be given to the desire of Vietnamese leaders for extension of some U.S. aid directly to the Vietnamese rather than channelling all aid through the French". (49)

The Laotian crisis also created a ripple in the Congress on what steps the United States should take towards meeting the situation. Representative Dewey Short (Republican, Missouri), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee believed that the United States might have to take whatever steps were necessary to foil the Communists in Southeast Asia. He went to the extent of suggesting an ultimatum to the Soviet Union to stay out of Southeast Asia even if it would mean the United States going to war. Senator William

48. Ibid., p. 51.
49. Ibid., p. 58.
Knowland (Republican, California) too supported prompt action by the United States. He pleaded with the Administration "not to foreclose the use of air or naval power" in order to defend the American national interests in Southeast Asia. (50) Senator Paul W. Douglas (Democrat, Illinois) criticized the Eisenhower Administration for acting less promptly and effectively in the current situation than President Truman had done in the Korean crisis. On the other hand Senator Everett Saltonstall (Republican, Massachusetts), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was among those who opposed any such unduly strong action. Saltonstall opposed the United States getting involved in Laos or sending any troops to help the defenders of Laos. He urged that the United States should not diminish its aid to Europe. (51)

The Laos Attack and the UN

The Laotian crisis also revived the proposals for bringing the United Nations into the picture. Following the Communist attack on 14 April, the Government of Laos appealed to the United Nations and many other countries of the world for help — a step which embarrassed and was opposed by the French Government. It believed such a reference would invite a foreign discussion of, intervention in and even attack of the Indo-Chinese affairs by the Asian and African countries; it would, by leading to UN intervention, invite a Chinese intervention on the other side creating a situation similar to that of Korea. Above all the

51. Ibid., 4 May 1953.
French were still reluctant to internationalise the war in Indo-China oblivious of the fact that it had long ceased to be purely a French affair.

This Laotian appeal for UN intervention and the French refusal to support this appeal brought about a widespread reaction in the United States. There was a general support for the Laotian proposal both in the official and non-official circles. The *New York Times* discounted the French uneasiness on this issue and affirmed that the Laotian case stood on firm grounds. It believed such a debate in the United Nations by focussing attention on the Soviet attitude, would help in evaluating the "Communist talk of peace". (52) The *Christian Science Monitor* supported the move on the ground that this would strengthen the hands of non-Communist nationalists in Viet Nam. Above all, it believed, this would provide a basis for a settlement of the Vietnamese issue along with other Far Eastern issues. (53)

The American Association for the United Nations too suggested that the American Delegation to the United Nations should bring the problem of the war in Viet Nam before the Security Council. It recommended the stationing of a UN Peace Observation Commission in Indo-China. (54)

Such a move was supported by many Congressmen too. The Special Study Mission of the House of Representatives recommended that both the recent attack on Laos as well as the war in Viet Nam be placed by the US Government officially before the United Nations

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52. "The Invasion of Laos", ed., *ibid.*, 17 April 1953,
53. *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 May 1953,
for prompt action. (55)

Senators H. Alexander Smith (Republican, New Jersey), Homer Ferguson (Republican, Michigan) and John J. Sparkman (Democrat, Alabama) supported the view that the Laotian crisis merited the UN attention.

On the other hand, Senator Walter F. George (Democrat, Georgia), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee believed that a reference of the issue to the United Nations would tie up the United States with the United Nations as in the Korean case and would not yield quick results. He said that "if we are going to do anything in Indo-China I hope we do it on our own, without United Nations interference." (56) Senator Robert Taft (Republican, Ohio), in one of his last major utterances, expressed a similar view on 26 May. The American experience in the Korean issue had convinced him that the United States should "as well abandon any idea of working with the United Nations in the East and reserve to ourselves a completely free hand...." (57)

The US Government too believed such a step would help in its recommending increased aid to the French and in overcoming some Congressmen's objection of extending aid to the French imperialist interests. Secretary Dulles who was in Paris in connection with the NATO conference also persuaded the French that such a move would make it easier to merge the two issues of Indo-China and Korea and help in including the former in negotiations


over Korea. (58)

The American suggestion led to a debate in France and even divided the French Cabinet. The continuing successes of the Communist forces in Laos along with the American arguments for referring the issue to the United Nations (which, according to Le Monde, was Dulles' condition for increased American aid) made the French reconsider their stand. To it was added the bad impression which the French opposition to/ Laotian request had created in other parts of the French Union. The French also calculated that the worsening of the situation would inevitably lead to an internationalisation of the conflict. This would lead naturally to a greater participation of the United States in the war and with it to an entry of the United States into what M. Letourneau called "a zone of political pressures and demands". (59) The French came to the view that if the war had to be eventually internationalised one way or the other, it would be better to do it under the auspices of the United Nations. Le Monde reflected this trend of thinking when it wrote that "Washington would enter the area of the political exactions feared by M. Letourneau" and that the French "shall then have to concede to the United States the right of examination that we have refused to the United Nations". (60) Hence the French Foreign Minister tried to work out a formula for appraising the United Nations officially of the Laotian attack. However, the split in the Cabinet more especially between Bidault and Letourneau was too wide to be

59. The Hindu, 2 May 1953.
60. Le Monde, 28 April 1953, as quoted by New York Times, 29 April 1953.
bridged. (61) The proposal, however, lost its urgency when the fighting in Laos abated in the first week of May. The controversy was finally brought to a close by the French Cabinet overruling any such move. Though the United States continued to support the moves by Thailand in this direction, its initial enthusiasm wore off in the face of the French resistance.

