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EDEN, THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND THE WAR IN INDO-CHINA

October 1951 to July 1954

Kevin Ruane

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Kent at Canterbury

Christ Church College Canterbury

May 1991

To Thomas and Mary Ruane
& Kathleen D'Arcy

This thesis could not have been started, let alone completed, without the help of a great many individuals and institutions too numerous to list. However, I would like to express my particular gratitude to the British Academy for invaluable financial support; to the staff of the Public Record Office (Kew) in London; to my supervisor, Dr. Sean Greenwood, for his constant encouragement and advice; to my wife, Catherine, for her patience and good humour throughout four long years of research and writing; and finally, to my immediate family, to whom this work is dedicated.

Kevin Ruane
Canterbury
May 1991

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ABSTRACT

This thesis re-examines the part played by Churchill's peacetime Administration in the settlement of the Indo-China war in 1954. Particular attention is paid to the Foreign Office, as the government department responsible for Indo-China policy at the political level. The performance of Churchill's Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, is also scrutinised: his personal contribution to the negotiating process at the Geneva Conference of April-July 1954 has been universally acclaimed and has survived the negative impact of the Suez crisis on his reputation as an international statesman. Drawing extensively on the official British archives, the role of Eden and British diplomacy in 1954 has been analysed from two complementary angles; firstly, as the culmination of policies and objectives generated and developed from the return of Eden to the Foreign Office in October 1951; and secondly, within the context of British foreign policy as a whole in the 1951-54 period. The first approach reveals that Eden's Indo-China policy prior to April 1954 was an unmitigated failure. Although he and his officials thereafter pursued a prudent, intelligent and ultimately successful course in resisting American plans for military intervention in Viet-Nam and working for a negotiated solution at the Geneva Conference, it is contended that the real art of crisis management is to avoid the crisis in the first place. In this connection, opportunities arose in 1952-53 for Britain to decisively influence the course of events in Indo-China, but these either went unnoticed or were consciously overlooked. The second approach reveals the constraints imposed on British Indo-China policy by ostensibly unconnected factors, most notably the problem of rearming West Germany within the framework of the European Defence Community (E.D.C.). By extension, it also reveals the reasons for the failure of British policy down to 1954. Until the April crisis, Indo-China was subordinated to the imperative of making West German rearmament operative. It is argued, for example, that Eden only agreed to include Indo-China on the agenda of the Geneva Conference out of concern that failure to do so would inflame anti-war feeling in France and lead to the downfall of what was believed to be the last pro-E.D.C. French government. Therefore, the convening of the Geneva Conference - the scene of one of Eden's most widely praised negotiating triumphs - had, in its Indo-China form, little to do with a preconceived commitment to bring peace to the area. It was instead a manifestation of the Cold War in Europe. Eden only came to see virtue in the Conference when the French were faced with military disaster at Dien Bien Phu and the United States threatened to internationalise the conflict. A negotiated settlement assumed importance in British thinking as a means of denying the Americans a pretext for intervention. Eden concluded that a poor peace, even one based on so distasteful a compromise as partition in Viet-Nam, was better than a major escalation of the war. The negative British reaction to American calls for 'united action' in the spring of 1954 was based on a catalogue of evidence dating from 1951 which suggested that the United States might use a local crisis in Asia (a 'new' Korea) to launch a major war against China. The thesis also contains a number of sub-themes, the most important of which posits Indo-China as a case-study in terms of the efforts of Eden and British diplomacy to cope with the problem of sustaining a world role at a time of diminishing economic and military strength. Eden, contrary to traditional opinion, did not suffer from delusions of grandeur but had a considered programme for offsetting Britain's post-war decline.

PREFACE

The part played by British diplomacy in securing a settlement of the Indo-China war in 1954 continues to be viewed as one of the most notable achievements of Churchill's peacetime Administration in a year which also brought success in resolving long-running disputes over Trieste, the Suez Canal zone, Iranian oil and a German contribution to Western defence.[1] On another level, 1954 has been singled out as a period of 'remarkable diplomatic achievement' for Anthony Eden personally.[2] His *rôle* in defusing all of these problems has survived the negative impact of the Suez crisis and, today, still generates widespread praise. It is argued that 1954 was Eden's 'most successful year as a diplomatist', even the 'high point' of his career as 'an international statesman'.[3] Some observers go further and contend that it is the restoration of peace in Indo-China upon which the notion of Eden's *annus mirabilis* of 1954 principally rests. This was '[u]ndoubtedly the greatest triumph of Eden's career' and one of the 'most remarkable diplomatic achievements of the post-war world'.[4]

Most historians draw a predictable if valid conclusion from the outcome of the Indo-China crisis, namely that Eden preferred a negotiated settlement rather than a military solution, involving American-led intervention, which risked a wider war with China and possibly the Soviet Union. The Geneva Conference of April-July 1954 provided Eden with a forum within which he successfully pursued this objective. This study has not set out to dispute this conclusion, only to trace how Eden himself reached it at the time. The results of this enquiry have been surprising. As a mathematician would admit, the answer to an equation can often be reached by more than one route. By applying a variant of this approach to Eden's

championing of negotiation over intervention - starting, that is, with the accepted view and working backwards - a number of the traditional assumptions about British policy, its aims and determinants, have been called into question. Likewise the notion that the outcome of the Geneva Conference was a triumph, either for Eden personally or for British diplomacy in general.

The 'route' pursued in this study is a dual one. Firstly, the Churchill Government's performance in 1954 has been re-examined in relation to the objectives of its Indo-China policy as they evolved from its return to power in October 1951. Hitherto most assessments have tended to begin and end with the year 1954. The crisis over 'united action' and allied intervention in April and the subsequent Conference at Geneva are often treated in isolation as elements in Eden's *annus mirabilis*. Few historians have looked beyond 1954 for the origins and determinants of British policy. Even the most detailed work produced since the opening of the official British archives, James Cable's *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina*, takes as its starting point the admittedly arbitrary date of 28 June 1953.[5] The following account will therefore attempt a somewhat longer-term analysis. Secondly, Indo-China policy has been placed within the context of British foreign policy as a whole. This, again, is a neglected method of inquiry. However, without an appreciation of the external factors influencing British thinking on Indo-China, or, indeed, without assessing the repercussions of the war in other ostensibly unconnected areas, the picture is only half-complete. Eden offered some advice to future historians of the 1951-55 Churchill Government's external policy when, in his memoirs, he pointed out that the events he described were ...

never seen in isolation at the time, but were constantly entangled with a dozen other problems which were vexing us simultaneously. None of them can be understood in isolation from the others.[6]

This applies especially to Indo-China. If, for example, Cable had followed Eden's advice, he could never have written that '[w]ithout persistent British efforts the Geneva Conference would never have been held, allowed to continue or permitted to end in even the limited measure of agreement actually achieved'. The first of these contentions is open to serious question, and even the last two are disputable. However, in fairness to Cable, he never claimed to be writing a 'universal' study.[7]

Among the issues highlighted by the longer-term approach is the extent to which, from the onset of the crisis over intervention in March 1954, the actions of Eden and his officials were a clear reflection of the anxiety which the belligerent American policy towards the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) had engendered in London since the outbreak of the Korean war. From late 1951, Eden sought to bring the United States into a formal defence structure for South-East Asia alongside France, Australia and New Zealand. This would cover Indo-China, widely acknowledged as the strategic key to the region's security and, by extension, the forward defence of the important British colony of Malaya. The object of defence co-ordination was the containment of Chinese expansionism. However, it would also ease British fears about the potentially disastrous consequences of American unilateralism in the region - provocation of the P.R.C., activation of the Sino-Soviet alliance, a conflagration throughout Asia spreading to Europe, and a third (nuclear) world war. The aim was to make Washington answerable to its allies rather than just itself for its actions. This, as much as the threat of Chinese aggression, accounted for British enthusiasm for

defence co-operation in South-East Asia. Unfortunately, the crisis in Anglo-American relations over 'united action' in April 1954 testifies to the failure of British diplomacy in this respect.

The contextual approach demonstrates the extent to which Indo-China was seen as an adjunct of the problems posed by the emergence of the P.R.C. as a force in international relations. Indo-China was also a difficult and divisive issue in terms of Anglo-American relations: differences in this respect were symptomatic of wider Anglo-American disagreements over policy in Asia generally. But perhaps the most striking result of the contextual approach is the light it sheds on the intimate relationship between the Indo-China war and Western defence policy in Europe, in particular the plan to rearm West Germany within the framework of the European Defence Community (E.D.C.) project. As will be seen, the fate of the E.D.C. was very much bound up with events in Indo-China, while British policy towards the latter was often framed with one eye on the former. As long as the Indo-China war continued to divert French troops and resources from Europe, the authorities in Paris could justify their refusal to bring the E.D.C. treaty (and with it the rearmament of Germany) before the National Assembly for ratification on the grounds that France would be left militarily outnumbered in the E.D.C. by the new German armed forces. This was politically and emotionally unacceptable. However, French prevarication placed a tremendous strain on Anglo-French relations, contributed to the continued military weakness of the Western Alliance in relation to the Soviet bloc in Europe, and so antagonised the Americans that a reversion to isolation or 'peripheral defence' was threatened. At the same time, the French refused to allocate enough troops for Indo-China to force a decisive

victory for, ironically, the same reason which precluded ratification of the E.D.C., to wit the risk of Franco-German military disequilibrium.

In London in 1952-53, there was a great deal of discussion about how best to unravel this tangled skein. One solution was for British forces to fill the gap left in European defence by French reinforcement of Indo-China. In this way, the French fear of a rearmed Germany would be lessened and the situation in Viet-Nam restored. French forces could then return to Europe thus removing one of the main obstacles to E.D.C. ratification. A considerable body of official opinion in London - military, political and diplomatic - regarded this as a realistic proposition. In the final analysis, however, Eden refused to countenance a British troop commitment. Britain's still extensive overseas responsibilities militated against any additional obligations in Europe. This, though, was the justification. The real objection was that a substantial troop commitment might be misinterpreted as a sign of readiness to join the supranational E.D.C., something which the Churchill Administration steadfastly opposed. The worry was that the Americans, passionate supporters of the project, might press London to make the commitment permanent if, in the process, E.D.C. ratification in France could be speeded up. Therefore, in refusing to draw closer to Europe, the British may have squandered an opportunity to alter the course of events in Indo-China.

Other more general questions are raised during the course of this study. For example, can the Geneva Conference be seen as a success for British diplomacy if, in reality, it was the culmination of three years of

vacillation, indecision and contradiction on the part of the Foreign Secretary and his advisers? Although policy-makers acted intelligently and skilfully once the crisis broke in 1954, it will be argued that the real art of crisis management is to avoid the crisis in the first place. Should the earlier failure therefore detract from the later success? Furthermore, can the Geneva Conference be said to have been a personal triumph for Eden if, as was the case, he agreed to participate for reasons related as much to the requirements of his E.D.C. policy as British objectives in South-East Asia and if, in addition, he had serious misgivings about the moral rectitude, as well as the durability, of an agreement for Viet-Nam based on partition?

A number of sub-themes also permeate the narrative. The most important of these focuses on the constraints imposed on British foreign policy formulation by the requirements of the domestic economy. The British economy experienced severe difficulties during much of the period in question and, as a result, policy-makers were under pressure to make foreign policy 'affordable'. This meant, *inter alia*, avoiding additional overseas commitments and, where possible, reducing existing ones. It also meant choosing between desired objectives rather than pursuing them all simultaneously. When the choice seemed impossible, there was always the option of using American resources and power to attain essentially British ends, a course which obviously required extremely careful handling. This approach is termed 'power-by-proxy'. While 'power-by-proxy' was regarded by Eden as having a general application, this thesis is to some extent a case-study of how successful it was in terms of Indo-China. Other sub-themes include Churchill and Eden's competing and conflicting views on the

rôle of Britain within the Anglo-American 'special relationship' in the early 1950s; British fears about the growing American nuclear arsenal; British attitudes towards European integration, to which end the E.D.C. was seen (especially in the United States) as a stepping-stone; and finally, with regard to 'power-by-proxy', how the Conservative Government attempted to preserve Britain's position and reputation in the world at a time of increasing military and economic enervation.

*

British Indo-China policy evolved in the early 1950s in such a way as to permit within an otherwise chronological account a certain degree of thematic analysis. Hence the division of the narrative into a number of sections or 'dimensions'. The first, the 'Chinese dimension', deals with Eden's efforts to encourage greater American involvement in the defence of South-East Asia against the designs of Communist China. The aggressive anti-Chinese posture adopted by the Truman Administration, and later embraced and intensified by its Republican successor, had a seminal influence on the formulation and conduct of British policy in 1954. The 'French dimension' deals with the growing realisation in London from mid-1952 that a Chinese invasion of Viet-Nam (itself a rapidly diminishing prospect) was just one element in a multi-faceted problem. Of more immediate concern was the possibility of a collapse of political support for the war in Paris leading to peace talks with the Chinese or the Viet-Minh resistance in Viet-Nam. To British minds, given the weakness of the French military position, such talks could only result in full control

passing to the communists with serious consequences for British interests in the region (notably Malaya and Singapore) as well as the position of the West in the delicately balanced Cold War.

In London, policy-makers believed the best means of avoiding this situation was for France to take the offensive in Viet-Nam and obtain a decisive victory over the rebels. This would also offset a further danger: in 1951 the French Government had drawn up plans for the Viet-Namese themselves to assume the defence of their own country. This involved the creation of a Viet-Namese army to whom defence duties could be transferred. However, to the alarm of the British, the French appeared intent on completing this process and pulling out the bulk of their troops by the end of 1954. It seemed that in their anxiety to extricate themselves from their draining Indo-Chinese commitment, the authorities in Paris placed undue faith in the native armed forces and their ability to cope unaided with the Viet-Minh. The British in contrast had no confidence in the Viet-Namese. Consequently, from the autumn of 1952, the Chiefs of Staff began to advocate an offensive French strategy aimed at destroying the Viet-Minh before the process of evacuation was commenced. The key to success was French reinforcement from Europe. However, as already noted, Eden ignored the advice of the Military and refused to approach the French on this subject for two related reasons: first, Paris would demand a *quid pro quo* if it was to contemplate despatching more troops to South-East Asia; second, this seemed certain to be a British promise to join the E.D.C. or at least to station additional troops in Europe to counterbalance the reduction in French forces. Eden, however, subordinated Indo-China policy to the interests of European policy and refused to consider compromising

his established policy on the E.D.C. This included non-membership and avoidance of additional military commitments on the continent. Therefore a chance, perhaps the last, for France to either win or, later, approach negotiations with the Viet-Minh from strength, may have been lost as a result of a decision taken in London. This section is accordingly termed the 'European Defence Dimension' and covers a period when British diplomacy is seen at its most impotent and myopic.

By the autumn of 1953, and with the absence of any substantial French reinforcements, British policy-makers began to fear the possibility of a French defeat at the hands of the Viet-Minh unaided by Chinese manpower. By then, however, the French had themselves taken a decision to negotiate their way out of the problem. All thought of pressing Paris to step-up the war effort was abandoned in London in the knowledge that the French, despite brave statements to the contrary, were preparing to wind-down their commitment. This section is entitled the 'Viet-Minh dimension'. All of which leads into the decisive year of 1954 which, inevitably, takes up the last third of the narrative. Though given the heading 'Anatomy of a Crisis', it might also be called the 'Anglo-American Dimension' for there were, in effect, two crises in 1954, one in Viet-Nam, the other in Anglo-American relations. The thesis concludes by discussing the extent to which the traditional view of British policy in 1954 can be sustained when judged against the objectives and aspirations of Eden and British diplomacy as they had developed since October 1951.

*

The nomenclature employed in this study requires some elaboration. The term 'Asia and the Far East', while sometimes used in the Foreign Office in

the 1950's, has been rejected in favour of the more compact 'Asia'. This is used when referring to the vast area stretching from India and Pakistan to China. Where appropriate, Asia is divided into regions, the principal focus of discussion being 'South-East Asia'. This, geo-politically-speaking, comprises Indo-China (Laos, Cambodia and Viet-Nam), Siam, Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia. Siam is preferred to Thailand to avoid constant alteration to contemporary quotations. The same applies to discussion of the E.D.C., where 'German' rearmament was the usual contemporary application rather than the more technically correct 'West German'.

Although a study of the Indo-China war, most attention is paid to Viet-Nam which, until April 1953 when the Viet-Minh invaded Laos, was the main arena of conflict. Events in Laos and Cambodia are singled out when necessary. In discussing the war, the all-embracing term 'French' forces is used rather than the more accurate - but longer - 'French, French Union and Associate State forces'. When relevant, the Viet-Namese armed forces are discussed as a separate entity. Likewise, the 'French Expeditionary Corps' is broken into French metropolitan and French Union forces.

Finally, all references ('Notes') are to documents held at the Public Record Office, Kew, London, unless otherwise stated.

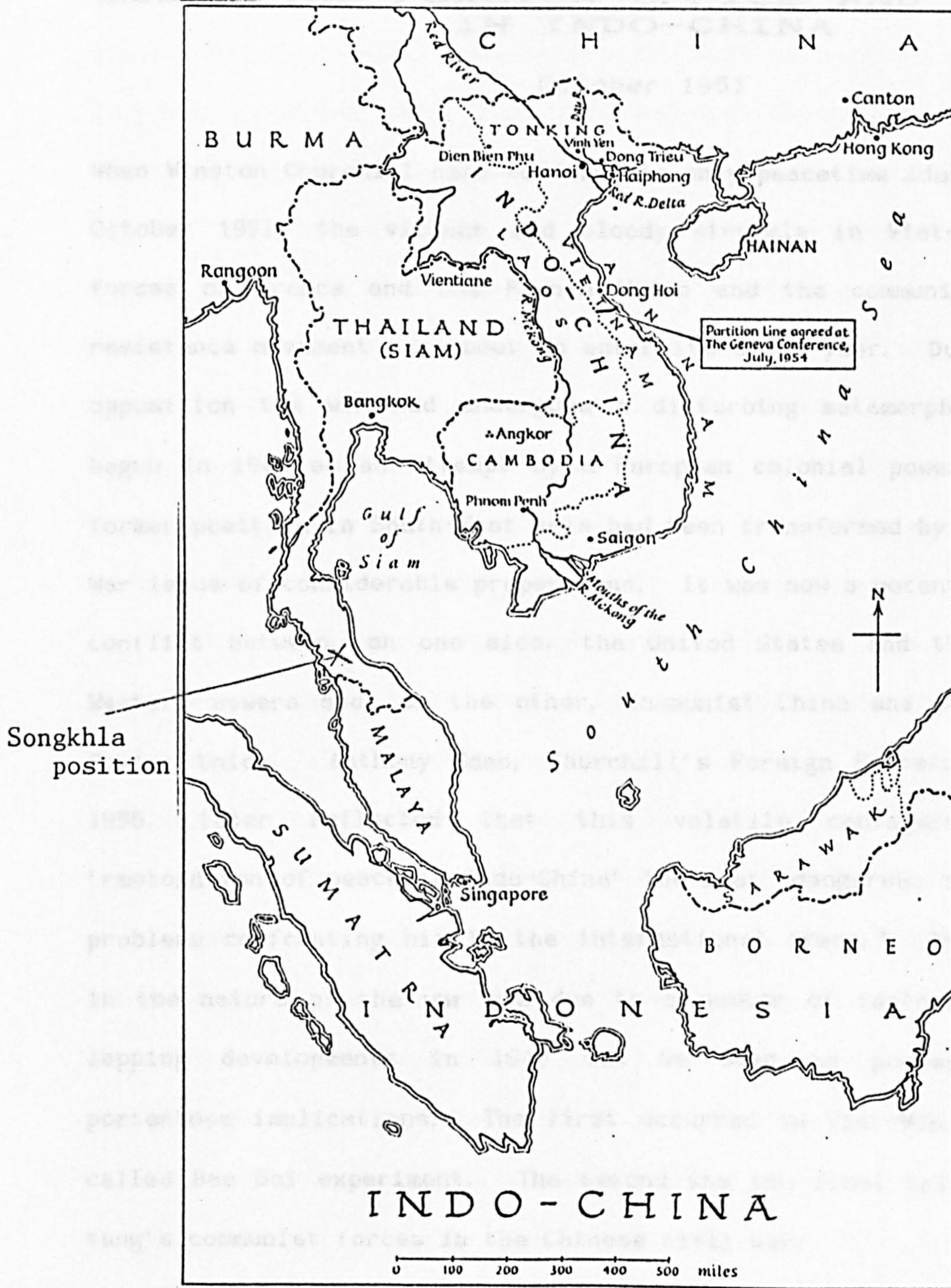
NOTES

1. Peter Hennessey and Anthony Selden, eds., *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford 1987), pp. 89-90; David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (London 1988), p. 202.
2. Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History 1945-89* (Oxford 1990), p. 132, hereafter *People's Peace*.
3. David Reynolds, 'Eden the Diplomatist 1931-56: Suezide of a Statesman?' in *History*, (April 1989), p. 73; C.J. Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy in*

the Twentieth Century (London 1989), p. 95, hereafter *British Foreign Policy*; also Anthony Selden, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government 1951-55* (London 1981), pps. 41, 379, 409-15, hereafter *Indian Summer*; Robert Blake, *The Decline of Power 1915-64* (London 1985) pp. 349-52, hereafter *Decline of Power*; Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (London 1986), pp. 389-90, hereafter *Eden*; Avi Shlaim, Peter Jones & Keith Sainsbury, *British Foreign Secretaries since 1945* (Newton Abbot 1977), p. 108, hereafter *British Foreign Secretaries*; Iveragh McDonald, *A Man of 'The Times'* (London 1976), p. 132.

4. Richard Lamb, 'Was Eden's Premiership a Failure? The Eden Government 1955-57' in *Contemporary Record* (Winter 1988); Rhodes James, ibid, p. 382; also Morgan, ibid, p. 132; Blake, ibid, p. 351; Richard Crockatt & Steve Smith, eds, *The Cold War Past and Present* (London 1987), p. 97, hereafter *Cold War*; Elisabeth Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe* (London, 1972 ed), p. 114. Even Geoffrey McDermott, in his critical *The Eden Legacy* (London 1969), writes of 'Eden's good year of 1954', p. 103. David Carlton, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1986 ed), p. 356 is a notable exception, hereafter *Eden*.
5. James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (London 1986), hereafter *Geneva Conference*.
6. Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London 1960), p. 12.
7. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 2.

Indo-China and South-East Asia 1951-55



Reproduced from Anthony Eden, Full Circle (London 1960)

INTRODUCTION

EDEN, THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND THE WAR IN INDO-CHINA

October 1951

When Winston Churchill came to form his only peacetime Administration on 26 October 1951, the violent and bloody struggle in Viet-Nam between the forces of France and the French Union and the communist-led Viet-Minh resistance movement was about to enter its sixth year. During his time in opposition the war had undergone a disturbing metamorphosis. What had begun in 1946 as an attempt by a European colonial power to restore its former position in South-East Asia had been transformed by 1951 into a Cold War issue of considerable proportions. It was now a potential catalyst for conflict between, on one side, the United States and the other leading Western powers and, on the other, Communist China and possibly even the Soviet Union. Anthony Eden, Churchill's Foreign Secretary from 1951 to 1955, later reflected that this volatile configuration made the 'restoration of peace in Indo-China' the most 'dangerous and acute' of the problems confronting him in the international arena.[1] The transformation in the nature of the war was due to a number of factors, but two overlapping developments in 1949 can be seen as possessing especially portentous implications. The first occurred in Viet-Nam and was the so-called Bao Dai experiment. The second was the final triumph of Mao Tse-tung's communist forces in the Chinese civil war.

The Bao Dai experiment was the French Government's response to charges that, since 1946, it had been engaged in a colonial war of reconquest. Claims to the contrary - that it was playing an essential part in the global struggle to contain Communist expansion - lacked all credence so

long as French colonial rule remained all-pervading. This situation greatly benefited the Viet-Minh, a national liberation movement comprising disaffected nationalists and communists and led by Ho Chi Minh, himself a long-time communist with links with Moscow.[2] Undiluted French authority so alienated Viet-Namese nationalists that many appeared willing to side with the Viet-Minh and, by extension, accept communist direction. It gradually became clear that if France was ever to defeat the rebels, Ho Chi Minh's popularity, based on his virtual monopoly of nationalist aspirations, had to be broken. The obvious solution was for France to bestow a meaningful measure of independence upon Viet-Nam which, in theory, would encourage those nationalists unhappy with the communist-orientation of the Viet-Minh to break away, thus weakening Ho Chi Minh's power base.

This consideration stung Paris into action. In March 1949 Viet-Nam's independence was formally secured by the Elysée Agreement but, importantly, only within the framework of the French Union, a highly centralised version of the British Commonwealth. In this way, France retained extensive control over foreign, defence and fiscal policy. Similar arrangements were extended to Laos and Cambodia shortly afterwards, the three countries being designated 'Associate States'. The ex-emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, became the Head of the new Associate State of Viet-Nam. In practice French rule, even at local government level, remained largely unimpaired and the experiment did little to dent the popular appeal of the Viet-Minh.[3] In an effort to strengthen the illusion of Indo-Chinese freedom, the French urged their allies to extend diplomatic recognition to the new States.[4] The French it seemed were not engaged in a bloody struggle simply to relinquish their grip on Viet-Nam at its conclusion.

The British Labour Government, unhappy with the limited level of Indo-

Chinese independence and doubtful whether Bao Dai could inspire mass support in Viet-Nam, nevertheless desired a French victory in the war and, in this respect, the Bao Dai experiment appeared to be a step in the right direction. With the additional motive of wishing to stay in line with the U.S Government which had already signalled its approval of the Associate States, Britain 'guardedly' extended diplomatic recognition in February 1950.[5] Twenty-four other countries did so too although India and the other leading non-aligned Asian nations refused to accept Bao Dai as anything but a front for continued French dominion. Late the previous month the Communist *bloc* countries had predictably recognised the Viet-Minh as the only legitimate government in Viet-Nam, an act which made Anglo-American acceptance of the Bao Dai regime 'easier'.[6]

The second important, overlapping, event of 1949 was the communist victory in the Chinese civil war. This had prompted the U.S. Government to look more favourably on French activities in Viet-Nam and, in approving the new Associate State system, to ignore for the time being the deficiencies of the Bao Dai experiment. Partly for reasons of domestic politics, partly as a reaction to the loss of Japan's traditional export market and source of raw materials and the related fear that Japan would be drawn inexorably into the Chinese Communist orbit, officials in Washington came to view the preservation of South-East Asia as vital in terms of providing Japan with an alternative economic outlet. This, combined with its broader - global - commitment to containing Communism, led the United States to regard the retention of Viet-Nam in the Western camp as pivotal to the preservation of South-East Asia generally. In short, Viet-Nam was the trigger-domino in what became known as the 'domino theory'.[7] While never happy about the imperfect nature of Associate State independence, from May 1950 the United

States began supplying aid to France to fight 'communism' in Indo-China until, by 1954, it was shouldering almost 80 per cent of the total financial and material cost of the war-effort.* With this kind of backing a French victory might have been assured if Communist China had not begun to supply the Viet-Minh with aid which virtually nullified that proffered to France. Chinese help manifested itself in sanctuary and training facilities for the Viet-Minh in China itself, as well as money, technical advice and weaponry. Recent research has confirmed the 'very substantial' quantity of Chinese assistance.* Direct Chinese involvement (combat troops rather than advisers) is still a topic of debate amongst scholars. What may be said is that if it occurred, it was either subtle enough or limited enough to be rejected by the British in the early 1950s as in any way comensurate with Chinese action in Korea and certainly not a *casus belli*.

This completed the transformation of the Viet-Nam problem. The reluctance with which France would continue in the years 1951-54 to assuage nationalist demands ensured that the war never really lost its colonial character. But it was, simultaneously, a Cold War flashpoint. In Viet-Nam the French and the Viet-Minh confronted one another as of old; in the background, aiding their respective surrogates, were the United States and China; and waiting in the wings were Britain and the Soviet Union, the former a close ally of the United States and France as well as an Asian power in its own right, the latter tied to Peking by a Treaty of Friendship signed in February 1950.

*

What, then, was the importance of Indo-China in terms of British foreign policy in the early 1950's? To begin with, from a narrow pragmatic point of view, Indo-China was the forward defence of Malaya and Singapore, a

strategic buffer between those economically important colonies (Malaya for its rubber and tin, Singapore as the principal seaport of South-East Asia) and a potentially expansionist People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) to the north. Should the French be defeated in Viet-Nam, it was feared in London that Laos, Cambodia and Siam would quickly succumb to communism either through external pressure or an internally-fomented *coup d'état*. This would seriously threaten Malaya's security and necessitate significant reinforcement of the colony at a time when British military resources were stretched to breaking-point and, until 1954, almost the whole strategic reserve was tied down in Egypt. Thus reinforcement could only be at the expense of defence obligations in the Middle East or Western Europe and would involve a calculated gamble on Soviet intentions in those two vital areas. However, there could be no question of shirking responsibility for Malayan security in 'conditions short of general war' without causing immense damage to British prestige and greatly encouraging communism elsewhere in Asia.[10] The British Chiefs of Staff believed that the effective defence of Malaya could best be achieved by occupying the Songkhla position on the narrow Kra Isthmus that linked the colony to mainland Asia. This strategically crucial point was inside Siamese territory and was to be seized in a crisis with or without the consent of the Bangkok Government.[11] If the latter, the British would be guilty of invading a sovereign, neutral, State and, as such, the disapproval of the United Nations as well as the United States was anticipated. Nevertheless the Chiefs of Staff, supported by the Cabinet, continued to adhere to this strategy which, at root, envisaged a 'Horatius on the bridge' defence.[12]

Nor were these the only problems expected to flow from a Viet-Minh success in Viet-Nam. Since 1948 Britain had been engaged in quelling a

communist insurgency of its own in Malaya and, in this respect, rebel activity was likely to be encouraged and intensified even if no direct external threat to the colony developed. It was also feared that civil disorder would be exacerbated if, following communist success in the rice surplus countries of Indo-China, Siam and Burma, this essential foodstuff was witheld from Britain's South-East Asian dependencies (all of which were rice deficit countries) with a view to obtaining concessions in other fields.[13] A major communist success in Indo-China would also be viewed with alarm in Australia and New Zealand. Britain relied on both Commonwealth partners to augment its defence effort in the Middle East in time of war, but a French defeat was likely to lead to greater reluctance on the part of Canberra and Wellington to commit their forces outside the Asian theatre and to perhaps a closer relationship with Washington. This would take their estrangement from Britain, begun with the A.N.Z.U.S. Treaty of 1951, one stage further to the dismay of Churchill and his Government.[14]

The financial aspect of reinforcing Malaya also had to be borne in mind at a time of severe economic difficulty for Britain and when the Treasury was pressing hard for major reductions in Defence expenditure.[15] Yet the consequences of losing Malaya were such that reinforcement would in the end have to be undertaken irrespective of its cost. These consequences were largely commercial. Malayan rubber was Britain's single greatest dollar earner in the early 1950s for, after a period of post-war stagnation, the industry had revived thanks to the decision of the U.S. Government to build a strategic stockpile of natural rubber in the wake of the Korean war.[16] As *The Economist* observed in April 1952 ...

> It is not always recognised that [a] deterioration in Indo-China affects the British more adversely than any other

> Western power. Any failure there ... would be likely to have serious repercussions on the Siamese, and on the war in Malaya. As it is, General Templer [High Commissioner in Malaya] is hard put to it to stop the slow decline in morale and economic resiliance of Malaya. Anything that tipped the scale enough to make his task impossible would have untold economic consequences for the whole sterling area. Compared to such possibilities, the French have less to lose.'[17]

The Churchill Administration also had to take account of the wider Cold War implications of Indo-China's position as the 'strategic key', not just to the security of Malaya, but to the whole of South-East Asia.[18] The domino theory had been aired in official British circles in one form or another for at least five years before President Eisenhower publicly enunciated it in April 1954.[19] As with the United States, in all British appreciations Indo-China was the lead-domino, the cornerstone whose removal would result in the collapse of the entire edifice of Western influence in South-East Asia as, one by one, the countries of the region fell to communism.[20] A related British concern - especially after 1953 and the advent of Eisenhower's Republican Administration - was that if French fortunes seriously declined, the United States might be tempted to intervene militarily in Viet-Nam to prevent the trigger-domino from toppling. This risked provoking Chinese counter-intervention on the Korean model, precipitating a major conflagration from which Britain, with its still considerable interests in Asia, would be unable to stand aloof. Hong Kong, for example, was expected to be an early casualty in any general war with China.[21] Added to this was the unknown quantity of the Sino-Soviet Pact. If Moscow chose to come to the aid of its Chinese partner this would raise the spectre of a third, nuclear, world war. Alarmist though this may now appear, to British policymakers in the 1950s it was a very real concern. As Churchill pointed out during a speech in London on 9 November 1951 ...

> It must not be forgotten that under the late Government we took peculiar risks in providing the principal atomic base for the United States in East Anglia, and that, in consequence, we placed ourselves at the forefront of Soviet antagonism.