THE FRENCH MOVES FOR NEGOTIATIONS AND THE AMERICAN REACTION

The French Government, instead, put forward an alternate move to mitigate the impact of the Laotian invasion as also to solve the Indo-Chinese question in general. The French seized on the American statements that the issues of Korea and Indo-China were "interdependent" and in fact "were parts of the same pattern". They believed that the issue of Indo-China should be included in the armistice talks on Korea. Coming so soon after the Chinese offer on the prisoners of war question in Korea, the Laotian events indicated what was in store for the Vietnamese war once the Korean truce was signed. The French also believed, as the United States did in general, that the Viet Minh were acting under the aid and counsel of Communist China and Soviet Union. Though the attack on Laos at a time when the Russians had opened a peace offensive in Korea created some doubts in this regard, it was generally agreed that this was more a demonstration of a Soviet bad faith rather than of any independent line of action by the

61. Le Monde reported that while Mayer and Letourneau were in favour of a reference to the United Nations both as a matter of principle and in the hope of discovering a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation, Bidault was firmly opposed to such a step.
Viet Minh. (62) Hence the French argued, the two issues of Korea and Indo-China were inter-connected and that only a complete settlement of all Far Eastern issues would bring permanent peace to this part of the world.

This French desire to link up the two issues of Korea and Indo-China was part of a nation-wide movement in France to bring the war to a close by direct negotiations with the Viet Minh. The Laotian invasion had confirmed the French pessimism of the outcome of the war in Viet Nam and gave rise to accusations and attacks against the government. To this tense atmosphere was added the political crisis with the fall of Rene Mayer's government. Though the fall of Mayer's government could be attributed to many reasons of a purely domestic character, his support to EDC, his eagerness to court American goodwill, his opposition to negotiations in Viet Nam and his readiness to accept the American suggestion to refer the war to the United Nations were some of the contributory causes. In this atmosphere of tension and frustration, the proposals to negotiate the war in Viet Nam received a new fillip. Many influential political personalities like Mendes-France, Albert Sarraut, a veteran Radical Socialist statesman and President of the Assembly of the French Union, and Paul Reynaud, a former Prime Minister, were among those who favoured an end to the war, either by negotiations or through an international conference. The Committee of Former Premiers convened by President Vincent Auriol had recommended the consideration of the Vietnamese issue along with Korea. It urged the new Government to take up this

62. The British Prime Minister Churchill alone believed that the Laos invasion might have arisen from local circumstances and from plans made long ago, rather than out of Soviet bad faith.
proposal as the first among the foreign policies to be followed and place it before the Bermuda Conference which was scheduled to be held very soon.

American Opposition to Negotiations on Viet Nam

The French eagerness to negotiate the Vietnamese question either as a separate issue or as part of the Korea truce talks was not very welcome in the United States. Though the United States had declared on various occasions that the two issues were interdependent and similar to each other, this did not lead to any American support for the French proposals. Walter Lippmann traced the reasons for this American reluctance to the fact that France had all along kept the Vietnamese war as its own special preserve; the other Powers did not have any influence or authority as in the Korean case. The Vietnamese case was also more complicated since in it was involved the settlement of Viet Nam's political future. (64) The United States also felt such a general Far Eastern settlement would be possible only if the French internationalised the war by referring it to the United Nations.

The United States also disapproved of any direct negotiations between the French and the Viet Minh. At a time when the cry was intense in France to bring the war to an end, the United States was more eager to continue with the war. Reflecting the general opinion in the United States, the New York Times wrote that such negotiations would not achieve any useful purpose and would be

very frustrating. (65) Any talk of negotiations with the Viet Minh either by France or any of the Associated States was according to the Times irresponsible, mischievous and dangerous. (66) It felt strongly that the French could not at this stage retire from their obligations even if complete independence were to be granted. The fighting should continue to be in the French hands with a good amount of material aid coming from the United States. (67) James Reston of the same paper argued that any talk of negotiations was untenable, as even such talks might lead to a staggering amount of defection to the enemy. In his view, nor was the Korean parallel suitable to Viet Nam, as there was no strict line dividing the enemy ranks in the latter case. (68)

It was generally felt that the way for the French to minimise their financial burden and to extricate themselves from the Vietnamese entanglement would be to strengthen greatly the nationalist government in Viet Nam, to give complete independence to the Associated States and to help them build their own native armies so as to replace the French forces at the earliest. In the American view, the war should not be brought to an end by negotiations but should be gradually transferred to the Vietnamese forces. It was generally assumed that the United States would step in and fill the vacancy created by France, by substantial financial and military aid to the Vietnamese directly.

American Pressure on France to Grant Complete Independence

Hence intense pressure was sought to be brought on the French to grant complete freedom to the Vietnamese both in the political and military spheres. The *New York Times* in frequent editorials repeatedly pleaded for the cause of Vietnamese independence as the only means to defeat Communism. It gave wide coverage to the views of Vietnamese nationalists, more especially to the strained relations between the French and the Cambodian King.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee too in a report on the Mutual Security Authorization Bill, presented on 16 June asked for more convincing assurance from France than had yet been received by the Associated States, for their independence. That alone, said the Report, would win the local population’s support for the fighting against the Communist led guerilla forces. (69)

These American pressures for granting greater independence came against the background of an increasing demand from the Indo-Chinese States for a revision of their status. Negotiations in this regard between France and Cambodia had already started in March, but these demands increased further when the Laotian invasion demonstrated the French inability to defend the Associated States. The relations between France and the Indo-Chinese States became further strained with the French devaluation of the piastre with barely two hours’ notice of the change to the Vietnamese government. This French action was interpreted as demonstrating the limits of their autonomy and as

69. Ibid., 17 June 1953.
violating the Paup Agreements. These and other grievances strengthened the hands of King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia who spearheaded the attack against France. The Cambodian Government asked for a status of independence similar to that of India and Pakistan within the Commonwealth and was not willing for any concessions short of it. To it were added mounting tension in Viet Nam and the recommendations of the new French Commander-in-Chief in Indo-China, General Henri Navarre. This made the French offer on 3 July to open simultaneous but separate negotiations with the three Associated States for a review of their status within the French Union. This was accompanied by the abolition of the much-criticised Ministry for the Associated States and its replacement by the post of a Secretary of State responsible to the Prime Minister. The posts of Commander-in-Chief and High Commissioner in Indo-China were separated and to the latter was appointed Maurice Dejean, a professional diplomat. However, these talks did not go on very smoothly or steadily, except in the case of Laos.

The slow pace of the negotiations, marked by greater demands and threats on the part of Cambodia, made the United States once again impatient. The United States which considered the outcome of the negotiations to be important to the outcome of the war in Viet Nam, suggested to the French Government a change in the structure of French Union into something like the British Commonwealth. (70) This proposal gained increasing currency even among the French especially among those who had earlier supported Mendes-France's views and brought about a division within the French

70. Ibid., 2 July. The French Union could be roughly compared to a federal arrangement while the British Commonwealth was more of a confederation.
cabinet. However, any serious consideration of this proposal was postponed for discussion in the coming Washington Conference of the Three Big Foreign Ministers.

The French offer to open negotiations and the changes brought about in the cabinet portfolios, could also be attributed to the prospective conference in Washington and the need for more American aid for the newly formulated Navarre Plan. (71) The Navarre Plan was proposed to be placed before the American Government during the course of this conference. The French offer to open negotiations also came at a time when the American Congress was discussing the Mutual Security Program for 1954 which sought to provide France nearly $400,000,000.

Reaction in Congress to the French Policy

The passage of this Program at this very time through both the Houses of the Congress was marked by a singular feature. The French policy towards European security, its attitude towards the question of Indo-Chinese independence and its relations with the United States, dominated the proceedings in both the Houses as well as in their Committee Hearings on the Mutual Security Bill. While in the House of Representatives, the discussions centred around France's attitude to EDC and Russian threat to Western Europe, the discussions in the Senate were almost completely monopolised by the French failure to grant complete independence, its repercussions on the course of the war in Viet Nam and on the aid policy of the United States. With a view to make the French commitment to EDC more firm, the House Foreign Affairs Committee recommended and the

71. Dealt with in detail in the following pages.
House adopted an amendment to the Bill as proposed by Representative James P. Richards (Democrat, South Carolina). The Amendment provided that "not less than 50 per cent of the funds authorized for military assistance to Europe in fiscal 1954 shall be made available only for the European Defense Community." (72) Besides Representative Richards there were others like H.R. Gross (Republican, Iowa), even John M. Vorys (Republican, Ohio), the floor manager for the Bill and Robert B. Chiperfield (Republican, Illinois), Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who expressed dissatisfaction with the French delay.

This dissatisfaction was also widespread in the Senate where Senators Taft and Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat, Texas) proposed an Amendment that the "President may, in his discretion, withhold not to exceed $1 billion of the assistance authorized to be made available for the year... until such time as the treaty establishing the European Defense Community... comes into effect." (73) However, more than the EDC it was the question of French relations with the Associated States and the French reluctance to grant complete independence that was severely criticized in the Senate. The Senate, with a near unanimity, believed that only the granting of complete independence and a Constitution to the Vietnamese, would win the war for the West. The opinion on this was so strong, that on 1 July Senator Barry M. Goldwater (Republican, Arizona) proposed an amendment which, had it been accepted, would have deprived the French of any aid

73. Ibid., 30 June 1953, p. 7873.
until it gave a "satisfactory assurance to the President of the United States that an immediate declaration will be made to the people of the Associated States setting a target date for the adoption of a constitution for such States and for the establishment of their complete independence." (74) This amendment, however, was viewed as being too strong by many others, even while they agreed with the spirit behind it. Hence a substitute amendment was introduced by Senator John F. Kennedy (Democrat, Massachusetts) which expressed the hope that the grant made to the war in Viet Nam would be administered in such a way "as to encourage through all available means the freedom and independence desired by the people of the Associated States, including the intensification of the military training of the Vietnamese." (75) Even though both the amendments were finally rejected, it was not before the Senate expressed its deep resentment with the French attitude by a cut in the allocation for the French in Indo-China by 25 per cent. (76)

Thus the 83rd Congress showed itself more concerned with the Indo-Chinese situation than any of the previous Congresses. The findings of a series of Congressional field studies during 1953 stressed this anxiety. The passage of the Mutual Security Bill through both the Houses was also punctuated with references to the Vietnamese war. There was a near unanimity in the Congress in its attitude to the crisis. While supporting continued American aid to the war, the Congress, just like the executive, believed that

74. Ibid., 1 July 1953, p. 8010.
75. Ibid., p. 8018.
76. New York Times, 22 July 1953. The cut was however, restored by a joint sitting of both the Houses on 3 August.
It was the French ambiguity to the issue of independence to the Associated States that impeded a successful conclusion of the war. The Congress also strongly resented the French policy of treating the war as its domestic concern and supported internationalising it. At the same time the Congress was wary of not pushing the French too hard for any meaningful concessions, for fear of a French withdrawal. It is noteworthy that in spite of the strong criticism against the French "colonial war" in Vietnam not a single Congressman desired a French withdrawal before achieving complete victory.