This concern was heightened by the fact that in the early 1950's Soviet atomic bombers could reach London but not Washington.[22]

A final Cold War angle - and one that will assume prominence in later chapters - was the effect of the Indo-China war on the security of Western Europe. For as long as the conflict continued to sap French military and economic resources (American aid notwithstanding), France would be unable to fulfil its N.A.T.O. obligations in terms of force levels. Nor would the French National Assembly be willing to ratify the Treaty for the European Defence Community (E.D.C.), a scheme devised to permit the controlled rearmament of West Germany as an accretion of strength to N.A.T.O. German rearmament could not become operative until *all* the prospective Community members (France, West Germany, Holland, Italy, Belgium and Luxemburg) ratified the Treaty. By 1954 France was the only hardened dissenter, worried about being militarily outnumbered by its recent enemy in Europe as a direct result of its debilitating commitment in South-East Asia.[23] One might go so far as to contend that Indo-China was directly responsible between 1950 and 1954 for the continued vulnerability of Western Europe *vis-a-vis* the Soviet *bloc* forces and for the severe strain this imposed on relations between Washington and the European N.A.T.O. powers. To the alarm of the British, French hesitancy over German rearmament gave rise to threats from Washington about a withdrawal of its forces from Europe. Though certainly containing an an element of bluff, the British could not afford to ignore these warnings.

For all these reasons the Churchill Administration desired a French

victory in Indo-China, indeed this was the only sure method of avoiding some if not all of these unpleasant, costly and potentially dangerous consequences. This said, it should be noted that Indo-China did not rate very highly on Eden's list of priorities on his return to the Foreign Office. It merited no mention, for example, in his statement in the first Foreign Affairs debate of the new Parliament on 19 November 1951. Matters singled out for particular attention included the Korean war, Western rearmament, Germany and the E.D.C., the re-structuring of N.A.T.O., Egypt and Persia. China and events in Asia beyond Korea received only cursory treatment.[24] This, however, did not mean that Indo-China was of no concern to British policy-makers, merely that recent events allowed room for qualified optimism about the future. Militarily, France had emerged from its most testing year to date in a reasonably healthy state, psychologically if not strategically. To many in London, this was due to the efforts of one man, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny.[25] An outline of de Lattre's achievements will thus serve to establish the immediate backcloth against which Eden was obliged to view matters from October 1951.

De Lattre arrived in Viet-Nam on 19 December 1950 to take on the dual politico-military responsibility of High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief. During the previous twelve months the French had sustained heavy losses in men, equipment and, equally important in a war for the loyalty of the native population, prestige. Fighting had been concentrated near the Sino-Tonking border, with the Viet-Minh looking to secure supply routes to China by ousting the French who occupied the crucial frontier positions. The series of setbacks sustained in 1949-1950 constituted, in Bernard Fall's celebrated description, France's 'greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec'.[26] Yet within a fortnight of de Lattre's

arrival the atmosphere had been radically altered. By what the Foreign Office termed his 'inspiring leadership', a major Viet-Minh offensive in Tonking was repulsed and all hint of defeatism in the French ranks removed.[27] In mid-January 1951 the rebels made a renewed thrust towards Hanoi and the French, 'helped by the timely arrival of American aid', were able to 'inflict on the Viet-Minh an impressive defeat' at Vinh-Yen.[28] During the first half of 1951 the French achieved two further noteworthy successes - at Mao-Khe in March and April, and in the south of the Red River Delta in late May and early June.[29] In the international arena de Lattre fought tirelessly for greater recognition of the vital position Indo-China held in the world-wide struggle against communism, and maintained constant pressure on France's allies, especially the United States, for increased aid.[30]

But to de Lattre, his success in the field threatened to unleash an altogether greater danger. His 'constant fear' and 'nightmare' was direct Chinese intervention, a concern heightened by the precedent of Chinese intervention in Korea.[31] Although it was clearly in de Lattre's interest to exaggerate the likelihood of active Chinese involvement in order to secure even greater aid appropriations from Washington, recent research suggests that the autumn of 1951 was indeed a time of serious debate in Peking as to whether direct intervention should take place. In the event the Central People's Government (C.P.G.) declined to become involved beyond existing levels. As R. B. Smith has concluded, 'the Chinese probably took a firm decision in late 1951 or early 1952 against intervention in Indochina by [People's Liberation Army] combat units ...'[32] But de Lattre was obviously unaware of this when he paid a visit to London at the start of October 1951, some three weeks before the British General Election. At

a meeting with the Chiefs of Staff the General repeated what he had recently told the Americans, namely that so long as China did not intervene he expected 'a settlement of the fighting in two years'. He added, however, that irrespective of their Korean commitment, the Chinese could assemble within a month a force of 150,000 to attack Tonking, a threat he could not counter. In such a situation 'immediate Allied assistance would be essential'. He could 'deal with Ho Chi Minh but not with Ho Chi Minh reinforced in this way'. De Lattre therefore urged the British to help create and contribute to a strategic reserve for South-East Asia from which, in an emergency, Indo-China could be reinforced. Neither the Chiefs of Staff nor the Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, were prepared to make any promises but Morrison did assure the General that the British Government regarded 'the defence of the Associate States as a matter of great importance to the whole Western position' in the Cold War.[33]

A strategic reserve had been one of the main recommendations of a conference held in Singapore the previous May of the British, French and American Commanders-in-Chief in Asia.[34] Little had been done thereafter to implement this proposal. Inaction on the British side was down in part to de Lattre's success which had robbed the issue of urgency. Morever, a promise to go to war with China for the sake of Viet-Nam was not to be given lightly and should, if possible, be avoided, the more so since the United States appeared decidedly unenthusiastic about making a similar commitment. Finally, the British Service Chiefs rated the chances of Chinese intervention considerably lower than de Lattre.[35] Even so, if one of the main aims of the General's visit was to convince the British that the recent improvement in the military situation should not blind France's allies to the greater danger lurking to the north and that it was

imperative to be prepared for a Chinese invasion, he achieved some reward. On 25 October, Morrison sent a telegram to the British Embassies in Washington and Paris instructing them to obtain the agreement of the French and American Governments to hold tripartite Chiefs of Staff discussions on South-East Asian defence in Rome in mid-November during a scheduled meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council.[36] The following day Morrison's unhappy seven month spell as Foreign Secretary was brought to an end by the defeat of the Labour Government at the polls. On 26 October Eden took up the reins of British foreign policy.

For the next nine months the Churchill Administration, mirroring the line adopted by its Labour predecessor, viewed the Indo-China problem almost exclusively in terms of a possible Chinese invasion of Tonking. Long after the point at which Professor Smith suggests that the C.P.G. had ruled this out the British were expending considerable time and energy in devising plans for deterring or, failing that, halting a Chinese attack. In so doing, British diplomacy was guilty of down-grading the real threat to the French position, namely the Viet-Minh unassisted by Chinese manpower. But in fairness to Eden, this was far from clear in October 1951, even to those in the Foreign Office whose sole occupation (unlike the Foreign Secretary) was monitoring events in South-East Asia. And until at least January-February 1952 British concern was, according to the Smith thesis, justifiable. Why the Chinese dimension continued to dominate British thinking thereafter is another question and one that will be addressed in due course. For the moment it is sufficient to say that Conservative and Labour policies differed little.

Continuity was also to be found on policy towards Asia generally. A Foreign Office paper of 30 October 1951 setting out the objectives pursued

in the region by the previous Administration was accepted by Eden with minor modification. The paper specified a dual strategy of coming to terms with the revolutionary forces sweeping across Asia and of preventing further communist expansion. In précis, accommodation and containment. Relations with the P.R.C. were of towering importance, for it was an admixture of Peking's military aggression, material assistance, political propaganda or revolutionary example which linked all the trouble-spots in the area, from Indo-China and Malaya to Korea and the Philippines. British recognition of the P.R.C. notwithstanding, the Korean war meant that more effort was devoted to containment although the goal of accommodation was not lost sight of. Indeed a *modus vivendi* with the P.R.C. remained Britain's favoured means of restoring stability in Asia. This objective, however, led to conflict with Washington where it was 'generally accepted that no compromise with ... China is possible ... [B]elieving also that a general war may break out, Americans consider that the wisest policy towards China is to contain and weaken her by all means short of war'. The fact that both countries accepted differing assumptions as the basis of their China policies meant 'the resultant differences have been a major irritant in Anglo-American relations'.[37]

Eden embraced these inherited precepts. Likewise the line taken in an early briefing paper devoted to Indo-China. This stated ...

> We approve French aims in Indo-China. Tongking is vital in the defence of South-East Asia. We admire the work of General de Lattre. Although we are anxious to help the French our resources are stretched and we cannot enter into any major commitments in respect of Indo-China except perhaps in the framework of an agreed Anglo-American-French policy for the defence of South-East Asia. The first step is agreement on military objectives at Chiefs of Staff level. Hence our sugg -estion for military talks ... at Rome, on which we are still awaiting the views of the French and American Governments.[38]

On 9 November Eden was informed by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, that his Government 'fully supported' Morrison's belated initiative.[39] No response had yet been received from Washington.

This, then, was the form in which the Indo-China problem presented itself to Eden in October 1951. Militarily, the French position gave modest grounds for optimism but, politically, Indo-Chinese independence remained limited. The Churchill Administration wished to see the French victorious in the war but the reality of Britain's poor economic position and its limited military resources imposed a severe handicap on the help it could offer in this connection. Under Eden, British diplomacy's goal in Indo-China - though never so bluntly stated - was French success with minimum British sacrifice. This meant, in the first instance, providing the French with verbal rather than material support. The United States could be expected and certainly encouraged to continue to provide the latter. Where it might be less easy for London to avoid a major commitment was in the event of an escalation of the fighting through Chinese intervention. Primarily in terms of the security of British interests in South-East Asia, but also because of the adverse effect on the East-West balance in the Cold War, such an attack could not go unchecked. After all, it was not as if it would end with Chinese absorbtion of Viet-Nam. The 'ultimate aim of the Communists', the Chiefs of Staff believed, was to 'eliminate Western influence from the whole of South-East Asia'.[40] Implicit in this conclusion and in Indo-China's strategic importance in the region was the need to contain Communism within the borders of Viet-Nam. For, as the Foreign Office acknowledged, 'the key to the defence of Malaya lies in Indo-China'.[41] Eden's 'chief concern was for Malaya', he later wrote, 'I wanted to ensure an effective barrier as far to the north of that

country as possible'.[42] No matter that the British, apart from some anxiety at the start of 1952, were far from convinced that China would enter the Indo-China arena, the possibility could not be dismissed out of hand and plans had to be made.

However, if Chinese intervention was to be successfully deterred or repulsed, the United States would have to add its military strength to that of France and Britain. Hence the Morrison initiative of 25 October 1951. American involvement in a co-ordinated defence for South-East Asia might even result in Britain avoiding active participation in a wider Indo-Chinese conflict altogether. Churchill would later argue that Britain's anti-Communist operations in Malaya were, given its other world-wide responsibilities, an acceptable contribution to regional security and that Indo-China should be a Franco-American responsibility in the event of Chinese aggresion.[43] But the problem was how to get Washington to accept such an extensive commitment. For if the United States could be brought to shoulder the burden of Indo-Chinese defence against an external (Chinese) threat in the same way that the French were presently combatting the internal (Viet-Minh) threat, it would be an extremely cost effective means of maintaining the security of Malaya and Singapore.

NOTES

1. Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 77.
2. See in general Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh* (London 1969).
3. CMD 2834, 'Documents relating to British Involvement in the Indo-China Conflict 1945-65' (HMSO 1965), p. 11. See also Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic 1944-1958* (trans., Cambridge 1989), pps. 121, 148, here -after *Fourth Republic*; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (London 1983), p. 180, hereafter *Vietnam*.
4. CMD 2834, pp. 10-11.
5. CAB 128/17 CM(50)4th meeting, 7 Feb. 1950; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 80; Geoffrey Warner in John W. Young, ed., *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration 1951-55* (Leicester 1988), p. 234-35, hereafter *Churchill Administration*.
6. LLoyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II Through Dien-*

bienphu (London, 1989 ed), p.86, hereafter *Approaching Vietnam*. For a general discussion of the Bao Dai 'experiment' and British policy see FO 370/2424, FO Library paper on 'History of Indo-China Conflict, 1945-55'; FO 371/83592/1, Gibbs (Saigon) despatch 20 to Bevin, 28 Feb. 1950; CMD 2834, pp.10-11; Ritchie Ovendale, *The English Speaking Alliance: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Cold War, 1945-51* (London 1985), pp.171-73, hereafter *English Speaking Alliance*. See also Anthony Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (Harlow 1989), pps.67-68, 78-79, hereafter *Vietnam War*; Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled* (London 1967), Vol.II, pp.667-734;.

7. See Geoffrey Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.233-35; in general on the factors underlying the American decision to supply aid to France, see Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (New York 1987), hereafter *Path to Vietnam*; also Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, pps.84-87, 108-10.
8. Eden, *Full Circle*; M. Carlyle, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1949-50* (Oxford 1953), Acheson statement, 8 May 1950, p.60, hereafter *Documents 1949-50*; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: The History of the Cold War* (Oxford 1987), pp.89-94, hereafter *Long Peace*; Alfred Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations Since 1945* (trans, London 1981), pp.131-32, hereafter *Western Alliance*.
9. R.B.Smith, 'China and Southeast Asia: The Revolutionary Perspective, 1951', in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.XIX, No.1 (March 1988), pp.101-02, hereafter Vol. & No.
10. CAB 131/12 D(52)5 & 8, 14 March & 16 April 1952; CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 12 June 1952. Also Corelli Barnett, *Britain and her Army 1509-1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey* (London 1970), pp.483-85.
11. See map.
12. CAB 131/11 DO(51)16, 23 Feb. 1951; CAB 131/12 D(52)5 & D(52)2nd meeting 14 & 19 March 1952; CAB 131/13 D(53)13, 26 April 1953; DEFE 6/23 JP(53)1(Final), 12 Jan. 1953; DEFE 6/24 JP(53)79(Final), 4 May 1953.
13. CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)4, 5 & 6, 6 June, 2 July and 13 June 1953
14. CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)3, 20 May 1953. Also FO 371/112050/163, High Commissioner Auckland tel. 195 to CRO, 8 April 1954; FO 371/112051/186G Menzies letter to Churchill, 6 April 1954; CAB 128/25 CC(52)81st meeting, 26 Sept. 1952; H.W.Brands Jnr, 'From ANZUS to SEATO: United States Strategic Policy towards Australia and New Zealand 1952-54', in *International History Review*, Vol.IX, No.2, p.266, hereafter Vol. & No.
15. CAB 129/55 C(52)330, 3 Oct. 1952; CAB 131/12 D(52)41 & 45, 29 Sept.& 21 Oct. 1953; FO 371/101061/151, Head letter to Eden, 15 Dec. 1952.
16. Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, p.206.
17. *The Economist* ('Indo-Chinese Dilemma'), 5 April 1952.
18. Eden to House of Commons, 5 Feb. 1952 in Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 5th series, Vol. 510, col. 2066, hereafter HCDebs, Vol. & col.
19. Ritchie Ovendale in Ovendale, ed., *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-51* (Leicester 1984), p.125, hereafter *Labour Governments*.
20. For example, FO 371/92065/37, FO brief for Eden, 1 Nov. 1951; FO 371/101263/99G, Scott min., 30 Aug. 1952; FO 371/101265/142G, COS brief for Minister of Defence, 5 Dec. 1952; FO 371/106996/8G, FO brief for Eden, 4 Feb. 1953; FO 371/106767/120G, Scott memo., 7 May 1953; FO 371/106768/134G, FO brief for Churchill, 25 June 1953; FO 371/106750/17, Allen letter to Trevelyan, 8 Jan. 1954.
21. Slessor Papers (Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch), Box 14,

note for CIGS on defence of Hong Kong, 20 March 1952, citing COS(50)139 Global Strategy paper for 1950.

22. D. Foliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1951* (Oxford 1954), Churchill speech, London, 9 Nov. 1951; Carlton, *Eden*, p.317.
23. On the E.D.C. see Edward Fursden, *The European Defence Community: A History* (London 1981), hereafter *European Defence Community*; Saki Dock -rill, *Britain's Policy for West German Rearmament 1950-54* (Cambridge 1991), hereafter *West German Rearmament*; Saki Dockrill in J.W. Young & M.L. Dockrill, eds, *British Foreign Policy 1945-56* (London 1989), pp. 149-72, hereafter *British Foreign Policy*; R.B. Manderson-Jones, *The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations and Western European Unity 1947-56* (London 1972), pp.97-129; Young in Young, ed., *Church-ill Administration*, pp.81-108.
24. HCDebs, Vol.494, cols. 34-53. Also Rhodes James, *Eden*, pp.346-47; Carlton, *Eden*, p.299.
25. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.81.
26. Bernard Fall, *Street Without Joy* (London, 1967 ed), pp.32-33; Eden, ibid; Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p.149; Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, p.211; Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp.184-85.
27. FO 371/101056/15, Graves despatch 18, 25 Jan. 1952, reviewing de Lattre's year in Indo-China; FO 371/92427/58, FO brief for Morrison, 4 Oct. 1951; P. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey of International Affairs 1951* (Oxford 1954), p.453, hereafter *Survey 1951*
28. FO 371/101045/1, Graves despatch 21, 4 Feb. 1952.
29. Smith, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XIX, No.1, p.103.
30. See *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951*, Vol.VI, Pt.1 (Asia and the Pacific - Washington 1977), pp.506-21, hereafter *FRUS*, Vol. & Pt. Also FO 371/101045/1, Graves despatch 21, 4 Feb. 1952.
31. DEFE 4/47, COS(51)155th meeting, 4 Oct. 1951; FO 371/92427/59, FO record of Morrison-de Lattre meeting, 5 Oct. 1951.
32. R.B.Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: Volume I - Revolution versus Containment 1955-61* (London, 1987 ed.), p.57, here-after Smith, Vol.I.
33. DEFE 4/47, COS(51)155th meeting, 4 Oct; FO 371/94247/59, FO record of Morrison-de Lattre meeting, 5 Oct. 1951.
34. A full report of the Singapore conference is in DEFE 5/31, COS(51)318, 29 May 1951, revised in DEFE 5/35, COS(51)676, 16 Nov. 1951. Also FO 371/93085/154G.
35. FO 371/92428/65, Morrison despatch 138 to Saigon, 25 Oct. & Scott let-ter to Graves, 11 Oct. 1951; DEFE 4/47, COS(51)152nd meeting, 3 Oct. 1951.
36. FO 371/93084/133G, Morrison tel. 5320, 25 Oct. 1951.
37. FO 371/92065/34, 'British Policy in the Far East', 30 Oct. 1951, and comments by Eden (n.d.).
38. FO 371/92065/37, FO brief for Eden, 1 Nov. 1951.
39. FO 800/780/2, Eden (Paris) tel. 532 to FO, 9 Nov. 1951.
40. DEFE 5/35, COS(51)793 approved at DEFE 4/50, COS(51)209th meeting, 28 Dec. 1951.
41. FO 371/101267/7G, FO brief for Macmillan, 25 Feb. 1952.
42. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.87.
43. PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 2883 to Eisenhower, 21 June 1954. Also *FRUS 1952-54* (East Asia and the Pacific - Washington 1984), Vol.XII, Pt.1, pp.569-70, hereafter *FRUS*, Vol. & Pt.

PART I: THE CHINESE DIMENSION

CHAPTER ONE

UNITING AGAINST CHINA

Anglo-Franco-American Defence Planning for South-East Asia

November 1951 to May 1952

In a study of the South-East Asia policy of the 1945-1951 Labour Governments, the British historian Ritchie Ovendale has concluded that it was a 'considerable achievement' on the part of the Foreign Secretary for much of that period, Ernest Bevin, to have helped secure an American commitment to the defence of the region against communist encroachment. The view in London after 1945 was that 'nothing could be done in Asia without American participation' and that 'only the United States could stop Communist expansion'. Unfortunately, Washington tended to look on South-East Asia as a British and French responsibility. By early 1950, however, the efforts of Bevin and British diplomacy (helped, admittedly, by the 'loss' of China in 1949) had contributed to a growing awareness in Washington of the region's military, economic, political and strategic importance and, simultaneously, of its vulnerability to aggressive communist designs. The American commitment to South-East Asian defence sought by Bevin was, according to Ovendale, finally secured with the outbreak of the Korean war in June 1950. Washington's swift response to North Korea's aggression was accompanied by an increase in the military assistance programme for the French in Indo-China unveiled the previous month. Together with a revival of support for the Nationalist Chinese Government on Formosa, this marked the assumption of significant defence obligations in Asia. The British Ambassador to Washington mused that the

Pax Britannica had been replaced by the *Pax Americana.*'

Ovendale, however, possibly overstates the extent and nature of Washington's involvement. During 1951, British policy-makers came to the conclusion that American interest in the defence of South-East Asia was considerably less than the undertakings of 1950 implied. Two years into the Korean war, a leading Foreign Office official was still able to write of the need to 'commit the Americans to support us in South-East Asia, the importance of which to the Western world the Americans still do not seem to grasp'.[2] One of the objectives of Eden and British diplomacy in the 1951-54 period was, in consequence, to encourage the United States to become still more involved in regional security. This was to be done by establishing a formal framework for defence consultation and co-ordination comprising Britain, the United States, France and possibly Australia and New Zealand. This might in turn form the nucleus of an Asian version of N.A.T.O. with an expanded membership. In the event, however, the Truman Administration displayed scant enthusiasm for extending its obligations and resisted all schemes for a multilateral security grouping on the grounds that it would limit its military freedom of manoeuvre.

This was graphically demonstrated by Washington's tardy response to Morrison's initiative of 25 October 1951 (which soon after became Eden's) calling for Anglo-Franco-American military talks on South-East Asian security and on Indo-China in particular. The scheduled meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council in Rome at the end of November passed without any substantive discussion of this issue, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, obdurately resisting French pleas for a formal exchange of views. The situation in Viet-Nam was more 'serene' than for some time, the French explained, but the 'possibility of a Chinese

attack had not disappeared' and 'ways and means of securing ... American and British support might be studied anew'.[3] Bradley, however, was unmoved. Towards the middle of December, an official from the U.S. Embassy in London confided to R. H. Scott of the Foreign Office that the American Military 'did not wish to take on any more commitments in South East Asia and that was why they were reluctant to take part in talks'.[4] At the same time the British were being pressed by the French to use their influence with Washington to convene a three-power conference.[5] An earlier direct appeal by Pleven to Truman had achieved nothing.[6] Two developments added urgency to French entreaties. The first was depressing news about the state of de Lattre's health: the General had returned from Viet-Nam on sick-leave on 20 November and by December concern was mounting in Paris that he might be unable to resume his duties.[7] The second was evidence of a major build-up of Chinese forces on the Tonking frontier. Rumours of such manoeuvres were common and tended to be discounted in London for lack of concrete evidence. However, British intelligence suggested that there was rather more substance than usual to these latest reports and, on Christmas Eve, a nervous Foreign Office instructed the Ambassador to Washington, Sir Oliver Franks, to 'express to the United States Government as soon as possible our view that tripartite military talks should take place without delay'.[8]

At last, on 28 December, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff relented and agreed in principle to hold a conference in Washington in January 1952.[9] Only the day before, Franks had reported Bradley's comment that he and his colleagues 'did not see where these conversations would lead and with their hands very full at the moment in Korea they did not wish to be drawn into any further commitments'.[10] Persistent Anglo-French pressure may have

caused a change of heart. Equally, the determining factor may have been the evident seriousness of Chinese designs on Tonking.[11] The same day, 28 December, the British Chiefs of Staff had approved a report which asserted that 'the Chinese could invade Indo-China now'. It continued ...

> While we still believe that the Chinese are unwilling, unless they feel themselves directly threatened, to engage deliberately in a campaign which might lead to all out war against the West, the number and quantity of the Chinese forces at present situated in the frontier area may indicate an intention to accord active support to the Viet Minh forces.[12]

Whatever the true intentions of the Central People's Government (and the Smith thesis suggests invasion was a serious option), and whatever the reasoning of the American Military, the worrying drift of American policy away from even discussing further involvement in South-East Asia had been halted.

The long-awaited security conference finally got down to business in Washington on 11-12 January 1952 with high-level military representation - Field Marshal Sir William Slim, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.) for Britain and General Juin, Head of the French General Staff, and General Bradley for the United States. Juin predictably drew attention to the latest reports of a Chinese threat to Viet-Nam and called for Anglo-American air and naval support (though not ground forces) should an invasion materialise. Slim and Bradley preferred to reserve judgment on this, but did agree to recommend to their two governments that a 'statement should be given to the Chinese to the effect that further active aggression would result in retaliation not necessarily confined to to the area of aggression'. In other words, China itself would be the target. To follow up this recommendation, an *ad hoc* committee was to meet in Washington 'as a

matter of urgency' to consider the resources which Britain, France and the United States could make available for action against China, as well as the nature of the measures to be taken in the specific area of a new aggression and against its more distant source. Australia and New Zealand were also to sit on the committee, whilst its terms of reference assumed that a warning had been issued to Peking although a formal proposal to governments was deferred until the committee reported.[13] However, provisional agreement on a warning statement failed to conceal the lack of enthusiasm of the American Military. One British observer found them 'extremely cautious' and noted that they had studiously avoided any commitment to send 'a man, a ship, or an aeroplance' to Indo-China.[14] Sir John Slessor, the Chief of Air Staff, felt that the Americans had still not grasped the fact that Indo-China was 'the key to the position in South-East Asia'.[15]

The *ad hoc* committee met for the first time on 25 January and confined itself to discussing short-term measures if China ignored an allied warning and attacked Viet-Nam, 'the most likely Chinese objective'. Two distinct forms of action were considered - that limited to the scene of aggression (Viet-Nam) and that against the source of aggression (China). On local action, the report concluded that the presently available resources of the Western powers in the area would be insufficient to ensure the retention of Tonking. By resources 'presently available', the report evidently had in mind British and French contingents in Indo-China and Malaya which were, on any reading, too weak to resist a Chinese onslaught. As for the Americans, although they provided figures for total air and naval forces available in Asia as a whole, they were, to the British, 'patently loath to give a definite indication of what proportion of these could be spared to re-inforce the French' and 'made it clear that no United States ground forces

would be committed'. The committee went on to focus on direct action against China. Though this might not help to save Tonking it was nevertheless felt to be the most effective method of relieving pressure on the French and very much favoured by the U.S. representatives.[16]

A serious Anglo-American disagreement arose, however, concerning the shape, level and ultimate objective of such action. The essence of this dispute lay beyond South-East Asia and was in many ways a symptom of wider Anglo-American differences concerning how best to deal with the emergence of the P.R.C. as a force in international relations. The British argued that none of the retaliative options available - a naval blockade of the China coast tantamount to economic sanctions and widespread non-discriminatory 'conventional' bombing of targets inside China - would be decisive and that 'the danger of this action resulting in general war was unacceptably serious'. The American view was that action against China 'should be designed to reduce her capacity for further aggression in all areas; the measures available would not be effective in the short-term but would have a long-term effect; [and] all retaliatory action carried an equal risk of extending the conflict which must be faced'.[17]

Therefore, while unable to make any specific recommendations, what the *ad hoc* committee's report clearly demonstrated was that, contrary to the impression the American Military had hitherto conveyed, the Truman Administration's commitment to the containment of communism in South-East Asia was not in question. Indeed the opposite. The real issue was the wisdom of the extreme methods it had in mind for effecting this policy. Also the fact that the Americans were determined to maintain a unilateral stance in the region and ignore moderate allied opinion. Unlimited retaliation against China disturbed the British because of the risk of a

conflagration across the whole of Asia, while the French were unhappy because American ideas placed little emphasis on defending Tonking (or indeed Indo-China generally) and appeared, rather, as an excuse for a show-down with Peking. The U.S. Joint Chiefs, doubtless conscious of the unpopularity of their favoured course, may thus have resisted the co-ordination of regional defence mainly on the grounds that this would make American action contingent upon allied approval. Such approval, certainly from the British standpoint, was remote.

The position was summarised for the Prime Minister on 16 February by Sir William Elliot, the respected head of the British Joint Staff Mission (B.J.S.M.) in Washington, who made clear that the British military view was not simply a negative rejection of American plans. If some action was necessary inside China it should be confined to bombing of rail communications and airfields '*leading to the areas of aggression, not therefore widespread bombing all over China* [emphasis added]'. A naval blockade would be ineffective 'unless we took action against Russian shipping and ports in the Far East'. Elliot concluded: 'We are opposed to general war against China or to action which we feel might (almost involuntarily) involve Soviet Russia and lead to global war'.[18] Therefore, as of mid-February 1952, tripartite defence planning for South-East Asia at the military level was badly stalled. Without agreement on the kind of action to be taken if China committed aggression there was little point and much danger in issuing a warning. One might go so far as to suggest that if China had invaded Tonking in February 1952, the Western response would have been confused, unco-ordinated and probably ineffective. Or else, led by the Americans, incendiary.

The Foreign Office was generally sympathetic to the position adopted by

the British Service Chiefs. The revelation (for that it is what it was) that the American Military actually possessed a clearly defined set of far reaching objectives for dealing with Chinese aggression in South-East Asia made the need for a co-ordinated Western defence scheme more apparent than ever, not simply to contain China but to restrain the United States. As things stood, there was nothing to stop the Americans from putting their plans for widespread retaliatory action into practice. 'I have the impression', minuted Sir William Strang, the Permanent Under-Secretary, on 21 January

> that as usual the Americans are trying to entangle us. In fact, it looks as though the tripartite talks as a whole have proved to be an entangling operation: objective: war with China.

This highlighted the essential difference in the British and American approach to China. British policy continued to be a mixture of 'containment and compromise' or 'the carrot and the stick'. American thinking seemed to have progressed little since it was depicted by a British diplomat in September 1951 as involving the use of the stick and nothing else.'[19]

There had been early doubts in the Foreign Office about the wisdom of an Anglo-American warning to China concerning the consequences which would flow from a new act of aggression as this might pre-define the form of punishment which, in the event, might not fit the Chinese crime and merely exacerbate the problem.[20] However, on 11 January 1952, pre-empting the conclusions of the tripartite Chiefs of Staff in Washington and in defiance of the prevailing Foreign Office consensus, Eden issued a thinly-veiled warning of his own during a speech at Columbia University in New York. It should be understood, he said ...

> that an intervention by force by the Chinese Communists in South-East Asia - even if they were called "volunteers" - would

create a situation no less menacing than that which the United Nations met and faced in Korea. In such an event the United Nations, I trust, would be equally firm to resist.[21]

Eden had acted very much on his own initiative in making this statement, and there is no evidence of serious consultation with the Foreign Office. In consequence, he naively ignored the time-lag factor between a French appeal to and action by the United Nations, during which the position in Viet-Nam might become wholly untenable.[22] This indeed was the principal French concern at the tripartite military conference. Eden also overlooked the Soviet veto in the United Nations Security Council (inoperative at the outbreak of the Korean war) and a likely groundswell of Afro-Asian opposition in the General Assembly unsympathetic to France's colonial record in Indo-China. However, Eden's view was that South Korea 'would probably never have been invaded if the Soviet's had understood the risks. French have told us & the world that they will go to U.N.O. & ask for help if invaded'.[23] This was true, but at the same time the French had always recognised the need for immediate action to stem a Chinese attack, something which the United Nations was ill-designed to provide. Only British and American contingents already in Asia could provide instant help.[24] In the months that followed, Eden's belief in the value of saving Indo-China came into conflict with his faith in a United Nations solution, something he no doubt favoured as a means of limiting British involvement in a wider war. Yet Eden also accepted that there would be 'serious consequences for France and the United Kingdom if the Chinese Communists made an incursion into Indo-China' and felt that 'the loss of Indo-China and subsequently Malaya would have grave consequences, both political and economic ...'[25] As such, he was eventually forced to concede the value of some kind of immediate allied response in the event of a Chinese attack.

The question of a more explicit warning to Peking was shelved in the Foreign Office in late January and February 1952. Instead the dominant issue, as it was for the military experts, was agreement on the kind of action to be taken if a warning were ignored. Like the Chiefs of Staff, Eden and his officials opposed extensive retaliation. This would mean 'war with China, and the possible loss of Hong Kong'. It would also mean redirecting men and resources from Europe and the Middle East to engage the Chinese thereby leaving the latter 'hot war strategic priorities' vulnerable to attack from the Soviet Union, 'enemy No. 1'. It was to be hoped that 'native caution' would prevent the Soviets from 'taking advantage of our embarassment' although, in the end, war in Asia meant taking a 'calculated gamble' elsewhere. A related fear in the Foreign Office was that hostilities might not be confined to Asia. Echoing the Chiefs of Staff, the political and diplomatic experts maintained that 'China is not very vulnerable to air action or naval blockade', that 'any attempt to carry out such measures on a scale big enough to be effective would significantly increase the risks of general war involving the Soviet Union' and that, consequently, 'hostilites should be limited to the theatre of attack'. Britain and the United States were both agreed that 'the action open to us would operate too slowly to be effective ... in saving Tonking', but the 'real difference of opinion is over the risks, which we rate higher than the Americans do, that direct retaliation may lead to general war'.[26]

These differences had to be reconciled if progress on defence planning was to be made and American power employed judiciously via a co-ordinated and pre-agreed Western strategy. With these considerations in mind, it was the Foreign Office that took a *political* initiative in an effort to break

the *military* deadlock. At a N.A.T.O. meeting in Lisbon at the end of February 1952, Eden approached Acheson about the unsatisfactory state of military discussions. The American Secretary of State revealed that the Administration's entire policy towards South-East Asia was under review, that this process would be complete in three-to-four weeks, and that Anglo-Franco-American Ministerial discussions might then ensue.[27] But Acheson's prescribed time-scheme expired without any sign of the projected talks and, on 12 March, Eden instructed Franks to tell the U.S. Government that in view of the continuing vulnerability of Indo-China to external threat it was 'urgently necessary' to reach an agreed Anglo-American position.[28]

While the result of this *demarche* was awaited, the Cabinet's Defence Committee met to discuss a paper by the Chiefs of Staff on the action to be taken 'in the event of overt Chinese aggression in South-East Asia'. There was, the Military observed, no guarantee that American plans for reducing China's capacity for further aggression through massive retaliation would be successful. On the contrary, there was every risk of precipitating a general war. Even if this were avoided, the exercise would still be highly counter-productive in other ways ...