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE AND THE VIET NAM WAR

The Big Three Foreign Ministers in response to a call from Churchill, (77) met on 10 July in Washington to consider top-level talks with the Soviet Union. The Conference which concerned itself mainly with the European issues, also took up Far Eastern Affairs.

The French delegation came to the Conference eager to discuss two aspects of the Vietnamese issue. One was the proposal to negotiate the Vietnamese question by linking it up with the Korean armistice talks in the form of a political conference. The other aspect was to find out what support it could expect from the United States if it decided to pursue the war to a victorious end. The French delegation placed before the Conference both its 3 July offer to open talks on the status of the Indo-Chinese States, as also its plans for military operations which came to be known as the Navarre Plan.

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77. The call was for a meeting of Heads of Government of the Big Three at Bermuda. But due to Churchill's illness and the political crisis in France, it became a Big Three Foreign Ministers' meeting.
As for the first proposal, the French Foreign Minister failed to get a favourable response from the United States. The United States considered it impossible, as the Korean issue was an UN affair while the Vietnamese fighting was the "primary responsibility" of France. France could only get a declaration that "an armistice in Korea must not result in jeopardising the restoration or the safeguarding of peace in any other part of Asia". (78)

Regarding the second question, the United States approved Navarre's Plan in principle. Referring to this new Plan, Dulles said in his Report to the Nation, "The new French plans are vigorous and deserve to be implemented in that spirit." (79) He undertook to persuade the Congress to vote additional aid to the French. The United States, however, felt that such a task would be made easier

78. In the final communique released on 14 July at the end of the Conference, Bulletin, 27 July 1953, p. 105. Dulles clarified later on that this "other part of Asia" referred particularly to Indo-China. In a report to the nation on 17 July, Ibid., p. 101. This warning was reinforced by a declaration on 27 July by the sixteen nations which participated in the UN Operations in Korea. It repeated verbatim the warning of the Washington Conference and even added that if the fighting was resumed it might not be confined to Korea. Ibid., 24 August 1953, p. 247.

79. Ibid., 27 July 1953, p. 101. The plan called for increasing the size of the French Union forces from 200,000 to 250,000 and of native troops from 200,000 to 300,000. By the end of 1954, it was expected that the 550,000 goal would be attained and that victory would be accomplished in a dramatic offensive during 1954 and 1955. The plan also envisaged a relaxation of France's attitude toward independence in order to get the genuine support of the Vietnamese for the war. The National Defence Committee of France before which the plan was placed on 24 July 1953 approved the proposal to increase the strength of the national armies with the proviso that the cost of the operation would have to be shouldered by the United States. Lancaster, n. 27, p. 236. The other part of the Plan dealt with military plans and strategies.
for the American Administration if only the French could give them some sort of an assurance that the EDC would be ratified without further delay. The French, apparently, made no commitment in this regard though the Communiqué expressed some pious hopes about the EDC.

The United States also applauded the French efforts to open negotiations with the Associated States and thought the proposal of independence within the French Union would "make it easier to stop Communist aggression in that part of the world". (80) Dulles was even convinced that the Associated States were eager "not to be wholly divorced from France" and preferred to have "a French Union like the British Commonwealth". (81) Neither the Communiqué nor Dulles' Report, however, mentioned anything on the current French thinking to bring the war to a close by direct negotiations with the Viet Minh.

The decisions of the Washington Conference were significant for the course of the war in Viet Nam. The French had come to be convinced that the war was becoming increasingly profitless and that with the signing of the Korean truce, Viet Nam might become the acutest area of conflict between the East and the West. At the same time the Korean truce also pointed to a hope that it might be followed by an Indo-Chinese settlement. The frustration with the war and the new hope for peace in Viet Nam, came to be represented for the first time in the official policy of France and placed before the Department of State.

80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
The Conference could also be considered as the beginning of the American advocacy of "united action". It was for the first time that the various aspects of the Vietnamese question were comprehensively discussed in a Big Three Conference and its conclusions released in a Communiqué. Dulles also said that if Viet Nam needed further assistance, the interested States would act with "a common and growing co-operation".

The Washington Conference also sought to resolve the various conflicting positions of the United States and France. The United States which was equally keen to bring the war to a close, however, opposed both direct negotiations as well as any international settlement. Such a quick and victorious end, in its view, should be brought about by either France internationalising the war through the United Nations or continuing to have the primary responsibility for the fighting with increased support from the United States. The United States was clear in its stand against a direct intervention by itself or even to send its ground troops to support the French.

In its eagerness to get the French continue the war, till they succeeded in defeating the Communists, the United States veered round to the former's view that membership within the French Union was the only basis on which negotiations could be conducted. It worked in the months that followed to avoid a break in the negotiations between France and the Associated States. It even aligned itself with the French so as to give the French no pretext for withdrawing in disgust. While being aware of the Vietnamese pessimism on the outcome of the negotiations, as well as of the unpopularity of Bao Dai, it brought pressure on them to
agree to/talks. It was also aware that any talks conducted by Bao Dai on behalf of the Vietnamese would not be popular. President Eisenhower was convinced that "had an election been held at this time, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected Premier". (82) However, the United States chose to ignore these political factors and allowed itself to be overruled by military considerations. The pressure which it brought on the Cambodian King, whom it originally encouraged, to participate in the negotiations could be explained in this context. At the same time, the United States was keen to separate itself from the French stand on the issue of colonialism. It missed no opportunity to hint at the colonial nature of the existing French relations with the Associated States and to stress its hope that the negotiations would lead to complete independence. It also tried to justify its aid, by picturing the war in terms of anti-Communism. It believed that the negotiations by leading to some results on the issue of independence, would help to separate the two aspects of colonialism and Communism in the war.

The Navarre Plan which in the coming year had emerged as a controversial military strategy, became the cornerstone of the Franco-American military policy in Indo-China. For the French it was the fulfilment of a condition to get the badly needed increase in the aid from the United States. They found in it a last chance to win some positions and gain some strength which would give them a better bargain in their contemplated negotiations with the Viet Minh. In their view the main task of Navarre was to defend Laos as best as he could and above all to safeguard the French Expeditionary Corps. He was to prepare the way in military terms

to the maximum extent possible towards negotiations and that without expecting any more French troops. (83)

As for the United States, the Navarre Plan served as a means to overcome the Congressional criticism in providing increased aid to the French. This was helped by the favourable report given by Lieut. General John W. O'Daniel, Commander of the US Army Pacific who headed a military mission that toured Indo-China at this time. Its purpose was to discuss with Gen. Navarre the manner in which the United States' material and financial aid might be utilized best as to contribute to the advancement of the French objectives. The O'Daniel Mission was also given the task of "insuring an increasingly close integration of the U.S. assistance with the plan development by the authorities of France and the Associated States", with a view to "increase the efficiency of the military efforts by France". (84) At the end of the survey tour, the Mission recommended an increase of military aid though it believed that the United States should be allowed to be informed of French operation plans, even if it was not going to participate in developing them. (85)

These recommendations influenced considerably the American approval of the Navarre Plan. The National Security Council backed President Eisenhower who was more than willing to support the Plan. (86) The United States hoped "that picking up the check in


86. Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report (New York, 1961), p. 120.
Indo-China would help to win approval of the European Defence Community in Paris". (87) "The money that the United States would save from such a military merger of the European countries", calculated the Administration, "would repay the investment in Southeast Asia many times over". (88)

The American approval of and aid for the Navarre Plan meant giving a major responsibility for the war to the United States. It established a military liaison between the Pentagon and the forces fighting in Vietnam. (89) Neal Stanford wrote in the Christian Science Monitor that the United States was on the way to making the war its own concern. (90)

THE NAVARRE PLAN AND THE INCREASED AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIET NAM

Following the passing of the Mutual Security Act by the Congress providing a sum of $400,000,000 for the French forces, the United States granted an additional amount for the specific purpose of implementing the Navarre Plan. This grant which amounted to $385 million was made on 30 September and was to be available before the end of 1954. This increase in aid which brought the American share of the cost of the war to almost 70 per cent was, however, hedged in with certain conditions. The French in accepting the various conditions, had pledged:

87. Ibid., p. 121.
88. Ibid.
(1) to carry out its announced intention of perfecting the independence of the three Associated States in Indo-China, through negotiations...

(2) to make every effort to break up and destroy the regular enemy forces in Indo-China

(3) to carry through ... the plans for increasing temporarily French forces to levels considered necessary to assure the success of existing military plans.

The French also agreed that this increase in their effort would not entail making "any basic or permanent alteration of the French Government's plans and programs for its N.A.T.O. forces". (91)

The French were also supposed to have promised the United States in confidence, "to take into consideration the opinions expressed by the American authorities in regard to the elaboration and execution of strategic plans". (92)

This near-doubling of American aid to the war came in the midst of various statements of the American Administration expressing its deep concern over the war and a greater realization of its importance to the United States. The most important aspect of the war which occupied the United States' attention at this time was the movement of the Chinese forces, which, now that they were relieved from Korea, might be directed to Viet Nam. Hence the American Government, to prevent any possibility of active Chinese participation in the Vietnamese war, sought to adopt a deterrent approach. It stressed in unmistakable terms its concern for the security of Viet Nam and the consequences that might follow


if the Chinese Communists sought to ignore this important consideration.

**Rumours of Possible Chinese Intervention and American Reaction**

In August, President Eisenhower declared that a Chinese intervention in Vietnam would be "something ... of a most terrible significance to the United States." (93) Nearly a month later, Secretary Dulles speaking to the American Legion Convention, spelt out in greater detail this American concern. With a view to prevent any such intervention Dulles drew another defensive perimeter (cancelling the previous one of Secretary Acheson) wherein he said, "A single Communist Chinese aggressive front from Korea on the north to Indo-China in the South. The armistice in Korea, even if it leads to a political settlement in Korea, does not end United States concern in the Western Pacific area." (94) In defence of this perimeter, the Secretary warned the Chinese, the United States might have to take counter-measures and intervene directly. In one of the strongest statements which the United States had as yet made over the Vietnamese crisis, Dulles said, "There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own army into Indo-China. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indo-China." (95) This warning was reiterated by Under Secretary Bedell Smith in a speech


95. Ibid.
on 15 September at the annual Conference of the UNESCO National Commission. He not only repeated the warning but went further and defined aggression as an attempt by the Chinese to move its "volunteer" units into Viet Nam to reinforce the Viet Minh. He spelt out that the American reaction would be "adequate to meet such a grave situation". (96)

This statement of Dulles could be properly called the beginning of a debate on direct intervention by the United States, even though it did not grow into an acute controversy till as late as April 1954. These warnings also anticipated the theory of "massive retaliation" which came to be formulated by Dulles in January 1954. It is, however, doubtful whether the Secretary's statement really indicated any possibility of an immediate intervention by the Chinese Communists. Nor was it really convincing that the United States had come to a point in its attitude to the Vietnamese crisis where it found direct intervention by it necessary and feasible, even though Dulles was careful to add that he was making the warning "soberly in the interests of peace". One finds it difficult to agree with Melvin Gurtov that the United States was motivated by the concern that a Communist success in Indo-China was a threat to the United States as much as the US intervention in Korea was a threat to Communist China; or that, Dulles was as serious in drawing a line and threatening China with an intervention if the latter trespassed it, as China was in drawing a line across River Yalu in the Korean crisis. (97)