> Where we and the Americans are really far apart is ... on [the] effect in Asia and the Far East generally. We think that not only would it not have the effect of checking Chinese aggression in Indo-China or elsewhere, but that its effect would merely be to make things worse and to invite further aggression - for instance against Hong Kong. If there was the slightest chance of bombing and blockade bringing China quickly to terms, that would be a different matter. But neither of us think that, and even the Americans agree that any effect could only be long term. Our view is that in the meanwhile it would probably make things much worse in Korea, invite attack on Hong Kong, and go a long way to do what the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff have always agreed we should not do, i.e. throw China more and more, and perhaps irretrievably, into the Russian camp. In short we cannot see the object of it. We think the American attitude is inspired not by cool strategic reasoning but by vengeful petulance - backed by political pressure to do <u>something</u> - without thinking out where it is going to lead.

In discussion, the Defence Committee concurred with these views and largely shared Slim's contention that if action had to be taken it should be confined to 'naval and air support of the battle area, and conventional bombing of Chinese communications in areas immediately adjacent to the battle-front, though this might, if necessary, include the bombing of Chinese territory'.[29] Given the make-up of the Committee (leading military and political representatives and chaired by Churchill), this represented an authoritative statement of the British position and was a demonstration of considerable politico-military unanimity.[30] This contrasted strongly with the apparent discord within the Truman Administration. On 22 March, in response to Eden's enquiry, Franks informed London that the Americans would not be ready for top-level discussions for some time yet and referred to unresolved internal 'differences' on South-East Asia.[31] What these were remained unclear, although there had been signs for some time of tension between the Military and the State Department with the latter unhappy at the way in which the former were dragging their feet.[32] On 31 March, Franks reported Acheson's generally approving attitude towards politico-military conversations but added the rider that 'he may run into trouble with the Pentagon'.[33]

Yet more delay ensued during April as the Truman Administration continued with its policy review.[34] Meanwhile in Viet-Nam the likelihood of a Chinese attack had been greatly reduced by, ironically, a severe French setback. On 23 February, the important road and rail centre of Hoa Binh, forty miles south-west of Hanoi, had been evacuated in the face of sustained Viet-Minh pressure. This success for the rebels may have finally dissuaded the P.R.C. against overt involvement. If so, there are grounds for viewing Hoa Binh rather than Dien Bien Phu as the decisive military

engagement of the war, certainly in terms of avoiding a wider conflict. From March 1952 the threat of Chinese intervention can be seen as receding although, at the time, the British continued to refine their response to such an eventuality. On 30 April, the Defence Committee approved a further paper by the Chiefs of Staff on South-East Asian security, the principal conclusions of which were the need for a co-ordinated and consistent Anglo-American policy embracing Korea, Hong Kong and Indo-China 'to deter China from further aggression and if such aggression occurs to resist it'; to ensure in the event of aggression that 'in addition to maximum political and economic action, appropriate military action should also be taken against China, limited initially at least to the locality of the aggression'; and, finally, that 'no further warning statement should be made at present'.[35]

It was only towards the end of May - that is some three months since the *ad hoc* committee concluded its work - that the Truman Administration appeared ready to recommence conversations. The British, French and American Foreign Ministers were due to meet in Paris for the signing of the European Defence Community (E.D.C.) Treaty and, reacting to signals that Acheson would use the occasion to discuss Indo-China, the Foreign Office drew up a brief for Eden's use. This noted ...

> There is at present an unresolved difference of view between ourselves and the Americans, both as regards the need for a coordinated policy for the containment of China (the United States attach major importance to Korea, an area of little real concern to us, but fight shy of commitments to defend South-East Asia in which we and the French are vitally interest-ed) and over the scope and effects of retaliation against China (the United States rate higher than we do the effective-ness of widespread air action and a naval blockade ... and, in our view, under-estimate the risks of this leading to global war).

Eden was thus advised (pending formal tripartite talks) to avoid entering into any commitments should China attack Indo-China, a stance indicative of Britain's reluctance to avoid obligations which the United States did not share.[36] Whether Acheson's willingness to resume discussion meant that the State Department had triumphed over the Pentagon, and that internal Administration divisions had been resolved in a manner which would herald a more urgent approach to South-East Asian defence co-ordination, remained to be seen. Likewise whether the State Department attitude to retaliation was substantially different to that of the Joint Chiefs. But at least matters were moving again.

In the six months since November 1951 the importance of a formalised American commitment to South-East Asian defence had never, from a British standpoint, been in doubt. What had altered was the purpose of a multilateral (or, at the least, tripartite Anglo-Franco-American) arrangement for consultation and planning. On his return to the Foreign Office, Eden had been faced with a U.S. Government outwardly reluctant to become more closely involved in regional security. However, the potential for greater participation was present in Washington's support for France in Indo-China and it was this that Eden and the Foreign Office sought to exploit. In so doing they were helped by the apparent seriousness of Chinese designs on Indo-China between December 1951 and February 1952. This, however, only served to show that the Truman Administration was not in the least complacent about regional defence. But the satisfaction which this should have produced in London was tempered by the extremity of American thinking with regard to retaliation and the manifest reluctance of the Pentagon to allow its military freedom of action to be compromised by too close a defence association with London and Paris. As a consequence,

from May 1952 British enthusiasm for a co-ordinated South-East Asian defence was sustained as much by the need to hold back the Americans as it was to hem in the Chinese and protect Malaya - perhaps more so. Notably absent from British assessments of the Indo-China problem after that point was any real belief in overt Chinese intervention.

NOTES

1. Ovendale in Ovendale, ed., *Labour Governments*, pp. 121-42. See also Ovendale, *English Speaking Alliance*, pp. 144-84; Ovendale, 'Britain, the United States and the Cold War in South-East Asia 1949-50', in *International Affairs*, Vol. 58 (1981-82).
2. FO 371/101263/99G, Scott memo., 30 Aug. 1952.
3. FO 371/93084/133G, 144G, Franks tels. 1145, 3620 & 3639, 7, 11 & 19 Nov; FO 371/93984/138G, FO tel. 5695 to Washington, 19 Nov; FO 371/93085/150G, 152G, Eden (Paris) tel. 587 to FO, 23 Nov. & Rumbold min., 21 Nov; FO 371/93085/155G, COS tel. JS23 to MOD, 28 Nov. 1951. French paper in DEFE 5/35, COS(51)709, 1 Dec. 1951. Also DEFE 4/51, COS(52) 1st meeting, 1 Jan. 1952 (views of Slessor).
4. FO 371/93085/155G, Scott min., 17 Dec. 1951.
5. FO 371/93085/164G, FO brief for Eden, 14 Dec; DEFE 4/50 COS(51)203rd meeting, 14 Dec; FO 371/93085/163G, 164G & 1967G, Scott letter to Twiss (20 Dec), Eden min. (15 Dec) & Murray min. (20 Dec) 1951. See also CAB 128/23 CC(51)18th meeting, 19 Dec. 1951.
6. *FRUS 1951*, Vol. VI, Pt. 1, pp. 579-80.
7. FO 371/92417/93, Rumbold letter to Murray, 19 Dec. 1951.
8. FO 371/92412/15 & 23, FO tel. 6258 to Washington & Strang min., 24 Dec., Eden min., 25 Dec. 1951.
9. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. VI, Pt. 1, pp. 130-31.
10. FO 371/92412/21, BJSM tel. to MOD, 28 Dec. & Franks tel. 3961 to FO, 27 Dec. 1951; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 6-7.
11. *FRUS 1951*, Vol. VI, Pt. 1., pps. 562-63, 571-72.
12. DEFE 5/35, COS(51)793, approved by the COS at DEFE 4/50 COS(51)209th meeting, 28 Dec. 1951.
13. See FO 371/101259/15G & 16G, McLean (Washington) tels. ZO 214 & 215, 12 & 11 Jan; DEFE 4/51, COS(52)8th meeting, 15 Jan; FO 371/101259/12G & 16G, Scott min., 15 Jan. & FO tel. 233 to Paris, 24 Jan. 1952. For background to the talks see DEFE 5/36, COS(51)780(revise), 3 Jan. and COS(52)15, 5 Jan. 1952. The full report of the talks has not been released but the US record can be found in *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 8-22.
14. FO 371/101259/12G, Scott min., 15 Jan. 1952 recounting views of McLean.
15. DEFE 5/51, COS(52)8th meeting, 15 Jan. 1952.
16. The full report is in DEFE 5/37 COS(52)123, 15 Feb. 1952. The US record is in *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 36-45.
17. FO 371/101260/30G, Eden despatch 100 to MacDonald, 28 Feb. 1952.
18. PREM 11/369, record of meeting at Chartwell, 16 Feb. 1952.
19. FO 371/101259/22G, Strang min., 21 Jan. 1952. That this remained British policy is clear from a min. by Scott on 17 May and endorsed by

Eden and Strang on 19 May, see FO 371/99217/2. Also FO 371/92067/21, record of Scott meeting with State Dept. officials, 12 Sept. 1951.

20. FO 371/101259/3G, Strang tel. to Eden (Washington), 4 Jan. 1952. The Chiefs of Staff supported a warning from the outset, see COS(52)2nd meeting, 4 Jan. 1952 (held back from DEFE 4 files) in FO 371/101259/9G.
21. D. Foliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1952* (Oxford 1955), pp. 41-46, hereafter, *Documents 1952*.
22. FO 371/92427/59, FO record of Morrison-de Lattre meeting, 5 Oct. 1951.
23. FO 371/101259/23G, Eden min., 23 Jan. 1952.
24. FO 371/92412/24 & 28, Hayter (Paris) tel. 652 & French *aide memoire* left at FO, 29 Dec. 1951; FO 371/101056/3, Harvey despatch 4, 2 Jan; FO 371/101066/1, Harvey letter to MacDonald, 4 Jan. 1952. Also DEFE 5/35 COS(51)709, French memo., 28 Nov. 1951.
25. CAB 21/3057, Eden to 3rd Anglo-American plenary session, 8 Jan. 1952.
26. FO 371/101259/23G, Harrison min., 19 Jan, Strang min., 21 Jan.; FO 371/101267/2G, FO brief for Eden, 16 Feb. 1952.
27. FO 371/101260/33, record of Eden-Acheson-Schuman meeting, 26 Feb. 1952; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 79-80.
28. FO 371/101057/49G, Eden tel. 1181 to Washington, 12 March 1952.
29. The paper itself, D(52)4, has been held back from the Defence Committee files. The extract given is from a re-draft in the Slessor Papers (Box 12, XIV D57), while full Defence Committee discussion of its contents is in CAB 131/12 D(52)2nd meeting, 19 March 1952. Other references to it contents are in FO 371/101261/40G & 42G: FO 371/101057/42G.
30. The Defence Committee comprised, among others, the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ministers of War, Defence, Colonies, CIGS and COS, Paymaster General etc., and clearly constituted an authoritative body.
31. FO 371/101058/59G, Franks tel. 722, 22 March 1952.
32. FO 371/92412/21, Franks tel. 3961, 27 Dec. 1951; FO 371/101259/12G & 23G, Scott min., 15 Jan., Tomlinson (Washington) letter to Scott, 17 Jan. 1952; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 87-91.
33. FO 371/101057/37G, Franks tel. 327, 31 March 1952.
34. See *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1 (Indochina - Washington 1982), pps. 52-54, 71-72, hereafter Vol. & Pt; FO 371/101261/42G & 52G, Franks tels. 379 (11 April) & 976 (13 May); FO 371/101058/55G, Eden despatch 411 to Paris, 29 April 1952.
35. FO 371/101058/67G, FO brief for Eden, 24 May, outlining main points of COS paper approved by Defence Committee, 30 April 1952.
36. FO 371/101058/67G, Harvey tel. 306, 23 May, brief for Eden, 24 May 1952.

PART I: THE CHINESE DIMENSION

CHAPTER TWO

DRIFTING APART

Widening Anglo-American divisions on retaliation against Communist China

May to September 1952

The Foreign Office's three-month wait for a high-level meeting with the Americans on South-East Asia was finally ended in Paris on 26 May when Eden and Acheson found time for an informal exchange of views on the eve of the signing of the E.D.C. Treaty. As it turned out, this meeting was a poor substitute for the wide-ranging discussions sought by officials in London and did little to bring the two sides closer together on the central issue of the scale and objective of retaliation against China. Discouragingly for the British, it transpired that the Truman Administration's protracted policy review had merely resulted in political endorsement of the established military view, namely that a warning statement should be issued to Peking to be followed, if aggression ensued, by air action inside China and a naval blockade of the Chinese coast.[1] Aware that this would be 'distasteful' to the British, Acheson proceeded to offer Eden a number of assurances. The United States, he said, was 'determined to do nothing in that area which would provoke a third world war', there was 'no thought of an all-out attack on China', and the 'realistic situation' which had to be faced was that the Chinese would 'continue their present threat ... without direct intervention' thus allowing the war to continue on a Franco/Viet-Minh footing. Eden 'agreed generally' with Acheson and had 'no objection in principle to considering whether some deterrent action ... might not be useful'. But he remained 'strongly opposed to any course of action in S.E.

Asia which would be likely to result in a war with China'. Eden personally thought it 'unlikely that the Chinese would attack' but conceded that 'we could not close our eyes to the danger of Chinese aggression'.[2]

This tentative sparring was followed on 28 May by a formal meeting with the French at the Quai d'Orsay during which Anglo-American disunity became more pronounced. Although tripartite agreement was quickly reached on the need to re-activate the stalled defence talks, Eden objected to Acheson's suggestion that a collective warning 'might be necessary at some stage'. He refused to be 'committed now to a warning statement, let alone its timing' or to 'agreement on the military measures which might be taken if a warning were ignored'. In other words, Eden would only countenance a warning if the British line on *limited* retaliation was first accepted by the Americans. Meanwhile, in the absence of a joint position, Eden still favoured placing Indo-China in the hands of the United Nations in the event of Chinese aggression even though this presaged a complete French defeat by the time any United Nations military action was approved.[3]

The Chinese dimension continued to dominate Western discussion of the Indo-China problem throughout the summer of 1952. In this Britain was a willing and active participant even though, as seen, Eden was prone to discount the danger of Chinese intervention. 'I personally thought it unlikely that China would enter the war', he later recalled. 'The present state of affairs suited China very well and she would have nothing to gain by internationalising the conflict'.[4] This raises two related questions. Firstly, why did British diplomacy expend so much time and effort in preparing to deter or counter a hypothetical contingency, one which grew less likely as the summer wore on? Secondly, why did a co-ordinated defence strategy with the French and Americans remain so important,

especially when, as will be later shown, there was growing unease in the Foreign Office at over-concentration on Chinese intentions and under-estimation of the danger from the Viet-Minh unaided? The answers to these questions are important if Eden is to be defended from the charge of having wasted over a year in fruitless argument with the Americans about how best to secure Indo-China from the designs of the wrong enemy.

In fact, a defence is not difficult to construct. To begin with, future Chinese aggression could not be dismissed out of hand. Furthermore, the French, for varying motives, continued to emphasise the potency of the threat from the P.R.C.. As one writer observes, Paris was concerned to 'preserve the goodwill and stimulate the generosity of France's allies, especially the U.S.A.' and, in this regard, 'the intentions of China were of paramount importance'.[5] From a purely British standpoint a co-ordinated defence for South-East Asia was a well-established policy objective and one which could not be abandoned even if its basic *raison d'être*, Chinese expansionism, appeared in temporary or tactical abeyance. As a Foreign Office briefing paper for Eden emphasised in June 1952, '[i]t is inconceivable that we should do nothing in the event of Chinese aggression in Indo-China'.[6] The reason was Indo-China's position as the front-line of Malayan defence, for it was obviously preferable to contain communism as far to the north of that colony as possible rather than wait until it reached the Malayan frontier. Better still if the United States could be brought to underwrite Indo-China's external security thereby obviating the need for Britain to ever fight China in Indo-China. This, as seen, was one of the attractions of expanding and formalising Washington's commitment to South-East Asian defence. Importantly, an American commitment along these lines would, by reducing the danger of open communist aggression, also

reduce the likelihood of British reinforcement of Malaya. The prospect of avoiding the financial outlay which such an operation would necessitate had considerable allure at a time when the British economy was experiencing severe difficulties and when the Treasury was exerting strong pressure to cut defence expenditure.[7] Indeed in the final analysis the Churchill Government's Indo-China policy was shaped, and at times emasculated, by the over-riding requirements of the domestic economy. Britain, in short, could not pursue the policy it wanted, only the policy it could afford.

To develop this theme, when the Conservatives were returned to power in October 1951 they inherited a parlous economic situation, the seriousness of which had been downplayed by the incumbent Labour Administration in the run up to the General Election. Five days into office, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, R. A. Butler, informed Cabinet colleagues that '[w]e are in a balance of payments crisis, worse than 1949, and in many ways worse even than 1947'.[8] A week later in a 'grave statement' on the national economic situation, Butler warned the House of Commons that Britain would be 'bankrupt, idle and hungry' if immediate remedial action were not taken 'in putting our balance of payments right'.[9] Although the Government wasted no time in addressing this problem, an improvement was slow to materialise. In the spring of 1952 the Paymaster General, Lord Cherwell, sent the Prime Minister a connected series of warnings dramatising the issue and emphasising that unless Britain cut its 'coat according to its cloth, economic and political disaster will be inevitable'. Since the war Britain had been 'living far beyond its means, supported by foreign aid; the day of reckoning has now come'. The reality of the country's economic decline had been obscured by 'the huge gifts and loans received from the United States and Canada, amounting in the years 1946 to 1950 to nearly £2,000 million -

an average of £400 million a year'. This £2,000 million helped pay for over one-third of Britain's imports from outside the sterling area and more than one-fifth of its total imports. However, as Cherwell noted in June 1952, '[n]ot only have these gifts and loans ceased, but we are now ... beginning to pay them back at a rate of £40 million a year (in addition to £40 million interest) ... And, as you [Churchill] have said, no one is going to keep the British lion as a pet'.[10] Reviewing the economic situation after a year in office, Butler told the Cabinet that there had been little improvement. In doing so he pinpointed another major reason for continued economic difficulty: the burden of sustaining the massive rearmament programme forced on Britain and the other N.A.T.O. allies by the United States in the wake of the Korean war in 1950 ...

> We were all agreed when we took office that the defence programme which we inherited was beyond the nation's means. It was based on assumptions about American aid and the strength of our economy which have since been proved false ... Anything more than the current level of expenditure means moving towards a war economy, with radical revision of our social and economic policies.[11]

Britain's economic problems inevitably affected the way in which the country's foreign policy was framed and executed. In short, external policy had to be affordable. To the dismay of the Defence Ministry, the War Office and the three Services, this meant cutting defence spending, and a number of historians have passed comment on the 'seemingly paradoxical' sight of a Conservative Government reducing the scale of a defence programme introduced by a Labour Administration.[12] It also meant avoiding any new overseas commitments and reducing the cost of existing ones. On 18 June 1952 Eden addressed this last question head-on in a lengthy and seminally important Cabinet memorandum on 'British Overseas Obligations'. This document provides the political counterpoise to the Chiefs of Staffs'

parallel and much discussed 1952 Global Strategy paper, the central conclusion of which - that British defence policy should henceforth rely principally on an independent nuclear deterrent rather than large conventional forces - was likewise reached with economic requirements very much in mind.[13]

Eden set himself the task of examining 'where if anywhere our responsibilities can be reduced so as to bring them more into line with our available resources'. He continued:

> The essence of a sound foreign policy is to ensure that a country's strength is equal to its obligations ... It is becoming clear that rigorous maintenance of the presently-accepted policies of Her Majesty's Government at home and abroad is placing a burden on the country's economy which it is beyond the resources of the country to meet. A position has been reached where there is no reserve and therefore no margin for unforeseen additional obligations.

Eden argued that, in consequence, existing commitments must be either reduced or shared with others but in such a way as to avoid damaging Britain's standing as a front-rank Power. If this failed to ease the economic situation then 'a choice of the utmost difficulty lies before the British people, for they must either give up, for a time, some of the advantages which a high standard of living confers upon them, or, by relaxing their grip in the outside world, see their country sink to the level of a second-class Power, with injury to their essential interests and way of life of which they can have little conception'.

On reflection, Eden came out in favour of burden-sharing and suggested spreading responsibility for 'one or two major obligations'. Here he had in mind the defence of the Middle East, for which Britain presently bore sole responsibility, and - of relevance to the present discussion - South-East Asia, where it was informally shared with the French by dint of their

interest in Indo-China. 'The security and defence of South East Asia is of very great importance' ...

> In conditions short of general war any sign of weakness invol -ving even a partial reduction of effort there, would be most damaging to ourselves and an immense encouragement to the Comm -unists. The remedy here lies in committing the United States and Australia and New Zealand to the defence of Malaya and Indo-China, perhaps by the establishment of a Far Eastern Regional Security Pact on N.A.T.O. lines.

For the moment the ideal of a broad-based Asian N.A.T.O. was unrealisable, the greatest obstacle being the commitment of many Asian countries to a policy of non-alignment in the Cold War. This left the security of South-East Asia in the immediate future primarily in the hands of the three major Western Powers plus Australia and New Zealand. And of over-riding importance in this respect was the active involvement of the United States:

> Our aim should be to persuade the United States to assume the real burdens in such organisations, while retaining for ourselves as much political control - and hence prestige and world influence - as we can.[14]

This approach may be termed power-by-proxy - the desire to wield power and influence without possessing it or, more accurately, using the power of the United States to achieve essentially British ends. This, of course, was by no means a new departure in British external policy. What is interesting is that it belies a common view of Eden in the 1950s as 'out of touch with reality ... He had never adjusted his thoughts to the altered status of Britain'. Also that he failed to appreciate the 'gulf between national resources and the multitude of political problems whose outcome the United Kingdom desired to influence' and that he made 'no attempt at a long term assessment' of the problems facing Britain. Or, in Anthony Verrier's trenchant phrase, he succumbed to 'the temptation of the illusion of power'.[15] However, as Eden's June 1952 Cabinet paper demonstrates, this

was by no means the case. How successful Eden was in effecting power-by-proxy is another matter. Indeed this study is in some ways an assessment of how this approach was applied to the specific issues of Indo-China and South-East Asian defence.

From the start Eden foresaw problems. In his Cabinet paper he noted the Truman Administration's record of hesitancy when it came to discussing collective defence arrangements in the Middle East and mainland Asia. On the other hand, Eden felt that if Britain could no longer hold certain positions in the world, the Americans would not, in the final analysis, permit any ensuing power vacuums to be filled by hostile influences. In support of this he cited the Greek precedent of 1947. In South-East Asia, the Americans were doubtful about British motives and feared becoming 'an instrument to prop up a declining British Empire'. Eden ended his discourse by highlighting Britain's specific role...

> a policy of this kind will only be successful with the United States in so far as we are able to demonstrate that we are making the maximum possible effort ourselves, and the more gradually and inconspicuously we can transfer the real burdens from our own to American shoulders, the less damage we shall do to our position and influence in the world.'[16]

In this sense, the pursuit of a collective defence for South-East Asia was a reflection of the Churchill Administration's attempt to solve what has been termed the 'fundamental problem of how to sustain a world role with diminishing resources in a hostile and swiftly changing environment'.[17] Moreover, the general policy outlined in Eden's Cabinet paper helps explain why this objective transcended the reduction of the Chinese threat to Indo-China after February 1952. Prestige was an end in itself.

There were however additional reasons. As seen, the first half of 1952 had revealed the existence of far-reaching American plans for retaliative

action against the P.R.C. which the British felt carried an ominous risk of general war. A related concern was that such a war might start, not through calculated Chinese aggression, but by American provocation of Peking. Within a collective defence framework, however, Britain would be in a position to counsel caution or exercise restraint over American policy as necessary. There was little doubt by mid-1952 that the United States was at least informally and unilaterally commited to resist Chinese encroachment in South-East Asia.[18] But Eden wanted something more - a commitment that could be controlled. Even if other determinants had not been present, British alarm about unfettered, independent, United States retaliatory action against the P.R.C. would on its own have ensured that defence co-operation remained a live issue. Only by placing American power within a multilateral defence mechanism could limitations be placed on the scope of Washington's policy. And the longer co-ordination was delayed, the greater the chance of a precipitate unilateral response by the United States to a future crisis. But what made for continued Anglo-American disagreement was, ironically, precisely Washington's marked reluctance to have its freedom of action circumscribed by allegiance to the *diktats* of what it deemed its over-cautious allies.

The British were given a vivid reminder of why the exercise of American power needed to be checked when, on 23 June 1952, the United States bombed, for the first time in the context of the Korean war, power stations on the Yalu river.[19] Though not actually on Chinese soil, these power stations did supply their airfields and came, in the British view, perilously close to an unprovoked extension of the Korean war to China proper, a course of action to which the Churchill Administration was solidly opposed. To make matters worse, the bombing occurred less than a month after Acheson had

assured Eden that the United States was determined to do nothing to provoke a war with China. Worse still, the British had not been consulted prior to the incident.[20] Only four days before, Eden had argued in Cabinet that Britain, by its contribution to the common cause in Korea, had acquired a 'right to American consideration in matters affecting ... the Far East generally'.[21] Although Eden was obliged to water-down his criticism of the United States following a plea from the Prime Minister to avoid a public display of disunity, the episode underlined the need for collective defence planning in South-East Asia.[22] The French shared this view, Schuman telling the British Ambassdor in Paris, Sir Oliver Harvey, that the American action 'proved the need for some kind of permanent body for consultation on South East Asian affairs'.[23] When Eden eventually spoke to Acheson it was, as the latter recalled, to plead for 'no more surprises'.[24]

If these were all sound reasons for continuing to strive for a co-ordinated defence despite diminishing evidence of aggressive Chinese intentions, at the same time there was little sign in the weeks following the Paris E.D.C. conference that Anglo-American differences had narrowed on the question of retaliation. This was the principal hindrance to detailed defence planning and the attainment of British *desiderata*.[25] On 18 June, Acheson gave Ambassador Franks the clearest espousal yet of the Truman Administration's post-policy review position on Indo-China, the substance of which, when juxtaposed with British thinking, highlights the extent of the Anglo-American divergence. Acheson favoured a warning to China which, if ignored and an invasion of Tonking ensued, should be followed by stern counter-measures. However, to confine these to Viet-Nam 'would not hurt the Chinese very much' when, in actual fact, their primary object should be to hurt the Chinese 'as much as we could'. Accordingly, 'air forces should

strike widely and generally in China and there should be a general sea blockade which would interrupt the very considerable volume of trade entering China'. Acheson was at pains to stress that it was not his Government's intention 'to unseat the Communist Government in Peking' and that they had taken into account the Sino-Soviet Treaty 'and the threat of world war'. Though a risk remained it was not sufficiently large to make such action 'unwise'. This, the American concluded, represented 'the best views the United States Government had been able to form so far about a very difficult position'.[26]

In the Foreign Office, the Head of the South-East Asia Department thought Acheson's remarks showed that 'the American view is now very much closer to our own'.[27] In truth this was far from the case. For one thing, Eden had come out firmly against an open warning, both because of the absence of an agreed policy on retaliation and because it might provoke that which it was designed to deter.[28] Instead, cleverly dove-tailing this position with the on-going necessity of placing American participation in regional defence on a multilateral footing, Eden hoped to see the early establishment of 'a joint allied machinery to plan a coordinated defence of the region'. By the simple fact of its existence, this grouping would act as a deterrent. Eden's plan was to convince Peking of the West's determination to resist further aggression 'by tangible evidence' rather than open warnings.[29] Acheson was duly informed of this on 19 June.[30] Eden's advisers, however, were inclined (as they would be in 1954) to play down differences with the Americans and to recommend against pressing opposition to a warning too strongly.[31] This attitude is not difficult to explain. Mirroring Churchill's outlook, there was clearly some concern in the Foreign Office that continued disunity might sour Anglo-American

relations in other areas. More specifically, Eden's officials were aware that the impasse on retaliative action was holding up defence co-ordination *per se* and judged that it might be better to formalise the American commitment to South-East Asia first, then seek to modify Washington's views within a planning agency. Eden, though, was disinclined to lend even implicit support to Washington's plans for massive retaliation. Acquiescence in this was too high a price to pay for British ambitions.

Eden and Acheson had a further opportunity to discuss South-East Asia on 26 June when the two met in London prior to talks with the French the following day. At first sight, this meeting seemed to pave the way for a *rapprochement*, Acheson proposing a new military conference on regional defence to take up where the Washington talks in January and February had left off. Australia and New Zealand should also participate. The American hoped that the military experts might be provided with a series of 'political' guidelines to help them overcome their differences, a conclusion which the Foreign Office had already reached.[32] By eliminating those forms of action which, militarily, made good sense but were, politically, impracticable, the Chiefs of Staff of the five powers would in theory have less scope for disagreement. Left on their own, the Service Chiefs were liable to waste time arguing about what *should* be done whereas it was the task of the politicians to decide what *could* be done - a subtle but important difference. At the expanded meeting the next day the proposal for talks with political guidance was accepted. Schuman, interestingly, showed himself closer to Eden's position than Acheson's by opposing a direct warning to China as unduly antagonistic and in expressing the hope that a 'permanent military organisation' might be created covering not only Indo-China but all of South-East Asia. Acheson raised no serious

objection. Thus the London talks held out some prospect of progress although the central and near-irreconcilable Anglo-American difference concerning the scale of military action against China remained.[33] However, the idea of 'political guidance' seemed to provide Eden with an opportunity to move forward on his terms by ensuring that it was the British and not the American thesis on retaliation which was accepted as the basis for discussion at the projected military talks.

The Foreign Office wasted little time. On 28 June, at meeting of senior British, French and American officials - convened at the behest of the Foreign Ministers the previous day to establish a provisional political platform - it was the British who seized the initiative by tabling a draft basis of discussion. Neither the French nor the Americans had undertaken similar extensive preparation. The principal features of the draft were that if China committed aggression in South-East Asia 'joint action *would* be taken [emphasis added]'; that this should not be designed to overthrow the Peking Government only to cause it to desist from aggression; the action should reduce 'to the minimum' the risk of 'provoking armed Soviet support to China'; counter-measures, 'at any rate to begin with, should if possible be confined to the area of aggression and support areas of Chinese territory'; and lastly, it would be necessary to demonstrate in advance to Peking that 'aggression will not pay'. The next military conference should frame its recommendations with these guidelines in mind. The British also called for the setting up of a formal military organisation to co-ordinate planning, the course favoured by Eden as less openly provocative to the Chinese than a stiff and direct warning. At the heart of the British draft was an appreciation of Indo-China, particularly Tonking, as 'one of the positions of paramount military importance to the Free World in Asia.[34]

The French and the Americans left London to ponder the British proposals but, from the outset, political guidance was a non-starter. Why the Foreign Office should have thought otherwise is surprising. After all, if the Truman Administration accepted the British draft it would be rejecting the views of its own Military. Likewise any modification of the draft by the Foreign Office would be to undercut their own Chiefs of Staff. The problem was that both the Foreign Office and State Department largely shared the outlook of their respective Military establishments. This meant perforce that each would propose guidelines which were political mirror-images of the military positions adhered to by their Chiefs of Staff. 'The last thing we any of us want to do is to get further tied up in China', minuted Eden on 11 July, succinctly summarising the attitude of the British Military.[35] Acheson, conversely, felt it 'important to hurt the Chinese as much as we could' and that 'air forces should strike widely and generally in China and there should be a general sea blockade'.[36] Moreover, while Acheson was in London the State Department had drawn up a report for the National Security Council which argued that if Anglo-French support for such action was not forthcoming, 'the United States should consider taking unilateral action'.[37]

Over the next two months, the Foreign Office persisted in a myopic belief that the U.S. Government would simply drop its support for unlimited retaliation and accept progress on South-East Asian defence on the basis of British political precepts. Officials may have been encouraged by swift French acceptance of their draft basis of discussion, but it was American adherance that mattered.[38] This was made less likely still when Eden actually stiffened the British draft by removing the words 'if possible' from the sentence 'action, at any rate to begin with, should if possible be

confined to the area of aggression'. This was consistent with his determination to limit the exercise of American power in South-East Asia. When an official suggested reinstating the words if the Americans pressed the issue, the Foreign Secretary was adamant: 'No', he retorted. 'This gives the Americans a freer hand than I am prepared to endure'.[39] Gradually the Foreign Office's political agenda was endorsed in London by the Chiefs of Staff, Minister of Defence, Commonwealth Relations Office and, finally, the Prime Minister.[40] In winning the latter's approval, Eden was careful to emphasise that 'the last thing we want to do is to be involved in fighting China' and that it was 'important that we should not appear to weaken in our desire to avoid further entanglements in the Far East'. This was necessary to allay Prime Ministerial qualms about 'being sprawled about in China' at the cost of the Western defence effort elsewhere. Eden accepted this, but also the obverse reality: '... we must play our part in collective resistance if China erupts again' and this could only be done effectively 'if there is advance consideration'.[41]

In the end this entire debate was academic. On 5 August, Franks informed London that the U.S. Government was poised to reject not only the British proposals but the whole concept of political guidance, the Pentagon leading the forces of opposition in Washington. Franks, after discussion with Elliot and Slessor (then in the United States), concluded that it was better to appease the Americans and accept military talks without political direction. Speaking for all three, the Ambassador counselled ...