96. Ibid., 5 October 1953, p. 465.
97. Gurtov, n. 12, p. 33.
As Gurtov himself has cited, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as the intelligence community did not believe that the Chinese would intervene directly or even resort to air attacks. The logistical problems faced by the Chinese in Southeast Asia were much greater than those in Korea. (98) This opinion was confirmed by Everett F. Drumright, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in November 1953. He believed that neither Dulles nor "any other high officials of State or the Pentagon seriously entertained the idea there would be direct intervention". "Sometimes statements are made", he continued, "for political rather than realistic reasons." (99) The United States, in conformity with this had also made it clear to the French that it would not use American forces in Vietnamese war; nor would it use or threaten to use the atom bomb there. (100) Hence these warnings could be only interpreted as born out of an eagerness to localise the war and to keep the Viet Minh fighting alone. This would enable the French to sort out other political issues with the Vietnamese. The United States, at this juncture, was also considering the Navarre Plan. It realized, even if the Plan were to be approved and implemented immediately, it would not be before 1955 that the war might be brought to an end. Hence, as the French were doing the fighting, the United States assigned to itself the task of dissuading the Chinese from jumping into the fray. It is very doubtful whether the United States would have directly intervened,

98. Ibid., pp. 175-6 (fn. 47).
99. Ibid., p. 178.
100. Ambassador Donald Heath's statement, as cited by Gurtov, ibid.
had the Chinese ignored these warnings and stepped up their support to the Viet Minh. The warnings were at best, a middle-of-the-road approach of the Administration in view of the frantic French pressures on the one hand and the American Congress' opposition to further involvement in Indo-China on the other.

It is even doubtful whether any such direct intervention would have been welcomed by the French public opinion. Even the American aid to Navarre Plan was looked with suspicion by the French public. The French viewed the American aid as taking away from them the prerogative of initiating any negotiations with the Viet Minh and as putting indirect pressure on them to continue fighting the unpopular war. The French opinion resented sending any more troops into Indo-China, more so at the American bidding.

The United States was well aware of the French desire for bringing the war to an end. The London Conference of 16 October where Indo-China was discussed among the Big Three Foreign Ministers had only convinced Dulles that "the course of the war in Indo-China had created a serious danger for the Laniel government in France". (101) However, the American reaction to this danger of a political crisis was not one of sympathetic understanding. The more intense the French desire for negotiations, the more concerned the United States was for a continuation of the war. It was clearly understood and agreed in the American Administration that the war should go on, with stepped up American support if necessary. The United States was quite decided that it would not agree to any settlement of the war, if such a settlement conflicted with the basic imperatives of American policy in the area.

Hence it sought to counterbalance the French pessimism by expressing hopes of a victory over the Communists, by encouraging the French efforts to grant independence to the Associated States and by eulogising the fresh vigour and determination with which the French were carrying on the fighting. The American authorities even began to see (truly or otherwise) a turn of events for the better and an improvement in the gloomy prospects of the war. Dulles went to the length of forecasting that the war could be won in 1954. (102)

The United States also supported the French in improving its relations with the Cambodian and Vietnamese nationalists. American officials persuaded them to adopt a moderate course and to co-operate with the French. They tried to impress on the Vietnamese that to achieve permanent independence, Communism would have to be defeated first and that this could be done only by carrying on within the framework of the French Union. (103) There was even a talk of the United States cutting off its aid to Cambodia unless the latter retreated from its neutralist posture to the Viet Minh. It tried to avoid a break in the negotiations.

102. New York Times, 15 December 1953. Dulles had also mentioned such a view in an earlier address to the New York Herald Tribune Forum on 20 October. Bulletin, 2 November 1953, p. 588. Besides Dulles, other officials too had expressed similar hopes. For instance, Bedell Smith in an address on the same day at the University of South Carolina, Columbia S.C. Ibid., 9 November 1953, pp. 631-2 and Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs in an address before the Women's National Republican Club, New York on 2 December. Ibid., 14 December 1953, p. 816.

103. Vice President Richard Nixon tried to present this view of the Administration during his tour of Viet Nam in November 1953. New York Times, 3 November 1953.
between France and the Associated States, as it feared this might lead the former to pull out of Indo-China. The United States was also afraid that such a break might result in the Laniel Government being overthrown and replaced by a government committed to negotiations with the Communists. The pressure which the United States sought to bring on the Associated States clearly showed that it had decided to push the question of complete independence to the Indo-Chinese States to a secondary position.

The United States also stood firm in its opposition to the French pulling out of Indo-China. Nixon, in expressing this approach stated "under no circumstances could negotiations take place that would place people who want independence under bondage. It is impossible to lay down arms until victory is completely won." (104)

Gordon Walker, a distinguished Labour Member of the British Parliament, also pointed out to a third line of approach on the part of the United States towards the French desire for negotiations. This was the military approach of finding a new formula for the American participation in the war beyond the present financial aid programmes. This had become necessary, as in the eyes of the United States, any negotiations with the Communists would be as serious a blow as it would have been if the Communists had captured Korea. (105)

As the Department of State was working to stall any French effort towards negotiations another event took place which threatened to upset the former's aim. In an effort to exploit

104. Ibid., 5 November 1953.

the widespread desire in France for negotiations, Ho Chi Minh, in an interview to the Stockholm newspaper Expressen indicated his readiness to examine any French proposal for armistice in Viet Nam. The offer which was repeated throughout December over the Viet Minh Radio evoked widespread interest in France. Though it did not lead to a commitment by the French Government to any immediate negotiations, it cornered the French Premier who, not long ago, had put the blame for the continuation of the war on the Viet Minh. The Ho Chi Minh offer further isolated the French Government from growing sections of its people. The Viet Minh propaganda also strove to strengthen French suspicions of the American intentions since practically all the truce offers were inevitably followed by condemnation of the American "imperialist" aims. Thereby, the Viet Minh sought to influence the discussions and decisions of the Bermuda Conference which met from 7 December.

The Bermuda Conference attended by President Eisenhower, Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Minister Bidault in the place of the ailing French Premier Laniel considered, among other issues, the Vietnamese war. Though the Communiqué released at the end did not mention anything of significance, it was widely reported that the United States had expressed its impatience with the French desire for peace in Indo-China as well as the growing opposition to the EDC. It was also speculated that there were some unpublicized agreements arrived at Bermuda namely that Bidault had promised the United States not to take up Ho's peace offers but to go ahead with the war. It was also agreed that the United States would send to Indo-China American instructors with experience in Korea. The Vietnamese officers would be trained by the US Army and a US military mission would take part in the organization of
Vietnamese units. Also, American officers from Tokyo would be attached to the French High Command in Indo-China. (106) It was also agreed to have unanimity on the preconditions to have a Big Five meeting (the fifth was Communist China) one of the preconditions being a genuine desire on the part of the Communists to break the Korean deadlock. This agreement raised hopes among the French that a settlement for the Vietnamese war might be linked up with a political conference on Korea.

THE STRATEGY OF DIEN BIEN PHU AND ITS IMPACT ON THE AMERICAN POLICY

Meanwhile even as these agreements were being arrived at Bermuda, the war in Viet Nam had once again revived with the end of the rainy season. The French on 20 November had captured Dien Bien Phu from the enemy. This was hailed as a great success. From the military point of view Dien Bien Phu became the centre of the French strategy in the subsequent months and it was decided to hold this outpost at all costs. The French turned it into a "fortress" and moved more and more equipment and men into the fortress. This marked the beginning of what came to be known as the battle of Dien Bien Phu where the finale of the Vietnamese crisis was to be played.

This strategy of building up Dien Bien Phu as a ground for conventional battle against the core of the Viet Minh troops, however, created widespread doubt and pointed to an essential gulf between the US military thinking and Navarre's tactics.

106. France-Observateur, 10 December 1953, as cited by Werth, n. 31, p. 661.
President Eisenhower viewed this step as unexplicable and wrong. He was concerned with the fate of troops in an isolated fortress to which the only means of resupply was by air. He was confirmed in this by the intelligence report that the Viet Minh were encircling the fortress of Dien Bien Phu. In his view "while the location of Dien Bien Phu was of minor military significance, the far-reaching psychological effects which the loss of this garrison of fine troops might have on the French would be serious." (107)

To this concern of Navarre's strategy of Dien Bien Phu was added the anxiety born out of the second Viet Minh attack on Laos on 23 December. This attack which resulted in practically cutting Indo-China into two along the 16th Parallel was militarily as well as politically important. It affected the French plan of establishing a large garrison at Dien Bien Phu. (108) Politically it bore a relationship to the prospective meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Berlin. (109)

However, there was a wide divergence of thinking even among American leaders. While Eisenhower's book shows his own pessimism as well as that of Admiral Radford and Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, American military personnel on the spot like Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnell, Chief of MAAG approved the Dien Bien Phu operations. (110) Again while Eisenhower records that the operations were started a year in advance of the build up.

108. Ibid.
110. As cited by Gurtov, n. 12, p. 50.
contemplated in the Navarre Plan, thereby deviating from the original strategy, (111) Dulles himself was not convinced that "anything that has happened upsets appreciably the timetable of General Navarre's plan." "There is no reason that I am aware of", he added, "for anybody to get panicky about what has happened." (112)

In the midst of this confused military and political picture that Indo-China presented one thing stood out clearly in the American policy. The United States found itself with no alternative except to back the Navarre Plan, whatever it had come to mean in practice now. The United States realized the need to help the French as effectively as it could to ensure success to the Navarre strategy. Whatever might have been its doubts on the outcome of Dien Bien Phu battle, the United States found itself committed to back this effort of General Navarre. In the early months of 1954, Dien Bien Phu became the centre of the Franco-American hopes and the testing ground of their military policy. Hence as the new year opened, the United States was faced with finding ways to help the French. The only feasible and the least risky method was, as Eisenhower recorded later on, to provide material aid and this the United States was already giving to the extent that the French forces could absorb. The US President felt, without the American

111. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 339. This change of strategy was opposed by Prime Minister Laniel too. It was considered by many as being solely responsible for the debacle of the French forces in May 1954 and prompted a controversy between Laniel and Navarre which went on even after the tragedy. Victor Bator and Shaplen also contribute to this view. Victor Bator, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy (New York, 1965), p. 27.

112. Bulletin, n. 109. In this view, Dulles was supported by Admiral Radford.
technical personnel to train the French and Vietnamese in the maintenance and operation of advanced equipment, to send more would be superfluous. (113) The other way in which the United States could have helped the French would be by air strikes with American aircrafts. This would have been very timely, as Navarre had requested the French Government on 1 January for air power reinforcement since Dien Bien Phu had become "above all an air battle". (114) However the American Administration avoided any such offer, as it might be viewed as American intervention, thereby triggering a possible Chinese intervention. Further, such an air strike might not be very effective in view of the Viet Minh forces being widely dispersed.