> It seems to us important to get these [military] talks going not only because we want to do all we can to ensure the defence of South East Asia but because it is most desirable to influence American thinking and planning before an emergency happens. As things are at present, if Chinese aggression occurred the Americans would very likely rush into action which we would feel ill-advised.[42]

Ironically, it had been precisely in order to secure both of these objectives that Eden and his staff had placed such faith in political guidance. However, pressure quickly mounted to accept the Franks expedient. The Service Chiefs soon endorsed the revised format as did the Minister of Defence and, finally, Churchill.[43] The French also complied.[44] On 21 August, the Truman Administration formally proposed 'a purely military analysis of all military courses of action which the military capabilities of the powers concerned would make possible, in the event of Chinese armed aggression, to cause the Chinese to cease their aggression'.[45] The Foreign Office capitulated, agreed on a straight military conference in Washington at the end of September, but insisted that its established political criteria should be accepted by the British representatives as the yardstick against which the feasibility of any form of military action should be judged.[46]

On 9 September the Cabinet's Far East (Official) Committee was acquainted by the Foreign Office of the saga surrounding political guidance and how the U.S. Government had 'demurred, stating their preference for a purely military meeting, as they felt that any form of political guidance would tend to inhibit the talks'.[47] It would also, by extension, inhibit American freedom to indulge in massive retaliation. What the Americans had come to realise was that the very idea of political direction, let alone the Foreign Office precepts, was weighted on the side of circumspect military action and the British thesis on retaliation. Acheson, in proposing the idea in the first place, may not have discerned this. But when he did, it was inevitable that he and his Government should revert to the principle of straight military discussion. From the American perspective this *volte-face* is understandable. What is less so is that

Eden or his advisers should ever have thought it would be otherwise.

The forced abandonment of political guidance meant that Eden and the Foreign Office had to confront square-on the virtual certainty that the Washington military conference would again end in deadlock. That would complete a year of unrelieved failure as far as establishing a co-ordinated Western defence for South-East Asia was concerned. A year, moreover, of repeated British initiatives and American rebuttals. Disappointment with this stalemate might have been greater, however, if the P.R.C. was perceived in London as posing a real and immediate threat to Indo-China. But this was no longer so. Eden and his officials had continued to pursue a collective defence for the subsidiary reasons already outlined, but by September 1952 there was growing concern in London - a corollary of the stagnation of regional defence planning - that the Chinese dimension was a distraction. Unease had been mounting since January that there was a crisis brewing in Viet-Nam irrespective of Peking's intentions. In August a Foreign Office memorandum had warned of the danger of a 'victory for communism in Indo-China, *gained by local forces without large scale Chinese intervention* [emphasis added]'. This would do 'far more than offset their partial defeat in Korea: it will have far reaching results elsewhere'. Most notably, because of its dependence on the region as both a source of vital raw materials and a market for its exports, 'Japan could not afford to stay in the western camp if South-East Asia were communist-controlled.[48]

Viet-Minh success in the field, when combined with war weariness and disillusion in France, the unpopularity of the Bao Dai regime in Viet-Nam and continued French failure to grant the Associate States full independence, was increasingly viewed in London as the real problem in Indo-China. Regional defence planning continued to be important for those

reasons which sustained British interest even when Chinese aggression ceased to be an immediate concern. But in the last months of 1952 it came to be seen as merely one element in a multi-faceted problem and, if anything, the least serious. The Chinese dimension was superseded by what may be termed the French dimension and British diplomacy had to react accordingly.

NOTES

1. This review emerged in May as NSC paper No. 124/2, 'the strongest position that the US had adopted so far towards Southeast Asia', Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 102. It was approved by Truman in June, see *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 127-34.
2. FO 371/101058/78, FO record of Eden-Acheson meeting, 26 May 1952; also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 96-97.
3. FO 371/101058/72, Eden tel. 180 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.
4. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 83.
5. P. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey of International Affairs 1952*, p. 418. hereafter *Survey 1952*. At the Washington military conference in Jan-uary the French had spoken of a Chinese attack 'within 14 days', DEFE 4/51 COS(52)8th meeting, 15 Jan. 1952. See also FO 371/101059/97, Graves tel. 195, 22 June 1952; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower The President* (London 1984), pp. 100-101
6. FO 371/101262/60G, FO brief for Eden, 20 June 1952.
7. CAB 131/12 D(52) 41 & 45, 29 Sept. & 21 Oct. 1952.
8. CAB 129/48 C(51)1, 31 Oct. 1951.
9. HCDebs Vol. 493, cols. 191-96, 7 Nov. 1951. On the economic problems facing the Government see also Selden, *Indian Summer*, pps. 21-22, 169-70; Morgan, *People's Peace*, pps. 112-13, 126-27; Anthony Howard, *RAB: The Life of R. A. Butler* (London 1987), pp. 183-84; Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (London 1971), pp. 156-57.
10. Cherwell Papers (Nuffield College, Oxford), J. 111, memos. to Churchill, 21 & 28 May, 18 June 1952.
11. CAB 129/55 C(52)320, 3 Oct. 1952.
12. CAB 129/54 C(52)253 & 64, 27 & 28 July 1952; Selden, *Indian Summer*, p. 14; Morgan, *People's Peace*, pp. 126-27; Crockatt and Smith, *Cold War*, p. 67; D. C. Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900-75* (Cambridge 1975), pp. 123-24, hereafter *John Bull*.
13. On the 1952 Global Strategy Paper see Michael Dockrill, *British Defence Since 1945* (Oxford 1988), pp. 45-48, hereafter *British Defence*; Selden, *Indian Summer*, pp. 330-33; Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 94-95; David Dilks, ed., *Retreat From Power: Vol. II - After 1939* (London 1981) pp. 160-61; John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations 1939-84 (London 1984), pp. 67-69. The economic situation began to improve from late 1952, see Morgan, People's Peace*, p. 113; Blake, *Decline of Power*, p. 345.
14. CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 18 June 1952
15. Shlaim, et al, *British Foreign Secretaries*, pp. 90-91; Paul Kennedy, *The*

Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy 1865-1980 (Glasgow, 1981 ed), p. 373; Anthony Verrier, *Through the Looking Glass: British Foreign Policy in an Age of Illusions* (London 1983), p. 82, hereafter *Looking Glass*.

16. CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 18 June 1952.
17. Anthony Adamthwaite in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 3
18. See Administration statements collated in FO 371/101267/4G, FO brief for Eden, 30 Jan. 1952 and Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p. 401. Also FO 371/90938/41G, Truman message to Churchill, 28 Dec, 1951; CAB 21/3057, Acheson to British officials, 5 & 8 Jan. 1952; FO 371/101262/54G, Franks tel. 1168, 18 June 1952. Also *The Pentagon Papers* (Senator Gravel edition): *The Department of Defense History of United States Decision-Making on Vietnam* (Boston 1971, 4 vols), Vol. I, pp. 82-88, hereafter *Pentagon Papers*; Geoffrey Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 233.
19. PREM 11/111, Steel (Washington) tel. to FO, 24 June 1952; Carlton, *Eden*, p. 318.
20. Carlton, ibid.
21. CAB 128/25 CC(52)61st meeting, 19 June; CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 18 June 1952.
22. CAB 128/25 CC(52)63rd meeting, 26 June 1952.
23. FO 371/101738/1, Harvey tel. 367, 26 June 1952.
24. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (London 1969), p. 656, hereafter *Creation*.
25. FO 371/101261/52G, Murray min., 14 June 1952.
26. FO 371/101262/54G, Franks tel. 1168, 18 June 1952.
27. FO 371/101262/54G, Murray min., 19 June 1952.
28. FO 371/101262/53G, Scott min. 6 June, Eden min. (n.d.); FO 371/101261/52G, Eden min., 15 June 1952.
29. FO 371/101262/53G & 55G, Eden tel. 2379 to Washington, 13 June, Franks tel. 1186, 20 June 1952.
30. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, pp. 114-15.
31. FO 371/101262/60G, FO brief for Eden, 20 June 1952.
32. FO 371/101262/57G & 53G, FO record of Eden-Acheson meeting, 26 June, Scott min., 6 June 1952.
33. FO 800/781/57, record of tripartite meeting, 27 June 1952.
34. FO 371/101262/61G, record of meeting of British, French and American officials, 28 June. Eden's position on joint planning machinery is most clearly expressed in FO 371/101262/53G, Eden tel. 2379 to Washington, 13 June and in a min., 15 June 1952, in FO 371/101261/52G.
35. FO 371/101262/67G & 60G, Eden min., 11 July, FO brief for Eden, 20 June 1952.
36. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 136-37; FO 371/101262/54G, Franks tel. 1168, 18 June 1952.
37. *FRUS*, ibid, p. 132.
38. FO 371/101262/63G, Massigli letter to Eden, 4 July 1952. US discussions in *FRUS*, ibid, pp. 143-56.
39. FO 371/101263/74G, mins by Tahourdin (22 July), Eden (24 July) & Shuck-burgh (26 July) 1952.
40. The Chiefs of Staff proposed, and the Foreign Office rejected, some minor amendments, see FO 371/101262/62G & 67G, Scott letter to Ewbank (COS Secretariat), 4 July, Tahourdin min., 10 July, Strang & Eden mins., 11 July 1952. Also, FO 371/101263/74G, Salisbury min. & Colville min. to Crawley (CRO), 7 Aug. 1952.

41. FO 371/101263/74G, Eden min. to Churchill, 1 Aug. & Churchill in HCDebs Vol.503, col. 285, also cols. 270-73 & 285-86 (1 July 1952).
42. FO 371/101263/77G, Franks tel. 1485, 5 Aug. 1952; also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XII, Pt.1, pps. 184-86, 210-11.
43. DEFE 4/55, COS(52)111th meeting, 6 Aug. & 114th meeting, 12 Aug; FO 371/101263/79G & 85G, Alexander min. to Eden, 19 Aug., Salisbury min. to Lloyd, 13 Aug., Churchill min. to Eden, 30 Aug. 1952.
44. FO 371/101263/81G & 90G, Scott mins., 14 & 29 Aug. 1952.
45. FO 371/101263/83G, Top Secret State Dept. memo. and covering min. by Olver, 21 Aug. 1952.
46. FO 371/101263/83G, Eden tel. 3515 to Washington, 1 Sept., also -/79G, mins. by Tahourdin (13 Aug) & Eden (14 Aug) 1952.
47. CAB 134/897, FE(O)(52)10th meeting, 9 Sept. 1952.
48. FO 371/101263/99G, Scott memo., 30 Aug. 1952.

PART II: THE FRENCH DIMENSION

CHAPTER THREE

THE GROWTH OF FRENCH DEFEATISM

January to May 1952

During the course of 1952 war-weariness in France became a far more potent threat to Viet-Nam's non-Communist future than a hypothetical Chinese invasion. The Indo-China war had never been popular in France but, in the last months of 1951 and coinciding with General de Lattre's illness, public disillusionment reached new heights of 'weariness and disgust' while in the National Assembly opposition to the war from the usual quarters (the Communists, Socialists and some Radicals) intensified.[1] In the Foreign Office, the first signs of disquiet at this turn of events is detectable at departmental level from January 1952 when leading figures in the Centre-Right Governments of, first, René Pleven and, after 17 January, Edgar Faure, tentatively raised the possibility of a negotiated peace and a military withdrawal. Hitherto successive French Governments had been firm in their determination to see the war through to a successful conclusion. As recently as October 1951 a senior official at the British Embassy in Paris expressed confidence that 'the present Government will certainly not agree to withdrawal, and the same is true of any right-wing government which might take its place'.[2] Now, however, it appeared that the French authorities were beginning to think in terms of liquidating their commitment in South-East Asia for reasons entirely unconnected with the 'threat' to Viet-Nam from the P.R.C. But to British observers, given the present military balance, negotiations with Ho Chi Minh could only be

conducted from a position of weakness. This might produce in the short-term a face-saving compact allowing the French to disengage their forces with some semblance of honour, but in the long-term the feeling was that it would lead to the complete communisation of Indo-China by, as it were, default. And the consequences for Britain and the West of such a development were at least as great as those impended by Chinese absorbtion.

The factors which underlay French 'weariness and disgust' were examined on 23 December 1951 in a letter to Strang from Sir Oliver Harvey in Paris. Harvey noted that many people in France were now beginning to question why, and for what possible advantage, the war was being fought. With the creation of the Associate State system in 1949-1950 the French had agreed to 'convert their colonial position ... into a sort of Commonwealth one in which full autonomy and virtual independence were promised the local states' and, accordingly, French officials and soldiers would be expected to leave Indo-China 'as soon as the war is over'. In other words, despite the continued limitations of Associate State freedom, the war was no longer considered a war for French territory and increasingly unpopular for that reason. French public opinion was also unhappy with the amount of 'blood and treasure' expended on Indo-China and, related to this, the 'heavy handicap' the war imposed on the build-up of the French Army in Europe as part of N.A.T.O.'s rearmament programme. Opposition to the war in Parliament was based partly on this consideration and partly on the strain on the country's domestic economy. Finally, there was a widespread feeling that if, as repeatedly claimed by the French authorities, Indo-China was integral to the security of the whole free world community, France's allies should take on more of the material burden.[3]

However, in a despatch on 2 January 1952, Harvey observed that

regardless of this disaffection, the existing policy of maintaining the position continued to receive majority support in Parliament because the 'disastrous effects' of withdrawal in terms of French prestige, and the 'impossibility of negotiating with the Vietminh' and so appeasing communism, were both widely accepted. Instead, the Government looked to a 'general Far Eastern settlement' between the West and the P.R.C., commencing with agreement on a Korean armistice and, later, including a Chinese promise on non-interference in Indo-China. Negotiations with the P.R.C. could be portrayed in France as Great Power Diplomacy and so avoid the humiliation of talking to Ho Chi Minh. Moreover, deprived of Chinese aid, the threat from the Viet-Minh would be greatly reduced and the chances of French success enhanced. But until this fanciful panacea materialised, France had no choice but to continue the war. Indeed Government spokesmen insisted that victory remained the objective. To Harvey, however, this 'outward optimism' was based on some questionable premises: that American aid would increase and its delivery be speeded up; that a military solution was possible relatively quickly; that China would not intervene; and that de Lattre would return. In many ways de Lattre was the key. The 'delicate balance of opinion which at present tilts towards a continuance of the war', Harvey averred, 'has ... one weighty piece in the right tray: General de Lattre ... He is the man who has worked the miracle of French recovery in Indo-China, and he is probably the only man who can go on working it'.[4]

Nine days later de Lattre was dead, a victim not of the Viet-Minh but of cancer. Although Eden later reflected that France's 'slender' chances of winning the war were 'further diminished' as a consequence, in truth it had little impact on the military situation.[5] Admittedly, a deterioration had set in soon after de Lattre's return to Paris, but Graves, assessing

matters from Saigon, believed this would 'almost certainly have been the case even if de Lattre had been personally directing operations' for he had been less of a genius in the field of military strategy than in 'leadership'. Even the morale of the French forces remained remarkably good in the wake of the General's passing.[6] The same, however, could not be said of the politicians in Paris. Arguably the most important consequence of de Lattre's death was the crisis of confidence it precipitated in metropolitan France. Prior to the onset of his illness there had been no hint that the Pleven Administration had any thought of a political solution to the war.[7] Yet as soon as it became clear that de Lattre would not return, both the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister declared separately and in public that no opportunity would be neglected to bring the war to a peaceful conclusion. So close were Schuman's remarks in a speech on 6 January 1952 to a statement of France's intention to pull out of Indo-China forthwith that the Quai d'Orsay was obliged to issue an official disclaimer.[8] Perhaps most revealingly, a State Department official, returning from Paris to Washington via the Foreign Office in mid-January, depicted the French Government's reaction to de Lattre's death as 'a mixture of dismay and relief, dismay at the loss of a brilliant French soldier tempered by relief that Paris would now be free from the constant pressure he exerted'.[9]

It would appear, therefore, that only de Lattre's towering reputation and his rather bullying personality had kept Government irresolution in check, and with his departure French Ministers found themselves free to consider cheaper and quicker solutions. Graves for one believed 'it needs the leadership of a personality as strong as de Lattre's to give the French the heart to carry on with the sacrifices they are making with so little

apparent effect'.[10] In the Foreign Office there was some concern that with de Lattre gone so too had the determination to pursue military victory and that France was instead preparing for compromise and ultimate evacuation.[11] There are any number of dates in the early 1950's which may be singled out as a turning-point, the moment at which the French position became hopeless and humiliation only a matter of time. One such is certainly 11 January 1952 and the death of de Lattre for thereafter the spine of political support for the war in Paris was fatally fractured.

During February reports began to reach the Foreign Office referring to the damaging effect on French and native morale in Viet-Nam caused not by de Lattre's passing but by indications that the Government in Paris was seeking to detach itself from its responsibilities. The related inference was that the war would not now be won or lost solely on the battlefield but to a large extent in the Chamber of Deputies.[12] Jean Letourneau, the Minister for the Associate States, spent a month in Viet-Nam attempting to dispel local 'alarm and despondency' by emphasising his Government's determination to complete Indo-China's independence, to continue the fight and not to parley with the enemy.[13] Yet even he, at a press conference towards the end of his visit, advanced the view that France could not 'on principle reject the slightest opportunity of ending hostilities'. A further pointer to the future was Letourneau's announcement that the French Expeditionary Corps would no longer be reinforced, the Government's policy being to pass responsiblity for Viet-Nam's defence to the native Army, currently in process of formation.[14]

On top of these public statements the Foreign Office gave credence to secret intelligence which suggested that Letourneau had been in contact with the Viet-Minh while he was in Viet-Nam, that France sought Soviet

mediation to arrange a truce, and that French officials had spoken to representatives of the P.R.C. with a view to opening an alternative channel for negotiation.[15] At the same time, military developments were also causing concern, notably the evacuation of Hoa Binh at the end of February.[16]. Although de Lattre's successor, General Salan, claimed it was a tactical retreat, the French High Command in Indo-China had earlier described the fate of Hoa Binh as 'materially affecting' the outcome of the war, and the eventual withdrawal of some 20,000 troops was 'widely regarded as a major defeat and a great blow to French prestige, was nationally distressing and strengthened the currents of French pessimism and defeatism'.[17]

By March a disturbed Foreign Office began to consider ways and means of arresting the apparent drift of French policy towards wholesale withdrawal for, as one leading official put it, in present circumstances 'negotiations for an armistice would be negotiation from weakness, and it is difficult to see how they would result in anything but a Communist victory'.[18] Matters were deemed sufficiently serious to set in train a joint Foreign Office-Chiefs of Staff study which was eventually put to the Cabinet's Defence Committee on 19 March. Referring to 'disturbing indications that French determination to continue the fight in Indo-China may be weakening', the paper argued that a French withdrawal would be 'a major victory for Communism' and would have 'grave consequences in Hong Kong and Malaya'. With the inevitable capitulation of Burma and Siam, communism would be brought to the borders of Malaya where the resulting reinforcement would be a considerable - and risky - undertaking since it would be 'at the expense of our promised contribution to [N.A.T.O.] in the opening phases of the hot war, and ... will thus imply a major revision of our global strategy'.

Yet, having laid out these cogent reasons why the French should be encouraged to maintain their present effort, the authors of the study could suggest no means by which Britain might contribute to this end. They rather lamely observed that the limited assistance which might be offered from over-stretched military reserves would not materially affect the situation unless accompanied by a substantial American contribution including ground forces. But apart from the fact that internationalising the war in this way might provoke Chinese intervention, Washington was expected to be 'very reluctant' to shoulder so extensive a commitment. Nor was Britain in a position to offer any financial, material or even logistic support (and hence encouragement) to France. Again only the United States possessed this capacity.[19]

These negative conclusions highlight the severe constraints which economic factors - particularly the imperative of avoiding additional commitments - placed on Britain's Indo-China policy. On one level, it was undoubtedly important to see the French win through. On another, Britain had nothing to offer its ally but verbal support. Yet, paradoxically, should the French position collapse Britain would have no option but to reinforce Malaya and accept the unwelcome and debilitating economic consequences of that undertaking. One would imagine, therefore, that there was something to be said for avoiding the need for so major a sacrifice in the future by summoning up in the present some means of assisting the French and underpinning their morale. The scale of this commitment would be considerably less than that required should Indo-China fall to communism and Malaya require reinforcement for, if France maintained its position, French troops, by defending Viet-Nam, would in effect be defending Malaya.

With hindsight there appears to have been a clear choice facing the Churchill Administration: an immediate financial or material gesture to prop up the French or, if that were not forthcoming, a potentially daunting outlay in men, money and equipment if the French will to continue the fight crumbled and general evacuation ensued. At the time a third course was favoured - vacillation. Even with so influential a figure as Montgomery, Deputy Supreme Commander of N.A.T.O. forces in Europe, insisting that 'we cannot allow the British Army to be sucked into Malaya', the idea of investing in Viet-Nam to avoid this danger does not appear to have been seriously entertained.[20] In the end, one is struck by the short-sightedness with which the British Government approached the problem of shoring-up French morale in March 1952 when, as most agreed, the 'key to the defence of Malaya lies in Indo-China'.[21] The mitigating factor was, again, the economic plight of the country. Even so, British caution knew no bounds. This was demonstrated by the refusal of the Defence Committee to agree on an approach to the United States about upping its assistance to France (held by the British Service Chiefs to be 'one of the most effective means of buttressing the French will to continue the struggle') on the grounds that if Washington assented it might be at the expense of the 'small amount of aid' currently given to Britain.[22]

A further consequence of Britain's economic difficulties was a readiness to wait on events rather than embark upon immediate and potentially costly action. Hence Churchill's advice to the Defence Committee that it was 'too early to assume the worst' and that there might be 'many developments in the world situation before a real threat to Malaya developed' although it would be 'prudent' to make plans. Tellingly, this was to be done 'without expenditure of money or resources'.[23] Churchill,

as ever, wished to bring 'local events in the Far East into their proper relationship to our predominating danger in Europe'.[24] Inevitably, the Defence Committee's deliberations must be looked at in the context of power-by-proxy. And here one is struck by the contrast between the two main elements of that principle as it was applied to Indo-China. Firstly, British efforts to bring the Americans into a defence grouping for South-East Asia in order to continue to exert an influence in the region above that which its diminishing power would otherwise allow, is an example of positive diplomacy. Secondly, the related imperative of avoiding additional commitments and of making foreign policy affordable produced an entirely negative and ineffective policy when it came to dealing with the prevailing situation in Viet-Nam and the problem of French morale.

In the event, Churchill's wait-and-see approach was partially vindicated. By the end of March the French Government (now under the leadership of Antoine Pinay) seemed to have recovered its nerve. For this Letourneau was primarily responsible. In firm public statements during March, and in private talks at the Foreign Office, he succeeded in quashing rumours of an imminent French withdrawal, a development which Eden found 'heartening'.[25] Strang concluded that the French did not intend to pull out 'at present' although they 'might be forced to do so by a future internal crisis'.[26] It also emerged that the Foreign Office had read too much into its 'secret' information about French contacts with the Viet-Minh and Chinese. Eden was angry that these unsubstantiated reports had been passed on to the Americans who, privately, considered them unduly alarmist. As he made clear in a minute on 6 April, such rumour-mongering could only undermine rather than enhance the object of British policy: '... we must be

careful not to spread alarm & despondency ourselves about the French position in Indo-China ...

> It is a British interest that the French should stay in Indo-China and we should try to encourage them to do so and the Americans too.[27]

To be fair to Eden's staff, they had not invented a deterioration in French resolution since the death of de Lattre, they had merely over-stated it.[28] Moreover, the danger still remained that a sudden disintegration of government and parliamentary support for the war would presage an ignominous exit from Indo-China, or that a serious military reverse might occur should the morale of the French forces be undermined by the knowledge that their efforts were no longer appreciated in France itself. The extent of this last danger was underlined in a report from Harvey on 25 March in which he stated that it was no longer just the Communists and Socialists in the National Assembly that wanted an end to the war, rather the desire was 'almost universal'.[29] There was also a rumour that the French General Staff had recommended the evacuation of Tonking and thought complete evacuation inevitable. Though denied by the Pinay Administration, a Foreign Office submission for Eden in April warned that 'further internal difficulties in France might greatly increase the pressure for this, and the general French will to continue the struggle may, in any case, be questionable'.[30]

The unease which recent events in France and Viet-Nam had caused in the Foreign Office served a positive and unexpected end in that it revealed clearly, and for the first time, the duality of the problem which Indo-China posed for British diplomacy. As outlined by Assistant Under-Secretary R.H. Scott on 27 March, this was (i) what 'can and should be done in the event of open Chinese intervention' and (ii) what 'can and should be

done if, without open Chinese intervention, the French suffer serious reverses in Indo-China or for reasons of domestic and European policy are compelled to withdraw, at any rate from the North'.[31] Over the next few months the latter problem would come to outstrip the former in importance. For the moment, though, both considerations tended to converge as an Anglo-American commitment to come to the aid of France in the event of Chinese aggression assumed additional significance as a means of bolstering morale in Paris, Saigon and Hanoi in terms of the immediate struggle against the Viet-Minh. A Foreign Office brief for Eden in February had argued that unless Anglo-American disagreements on retaliation against China were resolved 'within a reasonably short time', the French 'may lose heart in Indo-China with incalculable effects on the whole situation in South East Asia'.[32] Later in the month a China Department paper made the same point, adding that without prior Anglo-American pledges French resistance might crumble immediately upon a Chinese incursion or, importantly, 'even in the face of intensified Vietminh activity, unsupported by overt Chinese intervention'.[33] Even the lacklustre politico-military memorandum put to the Defence Committee on 19 March accepted that the 'firm knowledge' that Britain and the United States would come to France's aid would be a 'direct contribution to French morale in Indo-China'.[34]

The French, however, were unlikely to be granted succour from that quarter given the Anglo-American impasse on retaliatory policy and the consequent stagnation of defence planning for South-East Asia. The Foreign Office was thus compelled to consider what could be done in the short-term to shore-up morale in Paris and ensure that enthusiasm for negotiations did not get out of hand. But, as ever, there was little that could be done since Britain 'could not offer practical help ... and it was not desirable

to urge the Americans to increase the scale of their financial aid to France'.[35] It transpired, however, that the Americans were themselves fully alive to the importance of further assistance. On 30 March, Acheson told Franks that he thought the French 'would stay in Indo-China and see it out' provided three conditions were met: that enough military assistance continued to reach them, that enough of the budget deficit in France caused by the war was covered by American dollars, and that enough progress was made in building up the native Viet-Namese Army so as to relieve the strain on French manpower through the gradual transfer of defence responsibility.[36]

For the remainder of April, and for much of May, British policy-makers were obliged to wait on events, unable themselves to offer help or even advice to the French for fear of inviting counter-demands, and speculating as to what moves the Truman Administration would make once its policy review was completed, the prolongation of which, as seen, also held up progress on regional defence planning.[37] This inertia might have been a cause for concern in London if the onset of the rains had not brought the campaigning season in Viet-Nam to a close until October and if the Pinay Administration had not continued to emit positive noises about its commitment to the Associate States. On 10 April, Letourneau reiterated in the National Assembly his Government's determination to stay in Indo-China until its task was complete and that there was no question of an appeal to Ho Chi Minh.[38] A week later Harvey reported that, barring any dramatic turn of events, 'the French will continue to hold their present line ... and to devote the necessary men and resources to this end'.[39] Welcome as this reconstitution of French purpose was, there was some speculation in London about what had really lain behind its recent fluctuations. On a

cynical reading, talk of negotiation and rumours of evacuation might have been deliberately cultivated by the French so as to frighten the Americans (and the British for that matter) into furbishing them with whatever level of assistance they subsequently asked for.[40] Harvey denounced the French as 'past masters in this tactic', while statements from military and political sources leant substance to the theory that France was 'priming' its allies for a new request for aid.[41]

On 16 March, for example, the *Observer* newspaper reported General Juin as saying that unless more help could be obtained from the United States, France would have to withdraw all but a small garrison from Indo-China to meet its commitments in Europe.[42] In his address to the National Assembly on 10 April, Letourneau 'indulged in the usual veiled reproaches for the insufficient gratitude shown by France's allies'.[43] If this was really the intention of the French Government it now appears to have comprised an element of self-deception, as concerned reporting by Graves underlined. 'Wending its way through this country like a trail of saltpetre', he informed Eden on 18 April, 'is the suggestion that "a military solution is no longer possible"', the corollary of which was a 'feeling' that the French Government was preparing the way 'for some alternative - though unprescribed - solution'. Graves concluded: 'if the present despondency spreads we will find ourselves in great difficulties, not because of military reverses, but because the determination to hold off the aggressor will have been allowed to weaken'.[44] Therefore, irrespective of whether French irresolution had been genuine or manufactured for an ulterior, financial, purpose, the damage to morale and the prospects of success in Viet-Nam discerned by Graves was the unwelcome and real outcome.

At last, on 19 May, the Truman Administration emerged from its drawn-

out policy review and Acheson was instructed by the President to take advantage of the presence of the British and French Foreign Ministers in Paris the following week for the signing of the European Defence Community (E.D.C.) Treaty in order to discuss Indo-China.[45] As already seen, in the context of planning to resist Chinese aggression the American policy review contributed little to narrowing differences with Britain on the question of retaliation. This, though, was not the only aspect of the Indo-China problem on which Eden was briefed by his officials. He was also made aware that the issue of greater aid to France to combat the immediate problem posed by the Viet-Minh was likely to come up in discussion. However, the advice offered in his brief was astonishing. On the one hand, the Foreign Office favoured increased supplies of American *material* aid for Indo-China 'provided this were not at the expense of ... defence assistance of higher priority elsewhere', but on the other, a substantial increase in American *financial* aid to France to underwrite the cost of the war (and which London had previously viewed as an essential antidote to French defeatism and early withdrawal[46]) was 'likely to be partly at least at our expense and we do not therefore favour it'. The brief concluded: 'The Secretary of State will doubtless prefer not to take any active part in any discussion of these points with M. Schuman and Mr. Acheson'.[47] Nothing demonstrates so vividly the confused and contradictory British perception of the Indo-China war at this time. Although it was a clear British interest that France stayed in Indo-China, the Churchill Government could not or would not offer any money or equipment to help achieve that end, nor would it press the United States to do so, and, when the latter was prepared to increase assistance of its own volition, the British felt unable to approve the action for fear that it would be at their expense. If Indo-China was

important to Britain, this position, based on a suffocatingly narrow evaluation of national self-interest, was quite extraordinary.

When the Paris talks got underway on 26 May with an informal Anglo-American exchange at the British Embassy, the provisions of Eden's brief were immediately rendered academic when Acheson revealed that his Government had already taken a firm decision on the question of further aid to France. In line with recent British conclusions, the American Secretary of State considered that a French withdrawal from Indo-China would be 'a disaster of such magnitude' affecting their other interests and national prestige that 'provided they were assisted, there was a fair prospect of their [the French] being able to continue to hold on'. In this connection, Letourneau had been invited to Washington the following month to discuss the matter.[46] The British could only wait and see what this meeting produced, doubtless hoping that France would obtain what was necessary for her to prosecute the war more vigorously - hoping, too, that extra help would not be matched by a comensurate reduction in American assistance to Europe in general.

Two days later at a formal tripartite meeting in the Quai d'Orsay Acheson's sympathy for French requirements was severely tested by their aggressive and forceful diplomacy. Confident that the Americans were now committed to providing greater help, Defence Minister Pleven decided he had little to lose by making a case for as large an appropriation as possible. His tactic was to dwell on the unfortunate Eurocentric consequences of France's present effort in South-East Asia. A 'rapid and considerable increase in the military power of France was essential' in terms of enhancing West European security, he argued. But the 'main obstacle' to this was the Indo-China war which absorbed a third of the country's defence

expenditure and immobilised 26 per cent of its officers. France was not fighting for itself but for the free world and was doing as much as it could with the aid currently available, thus France 'must have further aid if Europe is not to suffer'. Pleven followed up these remarks with a declaration that was destined to complicate British thinking about Indo-China as well as West European defence for the next two years:

> French forces in Europe must be at least equal to the German forces [in the European Defence Community], and should be somewhat greater in the interests of peace. Indo-China ... was the heart of European defence.[49]

According to the American record, Pinay added that the French Government was 'unanimously behind Mr. Pleven in this statement'.[50]

As will become clear, from the moment that the E.D.C. Treaty was signed the problems of German rearmament and the Indo-China conflict became inextricably entwined, the solution of one dependent upon the solution of the other, until their respective *dénouements* within a month of each other in the summer of 1954. As Eden himself conceded, the 'implications of the Indo-China problem now extended far beyond South-East Asia' for in view of 'French anxiety to maintain military parity with Germany, the fate of E.D.C. was in part dependent upon its solution'.[51] This was in fact an understatement. As events unfolded it became clear that Indo-China was one - possibly the major - justification or excuse by which successive French governments avoided putting the E.D.C. Treaty before the National Assembly for ratification. The British could never make their minds up whether Indo-China was a legitimate reason for delaying a vote on the Treaty or a useful device for postponing indefinitely that which few Frenchmen had any great love for, namely German rearmament. Moreover, because France insisted on the E.D.C. (and by extension German rearmament) only becoming

operative once the Treaty was ratified in the national parliaments of *all* signitories,[82] and because French ratification was continually deferred, one may contend that Indo-China contributed directly to Western Europe's continued vulnerability *vis-a-vis* the Soviet bloc during the 1951-1954 period. From May 1952 Indo-China superceded Korea as the bridge that linked the Cold War in Europe with the Cold War in Asia.

NOTES

1. Alexander Werth, *France 1940-1955* (London 1957), p. 550, hereafter *France*; FO 371/92428/79, Harvey letter to Strang, 23 Dec. 1951; FO 371/101728/1, Harvey despatch 1, 23 Feb. 1952 - Annual Review for 1951.
2. FO 371/92417/76, Hayter letter to Murray, 3 Oct. 1951.
3. FO 371/92428/79, Harvey letter to Strang, 23 Dec. 1951.
4. FO 371/101056/3, Harvey despatch 4, 2 Jan; also FO 371/101066/1, Harvey letter to MacDonald, 4 Jan; FO 371/101729/1, Harvey tel. 2, 2 Jan 1952. On the 'general Far Eastern settlement', see FO 371/92427/59, record of Morrison-de Lattre meeting, 5 Oct. 1951; FO 371/101057/38G, Hayter tel. 188, 1 April 1952; *Economist* ('The Cost of Indo-China') 5 Jan. & ('Danger South of China'), 12 Jan. 1952; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 82.
5. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 81.
6. FO 371/101047/6 & 8, Graves despatches 7 & 14, 18 & 24 Jan; FO 371/101056/15, Graves despatch 15, 25 Jan; FO 371/106742/1, Graves despatch 6, 9 Jan. 1952 - Annual Review for 1952.
7. FO 371/92427/51, Murray letter to Hood, 29 Sept. 1951; FO 371/92417/76 & 81, Hayter letter to Murray, 3 Oct. & Graves letter to Murray, 17 Oct. 1951; FO 371/101056/3, Harvey despatch 4, 2 Jan. 1952.
8. FO 371/101056/3, Harvey despatch 4, 2 Jan. & Murray min., 15 Jan; FO 371/101047/6, Graves despatch 7, 18 Jan; FO 371/101056/4, Harvey tel. 15, 8 Jan. 1952. See also Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p. 410.
9. FO 371/101259/23G, FO tel. 6 to Saigon, 19 Jan. 1952.
10. FO 371/101047/8, Graves despatch 14, 24 Jan. 1952. See also FO 371/101069/5, report 189 by Naval Attache, Paris Embassy, 24 Jan. 1952.
11. FO 371/101056/3, Olver min., 11 Jan. 1952.
12. FO 371/101066/3, Graves letter to MacDonald, 3 Feb; FO 371/101732/12 & 18, Harvey despatch 52, 6 Feb. & tel. 127, 29 Feb. 1952.
13. FO 371/101729/3, Hayter tel. 74, 29 Jan. 1952; FO 371/101056/12 & 21, Harris min. (30 Jan) & Graves despatch 24 (16 Feb) 1952.
14. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p. 410; *The Times*, 26 Feb and *The Economist*, 8 March ('Truce Chances in Indo-China') 1952.
15. See FO 371/101057/49G, FO tel. 1181 to Washington, 12 March; FO 371/101055/16G, mins. by Scott, Harris & Murray 4, 5, & 7 Feb. 1952.
16. See pp. 29-30.
17. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, pp. 425-27; FO 371/101056/24, Graves despatch 28, 27 Feb; FO 371/101729/8, Hayter tel. 173, 26 March 1952.
18. FO 371/101056/26G, Scott min., 3 March 1952.
19. CAB 131/12 D(52)5, 14 March; also FO 371/101260/37G, Olver min., 12 March 1952.

20. P.J.Grigg Papers (Churchill College Cambridge), 11/3, letter from Montgomery, 29 Nov. 1951
21. FO 371/101267/7G, FO brief for Macmillan, 25 Feb. 1952.
22. CAB 131/12 D(52)5, 14 March 1952.
23. CAB 131/12 D(52)2nd meeting, 19 March 1952.
24. Robert Rhodes James, ed., *Winston S. Churchill: The Complete Speeches*, Vol.VII (London 1974), p.8335.
25. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, pp.410-11; FO 371/101057/30G, Reading min. for Eden, 17 March 1952 & Eden min., n.d.
26. FO 371/101057/36G, Strang tel. 1085 to Paris, 28 March 1952.
27. FO 371/101058/59G, Eden min., 6 April; also FO 371/101057/34G, 37G, 38G & 40G, Graves despatch 114 (27 March), Eden min., n.d., Hayter tel. 188 (1 April) & Tomlinson (Washington) letter to Scott (31 March); FO 371/101058/59G, Strang min., 3 April 1952: *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XIII, Pt.1, pps. 52-54, 77-81.
28. *The Economist* ('Indo-Chinese Dilemma'), 5 April 1952.
29. FO 371/101057/33G, Harvey despatch 149, 25 March; also *The Economist* ('Truce Chances in Indo-China'), 8 March 1952.
30. FO 371/101057/35, 37, 48 & 49G, Hayter tel. 191 (27 March), reports by Military Attache, Paris Embassy (22 & 29 March) and letter to WO (10 April) & draft FO submission for Eden, n.d; FO 371/101058/52, Murray min., 30 April 1952.
31. FO 371/101057/36G, Scott min., 27 March 1952.
32. FO 371/101267/2G, FO brief for Eden, 16 Feb. 1952.
33. FO 371/101260/29G, China Dept. memo., 21 Feb. 1952.
34. CAB 131/12 D(52)5, 14 March 1952. See also FO 371/101057/49G, draft submission for Eden, n.d., April 1952.
35. FO 371/101057/36G, Scott min., 27 March 1952.
36. FO 371/101057/37G, Franks tel. 327, 31 March 1952.
37. FO 371/101057/36G & 38G, Scott min. (27 March) & Harris min., 4 April 1952.
38. Speech in Foliot, *Documents 1952*, pp.492-98.
39. FO 371/101057/48G, Harvey despatch 179, 16 April 1952.
40. See FO 371/101057/34G, Graves despatch 114, 27 March; FO 371/101058/52, Murray min., 30 April 1952. Graves in his despatch 7, 18 Jan. 1952 in FO 371/101047/6, was reluctant to talk in terms of French 'blackmail'.
41. FO 371/101056/3, Harvey despatch 4, 2 Jan. 1952.
42. Cited in Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p.410.
43. FO 371/101057/48G, Harvey despatch 179, 16 April 1952; Foliot, ed., *Documents 1952*, pp.492-98.
44. FO 371/101058/52, Graves despatch 53, 18 April; see also FO 371/101057/39, Graves tel. 121 (1 April); FO 371/101058/56G & 65, Graves tel. 143 (25 April) & despatch 63 (8 May) 1952. Similar views were expressed by the British representative in Hanoi, see FO 371/101048/20, Whitworth despatch to Graves, 3 March 1952.
45. Acheson, *Creation*, p.675.
46. See for example FO 371/101067/14G, FO brief for Macmillan, 25 Feb.1952.
47. FO 371/101058/67G, FO brief for Eden, 24 May 1952.
48. FO 371/101058/78, record of Eden-Acheson meeting, 26 May 1952.
49. FO 371/101261/53G, Eden tel. 179 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.
50. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XII, Pt.1, p.105; Vol.XIII, Pt.1, pps, 52-54, 157-66.
51. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.84.
52. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.85.

PART II: THE FRENCH DIMENSION

CHAPTER FOUR

BRITISH DIPLOMACY, THE INDO-CHINA WAR AND GERMAN REARMAMENT

May to September 1952

Pleven's explicit linkage of the E.D.C. and Indo-China problems in May 1952 surprised and angered the British and Americans. Acheson, while accepting that there was 'no question that France's effort [in Indo-China] was in the general interest', observed that his Government was already bearing about a third of the cost of the war effort yet 'to hear the French speak, one would think they were only supplying them with an odd revolver or two'. Pleven returned to the charge at the end of the E.D.C. Conference. If more help were not provided for Indo-China the detrimental impact the war was having on French military capacity in Europe could lead to 'great parliamentary difficulties ... [and] might well prejudice the ratification of the E.D.C.', not to mention the 'continuation of French efforts in Indo-China'.[1] The message was plain: the Indo-China war had to be ended before German rearmament could be made acceptable to a majority of French opinion. The war was by no means the only cause of French unhappiness - foremost was a strong distaste for rearming Germany at all, compounded by misgivings, particularly on the right, at surrendering sovereignty over the French army to make this possible. Indo-China, however, provided opponents of the E.D.C. with a tangible rather than emotional excuse for deferring German rearmament. When the war was concluded, they argued, the bulk of the French cadres in the Expeditionary Corps would be free to return to Europe where their presence would ensure a preponderance of French forces over

German within the E.D.C. And the key to victory in Viet-Nam, as Pinay and Pleven pointed out, was more American financial and material help. If this were not forthcoming, either the E.D.C. would never be ratified or, alternatively, it would be sanctioned but only at the cost of abandoning Indo-China.

Eden was particularly aggrieved by French behaviour, accusing Pinay and Pleven of adopting 'a thoroughly defeatist attitude' and 'virtually trying to blackmail the Americans, and to a lesser extent ourselves'.[2] He was angry that the French, so soon after the completion of difficult and drawn-out treaty negotiations, had re-opened the vexed question of a German contribution to Western defence. But in fairness to the French Government it should be noted that three months earlier the National Assembly had passed a resolution stating that the treaty would only be endorsed if the pre-dominance of French forces in the E.D.C. was assured.[3] Indeed it was accepted as 'an act of national faith that French forces in Europe always had to be greater than or at least equal to those of Germany', something which the steady drain of Indo-China made impossible.[4] The Bonn Government had initially promised a contribution of twelve *groupements* (about 140,000 troops) to the European Army while, in February 1952, France was forced to reduce its original target from 14 to 10 *groupements*.[5] This prompted the then French Premier, Faure, to declare: 'France would not enter the EDC unless freed from the special burden of the Indo-China affair'.[6] However, this argument found little favour with Eden who admonished both Pinay and Pleven, telling them that they should 'understand that the only effect of these repeated ... conditions for any joint endeavour was to exasperate their best friends'.[7]

In attempting to account for Eden's irritation it is necessary to look

beyond simple frustration with the shortcomings of French policy in Indo-China and alight instead on the juxtaposition of E.D.C. ratification with further allied (principally American) aid. In the seven months since his return to the Foreign Office the question of a German contribution to Western defence (the 'greatest problem' facing the Churchill Administration in Western Europe according to a recent study[8]) had taken up more time and effort than any other single issue. The idea of rearming West Germany had been under serious discussion in London and Washington since 1949 and had been informally mooted as early as 1944.[9] With the outbreak of the Korean war in June 1950 Anglo-American deliberations assumed a new urgency. In the ensuing crisis atmosphere, with fears that events in Asia presaged a communist move in Europe, the Truman Administration pressed its N.A.T.O. partners to embark upon a massive rearmament programme. Even then, and counting a large American military contribution, N.A.T.O. was still considered no match for the Soviet bloc. Consequently and controversially, the Americans called for the creation of 10 West German divisions as an accretion of strength to N.A.T.O. Coming only five years after the end of the Second World War, 'the proposal stunned many Europeans, especially the French, with their bitter memories of three German invasions since 1870'.[10] The need to shore up Western defence against Soviet encroachment was not considered a sufficient justification in France for what many saw as the rebirth of German militarism. 'The French feared the threat present in such a revival more than they did the Russians', the French Minister of Defence confided to the British in September 1950. His views were not subjective, he said, but were shared by 'the vast majority of Frenchmen'.[11] For a nation trying to break free of the recent past through 'the healing power of a collective amnesia', German rearmament released 'powerful emotive

images' of 1940-44.[12]

If the French were ultimately unable to resist American pressure, they were successful in insisting that German rearmament be strictly controlled. On 24 October 1950, Pleven unveiled the scheme for a European Army which evolved into the E.D.C.[13] This called on member countries to renounce sovereignty over most of their armed forces and to commit to a general military 'pool' contingents of the smallest practicable military unit. Under the aegis of the E.D.C there was to be no independent German army nor a German High Command, just German battalions operating alongside battalions from the other member states under the direction of an integrated European Command.[14] This clearly did little for the military efficacy or cohesion of the European Army, but that was never a French priority. It was however consistent with their determination to prevent at all costs the establishment of an autonomous German Army.

The E.D.C. was also widely regarded - particularly in the United States - as a stepping-stone to the greater unity of Western Europe and marked an extension of the supranational principle first expressed in the Schuman Plan for a European coal and steel community. However, the French commitment to supranationalism as embodied in the E.D.C. had little to do with idealism about a united Europe and everything to do with preventing German *revanchism*. As Saki Dockrill has recently observed, in 1950 the French were unconcerned about 'the theoretical loss of ... military sovereignty as a result of their participation in such a supranational body, since they intended the European Army to become virtually a French Army under a French Supreme Commander'.[15] By May 1952 the Indo-China war had turned these calculations upside down. In between, in February 1951, representatives from France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and,

later, Holland began negotiations towards an E.D.C. Treaty with the full support of the United States. This was the state of play when, six months later, the Conservatives triumphed at the polls in Britain.

The attitude of the Churchill Administration towards the E.D.C. was essentially that of its Labour predecessor. It was governed by two sets of considerations. Because of its world-wide responsibilities, its important political and economic relationship with the Commonwealth, doubts about the stability of Western Europe, an acute aversion to supranational European bodies, misgivings about the practicality of the plan, and a determination to preserve the Anglo-American special relationship (to which end it was necessary for Britain to be seen to be strong and independent, not merely a part of Europe), the Conservative Government was unalterably opposed to British membership of the E.D.C. On the other hand, it also wished to see N.A.T.O. given some teeth, regarded German rearmament as both necessary and inevitable, and - perhaps most important of all - it believed the maintenance of Washington's commitment to Western Europe rested on the Europeans being seen to do more for themselves in terms of defence. The Churchill Administration consequently sought the closest possible association with, rather than membership of, the E.D.C. It was to be supported from without, not from within. As Foreign Secretary, Eden, while personally favouring a 'more modest scheme ... without elaborate superstructure', never deviated from this fundamental premise.[16]

From the outset the French, while reluctantly resigned to British non-participation, sought to make British association as intimate as possible. This was largely to minimise the possibility that at some point in the future Britain (and the United States) might decide to pull its forces out of Europe leaving France to deal on its own with a revitalised Germany.

Unrealistic as this might now seem, at the time it impelled the French to seek cast-iron pledges about Britain's future relationship with the E.D.C.[17] In this connection, in November 1951 Britain and the United States agreed to a French request for joint guarantees between N.A.T.O. and the E.D.C. so that an attack on one body was considered an attack on the other. During early 1952 Britain also proposed a series of technical arrangements linking British and E.D.C. forces, but by then the French were thinking more in terms of a formal Anglo-E.D.C. Treaty comprising an automatic commitment by both parties to resist an aggression. A compromise was reached in February: there would be a joint N.A.T.O.-E.D.C. (not an Anglo-E.D.C.) Treaty, an Anglo-American guarantee of the E.D.C.'s 'integrity (which covered any internal threat from Germany) and a separate British undertaking emphasising its special links with Europe.[18] Therefore by the time that the E.D.C. Treaty was finally signed in Paris two months later Eden doubtless felt that Britain had gone a long way towards ensuring its ultimate success. He may also have felt some relief, for there was always a danger of the Truman Administration bullying or cajoling Britain into joining the E.D.C. if this appeared to be the only way of making German rearmament palatable not just to France but to the smaller N.A.T.O. allies as well. Though sympathetic to Eden's position, the Americans were 'always liable to press him hard on EDC'.[19]

For these reasons, then, Eden's exasperation with the French when they linked ratification with more help for Indo-China is understandable. And, as mentioned elsewhere, until *all* E.D.C. signitories ratified the Treaty, German rearmament could not become operative. 'All was signed, but not delivered', Eden later wrote. The French, 'their confidence sapped by the steady drain of the Indo-China war were tempted to postpone a final

decision'.[20] This was all the more frustrating because until the spring of 1954 the success of the E.D.C. was considered by Eden to be more important than what was happening in the Indo-Chinese arena. Indeed one of the consistent features of this period is the extent to which the Churchill Administration's Indo-China policy was subservient to, restricted by, and constructed with deference to, the requirements of E.D.C. policy. This set of priorities is certainly defensible, but it will later be argued that it was also symptomatic of Britain's economic, political and military weakness, the reality of which became more apparent the harder that British diplomacy attempted to disguise it by creating a multi-tiered system of policy objectives.

But to return to matters as they stood in May 1952, it is clear that Eden had difficulty in accepting that events in Viet-Nam could or should have a bearing on the attitude of France to an ostensibly unconnected problem which was proving hard enough to resolve without additional complications.[21] From the French perspective, their aggressive diplomacy reflected a realisation that their two closest allies wished to see a non-Communist Indo-China *and* a German contribution to European defence. In each sphere Paris played the pivotal role, a situation it was not slow to exploit. Indeed a further constancy in the period 1952-1954 was the French reaction to allied pressure to ratify the E.D.C., namely vague mutterings about having to abandon Indo-China. Likewise pressure to increase their effort in Viet-Nam to bring the war to a successful conclusion was often met with veiled threats to destroy the E.D.C. The cumulative effect was a drift towards crisis in both South-East Asia and Western Europe in the spring and summer of 1954.

Leaving Paris, Eden reflected that if the French 'really wanted

American aid, they were going about it in the worst possible way'.[22] But he had to think again three weeks later when, at the conclusion of Letourneau's visit to Washington, the Truman Administration announced that within the limitations set by Congress its help to the French would after all be expanded and that 'this increased assistance over and above present U.S. aid for Indo-China, which now approximates one-third of the total cost of Indo-China operations, would be especially devoted to assisting the French in the building of the National Armies of the Associate States'.[23] Eden admitted that he had been 'wrong in doubting the French method'.[24] This announcement, coming fast upon French linkage of E.D.C. ratification with aid for Indo-China, suggests that Washington's attitude towards the war was at this stage conditioned almost as much by its enthusiasm for German rearmament and European unity as it was by anti-Communist determinants in South-East Asia. If so, this would bear out the recent contention of an American scholar that the Truman Administration's initial decision in May 1950 to extend aid to France for Indo-China was made for much the same dual Euro-Asian motives.[25] Interestingly, a Foreign Office memorandum of April 1954 reached a similar conclusion.[26] But whatever the reason, the fact remained that in June 1952 the French obtained the susbstantial increase in American assistance they craved. As Acheson revealed, this ammounted to an additional $150 million during the coming fiscal year and was, Eden calculated, 'generous by any standards'.[27]

As we have already seen, the rest of the summer of 1952 was dominated by fruitless efforts to reconcile Anglo-American differences concerning action to deter or resist Chinese aggression in South-East Asia and to establish a regional defence mechanism. Unease in London that this might be the wrong angle from which to approach the more specific problem of

Indo-China was kept within bounds by, firstly, the various extra-Indo Chinese factors which made collective security and American participation worthwhile objectives even when the threat of Chinese aggression was receding, and secondly, by the cessation of major military operations by both sides in Viet-Nam for the duration of the rainy season. However, from the autumn of 1952 onwards the emphasis in London came to be placed more and more on what could be done to ensure success for France in its struggle with Ho Chi Minh and, in this connection, how best to steel the French Government to resist the growing clamour of public and parliamentary opinion to bring the war to an end, possibly through a negotiated settlement on disadvantageous terms. The Chinese dimension ceased to be a major consideration in British analyses. But before it was finally superceded there was a period in September and October 1952 when the issues of defence planning against Chinese expansionism and, in Viet-Nam, the Franco-Viet Minh conflict, overlapped. An examination of this convergence provides a number of pointers to the way in which British policy was to develop during 1953, not least the form in which the E.D.C.-factor would again intrude on Foreign Office calculations.

With the collapse of British hopes that the next round of tripartite military talks on South-East Asia (now scheduled for Washington in mid-October) would be conducted with 'political guidance', officials conceded that there was faint hope of an Anglo-American agreement on retaliative action against China.[28] This gloomy prognosis was confirmed when, in mid-September, the Service Chiefs' Joint Planning Staff produced a number of briefs for the Washington meeting. One such, on action in the event of Chinese aggression *anywhere* in Asia, flatly rejected the American thesis on retaliation, arguing that there was 'no form of general action which is

both militarily acceptable and fully effective', be it atomic bombing of China, naval blockade of the Chinese coast, conventional bombing of ports, administrative centres, communications and military targets inside China, or the seizure of China's offshore islands. In the case of Viet-Nam, none of these options could prevent the immediate loss of Tonking. Therefore, 'the widespread action favoured by the Americans might involve an effort and risk out of all proportion to the results obtained'. The brief concluded by reiterating the Military's established view that 'retaliation should be confined to the areas adjacent to the battle-front though not necessarily on our side of the Chinese frontier'. Conceding that this was 'unlikely to satisfy the Americans who may well wish to take some intensive form of retaliation', the Military Planners nevertheless maintained their position for, importantly, 'it involved little risk of starting global war'. Since neither British nor American plans could actually save Tonking, the paper concluded that it made sense to pursue that course least likely to produce a dangerous escalation of the problem. The Chiefs of Staff formally approved this approach on 19 September and, in so doing, confirmed that there was still no basis for agreement with the Americans.[29]

Because of this negative assessment a second briefing paper went on to examine what could be done to deter Chinese aggression in the first place, thereby obviating the need for Western retaliation altogether. Of the ideas put forward the one considered most effective was an increased effort in Viet-Nam, the keystone of South-East Asian defence, in order to destroy the communist rebels ...

> Clearly one of the most effective means of checking Chinese Expansion to the South would be the infliction of a decisive defeat on the Viet Minh forces ... This could be achieved only by French forces as the employment of those of other Allied nations would create a new situation in Indo-China and involve a risk of violent Chinese reaction.

To this end, the Joint Planning Staff estimated that the French would need to transfer some three-to-four divisions with supporting aircraft from Europe to Viet-Nam. They warned, however, that there were a number of obstacles: the 'United States appreciation that global war is more imminent than we consider to be the case' meant that Washington would probably baulk at the idea of weakening Europe to 'win' the Cold War in South-East Asia. There was also the 'bad effect of such a redeployment upon other N.A.T.O. countries unless the divisions were to be replaced'. But if so, from where and by whom? It would, moreover, be 'unfortunate' if Britain were to suggest greater French sacrifices at a time when for economic reasons it might be obliged to reduce its own overseas commitments. Finally and portentously, there was the French 'fear of German predominance in the European Defence Community if they weaken their own contribution'. But in spite of these difficulties, the Planners recommended (and the Chiefs of Staff concurred) that the proposal, together with French views on it, should be explored at the Washington conference.[30] Thus an increased effort by France in Viet-Nam had become a means of disguising allied - mainly Anglo-American - differences on defence policy for South-East Asia as a whole.

The Military's basic contention that 'French reinforcement from Europe for Indo-China should certainly be considered at the Washington talks'[31] cannot have come as a complete surprise to the Foreign Office. It was after all only a slight modification of the view expressed by the Chiefs of Staff in January 1952 that it might be in 'the long term interests of N.A.T.O. [for the] Western Powers to strengthen South East Asia at the expense of the immediate N.A.T.O. build up'. As long as the 'cold' war in South-East Asia sapped French (and British) resources they would be unable

to contribute fully to the security of Western Europe, a 'hot' war priority.[32] When this idea resurfaced in September the only difference was that it was French rather than Western forces in general that were to be redeployed on account of the risk of provoking a Chinese riposte. The object was, of course, to deter precisely that. A further reason why the Service Chiefs prescription cannot have caught the Foreign Office entirely off guard was that officials had themselves been weighing up the merits of a more vigorous French military strategy for Viet-Nam. But diplomatic and political interest had been triggered for reasons other than the damaging, indirect, repercussions of the war on N.A.T.O. strategy, although these were fully acknowledged. Instead, the catalyst was a series of reports from British representatives in South-East Asia lambasting the negativity of French military thinking and positing a number of long-term and unwelcome consequences if this situation persisted. As a result the Foreign Office concluded that there were undeniable attractions in a policy of French reinforcement for different though complementary reasons to those which inspired the Chiefs of Staff.

Leading the attack on French strategy was Hubert Graves in Saigon who, from the middle of June, began to express deep misgivings about the defensive, holding-on, approach to the war favoured by the authorities in Paris. He was also disturbed by the view radiating from French Ministers since the start of the year that a military solution was no longer possible.[33] The French instead seemed content to hold a line pending a negotiated settlement, preferably with or through Peking rather than the Viet-Minh. This suggested that the defeatism released by de Lattre's death ran far deeper than the British had originally thought and was, as of mid-summer 1952, only in temporary abeyance. Graves was especially alarmed by

contemporaneous French plans to begin withdrawing their troops from Viet-Nam to Europe *pari passu* with the build-up of the Viet-Namese Army to whom defence responsibility would be transfered. According to the French themselves this process was to be completed by late 1954.[34] Although this now appears as a hopelessly unrealistic time-table, the British took the French at their word. Moreover, the prospect of the Viet-Namese assuming a greater share of the war-effort provided opinion in France with hope that there was an end in sight to French involvement if not to the war itself. What troubled Graves, however, was that Paris, in its anxiety to be rid of its debilitating South-East Asian commitment, might hand-over and pull-out too soon. It was hard to envisage a point when the embryonic native armed forces would be able to cope with the Viet-Minh on their own. Unless, that was, the French crushed the rebels before they left thereby bestowing upon the Viet-Namese a defence problem of manageable proportions.[35] But as the British Military Attaché in Saigon observed, the French would doubtless object to this course on the grounds that it 'calls in the first place for an increased French effort instead of a steadily decreasing one'.[36] In other words, a complete reversal of current French policy. Graves, though, was undeterred. By September his thinking had gravitated to bluntness. 'Our efforts must be directed towards persuading the French to smash Ho chi Minh before they quit'. To do this, 'aggressive action must be started in 1953'. Graves hoped that the impending military conference in Washington 'will give some serious thought to this problem'.[37] By this time, too, Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, was in open agreement with Graves.[38]

In the Foreign Office there was much symapthy with this diagnosis and prescription.[39] Even Eden had implicitly stated his support for a

decisive military solution when telling Acheson in June that the French should be dissuaded from their view that a 'general' Far Eastern settlement was their best hope of salvation. Persistence in this would cause them to 'lose the psychological approach required to achieve victory'.[40] According to the U.S. record, he spoke of 'divorcing' the French from their 'defeatist attitude'.[41] However, while the action advocated by Graves had much to commend it, there was in the end a tacit acceptance in the Foreign Office that the obstacles preventing it (denuding N.A.T.O., complicating still further the E.D.C. equation, a basic shortage of French manpower, above all a concern that pressing France to step-up its effort might be met with demands that Britain itself make a greater contribution in Indo-China in money and material) meant that a *demarche* to Paris was initially ruled out.[42] When, however, the Chiefs of Staff reached the same conclusion as Graves from a different starting-point in September, the Foreign Office was forced to re-examine the issue in the light of the near-certainty of another abortive military conference on South-East Asian defence.

The emergent consensus was that the consequences of this were so serious that some measure of agreement, particularly at the Anglo-American level, had to be achieved. Continued stalemate might even discourage what little interest the Truman Administration had so far displayed in regional defence co-ordination which, as the Head of the South-East Asia Department warned on 19 September, would leave 'hanging over all our heads the danger that the Americans may, by unilateral action, drag the western world into a full-scale war with China - or worse'.[43] Therefore to avoid the appearance if not the reality of total disunity it was considered prudent to attempt to effect Anglo-American agreement on the need for 'an all-out effort by the French in Indo-China' which, if the Viet-Minh were defeated, would be a

strong deterrent to Chinese intervention and would render Anglo-American disunity over retaliation academic. Eden's support was duly sought for consideration at the Washington talks of the 'possibility of transferring three to four French divisions from Europe'.[44] The focus was thus firmly on French reinforcement, be it to achieve a decisive and satisfactory end to the six-year war and so dam the flood of N.A.T.O. resources to South-East Asia, to deter Chinese aggression, or maintain American interest in regional security in its widest sense.

In the Foreign Office there was support for this solution up to and including Assistant Under-Secretary level.[45] But, crucially, not from the Foreign Secretary. Eden was unreservedly hostile to the idea. 'Surely not' was his initial, disbelieving, reaction, which he later developed: 'I cannot conceive that the transfer of four French divisions to Indo China in present circumstances is discussable'.[46] The Foreign Secretary had strong support from Deputy Under-Secretary Makins who thought the idea 'the greatest political nonsense and is really not worth discussing even at the military level in present circumstances'.[47] Churchill's opposition was also to be anticipated if the dismissive manner in which he greeted the idea when first aired by the Military in January was any guide.[48] At the start of October, Eden clashed with Lord Alexander, the Minister of Defence, on the issue. Eden hoped that Alexander would intercede with the Chiefs of Staff to ensure that French reinforcement was omitted from the Washington agenda, but Alexander was firmly of the opinion that 'as an increased French effort in Indo-China is, in present circumstances, the only solution to the problem there, the matter should be discussed at the talks'. In deference to the Foreign Secretary's protestations, Alexander did agree to instruct the British representative, Elliot, 'not to raise

this issue direct but rather to obtain from the French Delegation their assessment of the forces required to re-establish their position in Indo-China ...'[49]

Interestingly yet paradoxically, Eden had quickly gone from supporting one formula, political guidance, as a means of helping the military talks succeed, to rejecting another, French reinforcement, which many of his officials hoped would prevent that same conference ending in failure. Eden's attitude seems to have been based primarily on the complicating effect which the transfer of French troops from Europe to South-East Asia would have on the E.D.C. problem. Pleven had made it clear in Paris in May that the drain on the French Army resulting from Indo-China as it then stood was causing public and parliamentary unhappiness at the prospect of German domination of the E.D.C., and Eden was doubtless reluctant to lend impetus to this negative drift by sanctioning a course of action which would further accentuate Franco-German disequilibrium. But if Eden had reason to hope that the reinforcement issue would burn itself out he was to be disappointed. Having given their considered opinion as to what was needed to win the war in Indo-China, the British Chiefs of Staff proceeded to delegate to the Foreign Office the responsibility for overcoming the political difficulties inherent in persuading the French to take the necessary but unpalatable action.

NOTES

1. FO 371/101058/72, Eden tel. 179 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.
2. FO 371/101058/72, Eden tel. 179 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.
3. See Young in Young ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.85.
4. Fursden, *European Defence Community*, pp.260-61.
5. See Saki Dockrill in Dockrill & Young, eds., *British Foreign Policy*, p.154, and *West German Rearmament*, p.107..
6. Cited in Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indo-China 1945-54* (London, 1990 trans.), p.144, hereafter *Indo-China*
7. FO 371/101261/53G, Eden tel. 181 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.

8. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.81.
9. See Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, pp.4-21.
10. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.81; Mathias Peter in Anne Deighton, ed., *Britain and the First Cold War* (London 1990), p.58-59, hereafter *First Cold War*.
11. Sir William Elliot papers (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London), 1/4/1, tel. COJA 134A to COS, 26 Sept. 1950. Also Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, p.211.
12. Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, pps. 207, 143-44.
13. Carlyle, ed., *Documents 1949-50*, pp.339-44.
14. Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, pp.59-79; Young in Young ed., *Church -ill Administration*, pp.81-82; Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p.144; Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (London 1978), pp.347-48; F.S.Northedge, *Descent From Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-1973* (London 1974), pp.159-62, here -after *Descent From Power*; Wilfred Loth, *The Division of the World 1941 -55* (London, 1988 trans), pp.249-51, hereafter *Division of the World*.
15. Saki Dockrill in Dockrill & Young, eds., *British Foreign Policy*, p.154.
16. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp.33-34; HCDebs, Vol.494, col.40 (19 Nov. 1951); also Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.82; John W.Young, *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe 1945-51* (Leicester 1984), pp. 167-76.
17. Fursden, *European Defence Community*, p.200.
18. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, pp.84-87.
19. Ibid, p.85.
20. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.47.
21. See Carlton, *Eden*, pp.317-18.
22. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.84.
23. FO 371/101059/85 for text of *communiqué* issued after Franco-American talks in Washington, 18 June 1952. For further details on Letourneau's visit see FO 371/101059/92G, US record of talks; FO 371/101058/79 & 83, Harvey letter to Scott, 3 June & Franks tel. 1172, 18 June 1952; also Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, pp.422-23.
24. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.84.
25. Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, esp. pps. 85, 89-90, 99-100, 182-186, 217.
26. FO 371/112062/485, Research Dept. paper 'US Military Aid in Indo-China' 29 April 1954.
27. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.84.
28. See pp.46-50.
29. DEFE 6/22, JP(52)100(Final), 16 Sept; DEFE 4/56, COS(52)133rd meeting, 19 Sept. 1952.
30. DEFE 6/22, JP(52)113(Final), 16 Sept; DEFE 4/56, ibid.
31. DEFE 4/56, COS(52)133rd meeting, 19 Sept. 1952.
32. DEFE 4/51, COS(52)2nd meeting, 4 Jan; FO 371/101259/3G, Strang tel. 30 to Eden (*en route* to Washington), 4 Jan. 1952.
33. FO 371/101057/30G, Reading min., 17 March; FO 371/101058/79, Harvey letter to Scott, 3 June; FO 371/101055/36, Harris min., 23 June; FO 371/101067/41, Graves despatch 122, 25 Aug. 1952 enclosing memo. by MacDonald.
34. Graves discussed the French time-table for withdrawal in letters to Scott on 18 July and 22 Aug., see FO 371/101059/108G & FO 371/101060/ 117G. See also FO 371/101057/42G, FO tel. 93, General Distribution, 9 April 1952
35. See also FO 371/101055/36, Graves letter to Scott, 10 June; FO 371/ 101059/108G & 87, Graves letter to Scott, 18 June & Graves tel. 195,

22 June 1952.

36. FO 371/101059/88, letter from Field (MA Saigon) to War Office, and Graves letter to Scott, 13 June 1952.
37. FO 371/101060/119, Graves letter to Scott, 8 Sept. 1952.
38. FO 371/101060/117G, Graves letter to Scott, 22 Aug. 1952 enclosing views of MacDonald.
39. FO 371/101059/108G, Scott letter to Graves, 6 Aug. 1952.
40. FO 371/101262/57G, record of Eden-Acheson meeting, 26 June 1952.
41. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 135.
42. The course and result of FO discussion can be found in FO 371/101055/36; FO 371/101059/87 & 88; FO 371/101060/117G; FO 371/101264/104G. See esp. Olver min., 28 June 1952, in FO 371/101059/88.
43. FO 371/101263/101G, Tahourdin min., 19 Sept. 1952.
44. FO 371/101264/106G, South-East Asia Dept. paper for Eden, 27 Sept. 1952.
45. For example, FO 371/101263/99G, Scott memo., 30 Aug. & Reilly letter to Hayter, 22 Sept. 1952.
46. FO 371/101264/106G, Eden note on South-East Asia Dept. submission (n. d.) & min., 29 Sept. 1952.
47. FO 371/101264/106G, Makins min., 27 Sept. 1952.
48. FO 371/101259/23G, Makins min., 23 Jan. 1952.
49. FO 371/101264/196G, Eden min. to Alexander (30 Sept), Alexander min. to Eden (6 Oct) 1952.

PART III: THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE DIMENSION

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FRENCH REINFORCEMENT DEBATE

October to December 1952

The last three months of 1952 were crucial in terms of the evolution of British policy towards the Indo-China war. For it was only then that policy-makers faced-up to the fact that the leading Western powers, in devoting so much time to planning against Chinese intervention, had been focusing their attention in the wrong direction. Thereafter it was the Viet-Minh that was recognised as posing the immediate and hence the real threat to the French position. British thinking about the war duly entered a period of re-orientation. The result was that from the beginning of 1953 until the Indo-China problem came to a head in the spring of 1954, the Chinese dimension was considered a secondary factor. This is not to say that regional defence planning ceased - it did not - only that British policy-makers invested it with a new and additional utility. As a senior member of the Foreign Office observed, the inclusion of Indo-China under the umbrella of a collective security system for South-East Asia 'might not help the French directly in their fight against the Viet Minh unaided by China', but it would give them 'a strong moral stimulus by proving that the free world as a whole is behind them in the struggle to keep Indo-China out of the orbit of Peking'.[1] Thus defence co-ordination came to be seen in London as a device to bolster French morale in the continuing battle against Ho Chi Minh's rebel forces.

The autumn of 1952 was a watershed in British thinking for another

reason. It was only then that the true depth and complexity of the relationship between the Indo-China war and German rearmament was fully recognised. The Foreign Office was forced to concede that as long as the war consumed the bulk and the best of the French army in Europe, the Pinay Administration, concerned to avoid a negative vote in the National Assembly, would continue to postpone a debate on E.D.C. ratification. As Deputy-Under Secretary Pierson Dixon remarked in November 1952, 'Indo-China is the clue to a solution of the difficult French attitude in Europe'.[2] If, because of the war, France rejected and so destroyed the E.D.C., the implications for the future of the Western Alliance appeared grave. In December, Eden told the Cabinet that in such circumstances it would be 'difficult to avoid the admission of a national German army [to N.A.T.O.] ... This alternative, though it might well be preferable militarily, would not be politically agreeable to the French'.[3] Ambassador Harvey in Paris went further, warning that 'France's endemic anti-Americanism might combine with the permanent fear of Germany to create an irresistable force not only among the deputies but also in the country at large, and the influential old gentleman whose neutral tendencies lie this way might then lead a movement out of the American camp'.[4] The 'influential old gentleman' was, of course, General de Gaulle.

More worrying still from a British perspective, with the demise of the E.D.C. American governmental and public opinion might - in Slessor's graphic phrase - 'say a plague on all your houses and leave us and Europe to stew in our own juice, militarily and economically'.[5] It was this concern more than any other factor which ensured fulsome British support for the E.D.C. despite private doubts and misgivings about the project. For this reason, too, Dixon was prepared to advocate a 'political' solution

in Viet-Nam. This would 'from every point of view be preferable to the wreck of the EDC with its incalculable effects on the whole W[estern] defence effort'.[6] However, though Dixon's concern about the fate of the E.D.C. was widely shared, the idea of a negotiated settlement of the Indo-China war was not. On the contrary, the autumn of 1952 is notable for the emergence of a powerful consensus within the British politico-military establishment in favour of urging France on to final and complete victory. This contention is at variance with Eden's later account of events in which he maintained that a more vigorous French military policy was necessary in order to commence negotiations with the Communists from a position of strength.[7] In fact apart from Dixon's trial balloon, the word 'negotiation' is conspicuous by its absence from discussion in the Foreign Office. The problem, however, was that a decisive military solution was far from the minds of French Ministers who instead looked forward to a speedy termination of their country's military commitment. The British in contrast wholly rejected the idea of compromise inherent in this approach, and would continue to do so far longer than Eden's memoirs suggest.

Two developments in particular caused British policy-makers to finally break free of the constraints of the Chinese dimension. Or, as one official put it, to stop pursuing 'this will-o'the-wisp while shutting our eyes to the present reality of the mounting danger of the war against the Viet-Minh'.[8] The first was the predicted failure of the Washington military conference on South-East Asian defence (6-17 October). Equally predictably, it foundered on the rocks of unresolved Anglo-American differences on retaliatory policy against China and the absence of political guidance. This, in turn, was a reflection of continuing American determination to 'retain freedom of military action in the Far East'.[9] The

principal British representative at the talks reflected: 'The Americans seemed to have decided, before the discussions took place, that there would be no basic change in the attitude which they had adopted at the conference held in February ... [that] they must be left free to pursue their own military policies in the Far East without any international intervention'.[10] It was, as seen, fears about where American unilateralism might lead as much as Chinese expansionism which accounted for British enthusiasm for collective defence in South-East Asia. This, together with the application of power-by-proxy, would ensure that defence co-ordination remained an important long-term British objective. For the moment, though, in terms of Indo-China the collapse of the Washington talks served to focus attention on the real threat from the Viet-Minh.

The second catalyst in this respect was the onset of the Viet-Minh's autumn offensive in the Thai country of northern Tonking from 15 October. A number of French outposts were taken and, on 11 November, Graves informed the Foreign Office that it was becoming 'increasingly clear that the Viet Minh operations in the Thai country represent a major effort'.[11] At the same time, the French Government sought to play down the significance of the offensive, arguing that Viet-Minh advances were strategically unimportant, a view which found some support in London.[12] Then, towards the middle of December, the Viet-Minh began to systematically relinquish most of its gains and withdraw to its pre-October positions.[13] Its objective had been achieved, namely 'to raise the morale of [its] supporters by a startling victory and correspondingly to lower French prestige and spirits'.[14] Military developments certainly had a significance far beyond simple calculations of profit-and-loss on the battlefield. Viet-Minh strategy appears to have been devised with at

least one eye on the impact it would have on public opinion in France. Even with Chinese material and technical assistance, Ho Chi Minh's forces were probably incapable of the outright defeat of the French at this time, hence the addition of a political dimension to their strategy. Whereas to the trained observer the Viet-Minh's offensive might have had little effect on the over-all strategic balance in Viet-Nam, to the French public recent events looked extremely ominous in newspaper sketch maps and, in consequence, accentuated the mood of disillusion across the country. In the National Assembly Pinay's coalition found itself under pressure from many quarters to bring the war to an end by negotiation. If, therefore, Viet-Minh operations were calculated to sow political discord in France, it was a ploy which, by December 1952, had achieved some success. The Paris correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, for example, thought the position was 'grave' and that there was 'little doubt now that the Viet-Minh, by maintaining their offensive, will precipitate a complete French withdrawal'.[15] This underscored a report from Harvey a month earlier that 'Deputies of all Parties including the Gaullists [hitherto die-hards on Indo-China] are talking freely, though not yet publicly, of the need for an early French withdrawal'.[16] The spectre of a *débâcle* in Viet-Nam caused by a collapse of morale on the metropolitan front loomed once more.

These disturbing developments served to place the Chinese dimension in perspective as the lesser of several threats to the French position in Viet-Nam, a realisation which demanded a fresh British approach. Leading the way in the Foreign Office was R. H. Scott, a highly respected Orientalist and supervising Under-Secretary for South-East Asian affairs.[17] On 25 October he suggested: 'instead of postulating a Chinese attack, consider

only how the present situation in Indo China is to be resolved assuming that there is no open Chinese aggression'. He went on:

> The loss of Tongking would be a major disaster in the cold war, opening the way to communist control of the rice lands of South East Asia (and so giving them a powerful lever against Japan and India); it would have repercussions in North Africa and probably reduce France to the status of a third class power; it would frighten Australia away from helping in the Middle East and draw her even more closely into the American orbit; and it would result in a reduction or perhaps loss of over half the net dollar earnings of the whole sterling area [by endangering Malaya's security ...]'[18]

These were all sound reasons for wishing to see the French emerge victorious, a theme Scott returned to regularly in the following weeks while emphasising that the 'immediate and pressing problem is ... how to cope with the present situation in Indo-China' and that 'there seemed no pressing hurry to plan for action in the event of a hypothetical Chinese attack'.[19] By December the turn-around in Foreign Office thinking which had been building-up since the start of the year was complete, Eden telling the Cabinet that Chinese intervention in Viet-Nam could not be discounted but was 'on the whole unlikely'.[20] On 9 December, the Cabinet's Far East Committee were told that the 'main concern' of the Foreign Office was now the 'situation in Indo-China' and, two days later, an official was able to declare that there was 'general agreement that something drastic must be done to save Indo-China', not from the designs of Peking but from the altogether more pervasive threat of Viet-Minh military strength and political popularity in Viet-Nam.[21] Eden and his staff were not to suffer from a shortage of advice on what exactly this 'something drastic' should be. Invariably it was French reinforcement from Europe.

To British diplomatic and military representatives on the spot in South-East Asia the matter was straightforward. The war had to be won and

the French had to provide whatever extra troops were necessary to achieve this end. Reinforcement and victory appeared all the more urgent because of French plans to withdraw their Expeditionary Force *pari passu* with the expansion and training of the Viet-Namese army. The target-date for the dissolution of the French High Command was the end of 1954.[22] But because of the slow progress in developing the indigenous armed forces - the process had only begun in July 1951[23] - British observers regarded this time-table as *naïve* and reckless. Yet the French appeared determined to follow it through. On 1 October, Letourneau announced plans to withdraw two battalions by the end of the year: these would not be replaced.[24] Nor did subsequent events in the Thai country appear to affect calculations, a leading French Minister telling Bao Dai in November that France's military commitment would not continue on its present scale after 1953.[25]

For Graves in Saigon, the Viet-Minh's autumn offensive provided an opportunity to renew his call for a more forward French policy aimed at defeating the Viet-Minh before evacuation commenced. To do otherwise would be tantamount to acquiescing in the communisation of all of Indo-China. The French would leave behind in the shape of the Viet-Namese army a 'facade of military strength but not much substance behind it'. Paris's approach was based on the 'fundamental fallacy' that 'no military solution in Indochina is possible'. Writing to Scott on 14 November, Graves declared that 'unless something is done between now and 1955, the drift towards eventual Communist control of the country appears likely'. The 'something' he had in mind was the 'crushing of Vietminh before the French withdraw and I think we ought to ponder over how to bring this about'.[26] A little later he argued that 1953 would be 'the vital year, and that, if we are to crush the Viet-Minh, we must make the major effort then'.[27] The key

to this effort was twofold: reinforcement, and convincing a French Government intent on reducing its involvement that this was necessary. In Graves's opinion recent French military reverses were not entirely the fault of the High Command in Indo-China:

> Inhibited in their military freedom of action by political caveats from Paris, directed to plan for the withdrawal of French forces when their crying present need is reinforcements, they have been reduced to waiting to be hit. When they are hit, French opinion at home takes another plunge into despondency and pessimism and so the vicious circle continues.[28]

Negative military tactics which prevented morale-boosting successes against the enemy, the *Economist* noted on 29 November, added to the 'constant danger that public opinion in France may one day refuse to bear this grim and costly burden any longer'.[29]

Towards the end of 1952 Graves, a lone voice for much of the year, found his views given the widest possible endorsement when the British Commanders-in-Chief in the Far East, together with Ambassadors, Heads of Missions and Colonial officials in Asia, met for their annual conference on regional issues at Bukit Serene in Singapore. Their collective conclusion was embodied in a telegram from MacDonald to London on 8 December. With the French intending to complete their military withdrawal from Viet-Nam within 12 months the Viet-Namese would soon be left to 'deal with the Viet Minh forces by themselves'. There was 'little reason to suppose that they will be able to do this effectively, unless in the meantime the Viet Minh have received such a military defeat as will permanently weaken their forces'. It was therefore ...

> ... evident that both in the short and the long term the urgent need is for reinforcements. In present circumstances these can only be French. We are only too fully conscious of the great difficulties and more particularly those arising from French preoccupations in Europe. Out here we are concern -ed with the security of South East Asia and of the British territories within this regime [sic] and, therefore, with the

vital necessity that Indo-China should be held against the Communists. From that point of view, we feel bound to represent that it is of the highest importance that the French should reinforce their forces in Indo-China and that every thing possible to remove the obstacles to this should be done.[30]

This course of action was also being pressed for by the British Chiefs of Staff whose reasoning, as previously noted, had as much to do with N.A.T.O. strategy in Europe as it did with South-East Asia. As Slim's successor as C.I.G.S., General Sir John Harding, observed on 18 November, 'there was a real danger that unless there was some foreseeable end to this damaging French commitment in Indo-China, French co-operation with her Western Allies and French participation in the defence of Western Europe would be seriously undermined'. The solution was for France to step-up its involvement in the short-term in order to be able to safely wind it down in the long-run. '[W]hat we wished to see in Indo-China', Harding explained

> ... was that, as a result of a major military operation by the French and Vietnamese forces, a sound military position would be established which could, in the main, be held by the Viet -namese forces themselves, thus allowing the French to withdraw the bulk of their forces without the Communists being in a position to take over control again.[31]

The attitude of the British Military was codified at the start of December in a series of memoranda which combined to form a brief for the Minister of Defence for a meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council in Paris. If the French were compelled to withdraw from Viet-Nam (either through military pressure from the Viet-Minh or political pressure from Paris - the Chinese dimension was largely ignored) 'we consider that the whole country will fall eventually under Communist domination'. This in turn would mean 'Siam and Burma eventually falling under Communist domination and a grave deterioration of our position in Malaya'. Thereafter ...

> [a]long with a great reduction of confidence in the West and the denial of rice imports from Burma and Siam, we could expect that the bandit campaign [in Malaya] would be so intensified

> that it would become beyond the capacity of our existing forces to contain. To deal with it, drastic measures would be required including the reinforcement of the garrison and the occupation of the Songkhla position in order to seal off Malaya from Communist penetration.

The Songkhla position was on the narrow Kra Isthmus which linked Malaya to the mainland of Asia and was, importantly, inside Siamese territory. Its seizure was contemplated with or without the consent of the Bangkok Governemnt. If the latter, it would be technically an invasion of a sovereign netural state and the disapproval of the United Nations and possibly the United States was to be anticipated. Nevertheless plans (drawn up as early as 1950) continued to be developed and refined.[32] Alexander's brief, in addition to commenting on 'political difficulties' inherent in the Songkhla strategy, also conceded that 'some degree of U.K. mobilisation would be necessary'.[33] In actual fact the implications of Malayan reinforcement went far deeper. With no strategic reserve it could only take place by weakening Britain's defence commitments in Europe or the Middle East which, though in-depth analyses of Soviet objectives concluded that a 'general' war was not imminent, would still be a calculated gamble.[34] Nor could the financial cost of the enterprise be ignored when the Treasury was demanding savings in defence expenditure and the Military establishment was complaining that current appropriations were barely sufficient.[35] In December, Anthony Head, Secretary of State for War, cautioned that 'serious economic difficulties' must flow from 'an increase in trouble in Malaya, a situation which would inevitably follow a reverse in Indo-China'.[36]

Given the potentially disastrous consequences of French abandonment of the struggle in Indo-China, the Chiefs of Staff, in briefing Alexander, logically turned to preventative action. The French, they pointed out,

were 'barely holding their own in Indo-China and the drain on French manpower and resources is critical'. The solution, as ever, was reinforcement ...

> The only completely effective methid [sic] of restoring the situation ... would be for the French to destroy the Viet Minh forces (i.e. prevent their escape into China) and then to build-up Viet Nam confidence by increased political stablilty. Any other course might have initial success, but results would be short-lived. Given additional forces, however, estimated at three divisions, the French should be able to re-establish their frontier posts and stop the passage of arms, equipment and reinforcement from China.

The reinforcements had to be French - the 'Viet Nam forces are not good enough' and 'the employment of troops from other nations would probably result in immediate Chinese intervention'. The brief concluded: 'Despite the difficulties in removing French divisions from Europe, we consider that this is the only means by which the Viet Minh could be defeated'.[37]

Support for the reinforcement thesis was provided by other influential figures at this time. Head, for example, maintained that '[a]llmost everyone who has studied the matter closely is in agreement that Indo-China is probably the most important single place in the cold war' and that 'if things went wrong there it might well substantially increase our commitments either by being forced to reinforce the French or, should they pull out, by our being forced to increase the strengh of the troops in Malaya'.[38] General Sir Gerald Templer, High Commissioner in Malaya, was convinced that 'provided the French did not crack in Indo-China', South-East Asia could be 'saved from Communism'. On the other hand, if Indo-China were lost 'Siam would collapse at once, and Burma probably not long after'. Templer 'could not possibly defend Malaya if Siam went ...'[39] Even the Paris Embassy, previously unenthusiastic about reinforcement on the grounds that the French authorities would never agree to it, had by

January 1953 come out strongly in favour. Citing the Bukit Serene conference conclusion that 'in the short and the long term the urgent need is for reinforcements', Hayter, the First Minister, declared: 'So far as we can judge from here this is an absolutely correct estimate'.[40]

The Foreign Office reacted with sympathy to this increasing volume of support for a more forward French policy in Viet-Nam.[41] But in addition to the advantages of victory-through-reinforcement already cited, officials were impressed by a further, Eurocentric, benefit - the removal of one of the biggest stumbling-blocks to French ratification of the E.D.C. Treaty. As Harvey had made clear to Eden in November 1951, it was concern about a revival of German militarism more than the 'new' threat from the Soviet Union which preoccupied the French. The 'position beyond France's eastern frontier ... is the deciding factor in her foreign policy' and '[t]raditionally the eastern frontier means Germany'.[42] A year on, there were few in the Foreign Office who doubted that French ratification of the E.D.C. was dependent on an end to the war in Indo-China. Until a solution was found, minuted one official, the French 'will not willingly agree to German rearmament, even if they do then'. Another called Indo-China a 'running sore that is spreading over to Europe'.[43] A future French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France, put it more starkly in November: '... until the French people see the light at the end of the Indo-Chinese tunnel the [National] Assembly will never ratify the Treaty for the European Defence Community'. Officials were forced to accept that disagreeable as this view was, it was 'shared by a large number of responsible Frenchmen'.[44]

Thus it seemed that only the return of French forces from Indo-China and the creation of, at worst, a Franco-German balance and, preferably, superiority of French forces in Europe, could assuage doubts and misgivings

about the Bonn Government's future intentions and so ease the passage of the E.D.C. through Parliament. As Harvey put it in a despatch to Eden on 19 November 1952 ...

> Politically Indo-China is now in the heart of Europe. None of the major problems which beset Europe can be solved in isolation from what happens in South-East Asia. French doubts about the ratification of the Treaty of the European Defence Community stem largely ... from their fear that the drain of Indo-China will prevent them from providing forces equivalent in strength to the German forces, and as long as these doubts persist the problems of Europe will never be settled.[45]

There was thus no doubting the extent of support in London for a military solution to the Indo-China problem, nor the widespread recognition of the considerable benefits (in Europe as much as South-East Asia) which would accrue from French victory. However, the difficulty was in convincing a reluctant French Government, a task which fell squarely to Eden and his staff. On 28 November, Scott was asked by the Chiefs of Staff to remind the Foreign Secretary that 'the defence of Indo-China is one of the key points of our cold war strategy' and to 'express most strongly the disastrous consequences which would follow from Indo-China falling into the hands of the Communists'. As for reinforcement ...

> In view of the delicate political, economic and military situ -ation in Western Europe, the Chiefs of Staff appreciate that the suggestion that the French should themselves find three additional divisions ... is one which will require the most careful handling. We do, however, feel that the issue must not be shirked and that it is a political matter with which you in the Foreign Office must deal.[46]

'I do not think that the Chiefs of Staff over-rate the importance of helping the French in Indo-China', minuted Dixon on 1 December. Eden replied, rather despairingly, three days later: 'Yes. But even the Chiefs of Staff firmly "pass the buck" to us. What do we do?'[47] Eden, recently returned from a month immersed in Korean discussions at the United Nations,

thus found himself presented with a forceful body of opinion, including a significant number of his own advisers, in favour of a course of action which he had vigorously opposed in August and September when the Military had first raised it in relation to the Washington conference.[48] Now, as then, it was not the end (French victory) but the means (the transfer of French forces from Europe) that worried Eden and, ultimately, compelled him to reject the entire reinforcement thesis. Moreover, those officials in the Foreign Office originally in favour of a new aggressive French approach concluded, on closer consideration, that it was an unrealisable aim.

This negative decision resulted from the sheer scale of the political and military obstacles strewn across the path of French reinforcement. Obstacles, moreover, which the Chiefs of Staff expected the Foreign Office to remove. Despite the positive benefits of French victory-through-reinforcement, British diplomacy was not equal to the task. This left only the deeply unsatisfactory alternative of doing nothing. As Graves warned on 23 December ...

> I do not think that either the forces now available, or likely to be available by 1955 on present planning, will be able to destroy the rebel movement. If we are to save Indochina from slow strangulation we shall have to do something in the next six months or so, and that something will have to include an exorcisation of the French fortress mentality and an infusion of the offensive spirit'.[49]

What, then, were the obstacles that militated so strongly against French reinforcment? To begin with, there was the frustration and war-weariness of the French people. The failure over six years to obtain a conclusive victory, the strain which the war placed on the domestic economy and the weakening of the French army in Europe at a time when Germany stood on the brink of taking up arms again, all contributed to this mood. Disaffection was exacerbated by the seemingly endless waste of life in Viet-Nam. This

loss was, in turn, compounded by two factors. Firstly, the knowledge that whatever happened, France's influence in Indo-China was at an end for the Associate States could not be denied true independence for ever, nor the right to secede from the French Union. Thus France stood to gain little by way of economic or commercial benefit from its on-going sacrifice of blood and treasure.[80] Secondly, successive French Governments stressed, and most Frenchmen evidently accepted, that the war was not being waged for reasons of national self-interest but on behalf of the 'free world'.[81] Such apparent altruism tended to harden an already substantial public consensus against further loss of life for a cause that, in more ways than one, was no longer France's. Already, in the wake of the latest Viet-Minh offensive, the country was becoming restive. The reason, noted the *Spectator* on 21 October, was that nearly '200,000 French troops [colonial and Indo-Chinese as well as metropolitan French], including a very high proportion of officers, N.C.O.s and specialists ... are locked up in an outwardly thankless and intermittently bloody struggle, whose object is to deny the Communists control of a huge area of South-East Asia which France does not love and which does not love France'.[82] In monetary terms (American financial help since 1950 notwithstanding) The *Economist* calculated that 'the defence of Indo-China has already cost France more than twice the amount received under the entire Marshall Plan'. As for the human cost, 'the losses have been appalling; before the start of the most recent campaigns, well over 30,000 French soldiers and some 1,500 officers had died'. This latter figure meant that the graduating classes of France's military academy at St.Cyr were sent directly to Indo-China 'and that few survive to grow into future officers and generals'.[83] Nor did this estimate take into account the large numbers of Viet-Namese casualties

or those of the French Union (mostly North Africans) who fought alongside their metropolitan French colleagues.

A second obstacle (and, ironically, one which the British argued justified the need for more troops in Viet-Nam) was France's evident intention to withdraw its Expeditionary Corps by the end of 1954, a policy obviously framed with a view to appeasing a peace-hungry metropolitan population. Short of the chimeric 'general Far Eastern settlement', this was the only obvious means of disengagement without a major loss of prestige and serious repercussions on the French position elsewhere in the French Union, notably North Africa. But as British observers consistently pointed out, the success of this policy rested on the capacity of the indigenous anti-Communist forces to cope unaided with the threat from the Viet-Minh, something which was open to serious question. The authorities in Paris, however, appeared oblivious to the need to 'seriously weaken the Vietminh before they left'.[54] In terms of the acceptance or otherwise of British views on reinforcement, French policy was conditioning - and being conditioned by - public opinion to anticipate at a fixed point in the future a diminishing rather than increasing involvement in Indo-China. As Eden accepted, 'a respectable departure would have been welcomed by every shade of opinion'.[55] When, in September, the Foreign Office had enquired of the Paris Embassy what it thought of the Military's ideas on reinforcement, the response was that many in France would be unable 'to forget the numerous public statements of French leaders ... implying that the time is not far off when it will be possible gradually to reduce the strength of the French forces'.[56]

Assuming for present purposes that public, parliamentary and governmental opinion could be massaged into accepting the sagacity of

reinforcement, a whole new series of problems would still have to be circumvented. The most fundamental of these was a shortage of military manpower. The French army in the 1950s, like its British counterpart, was severely overstretched. The bulk of its troops were stationed in Germany and Indo-China but significant numbers were also tied down policing other areas of the French Union.[87] Because the China-factor dictated that reinforcements had to be French, this, in practice, meant drawing on two possible reservoirs, neither of which offered much prospect of meeting projected needs. Firstly, French colonial forces. Here, apart from what was seen as their inferior quality when judged against the metropolitan French army, unrest in Morocco and Senegal (major recruiting grounds) produced the conclusion that Paris could 'probably do little in the way of drawing for additional troops on other parts of the French Union'. Secondly, the French army in Europe. The problem in this respect was that as recently as 12 June, Pleven had announced that there were only five full strength French divisions in existence on the continent, five in process of formation and two still to be created.[88] Clearly, any suggestion that three to four of these divisions be transfered forthwith to Viet-Nam would receive a frosty reception. Also, while a speedy end to the Indo-China war was seen in London as a means of facilitating French approval of the E.D.C., it was precisely French fears about the E.D.C. which seemed bound to form the basis of their objections to reinforcement.

It is worth pausing to reflect that French concerns about German domination of the E.D.C. were grounded in something more than paranoia. For example, Article 43 of the E.D.C. Treaty defined the relative voting strengths of the member states within the proposed E.D.C. Council according to their national contribution to the general military pool. Therefore, as

a direct result of the war in Indo-China, German military predominance could lead to political primacy in Europe as well.[59] Nor should it be assumed that France took its responsibilities as a member of N.A.T.O. lightly, or that it was impervious to the dangers of Soviet expansion. In 1951-1952 France was the only N.A.T.O. power to exceed the figure for defence expenditure required of it by the Temporary Control Committee. Britain, in contrast, spent 3.4 per cent less.[60] Moreover, a part at least of the French Military establishment was 'concerned to ensure that further troops were not diverted from the defence of Western Europe'.[61] Therefore, for these extra-E.D.C. reasons, a further diminution of French military strength in Europe would be viewed with serious misgivings in Paris. In the end, though, the French desire to maintain their N.A.T.O. contribution and to ensure against German domination of the E.D.C. amounted to much the same thing, a point brought out by Harvey in November when observing that no French Government would take the 'risk' of reinforcing Indo-China in present circumstances 'not only because of the resulting weakening of the defences of Western Europe but because of the increased disequilibrium between France and Germany that would result'.[62]

There did remain one as yet untapped source of manpower which might conceivably be utilised - French National Servicemen. It was a matter of considerable irritation to the British that France had only an eighteen month period of National Service and refused to send conscripts to zones of active operations. When Pleven had argued in May that Indo-China made it impossible for France to build an army in Europe, Eden responded angrily that this 'would carry no conviction in the United Kingdom'. When France 'had two years' service ... and called up their reserves for training, we should be more impressed'.[63] Eden's irritation was doubtless heightened

by the fact that British conscripts were fighting in Malaya. In November, in the midst of the debate about French reinforcement, the Western and Southern Department of the Foreign Office concluded that 'if an increase in the period of French national service is capable technically of providing the extra troops now wanted, it might represent the course we should press for'. Britain could 'justifiably press the French on this because we have a 2 years' service' which was 'the N.A.T.O. ideal'.[64] However, similar probings in the past had met with strong French objections and their revival now seemed likely to be equally poorly received. No French Government was prepared to accept the domestic criticism which extending conscription would produce. Further, the despatch of concsripts would mean rescinding a law of 1950 which stated that 'in time of peace' they were not to be sent to any 'theatre of active military operations'. As far as the French were concerned, the situation in Viet-Nam was juridically a civil war, thus the present moment was a 'time of peace' and the law operative.[65] Its amendment would be a controversial and domestically divisive move at a time when, as noted, many in France envisaged winding down operations. It has been suggested that public 'horror and resentment' at the level of French casualties in the war never became as strong a political force as the American reaction to loss of life in Korea because 'the French victims were not conscripted civilians but professional or volunteer soldiers'.[66] For this reason, and because of the endemic instability of all French governments following the collapse of the M.R.P./Socialist 'Third Force' in 1951, sending conscripts to Indo-China would have been political suicide for whatever Administration took the decision.[67]

Clearly, then, the task confronting British diplomacy in making reinforcement acceptable in France was considerable. But these difficulties

were in themselves insufficient reason for not making some effort. After all, there were manifold advantages to be derived from a swift and favourable result in Viet-Nam, and equally serious disadvantages if matters were left to drift. Yet, in spite of this, Eden and the Foreign Office chose to reject the reinforcement thesis. Eden had made his own doubts clear in September. Then, on 11 November, a more formal statement of Foreign Office thinking was given to the Cabinet's Far East Committee: it would be 'politically undesirable to bring pressure on the French Government to send more troops or to increase its present effort'.[66] This negative attitude was only partly based on the apparently intractable nature of the difficulties for France in adopting a policy of reinforcement. The determining factor was the certainty that, precisely because of these difficulties, Paris would demand a price - some form of British concession - if it were to take the offensive in Viet-Nam. It was the knowledge that it would have to provide something in return for its advice which produced in the Foreign Office a policy of inaction when events in Viet-Nam seemed to demand immediate and decisive measures. What this 'price' was, and why it was so unacceptable to Eden and his officials, will be discussed in the following chapter.