THE NEW LOOK POLICY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR VIET NAM

Meanwhile on 12 January, in an address before the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, Secretary Dulles evolved a new strategy for the United States. The policy which came to be known as the "New Look" was an attempt to reconcile a tough policy toward world Communism with a reduction in military expenditures - one of the promises made during the presidential campaign in 1952. (115) The new policy, as outlined by Dulles, believed it was not sound military strategy to permanently station US land forces


114. Gurtov, n. 12, p. 51.

115. For the text of the speech, see Bulletin, 26 January 1954, pp. 107-10. Gurtov gives a good account of the origin and process of the formulation of this policy basing his account on primary sources like the Papers of NSC. See Gurtov, n. 12, pp. 53-56.
in Asia or to commit the American forces for the permanent support of other countries. On the other hand, it should try to get maximum protection at a bearable cost. This could be done by placing more reliance on "the deterrent of massive retaliatory power". This deterrent power could be most effectively employed if 1) the Western Allies were to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and with means of its own choosing, 2) if they faced the glut of the manpower which the aggressor possessed by means and weapons in which the West was superior, presumably nuclear arms.

Though the New Look Policy was formulated in a global context and only a passing reference was made to Indo-China in Dulles' speech, the new formula assumed an increased importance in view of the crisis in Indo-China. In fact to some extent the timing of the address if not the text of it, was prompted by the events in Indo-China.

In the beginning of 1954, not only had the battles in Indo-China acquired an increasingly gloomy prospect, but there was also an appreciable increase in the amount of Chinese aid, both technical and military, to Indo-China. The French keenness to negotiate soon and the American desire to bring the war to a victorious close at the earliest, looked like being thwarted by the prospects of a Chinese intervention. (116) The battle over

116. The following military analysis was given in favour of the view that a Chinese intervention was imminent. The French strategy had assumed with the implementation of the Navarre Plan the Franco-Vietnamese forces would encounter the Viet Minh by 200,000 men. This shortage in men would make the Viet Minh to not only seek more aid from the Chinese (which could be counter-balanced by increased American aid) but might also compel the Chinese to send in 'volunteers'. It was this hypothesis which started the rumours of Chinese intervention and was perhaps responsible for the warnings issued by the American Secretary of State both on 29 December and 12 January 1954.
Thakhek in December-January showed that the American warnings had not been taken too seriously by the Communist forces. Hence the United States viewed the need to announce its new policy as a final effort to deter the Chinese from intervening.

Though Dulles denied later that the speech bore any direct relation to the Vietnamese events, it appears that it was prompted by the immediate situation in that theatre. Gurtov has cited a telephonic conversation between the Secretary of State and Allen Dulles to the effect that the battle for Thakhek from 29 December onwards was decisive in fixing up the date and the forum before which the policy would be announced. (117) Further the reference in the speech that "a potential aggressor ... glutted with manpower" might try to use this superiority in manpower clearly showed that the "potential aggressor" Dulles pointed out was only Communist China.

It is, however, doubtful how far the New Look strategy could be applied to a war like the one in Viet Nam where the political and military considerations were inextricably intermixed. It was a war in which the enemy followed mainly guerilla tactics and fought in the countryside amidst the thick paddy fields. The majority of the population believed it to be a struggle against Western imperialism. To them, the fact that it was led by the Communists, appeared incidental. This made the Viet Minh popular even among the non-Communist Vietnamese and thereby contributed to the success of their guerilla strategy. Hence in this war the element of nationalism overrode any ideological considerations. Nor were there any regular battle lines dividing the two opposite

117. Gurtov, n. 12, p. 182.
parties because of this strategy.

The new policy was also opposed by the American Army which viewed it as one which concentrated unduly on air power. Army leaders were sceptical whether air power would be as effective as was believed, in a place like Indo-China. The Vietnamese war was essentially a conventional warfare and could be fought mainly with ground troops. (118) Mathew B. Ridgway, the Army Chief of Staff, wrote that the Vietnamese war was a bloody jungle war in which the nuclear capability of the United States would have been almost useless. (119)

Lieut. General James Gavin, formerly Chief of Research and Development in the Department of Defense, wrote subsequently about the weakness of the theory of "Massive Retaliation". He asserted that it was found inapplicable to the very first battle fought after the theory had been put forward. When the battle of Dien Bien Phu was finally joined it was one where the initiative lay with the Communists, even though it was the French who built it up as a trial of strength. It was a battle where all the modern technology and nuclear power were useless and the battle was fought man against man. The outcome of the battle caused much soul-searching in the Department of State and Pentagon, as it refuted the entire theory of "New Look". It was a battle, Gavin continued, which made the American military authorities realize that no air force, no tactical weapons or SAC could have served the purpose. The

118. The controversy between the Air Force and the Army in the United States on the new policy has been dealt with in more details by Walter Lippmann in his article, "Indo-China's Future", The Hindu, 2 March 1954.

Pentagon finally resolved that if the United States decided to intervene it could be done only by the Army and the Marine Corps, though with the full support of other services. (120)

Whatever might have been the applicability of the new policy to the Indo-Chinese war, it had aroused considerable apprehension both at home and abroad and brought in turn, considerable amount of clarifications from Dulles. These apprehensions and clarifications necessarily led to a widespread debate in the United States on the immediate objectives of the new policy and the Administration's intentions in this context. The most dominant question in this debate was whether the enunciation of such a policy meant an immediate American intervention in the Indo-Chinese war.