NOTES

1. FO 371/101060/130, Johnston min., 3 Dec. 1952.
2. FO 371/101265/138G, Dixon min., 29 Nov. 1952.
3. CAB 128/25 CC(52)102nd meeting, 4 Dec. 1952.
4. FO 371/101738/12, Harvey despatch 631, 28 Nov. 1952.
5. Slessor Papers, Box 12, XIV D57, notes on 'Defence Policy in Economic Crisis', 20 Oct. 1952.
6. FO 371/101264/123G, Dixon min., 25 Oct. 1952.
7. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 84.
8. FO 371/106765/1G, Tahourdin min., 15 Jan. 1953.
9. FO 371/101264/123G, Tahourdin min., 24 Oct. 1952.
10. DEFE 4/57, COS(52)147th meeting, 21 Oct. 1952. For further details of the Washington Conference see FO 371/101264/115, Tahourdin letter to Rumbold, 30 Oct; FO 371/101265/134 & 135, notes by M. A. Saigon (Brig.

Field), 1 Dec. & Eden despatch 558 to MacDonald, 5 Dec. 1952.
11. FO 371/101071/53, Graves tel. 323, 11 Nov. 1952.
12. FO 371/101070/42, Harvey tel. 431, 24 Oct. 1952.
13. FO 371/101071/66G, Graves tel. 360, 16 Dec. 1952
14. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, pps. 430 & 431. It has also been suggested that the Viet-Minh withdrawal was down to superior French fire-power at the seige of Na San, see Dalloz, *Indo-China*, pp. 147-48.
15. *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Dec. 1952.
16. FO 371/101729/24, Harvey tel. 441, 6 Nov. 1952.
17. See complimentary references to Scott in Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951-1955* (London 1986), entries for 21 Jan. & 7 Oct. 1955; FO 800/671/14 (Macmillan Papers), Macmillan tel. 2638 to Washington, 3 June 1955.
18. FO 371/101264/123G, Scott min., 25 Oct. 1952. Scott had in fact been openly advocating this since August, see p. 50.
19. FO 371/101264/122G, Scott letter to Hayter, 10 Nov; FO 371/101265/143 & 144, Scott mins., 6 & 11 Dec; DEFE 4/57, Scott to COS(52)158th meeting, 18 Nov. 1952.
20. CAB 128/25 CC(52)102nd meeting, 4 Dec. 1952.
21. CAB 134/897 FE(O)(52)13th meeting, 9 Dec; FO 371/101061/136, Olver min., 11 Dec. 1952.
22. FO 371/101061/134, Burrows min., 2 Dec. 1952.
23. See Dalloz, *Indo-China*, pp. 140-41.
24. FO 371/101060/121, Hayter tel. 407, 2 Oct. 1952.
25. FO 371/101061/134, Graves letter to Scott, 24 Nov. 1952.
26. FO 371/101061/131, Graves letter to Scott, 14 Nov. 1952. Also FO 371/101071/64, Graves despatch 168, 2 Dec; FO 371/101061/136, Graves despatch 166, 2 Dec. 1952.
27. FO 371/101061/134, Graves letter to Scott, 24 Nov. 1952
28. FO 371/106742/1, Graves despatch 6, 9 Jan. 1953 - review of 1952.
29. *The Economist* ('War in the Thai Country'), 29 Nov. 1952.
30. FO 371/101061/136, MacDonald tel. 680, 8 Dec. 1952; also CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)1st meeting, 13 Jan. 1953. For background to Bukit Serene see FO 371/101235/7, Scott min., 28 Aug; FO 371/101061/136, Olver min., 11 Dec. 1952. The Conference conclusion was passed to the State Dept., see *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 316-17.
31. DEFE 4/57, COS(52)158th meeting, 18 Nov. 1952.
32. On the Songkhla strategy, see CAB 131/11, DO(51)16, 23 Feb. 1951; CAB 131/12, D(52)2nd meeting, 19 March 1952; also map.
33. DEFE 6/22, JP(52)137(Final) - COS(52)167, 5 Dec. 1952.
34. CAB 131/12, D(52)5 & 8, 14 March & 16 April; CAB 131/13, D(53)3, 28 Jan. 1953; also FO 371/101061/136, Scott min., 11 Dec. 1952.
35. CAB 131/12, D(52)41 & 45, reports on the Defence Programme, 29 Sept. & 21 Oct. 1952. Also CAB 129/54 C(52)253 & 264, memos by Alexander (22 July) & Head (28 July); CAB 129/55 C(52)316 & 320, memos. by Alexander & Butler, 3 Oct. 1952.
36. FO 371/101061/151, Head letter to Eden, 15 Dec. 1952.
37. DEFE 6/22, JP(52)137(Final) - COS(52)545, 5 Dec. 1952. The combined briefs can also be found in FO 371/101265/142G.
38. FO 371/101061/151, Head letter to Eden, 15 Dec. 1952.
39. FO 371/101267/19, Roberts min., 11 Dec. 1952.
40. FO 371/106765/1G, Hayter letter to Scott, 2 Jan. 1953.
41. FO 371/101060/130, Tahourdin min., 27 Nov. 1953.
42. PREM 11/1765, Harvey despatch 505, 5 Nov. 1951. Also CAB 129/65

C(52)375, 30 Oct. 1952; Alistair Horne, *Macmillan*, Vol. I, 1894-1956 (London 1988), p. 351.

43. FO 371/101070/45, Robey min., 7 Nov; FO 371/101264/123G, Dixon min., 25 Oct. 1952. Also FO 371/101741, Harvey letter to Strang, 10 Nov; FO 371/101071/49, Burrows min., 5 Nov. 1952.
44. FO 371/101060/127, Rumbold letter to Scott, 7 Nov. & Burrows min., 12 Nov. 1952.
45. FO 371/101060/130, Harvey despatch 606, 19 Nov. 1952.
46. FO 371/101265/136G, Strickland letter to Scott, 28 Nov. 1952.
47. FO 371/101265/136G, Dixon min. (1 Dec) & Eden min. (4 Dec) 1952.
48. See p. 86.
49. FO 371/101071/68, Graves letter to Tahourdin, 23 Dec. 1952.
50. See Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p. 292.
51. See Grosser, *Western Alliance*, pp. 130-31; *The Economist* ('France's Open Wound'), 1 Nov., and *New Statesman and Nation* ('France Angry'), 1 Nov. 1952.
52. *Spectator* ('Black River and Beyond'), 31 Oct. 1952.
53 *The Economist* ('France's Open Wound'), 1 Nov. 1952.
54. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 84.
55. Ibid.
56. FO 371/101264/104G, Hayter letter to Reilly, 25 Sept. 1952.
57. FO 371/101061/136, Cheetham min., 16 Dec. 1952.
58. Werth, *France*, p. 592.
59. Fursden, *European Defence Community*, p. 199-200; Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, p. 107.
60. FO 371/101265/138G, Dixon min., 29 Nov. 1952; also Peter Boyle in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 39.
61. DEFE 4/57, COS(52)147th meeting, 21 Oct. 1952.
62. FO 371/101061/130, Harvey despatch 606, 19 Nov. 1952.
63. FO 371/101058/74, Eden tel. 181 to Saigon, 30 May 1952.
64. FO 371/101061/136, Cheetham min., 16 Dec. 1952.
65. *The Times* ('Viet Nam Independence'), 23 Dec. 1952.
66. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1952*, p. 293; Werth, *France*, pp. 676-77.
67. FO 371/101060/130, Harvey despatch 606, 19 Nov; FO 371/101061/136, Cheetham min., 16 Dec 1952. Also FO 371/106765/5, Tahourdin min., 6 Jan. 1953; Herbert Tint, *France Since 1918* (London 1980), pp. 135-36, hereafter *France*.
68. CAB 134/897 FE(O)(52)12th meeting, 11 Nov. 1952. This view was repeated at a further meeting on 9 Dec. 1952.

PART III: THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE DIMENSION

CHAPTER SIX

"REFUSING TO PAY THE PRICE"

British diplomacy and French reinforcement

December 1952 to February 1953

British policy-makers anticipated that any approach to Paris on the subject of reinforcement for Viet-Nam would be met with French calls for a *quid pro quo*. The 'price' to be paid for French acceptance of British advice was expected to take three forms. First, an increase in the Churchill Government's financial and material contribution to the war effort. Second, an undertaking to station extra British troops in Western Europe to ensure that the transfer of French forces to Viet-Nam did not undermine the efficacy of N.A.T.O. As Hayter of the Paris Embassy had observed in September, the 'only condition on which I can imagine the French agreeing to [reinforcement] would be that we and/or the Americans would be prepared to make good the gap thus caused in Europe'. If a guarantee were forthcoming, the authorities in Paris could explain to public opinion that reinforcement was 'in accordance with their pledges about reduction of the forces in Indo-China since the temporary increase would be followed by a major reduction once the situation was restored'. This, however, 'would not get round the difficulty about the balance of power within the E.D.C.'[1] The third possible price was linked to this last consideration. As the Chiefs of Staff acknowledged in November, any suggestion that France redeploy significant numbers of troops to Viet-Nam 'might well be used as a lever to force the United Kingdom to commit forces to the European Defence Community' given the resultant military superiority of Germany.[2]

Despite the obvious advantages of a French victory, to Eden and the Foreign Office none of these potential pre-requisites were acceptable. A demand for greater assistance in prosecuting the war was regarded as beyond the country's means to provide. The Conservative Government's first year in office had seen only a marginal improvement in the economic situation. At the start of October 1952, Butler cautioned the Cabinet that '[w]e are trying to do far more than our resources permit' and that 'if, as regards defence, we go partly over to a war effort, then, on the rest of the field, we must go partly over to a war economy'.[3] Among over things this would necessitate a major revision of the Government's housing policy upon which so much of its domestic popularity, existing and potential, rested.[4] In July Churchill had lamented to the House of Commons: 'Tragic indeed is the spectacle of the might, majesty, dominion and power of the once magnificent and still considerable British Empire having to worry how we can pay our monthly bills'.[5] Thus the simple inescapable facts of economic life partially account for the Foreign Office's refusal to sanction the reinforcement thesis. 'Vital United Kingdom interests in South-East Asia are at stake but as the United Kingdom is not playing a major part in supplying or fighting the Indo-China war, she has little real _locus standi_ to advise', concluded the South-East Asia Department, its Head, Tahourdin, adding that the British Government 'is not in a position to add to their existing commitments either military or financial'.[6]

The other probable French demands were equally unacceptable for reasons relating to Britain's established position on the E.D.C. Indeed other factors apart, it is clear that the Government's Indo-China policy was greatly circumscribed by the principles upon which its E.D.C. policy rested. For instance, a request that Britain should commit forces to the

E.D.C. comensurate with those French forces re-directed to Indo-China was likely to be viewed by Eden - in spite of its temporary nature - as a disingenuous French ploy to secure British membership of the E.D.C. through the back door. As already seen, Eden had quickly embraced the previous Labour Government's policy of association with rather than membership of the E.D.C. It is not without relevance that Eden chose to reaffirm this position in unequivocal terms at just the point, in December 1952, when the issue of French reinforcement was being debated in the Foreign Office. Britain 'cannot join the Community nor merge any part of its forces in the Community', he told the Cabinet, a view he repeated during a meeting with the French President at the end of the month.[7]

As for the idea of British troops filling the 'hole' in Western defence caused by French reinforcement, this was, at first sight, a more realistic proposition if only because it did not involve joining the E.D.C. Instead, the risk of German domination could be reduced by an increased British presence on the Continent within N.A.T.O. but outside of the E.D.C. However, even if a dearth of military manpower had not ruled this impracticable, Eden was already in the process of rejecting a similar commitment in relation to the E.D.C. The French, consistent with their desire for the most intimate British relationship with the European Army, had been angling for a firm undertaking on the part of the Churchill Government to maintain its forces in Europe at their existing level for the foreseeable future. Such a pledge would, in theory, make the E.D.C. more palatable to the French National Assembly wherein there was a 'profound fear, largely based on a lack of self-confidence, of being left alone in the EDC to deal directly with the Germans on day-to-day political, economic and military problems' without the supporting presence (or in this case

proximity) of Britain.[8] Eden, though, vigorously opposed any such promise, telling the Cabinet on 4 December that 'we had already gone as far as we could short of full membership'.[9] A week later he again insisted that Britain should 'refrain from entering any commitment to maintain any fixed quantity of British forces on the Continent for a specific number of years' and, on 30 December, made clear to the French Ambassador to London that there could never be any 'irrevocable guarantees' about British troop levels.[10] The furthest that Eden would go was to 'consult' with the French and the other E.D.C. powers before withdrawing British contingents.[11]

This inflexible attitude had a three-layered foundation: limited manpower and the absence of a strategic reserve; the need for freedom of manoeuvre given Britain's still considerable world-wide interests; and Eden's personal belief that the E.D.C. should be encouraged by means which 'do not involve any real sacrifice on our part'.[12] Clearly any French request for *extra* troops in Europe to facilitate reinforcement of Indo-China would have been effectively rejected *a priori* in the context of Britain's E.D.C. policy. To have accepted such a price would have stood this policy on its head. Eden, in short, would not do for France in Indo-China more than he had already refused to do for France in terms of the E.D.C.

Discounting these objections, there may also have been some reluctance to meet French requirements based on a mild but pervasive contempt in the Foreign Office for the way in which France wallowed in its post-war economic and military weakness. 'Everyone recognises that Indo-China is a frightful drain on France', observed Scott on 25 November 1952 ...

> Yet in a sense it is a symptom rather than a cause of French impotence. Since Turkey recovered twenty years ago France has taken her place as the sick man of Europe. She exploits her feebleness and the debt which others owe to her to secure pall-

iatives from abroad, when the only hope of a cure lies in a more robust policy at home.'[13]

Churchill, too, seems to have regarded French problems in Indo-China as a prelude to the relegation of France to the level of a third-rank power.[14] On the other hand, the debate about the value of France as an ally was not new in official British circles.[15] In the end officials tended to reach much the same conclusion: 'France is necessary to us for geographical and other reasons ... and we shall have to make the best of a bad job'.[16]

All these factors combined to ensure a decision in the Foreign Office against raising the reinforcement issue with the French despite ample opportunity for doing so. The Pinay Administration, disappointed with the inconclusive outcome of the Washington military conference in October, planned to use the presence of Eden and Acheson at the next session of the N.A.T.O. Council in Paris in mid-December to resume discussions.[17] This provided the British with an ideal forum in which to discuss reinforcement as well as its implications for Europe and the E.D.C. However, no such positive initiative was contemplated. As Eden's brief for the meeting made clear, Britain 'cannot assist the French either with money or troops'. On the central question of reinforcement ...

> it is not politically possible to suggest this to the French because they would not only fear the consequent weakening of their position vis-a-vis Germany but might well propose unaccept -able terms. They might for example stipulate that any force sent to Indo-China should be replaced by additional British or American forces in Europe.

If, however, Schuman happened to mention the impossibility of his country despatching more men to Viet-Nam of his own accord, Eden was to ignore the well-chronicled reasons why this was so and instead brow-beat the French on conscription, the limitations of which 'seriously reduce French ability to discharge its military commitments in Europe and in Indo-China'.[18]

However justified this attitude, Eden's N.A.T.O. brief was still, at root, a contradictory document. Convinced that something 'drastic' had to be done to arrest the drift towards premature French withdrawal, the architects of British diplomacy decided on a something that amounted to nothing. On one side, there were serious doubts about the ability of the Viet-Namese army to deal effectively with the Viet-Minh on its own. On the other hand, though the British believed they had the answer to the problem they felt unable to tell the French what it was. But if Indo-China was worth saving - and there were few who did not think so - a do nothing approach was deeply unsatisfactory. Indeed to maintain such a position given London's acute appreciation of the situation in Viet-Nam, the failings of French strategy and the repercussions of French capitulation, would amount to witting acquiesence in what threatened to be the loss of the whole of Indo-China.[19]

The inertia which enveloped British policy in December 1952 was plainly incompatible with the urgency of re-directing French policy away from its self-constructed precipice in Viet-Nam. This was underlined when the N.A.T.O. Council convened in Paris on 16 December. At first sight, the meeting seemed to produce a number of constructive results, certainly from the French standpoint. One such was the most unequivocal public statement yet from their allies that Indo-China was not just a colonial issue but a vital front in the world struggle against international Communism. London had hitherto held back in this regard in order to maintain pressure on Paris to perfect Indo-Chinese independence, and because fulsome expressions of solidarity might be met with French demands to convert words into assistance. However, the need to shore up morale in France in the wake of the Viet-Minh's autumn offensive produced, on 17 December, a N.A.T.O.

resolution expressing 'wholehearted admiration for the valiant and long continued struggle of the French forces' and agreeing that 'the campaign ... deserves continuing support from the N.A.T.O. Governments'.[20] The resolution broke new ground for another reason: it was 'the first time that Nato has formally stretched an arm outside the European theatre [and] emphasises in an unprecedented way the identity of the problems of defence in Europe and the Far East'.[21]

The French had also hoped to break the deadlock on South-East Asian defence planning and, in this connection, to secure a firm assurance of immediate Anglo-American help in the event of a Chinese invasion of Viet-Nam. To this end, agreement was reached in Paris on the establishment of a Five Power Staff Agency for the region to 'maintain contacts and continue studies for effective military action against aggression'.[22] Eden had favoured for some time a multilateral defence mechanism as an end in itself, a shackle on American adventurism, and as a less provocative deterrent to Chinese aggression than an open warning statement. However, the Staff Agency plan fell a good way short of this ideal and was in reality little more than a platform upon which the previously *ad hoc* meetings of British, French, American, New Zealand and Australian military experts could be conducted more formally and regularly.[23] In line with the evolution of British thinking since September 1952, it was also viewed as a boost to French morale in their struggle against the real enemy, the Viet-Minh.[24] The French, though they later tried to extend the Agency's scope, were pleased with this measure of progress.[25] It may also have tempered their disappointment at not obtaining a further increase in American aid to expedite the training of the Viet-Namese army.[26]

Predictably, the British had ignored the issue of reinforcement in

Paris. While Eden and the Foreign Office may have had good reasons for following such a tepid line and, by extension, accepting optimistic French forecasts about the future, the advocates of decisive action were dismayed. Nowhere was disappointment more keenly felt than in the Paris Embassy. Prior to the N.A.T.O. Council, Harvey had argued that if France required 'compensatory guarantees in respect of the E.D.C. and Germany to counterbalance the resultant French inferiority' and so make reinforcement of Indo-China possible, it would be 'in our own interests to go as far as we can to supply it'.[27] Now, in the wake of the Paris meeting, such exhortations gained intensity as the Embassy took the lead in ensuring that the Foreign Office did not persist in sidestepping the question of reinforcement. On 2 January 1953, Hayter wrote to Scott warning that the French were in a 'thoroughly bad position', that the Viet-Minh had 'complete liberty of action' in Tonking and that accordingly 'there is no prospect whatsoever of the Vietnamese being able to deal with the Viet Minh by themselves in the future, though the French in theory intend to start withdrawing their troops this year'. Speaking for the Embassy as a whole, Hayter asserted that '[i]f the war is not to end in disaster ... substantial reinforcements have got to be sent from somewhere soon, say within a year from now'. He followed this up with a strong indictment of the passivity of the British delegation at the Paris N.A.T.O. Council ...

> We have so far all been proceeding on the assumption that there are no reinforcements which can be sent. There are no British troops available, all the available American troops are engaged in Korea, and even if there were any spare British or American troops it is argued that to send them to Indo-China would result in bringing in the Chinese and making another Korea. And it is also assumed, at least by the French, that there are no French reinforcements available unless they had two years military service and altered their law about sending conscripts abroad. They would also need to have the extra cost underwritten by the Americans and receive some additional guarantee against German preponderance in Europe. It has so far been taken for granted that these require-

ments were all of them too difficult to fulfill, given the polit -ical situation in France and British and American reluctance to commit ourselves any more deeply in Europe militarily or financially. And so we go on drifting hoping that something will turn up and using such devices as the establishment of a "five power staff agency" to give ourselves the false but comfortable feeling that everything possible is being done. That at any rate is how it looks to us here in Paris.

Hayter's forthright analysis served to put reinforcement at the forefront of Foreign Office thinking once more. 'If we, the French and the Americans can collectively face the facts of the situation in Indo-China', he concluded, 'the French might feel obliged to put themselves in a position to send further reinforcements and we might find it possible to pay the price which they would demand of us in Europe'.[28]

It was obvious, not just from the stance taken by the Paris Embassy, that the reinforcement lobby was as strong and vocal as ever. Hayter's assessment, for example, echoed that of the 1952 Bukit Serene conference, while on 11 December the Cabinet's Defence Committee were told by the Chiefs of Staff of the importance of French reinforcement and that 'the political difficulties inherent in this must be faced, and that if necessary the Far East should be strengthened temporarily at the expense of the N.A.T.O. build-up in Europe'.[29] 'Our Chiefs of Staff are very worried about the effect of French failures on Malaya, Burma and Siam', noted Eden's Private Secretary five days later.[30] A paper drawn up by the Joint Planning Staff on 22 January 1953 argued that it was 'essentially in our interests ... [t]o assist to our utmost in resolving the situation in Indo-China while the opportunity still remains'. At the end of the month, the influential British Defence Co-ordination Committee for the Far East declared that it was of 'the greatest importance that every effort be made to persuade the French to provide the necessary reinforcement without

delay, and to make it politically possible for them to do so, in order that they may be deployed in Indo-China by next September at the latest'.[31] The High Commissoner in Singapore counselled similarly that 'the best help we can give the French is to assist in overcoming the political difficulties in Europe to providing more French troops for Indo-China'.[32]

Eden and the Foreign Office were also subjected to indirect pressure to reconsider their decision on reinforcement. This first manifested itself in statements by leading figures in the new French Government of René Mayer (formed on 7 January 1953) that the policy of the previous Administration would continue.[33] Letourneau, who retained his portfolio, told Harvey on 27 January that the only possible course for France was 'to build up the Vietnamese army so that the French could withdraw their forces'. Yet it was this very same policy which the British maintained necessitated prior reinforcement. Letourneau, however, rejected the suggestion on the grounds that it 'depended entirely on the policy of the Chinese Government, and that they were perfectly capable of reinforcing the Viet Minh up to any amount which the French might send out and would probably in fact do so'. Previous British assessments of French opposition to reinforcement had dwelt on its domestic unpopularity and the E.D.C. factor, but this was a new argument. 'From what M. Letourneau said', Harvey reflected, 'I am fairly certain that the present French Government will not contemplate this course of action'.[34] Interestingly, the Chinese dimension was now almost entirely absent from British calculations, though clearly not from French ones. Meanwhile, *The Economist*, in an editorial widely discussed in the Foreign Office, demonstrated that the reinforcement thesis was not just the preoccupation of Whitehall officials. In advocating the despatch of more French troops to Viet-Nam, it noted the need to 'give some further

guarantee that Germany will not be allowed to dominate the western partnership', something which was within Anglo-American power to grant ...

> There will be no effective German force for at least two years, and by that time Indo-China should be won or lost: it would cost the Americans and the British little to give an undertaking to maintain on the Continent of Europe for this period a force at least equivalent to that of the new German army.[35]

Whether Eden liked it or not, the problem of reinforcement was not going to disappear. At the same time, though, the probable compensatory demands which Paris would make if its policy of staged disengagement was to be reversed were no more affordable or acceptable in January and February 1953 than they had been in November and December 1952, a point highlighted in a stock-taking paper drawn up by the South-East Asia Department ...

> Large-scale reinforcement bristles with difficulties. France has at present only five effective divisions in Western Europe. Opinion in France is greatly exercised at the prospect of the embodiment of the French forces within the EDC and of plans for rearming Germany within EDC. Even present EDC plans present a considerable threat to the French Government. As things stand it would be most difficult to put forward a proposal for reinforcing Indo-China. There seems little doubt that France would insist upon a considerable quid pro quo in the form of UK and US guarantees to Europe. In order to raise the necessary forces the French conscription period might well have to be lengthened and French conscripts sent overseas. This would require legislation and the debate would be most difficult for the French Government ... The resources of the UK are fully strained and further commitments as regards EDC would present great difficulties.[36]

Guided and at the same time restricted by the imperative of no concessions or new commitments, British diplomacy entered 1953 in search of a means of placing pressure on the French without leaving itself prey to embarassing entreaties for help.

In the end there was only one way round this difficulty. Gradually but perceptibly and - in terms of power-by-proxy - logically and even inevitably, British eyes turned to Washington. The United States already

seemed to possess a leverage over French policy far in excess of Britain's by dint of its massive assistance programme for Indo-China. As a Foreign Office official had predicted some six months earlier in response to the opening salvoes in Graves's offensive for a more forward French strategy, Washington was 'in a much better position to exercise some influence on the way the campaign develops ... I suspect that our only possible line of approach will be through the Americans'.[37]

Why did it take so long for this expedient to be adopted? Arguably, it was not until the end of 1952 that the inability of British diplomacy to pursue its objectives in Indo-China was fully revealed. There was also general acceptance that in a Presidential election year the Truman Administration was unlikely to take far-reaching policy decisions, the more so after 5 November when the Republicans triumphed at the polls.[38] However, by the turn of the year, and with Eisenhower's inauguration looming large, this period of indecision was about to end. Indeed the change of Administration occurred at what seemed to British policy-makers a particularly propitious moment for effecting what amounted a refinement of power-by-proxy, namely pressure-by-proxy on the French. There was much talk in the Foreign Office of an 'opportunity' to influence the final shape of the new U.S. Government's necessarily embryonic and hopefully malleable views on Indo-China. With Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, planning to visit London at the start of February 1953, the South-East Asia Department, reflecting the Foreign Office consensus, recommended that Eden should 'voice his concern over the existing policy of drift in Indo-China' when they met, and to try and elicit the views of the Republican Administration 'at their formative stage'. Crucially, such an approach might be made 'without the danger of laying ourselves open to any

further commitment'.[39]

The concept of pressure-by-proxy implied that Britain's want of power did not equal powerlessness if the resources of the United States could be used to achieve those objectives which were otherwise out of reach. Though given no official congnizance at the time, the course pursued by policy-makers with regard to Indo-China and French reinforcement in the first months of 1953 was consistent with what Eden, in his June 1952 Cabinet paper on overseas obligations, had described as the over-riding aim of British foreign policy - 'to persuade the United States to assume the real burdens ... while retaining for ourselves as much political control - and hence prestige and world influence - as we can'.[40] However, if pressure-by-proxy was to have any chance of success certain pre-conditions had to exist. Firstly, a close Anglo-American symmetry of outlook on the importance of safeguarding Indo-China and on the steps France needed to take to restore its position, to wit reinforcement. Second, should there be no such symmetry, British diplomacy had to be given an opportunity to bring Washington's thinking round through close consultation and liaison. Down to January 1953 neither pre-condition really existed. The Truman Administration, while agreeing that Indo-China was of vital concern to the West, evidently failed to view current French policy in the foreboding light that many British observers did. Hence it had no reason to urge a more forward strategy on Paris and seemed satisfied with plans for passing the burden of defence in Viet-Nam to native forces.

As for the second pre-condition, there had been little opportunity for putting across contrary British views on account of the Truman Administration's predilection for unilateral decision-making even on matters of general concern. In spite of the close Acheson-Franks

relationship there were 'endless complaints by the British at every level over lack of consultation'.[41] The advent of the Republican Administration was therefore seen as a chance to start afresh. In terms of Indo-China, there was broad agreement in the Foreign Office on the importance of making known British views 'before United States policy crystallises'.[42] This approach was not confined to South-East Asia for Eden was also anxious to put across British views on economic issues 'so that we may influence [the Eisenhower Administration's] thinking in their early days'.[43]

What signs were there, if any, that in either respect things would be better under the Republicans? On the first pre-condition, unanimity on the importance of Indo-China and the failings of the French, the early indicators were encouraging. Dulles, for example, left few doubts in the run up to the Presidential election that he personally viewed South-East Asia as 'a key region in the conflict with communist "imperialism", and that it was important to draw the line of containment north of the Rice Bowl of Asia - the Indochina peninsula'.[44] Following the election, Dulles told Selwyn Lloyd in New York that he was 'more worried about Indochina than about Korea'.[45] His reasoning, as privately explained to the President-elect in December, was geo-political ...

> Korea is important ... but the really important spot is Indo-China, because we could lose Korea and insulate ourselves against the consequences of that loss; but if Indo-China goes, and South Asia goes, it is extremely hard to insulate ourselves against the consequences of that.[46]

On 13 January 1953, the Cabinet's Far East Committee were informed of '[i]ndications that the new United States Administration were very much alive to the political and strategic importance ... of preventing Indo-China from becoming Communist' and, two days later, a Foreign Office official minuted optimistically that Eisenhower and Dulles were 'likely to

share the view ... that if things are allowed to drift in Indo-China we shall end up by fatally undermining NATO in Europe'.[47] But irrespective of these declarations, by the start of February there had been no firm pointers as to what Republican policy would actually be: whether it would accept, like the Truman Administration, French reassurances and merely seek to extend aid for the training of the Viet-Namese army or, alternatively, whether it would share London's anxiety and press for a more offensive strategy via reinforcement. A third line could not be totally discounted - that the new Administration, in accordance with its election pledges to regain the initiative in the Cold War, might be tempted to actively participate in the fighting. This would have 'dangerous repercussions on Hong Kong and Malaya, quite apart from any risk that by precipitating Chinese intervention in Indo-China they might ultimately involve us in direct commitments there'.[48] Churchill, during a visit to the United States in January 1953, warned Eden that there could be 'rough weather' ahead in 'dealing with the Republican Party who have been twenty years out of office'.[49] Moreover, though on Indo-China what little was known of Republican thinking seemed reasonable, indications of the shape of general strategy in Asia (pressurising the Chinese to take negotiations for a Korean armistice more seriously, a more vigorous strategy in Korea if this failed, de-recognition of the P.R.C. by Britain, the use of Nationalist Chinese forces in a pinprick war against the Peking regime, all of which Churchill objected to) were much more disturbing.[50] To Eden and his advisers the correct policy was to avoid internationalising the war while maintaining (in practice, American) assistance to the French and ensuring that a more robust politico-military approach was adopted in Viet-Nam.[51] This in turn reflected British policy towards Asia in general, namely 'to

maintain a firm and united front against Communist aggression and at the same time to search for a _modus vivendi_ [with Peking]'.[52]

Uncertainty about the final form of Republican policy on Indo-China underlined the importance of the second pre-condition to pressure-by-proxy, a close medium of consultation through which British views could be transmitted. Here, though, the signs were less pleasing. To begin with, John Colville, Churchill's Private Secretary, observed during the Premier's visit to the United States in January, that Eisenhower had 'a bee in his bonnet about "collusion" with us: is all in favour of it clandestinely but not overtly', something which seemed to preclude the type of intimate relationship required.[53] Churchill found the Republican politicians preoccupied with taking 'a different line to their predecessors' and, consequently, the tendency was to be 'less friendly in action, if not in feeling'.[54] This, however, amounted to much the same thing in practice. Eisenhower wished to avoid London and Washington projecting 'the appearance of attempting to dominate the Councils of the free world'. The President was particularly keen not to upset or exclude the French from major discussions (to the annoyance of Churchill) because 'their willingness to go along with us is tremendously important; not only because of their responsibility in the Indo-China war but because of their central position in Western Europe'.[55] Accordingly, officials in London harboured few illusions, one minuting on 24 January that although the new Administration was 'cooperative, communicative and ready to listen', it would 'not necessarily refrain from action if they cannot get our consent'.[56] The prospects for the success of pressure-by-proxy were thus mixed at best. When Eisenhower made his first public pronouncement on foreign policy on 2 February these prospects visibly receded.

NOTES

1. FO 371/101264/105G, Hayter letter to Reilly, 25 Sept. 1952.
2. DEFE 4/57, COS(52)158th meeting, 18 Nov. 1952.
3. CAB 129/55, C(52)320, 3 Oct. 1952.
4. Avon Papers (University of Birmingham), AP20/16/9, Butler letter to Eden, 23 Jan. 1953.
5. HCDebs, Vol.504, col.1509, 30 July 1952.
6. FO 371/106765/18 & 1G, Burrows & Tahourdin mins, 28 Feb, 15 Jan. 1953.
7. CAB 129/57, C(52)434, 10 Dec; FO 371/101743/2, Eden despatch 1181 to Paris, 22 Dec. 1952.
8. Fursden, *European Defence Community*, p.200. See also Tint, *France*, p.132; *The Economist* ('Indo-Chinese Dilemma'), 5 April 1952.
9. CAB 128/25, CC(52)102nd meeting, 4 Dec. 1952.
10. CAB 129/57, C(52)434, 4 Dec; PREM 11/438, Eden despatch 1198 to Paris, 30 Dec. 1952.
11. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.90.
12. CAB 129/57, C(52)434, 4 Dec. 1952.
13. FO 371/101741/1, Scott min., 25 Nov. 1952.
14. Mr. Anthony Montague Browne, interview, 13 Sept. 1989.
15. Sean Greenwood, 'Return to Dunkirk: The Origins of the Anglo-French Treaty of March 1947', unpublished Ph.D thesis (Univ. of London, 1982).
16. FO 371/112778/20, Kirkpatrick min., 30 April 1954. See under same ref. Harvey despatch 119, 30 March 1954 and associated minutes.
17. FO 371/101264/121G, Tahourdin letter to Rumbold, 8 Nov; FO 371/101265/135, Eden despatch 558 to MacDonald, 5 Dec. 1952.
18. FO 371/101265/141G, FO brief for Eden, 9 Dec. 1952.
19. FO 371/101060/130, Olver min., 27 Nov. 1952.
20. CMD 2834, p.57.
21. *The Economist*, editorial ('Western Stake in Indo-China'), 10 Jan. 1953. Also Grosser, *Western Alliance*, p.131.
22. The functions of the Agency had been agreed at the Washington military Conference in October, FO 371/101265/135G & 152G, Eden despatch 558 to MacDonald, 5 Dec. & Eden tel. 4424 to Paris, 24 Dec. 1952.
23. FO 371/101265/153G, Eden min., 19 Dec. 1952.
24. CAB 134/898, FE(O)(53)1st meeting, 13 Jan. 1953.
25. FO 371/101265/152G & 153G, FO tel. to Paris, 2 Jan. & Scott memo., 3 Jan; FO 371/106765/1G & 3, Hayter letter to Scott, 2 Jan. & Scott letter to N. Butler, 8 Jan 1953.
26. Slessor papers, Box 16 XXV/C82, Slessor tel. 293 to COS, 8 Dec; DEFE 6/22, JP(52)137(Final) - COS(52)545, 5 Dec; FO 371/101061/141, Hoyer-Millar tel. 824, 16 Dec; PREM 11/438, Eden despatch 1198 to Paris, 30 Dec. 1952. Also Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, (16 Dec), p.69; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey of International Affairs 1953* (Oxford 1956), pp.424-25, hereafter *Survey 1953*.
27. FO 371/101060/130, Harvey despatch 606, 19 Nov. 1952.
28. FO 371/106765/1G, Hayter letter to Scott, 2 Jan. 1953.
29. FO 371/101061/136, MacDonald tel. 680, 8 Dec. & Olver min., 11 Dec. 1952 summarising D(52)49 witheld from Defence Committee files. Also FO 371/106955/2, Olver min., 20 Dec. & Eden min., 21 Dec. 1952.
30. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, (16 Dec 1952), p.69.
31. CAB 131/13, D(53)1 ('Defence of Malaya'), 22 Jan; FO 371/106765/10G, B.D.C.C. (FE) tel. SEACOS 303 to MOD, 31 Jan. 1953.
32. FO 371/106765/15, Sterndale-Bennett letter to Scott, 2 Feb. 1953.

33. FO 371/107434/1, Harvey tel. 1, 1 Jan. 1953; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 84; Werth, *France*, p. 591.
34. FO 371/106765/7, Harvey despatch, 28 Jan. 1953.
35. *The Economist*, ('Western Stake in Indo-China'), 10 Jan; FO 371/106765/1G, Hood min., 16 Jan; FO 371/106996/5G, Hood & Roberts mins., 22 Jan; FO 371/106773/2, Tahourdin min., 15 Jan. 1953.
36. FO 371/106765/18, draft submission, 28 Feb. 1953.
37. FO 371/101059/88, Olver min., 28 June 1952.
38. See CAB 131/12, D(52)12th meeting, 11 Dec; FO 371/101060/127, Tahourdin min., 21 Nov; FO 371/101061/136, Olver min., 11 Dec; FO 371/101265/141G FO brief for Eden, 9 Dec. 1952. Also FO 371/106765/3, Scott letter to Butler, 8 Jan. 1953.
39. FO 371/106765/1G, Tahourdin min., 15 Jan. & mins by Cheetham, Hood & McDermott (Permanent Under-Secretary's Dept).
40. CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 18 June 1952.
41. Peter Boyle in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, pps. 36 & 31-38; Acheson, *Creation*, pp. 323-24.
42. FO 371/105182/1G, Scott min., 24 Jan; FO 371/106765/14G, FO brief for Lloyd, 10 Feb; FO 371/106765/1G, 9 & 10, mins by Tahourdin (15 Jan, 9 & 19 Feb) & Cheetham (16 Jan) 1953.
43. PREM 11/431, Eden tel. 3 to Churchill, 1 Jan. 1953.
44. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel edition), Vol. I, p. 85.
45. Avon papers, AP20/15/24A, Lloyd letter to Eden, 26 Dec. 1952.
46. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 173.
47. CAB 134/898, FE(O)(53)1st meeting, 13 Jan; FO 371/106765/1G, Tahourdin min., 15 Jan. 1953.
48. FO 371/106765/10G, FO brief for Scott for COS meeting, 10 Feb. 1953.
49. FO 800/838/1, Churchill tel. 34 to Eden, 8 Jan; Elliot papers, 5/1/55a, letter to Norman Brook, 10 Jan. 1953; John Colville, *Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-55* (London 1985), (7 Jan. 1953), p. 662, hereafter *Fringes of Power*.
50. Avon papers, AP20/15/22A, Lloyd letter to Eden, 20 Dec; PREM 11/572, Dening (Tokyo) tel. 2068, 30 Dec. 1952; FO 371/105221/1G, Colville min 8 Jan; FO 371/106996/5G, Tahourdin min., 28 Jan; FO 371/105183/2, Dening letter to Scott, 11 Feb. & Scott letter to Dening, 17 Feb; FO 371/105180/7, Makins letter to Eden, 21 Feb. 1953; Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, (16 Jan), p. 74; Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 52.
51. FO 371/106765/18, draft submission, 18 Feb. 1953.
52. FO 371/105179/1G, Scott min. ('Far East: Stocktaking'), 5 Dec. & Eden min., 21 Dec. 1952.
53. Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 660 (6 Jan. 1953).
54. Avon papers, AP20/16/21, Makins letter to Eden, 9 Jan. 1953.
55. PREM 11/431, Eisenhower letter to Eden, 16 March 1953.
56. FO 371/105182/1G, Scott min., 24 Jan. 1953.

PART III: THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE DIMENSION

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESSURE-BY-PROXY

February to April 1953

In the course of his first State of the Union address to Congress on 2 February 1953, President Eisenhower declared that the mission of the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the straits between Formosa and the mainland of China was to end forthwith.[1] The Fleet had been despatched by Truman in June 1950 to 'neutralise' the straits, preventing a Communist attack on Formosa and, equally, preventing Nationalist sorties against the mainland.[2] In practice, though, neutralisation quickly became a one-way policy. Its object, as Truman later admitted, was to stop 'crooked old Chiang Kai-shek from being mopped up'.[3] However, to many in the United States the ostensible even-handedness of the policy meant that the Fleet was in effect defending the P.R.C. at a time when American soldiers were being killed by Chinese Communists in Korea. Eisenhower duly acted to end this seeming anomaly. The United States intended 'nothing aggressive', he told Churchill, 'we are just tired of being dupes'.[4] The new British Ambassador to Washington, Sir Roger Makins, agreed that the issue could not be taken out of the context of American domestic politics for, at heart, it was a sop to the right-wing of the Republican party frustrated with the stalemate in Korea. What it did not imply was support for a Nationalist attempt to re-conquer China. Chiang's grandiose dreams were dependent on massive American assistance which there was never any intention of providing.[5]

Eden, however, was incensed at the way in which the new Administration

had by-passed British opinion. As recently as 7 January, Secretary of State-elect Dulles had declared his 'whole-hearted intention' to consult closely with the Churchill Administration 'in every issue and in every quarter'. At the end of the month Makins, acting on Eden's instructions, told the Americans that the British wished to be 'fully consulted in advance' if a change in the neutralisation policy was afoot.[6] In the event London was only brought into the picture the day before Eisenhower's announcement and at a point when the lines of policy had been clearly drawn. There was certainly a case for earlier British involvement. If, as Washington intimated, the move was an adjunct of Korean strategy in that it would oblige China to re-direct men and equipment from that theatre to reinforce is coastal defences opposite Formosa, Britain (along with the other members of the U.N. Command in Korea) had a right to consultation.[7] On 3 February, Eden argued in Cabinet that the decision was a mistake which threatened 'unfortunate political repercussions' for the negotiations at Panmunjom without any 'compensating military advantages'.[8]

In spite of Makins's conviction that the issue was not 'good ground on which to make a test case with the new administration'[9], Eden refused to acquiesce in the establishment of so disturbing a precedent. He was given an early opportunity to express his unhappiness when the American Secretary of State arrived in London on 4 February for his scheduled visit. The next day Eden confidently asserted in the House of Commons that, as a result of his talks with Dulles, it would now be 'impossible for any step which could have far reaching international reactions to be taken without our having an opportunity to express our views beforehand'.[10] But in private Eden was less certain, telegraphing to Makins on 7 February that any repetition of unilateral American decision-making would be 'disastrous'. He went on:

> I am sure you will do everything you can to ensure that the new Administration understands that the future of Anglo-American relations depends on their readiness to treat us reasonably as a partner ... My anxiety arises from fear that the new Administration, from inexperience as much as from anything else, will show themselves cavalier in their treatment of allies. Every time they do this they will give ammunition to their enemies and embarass their friends.[11]

It therefore seems unlikely that Eden received any firm promise from Dulles about future consultation and his confident performance in the Commons on 5 February was probably aimed at allaying speculation about an early rift with the Eisenhower Administration. Subsequent remarks by Dulles at a private dinner in Washington (the import of which was passed to the British) are illuminating. If the Eisenhower Administration was bound to consultation with its allies it would also be 'exposed to veto by those consulted, with consequent handicaps on freedom of action'. This tended to bring action down to 'the lowest common denomination of boldness and capacity among the consulting nations'. There had to be a 'balance', Dulles said, 'between allied unity and American freedom of action'.[12] Looking back a year later, Makins felt this belief stemmed from Dulles's determination 'not to be accused (as Mr Acheson repeatedly was) of being in the British pocket'.[13] But whatever the well-springs of American unilateralism, their allies still had to deal with the sometimes disconcerting end-product. And the way to do that, Dulles explained, was to display 'faith in the United States and show trust in the fundamental decency and moderation of American objectives'.[14]

The decision to de-neutralise the Formosa straits and the go-it-alone attitude adopted by the Eisenhower Administration in general can only have strengthened Eden's conviction that a formal collective defence arrangement for South-East Asia was a necessary channel through which Britain could

curb the more minatory aspects of American strategy. The French still suspected that if the Chinese moved on Viet-Nam 'the Americans will immediately react of their own bat by sea and air' while, early in April, the State Department confirmed that in such circumstances the inclination would be to 'throw the book at China'.[15] However, the co-ordination of regional defence was rendered less urgent by the continuing absence of any serious intention on the part of the P.R.C. to intervene in Viet-Nam where the Viet-Minh were proving more than a match for the French. Indeed it was the problems encountered by the French in their struggle with Ho Chi Minh's rebels that aroused the most persistent concern in London. In this connection, the diplomatic fall-out from the unleashing of Chiang clearly demonstrated that one of the pre-requisites to successfully effecting pressure-by-proxy - American readiness to listen and preferably act on British advice - could not be relied on.

Success therefore rested on the compatability of Anglo-American thinking on Indo-China. The first chance to assess this came with Dulles's visit to London. During talks at the Foreign Office on 4 February it transpired that the Administration had yet to come to any firm policy decisions but there was a general willingness to find 'ways and means' of giving extra help to the French. To this end, Dulles hoped to have 'concrete proposals' ready in time for a visit to Washington by French Ministers in mid-March. Encouragingly, there were hints that these might include pressing for a more forward military policy, Dulles avowing that 'provided a really well directed effort were made, the Indo-China problem could be resolved or at least reduced to manageable proportions within eighteen months'. Dulles's inference, however, was that this effort should be centred on expanding the Viet-Namese army and granting full political liberty to the Associate

States rather than French reinforcement. On the other hand he did believe that decisive action was necessary if only because of the 'grave repercussions' of the war in Europe. In contrast, Eden's performance at this meeting was desultory and he ignored several openings to argue the case for reinforcement. While 'improved training and use of native forces' might be the 'key' to the problem, he mused, the French 'must in any case have more troops if they were to clear up the situation'. However, 'the difficulty of financing this necessary increase ... might be troubling them'. Beyond this Eden merely restated the need for overhauling the French system of National Service.[16]

To judge from his approach to this meeting, Eden was still far from happy about French reinforcement. Indeed three days earlier he had attempted to kill the issue completely when ordering the removal of the entire section of his brief dealing with the Service Chiefs' views on the urgency of an aggressive French policy in Viet-Nam even at the expense of their contribution to N.A.T.O. Eden's justification was that reinforcements 'must be local' and, given money, 'they can be found on the spot'.[17] This was virtually the scenario outlined by Dulles when the two men finally met. Furthermore, having on 1 February approved a Foreign Office proposal for Anglo-American military talks aimed at reaching joint agreement on the nature of the problem in Viet-Nam and possible remedies, Eden, to the surprise and dismay of his officials, refused to raise it with Dulles.[18] In so doing he leant tacit support to existing French plans to hold-on in Viet-Nam pending the transfer of defence duties to the native army. More importantly, on another reading Eden had ensured that pressure-by-proxy was still-born. How, then, can Eden's extraordinary resistance to the reinforcement thesis be explained, particularly in view of the wide

consensus in military and political circles in favour of acting upon it?

Concern to avoid additional commitments must, as ever, feature highly in any answer. As already seen, a direct appeal to the French was ruled out for fear that it would produce unwelcome and unaffordable requests for compensation. Even an indirect approach through the Americans seemed to run a risk of damaging consequences. As the Mutual Aid Department in the Foreign Office warned in December 1952 ...

> the giving of extra U.S. financial aid to France in order to help her in Indo-China cannot fail to make it more difficult for the other European countries, including ourselves, to obtain the economic aid which many of them need if they are to sustain their own defence efforts ... [I]t is inevitable that the more that France gets, the less there will be for the rest of the world.

With a new fiscally conservative Administration in Washington publicly committed to cutting defence expenditure it was doubtful whether the Americans would 'increase the total of aid, in order to provide more for France'.[19] In January 1953, a submission for Strang concluded that if the total figure for United States assistance was maintained Britain 'might be justified in acquiescing in increased ... military and economic aid to France for the furtherance of the war in Indo-China at the temporary diminution of aid to Europe'. But if the total was reduced for 1953, 'the consequences as regards the NATO effort in Europe of giving priority to Indo-China might be serious'.[20] Eden may therefore have judged it unwise to discuss with Dulles a new and expensive method of resolving the Indo-China problem when even financing the existing one threatened adverse repercussions for the British economy.

In seeking to explain Eden's negative stance one is also drawn towards the E.D.C. factor. The Eisenhower Administration's undisguised enthusiasm for German rearmament must have had a seminal influence on Eden's thinking

about Indo-China in general and French reinforcement in particular. The creation of a United States of Europe was one of the major objectives of Eisenhower's Presidency and the successful launch of the E.D.C was viewed as a stepping-stone to that end. In his State of the Union message he had called for a 'more closely integrated economic and political system' in Europe. This was one of the six 'fixed ideas' that would govern his foreign policy, and he even hinted that American aid to Europe would be conditional on 'real progress' towards unity.[21] By the same token, Dulles's subsequent visit to London and other N.A.T.O. capitals was widely interpreted as an exercise in pressurising the Europeans, especially the French, into speedy ratification of the E.D.C. Dulles himself had fuelled such speculation before his departure when warning in a widely broadcast speech that 'if it appeared there were no chance of getting effective unity ... then it would be necessary to give a little rethinking to America's own foreign policy in relation to Western Europe'.[22] This was a forerunner to his more celebrated reference at the end of the year to an 'agonizing reappraisal' of American policy.

Given the ardour of the U.S. Government for the E.D.C. there was, from the British standpoint, no guarantee of immunity from pressure to move closer to or even join the project. Eisenhower's acceptance of Eden's position in December 1951 when the former was Supreme Commander of N.A.T.O., and his view that British participation in the E.D.C. at that time would complicate and delay its formation, could not be taken as an immutable policy position from 1953.[23] In terms of French reinforcement for Viet-Nam, the Foreign Office was convinced that this could only be attempted if Britain first promised to place extra forces on the continent or place contingents within the E.D.C. But to do so might encourage

Washington to press for this concession - made in the context of Indo-China - to be made permanent in the context of the E.D.C., something which the Churchill Government had no intention of agreeing to.

The *Times* had already discussed the possibility of American 'pressure on Britain to join the European Defence Community in order to further allay French fears of German military supremacy while their soldiers are engaged in the Far East'.[24] Moreover, the accession to power of the Mayer Government in France had led to increased calls for a British guarantee on troop levels in Europe to appease critics of the E.D.C. in the National Assembly.[25] These were formally tabled by the French Prime Minister in London in mid-February and, predictably, rejected by Eden at the start of March. Britain had 'gone to the limit of association', he asserted.[26] As had been the case in December 1952, this refusal to entertain any 'irrevocable guarantees' meant, perforce, the prior rejection of that which was most likely to win the French over to reinforcement, namely the deployment of even greater British forces on the continent. Thus Eden's E.D.C. policy effectively tied his hands when it came to Indo-China. Though this was doubtless frustrating for those in the Foreign Office whose professional concern was South-East Asia (those involved with European affairs must have been similarly resentful of Viet-Nam's intrusion into their cogitations), it was down to Eden to marry both considerations together. Because of the realities of Britain's economic situation this meant choosing between desired objectives rather than striving to attain all of them simultaneously. In accordance with this reasoning, German rearmament and the E.D.C. figured higher than Indo-China in Eden's calculations until at least the start of 1954.

A simpler though ultimately unsatisfying explanation is that Eden had

little time to devote to the Indo-China problem on account of the other more urgent issues of the day, not to mention his preoccupation with succeeding Churchill as Prime Minister, and he was consequently unaware of the brewing crisis. Warnings from officials about potential problems in South-East Asia had to compete with existing problems in Europe and the Middle East. One member of the Foreign Office has recalled that Eden had no Indo-China policy 'until the crisis loomed' in 1954, and that his advisers had 'an uphill task alerting [him] to the grave threat to British interests and world peace'.[27] Yet, as we have already seen, Eden was clearly more aware than this assessment suggests. It has also been said that it is 'often forgetten how low Indochina ranked in the list of British priorities, Malaya notwithstanding'.[28] But this, too, is far from the case. Indo-China's security was, according to Eden, of 'vital concern to the whole free world'.[29] Furthermore, as he confided to his diary in February 1953, '[w]ith our limited resources we must concentrate on those areas where our first interests lie', in which connection Malaya and South-East Asia and 'playing our part in Germany' were singled out for special emphasis.[30] Rather than its lack of importance, therefore, it was the inability of British diplomacy to attain its Indo-Chinese *desiderata* at a reasonable cost which sometimes led to a tendency to dismiss it as a priority. In ideal circumstances, Britain should have been able to negotiate a price with the French for reinforcement. As it was, the wider advantages - economic, military, strategic - of French victory were lost sight of as narrow short-term considerations of national self-interest held sway. As noted elsewhere, the idea of investing in Indo-China in the present to reap dividends in Malaya and Europe in the future was too far-sighted a concept for Eden and the Foreign Office to grasp at a time when

economic constraints dictated that British diplomacy be conducted on a day-to-day basis and developments reacted to rather than initiated or directed.

To return to matters as they stood in February 1953, the result of Eden's indifference was that pressure-by-proxy was shelved along with the reinforcement thesis. Its adherents in the Foreign Office, unable to move the Foreign Secretary, adopted a wait-and-see approach. Though some officials continued to emphasise the benefits of putting the British case for reinforcement to the Americans before the latter's thinking hardened (and with Dulles talking of 'concrete' ideas by mid-March there was now a time factor involved[31]), Eden had by February virtually smothered the issue and eschewed the chance to help mould American policy.

Eden was undoubtedly helped by an important shift in French policy. On 27 January, Letourneau had told Harvey that although 'good progress' was being made in training and expanding the Viet-Namese army, the process was likely to be a longer one than first thought and it was 'improbable that the French would be able to pull out entirely in the foreseeable future'.[32] The significance of Letourneau's remark was not lost in London. The plans hitherto in contemplation had envisaged commencing the run-down of French forces in 1953 and the completion of the process within two years. Now, as Graves reported on 19 February, 'it was evident that there had been a change of policy' and that there would be 'a delay in the programme of withdrawal and it seems likely that the main force will remain until the end of 1954'. This would give time for the recruitment of another 40,000 Viet-Namese.[33] As the South-East Asia Department of the Foreign Office noted:

> Estimates that drastic action to reinforce Indo-China was needed this year were based on the belief that the bulk of the French forces would be out by 1955. It seems increasingly clear that the French now have no intention of pulling out

> before the Vietnamese forces are ready, and this first urgency now seems to have receded ...[34]

The following month Letourneau admitted to the British that the decision to increase the native forces still further and to put off withdrawal was an 'alternative to the provision of more French troops from Europe'.[35] With this the reinforcement debate initially engendered by Graves in mid-1952 appeared to have been brought to an end.

Hindsight makes clear that Letourneau's faith in the ability of the embryonic Viet-Namese army was misplaced. If a decisive victory over the Viet-Minh was still possible (a debateable proposition) it was certainly not going to be achieved by expanding the native anti-Communist forces. There was in fact no satisfactory alternative to reinforcements from the professional, skilled and experienced French metropolitan army. One must therefore ask whether the impotence of British diplomacy in the period between June 1952 and March 1953 meant that a chance was missed for France to win the Indo-China war. For as Letourneau implied, the authorities in Paris were never going to consider the despatch of reinforcements of their own volition, preferring instead to believe that the Viet-Namese, given time, could solve the problem largely on their own. It required a more distanced and dispassionate analysis of the situation to bring into focus the flaws in this policy. This was possessed by the British. So too was the answer to the problem. Positive diplomacy in late 1952 at the time of the Paris N.A.T.O. Council might have brought home to the French the true value of reinforcement. It may of course be argued that an extra three or four French divisions would not have altered the outcome of the war - the American experience in the 1960's certainly demonstrated the futility of simply throwing ever-increasing numbers of ground troops into the arena -

but this was by no means clear in 1952-1953. On the contrary, expert British military opinion repeatedly stressed that victory through reinforcement *was* possible, an assessment which political and diplomatic opinion did not seriously question. It is in terms of this contemporary judgement that the failure of British diplomacy must be viewed.

There were, of course, considerable obstacles precluding a British *demarche* on reinforcement in 1952-1953 and it is difficult to see what could have been done to surmount them given the imperative of limiting existing financial and military commitments overseas and avoiding additional ones. The reinforcement debate does, however, focus attention on the flaws of power-by-proxy. The worry that the French would react to British advice by demanding compensation either in Europe or for Indo-China inevitably impelled the Foreign Office to look to Washington to offer the advice and so face the demands. Yet pressure-by-proxy (a corollary of power-by-proxy) failed to get off the ground because it was based on two false premises: that Washington shared London's assessment of the problem and its prescription for solving it; and, if not, that Washington could be persuaded to think in British terms. Thus the linch-pin of Eden's strategy (using American power for British ends) was instantly removed. The problem thereafter was that Eden had no contingency plan. And what applied in terms of Indo-China applied in most areas of Anglo-American relations in the early 1950's.[36] The Churchill Government was not just struggling to overcome its want of power to attain its foreign policy goals, it was also struggling to overcome the contradictions in the formula drawn up by Eden for negating, or disguising, this handicap.

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During March 1953 the Eisenhower Administration's Indo-China policy began to solidify. At the start of the month Eden and Butler visited Washington for high-level politico-economic discussions. At a meeting on 5 March Dulles argued that the main advantage gained by Moscow from the Korean war was the tying down of large numbers of American troops and the exposure of Western defence vulnerability in other areas. Indo-China produced similarly unwelcome consequences. Accordingly, the United States was thinking in terms of a 'policy of disengagement which would mean substituting indigenous forces for the bulk of the United States and French forces now tied down in Asia'. There was, Dulles said, 'no question of relying exclusively on local troops' and there would have to be 'stiffening from the outside'. He added that in the case of Indo-China it was vital that France completed the independence of the Associate States. This would encourage the local anti-Communist forces that they were fighting for themselves rather than a continuation of French dominion. The long-term objective behind disengagement was the expectation that 'the Russians might tire of supplying equipment for a war in Asia which instead of engaging United States and French troops was being mainly waged against locally raised forces'.[37] Eden had been given a foretaste of this when he met Dulles in New York in November 1952, the latter declaring that Korea was a 'strategic mistake which would have to be corrected as soon as possible'. There was no point 'in our first eleven being held down on a barren peninsula by the enemy's second eleven'.[38] As for Indo-China, Dulles argued that if the French disengaged, 'the "profit" would ... disappear from the Indo-Chinese operation for the Communists', an indication that he believed the Viet-Minh to be acting in accordance with directives from Peking and, ultimately, Moscow.[39] British policy-makers made no such

sweeping reductionist assumption. Nor, one feels, would Ho Chi Minh have been amused to see his struggle depicted in so demeaning a manner. For him the complete evacuation of the French would have been profit indeed.

Eden made little recorded response to Dulles's first formal exposition of disengagement and concentrated instead on securing an assurance that if an intensification of Korean operations was envisaged Britain would be consulted and not simply informed after the event. Dulles cooly replied that he 'would assume so'.[40] In general, however, Eden's stay in the United States seemed to go some way to repairing the damage to Anglo-American relations caused by the unleashing of Chiang in February.[41] Despite Dulles's less than fulsome support for close consultation, Eden returned to London sure that he could 'discount any possibility of rash or adventurous policies' on the part of the United States.[42]

Disengagement was further developed at the end of the month during the scheduled visit of Mayer and his party to Washington. The French agreed to increase the effectiveness of the indigenous forces in Viet-Nam and the Americans in turn responded sympathetically to requests for more aid to expedite this process.[43] They were not however ready to authorise an immediate appropriation as the budgetary position was unclear and, moreover, Eisenhower wished to relate it to a 'strategic and political plan for Indo-China' rather than a promise of action.[44] Both the Administration and public opinion had to be satisfied that there was a 'reasonable prospect of a successful end to the war within a fairly short time'.[45] Or, from the French standpoint, in order to obtain additional help they had to tell the Americans that the war was winnable and back this up with a politico-military blueprint for action.[46] This Letourneau attempted to do on the spot in 'a clever piece of improvisation': France would create 54

new 'light' battalions of the Viet-Namese army and, within two years, it would be possible to 'break the back of Viet-Minh resistance'.[47] Despite reservations about the time it would take to achieve this end, the Americans were impressed. The U.S. Military considered French thinking to be 'about as good as possible', while Dulles argued that 'we ought to back those plans'. The French left Washington with instructions to work out their strategy in more detail.[48]

The British reaction to these developments was a mixture of bewilderment and concern. Bewilderment was caused by the ready acceptance in Washington of optimistic French assessments of the military situation. Letourneau's remark about breaking the back of rebel resistance within two years contrasted sharply with a statement he made three weeks earlier to the effect that there was 'no possibility of France winning the war' and that in the end there must be a 'political settlement'.[49] In London, officials thought that the latter assessment (made in private during a visit to Australia) 'may be nearer to Letourneau's real views' and that on arrival in Washington he 'considered it necessary to paint a rosy picture of the future in order to secure a maximum of American assistance'.[50] British concern stemmed from the time it would take disengagement to fructify and, in relation to this, the fragility of political support in France for the prolongation of the Expeditionary Force's mission and where the 'outcry for ending the war was [now] louder than ever'.[51] Thus disengagement resurrected the prospect of a collapse of morale in France precipitating disaster in Viet-Nam. The probability was that the Viet-Minh would gain in strength and popularity and that the French, intent on simply holding the position while the Viet-Namese army was trained, would continue to suffer military reverses. This defensive strategy when coupled with a

lack of manpower meant, as Graves had recognised at the start of 1952, that the Expeditionary Force was 'reduced to being hit', and when that happened public opinion in France 'takes another plunge into despondency and pessimism'.[52] The danger as perceived by the Paris Embassy was that each 'successive setback releases a flood of defeatist talk in Paris, and at such moments there is probably a majority in the Assembly, as yet inarticulate, for the immediate opening of negotiations with Ho Chi Minh'.[53]

As conceived of in relation to Indo-China, disengagement amounted to a no-change policy. Because of the length of time it would take to produce results it was constructed on the shakiest of foundations, namely the readiness of the French public and parliament to continue the war. Moreover, though the British did not put it so bluntly, disengagement was built on a lie - the lie, expounded by the French in Washington to secure greater aid, that the war could be won in a relatively short time and by no other device than the build-up of the Viet-Namese army. This was a prescription willingly accepted in Washington where, by April 1953, it was clear that a decision had been taken 'not to press the French to reinforce their existing troops in Indo-China' although this remained the only conceivably effective panacea.[54] Astonishingly, '1953 was the year in which French and Americans exchanged visions of victory'.[55] On the other hand the architects of British policy could hardly complain about Franco-American myopia given their own refusal to even attempt to affect the course of events in a more positive manner. For this Eden is mainly to blame albeit because of his immersion in the troubled waters of the E.D.C.

The reinforcement issue was not, however, as dead as it appeared. For one thing, the Chiefs of Staff still adhered to the view that 'the policy

of expanding the Vietnamese army is not a satisfactory substitute to providing more French troops from elsewhere'.[86] For another, pressure on the Foreign Office to act on the reinforcement thesis was always liable to mount again if the lie upon which Franco-American policy rested was exposed. And so it proved when, towards the middle of April, the Viet-Minh took the French by surprise and invaded Laos, thus extending major operations in the Indo-China war beyond Viet-Nam for the first time. In London, the shock-waves generated by the invasion breathed new life into the reinforcement issue. Significantly, Eden was by then absent from his post through ill health (as he would be until October[87]) and Churchill was in charge of British diplomacy. Under his stewardship, not only did reinforcement rise phoenix-like to perplex the Foreign Office, but its objective was transformed. From mid-1953 it was seen not just in terms of bequeathing the Viet-Namese a defence burden they could handle but, increasingly, as a means of staving off what threatened to be a major, even a decisive, military defeat for France at the hands of the Viet-Minh.

NOTES

1. D. Foliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1953* (Oxford 1956), pp. 233-37, hereafter *Documents 1953.*
2. Carlyle, ed., *Documents 1949-50*, p. 932; Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope 1946-53* (New York, 1965 edition), pp. 380-86; Acheson, *Creation* pps. 406-09.
3. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York 1980), p. 368, letter to S. Minton, 6 Sept. 1958.
4. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower letter to Churchill, 2 Feb. 1953.
5. FO 371/103496/6, Makins tel. 100, 7 Feb. 1953. See also PREM 11/867, Makins tel. 206, 31 Jan; FO 371/105195/13, Makins tel. 231, 3 Feb; FO 800/838/15, Makins tel. 271, 9 Feb; FO 371/105180/7, Makins letter to Eden, 21 Feb; Ambrose, *Eisenhower The President*, p. 49; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, pp. 129-30; *The Economist* ('Chiang off the Leash'), 7 Feb. 1953.
6. FO 371/103519/1G, Colville min., 7 Jan; FO 371/105196/5, Makins tel. 186, 28 Jan. 1953.
7. FO 371/105179/2G, FO brief and Eden's comments, 30 Dec. 1952.
8. CAB 128/26 CC(53)6th meeting, 3 Feb; HCDebs, Vol. 510, col. 1672, 3 Feb. 1953.

9. PREM 11/867, Makins tel. 206, 31 Jan. 1953.
10. HCDebs, Vol. 510, cols. 2061-62 & 2058, 5 Feb. 1953. The record of the Eden-Dulles exchanges on Formosa are unavailable although it was touched on in relation to Indo-China, see FO 371/106765/13G.
11. FO 371/105180/2, Eden tel. 565 to Washington, 7 Feb. 1953.
12. FO 371/103513/31, Wilkinson (Washington) letter to Maitland (FO), 11 March 1953 enclosing account of Dulles's remarks on 15 Feb.
13. FO 371/109099/1, Makins despatch 73, 23 Feb. 1954.
14. FO 371/105180/5G, Tomlinson (Washington) letter to Scott, 19 Feb. 1953.
15. FO 371/106765/36, Makins tel. 664, 28 March; FO 371/107443/13, Makins tel. 700, 1 April 1953.
16. FO 371/106765/13G, record of Eden-Dulles meeting, 4 Feb. 1953.
17. FO 371/106996/8G, FO brief and Eden's comments, 22 Jan & 1 Feb. 1953
18. FO 371/106996/8G, Scott submission for Eden approved on 1 Feb; also FO 371/106765/10G, Tahourdin min., 1 Feb. & Phillips min., 7 Feb. 1953.
19. FO 371/101061/136, Crawford min., 16 Dec. 1952; also J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A critical appraisal of postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford 1982), p. 164, hereafter *Strategies*. For a detailed survey of economic aspects of the 'New Look' see Chaps. 5 & 6 of *Strategies*, pp. 127-198.
20. FO 371/106765/5, Tahourdin min., 6 Jan. 1953 in response to Strang min., 12 Dec. 1952, in FO 371/101060/130.
21. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, pps. 49 & 120; PREM 11/373, Eisen-hower letter to Churchill, 29 Jan; FO 371/103495/6, Makins tel. 100, 7 Feb. 1953. Also Foliot, ed., *Documents 1953*, pp. 233-36.
22. PREM 11/867, Makins tel. 206, 31 Jan. 1953; Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 49.
23. Avon Papers, AP20/15/1, Eisenhower letter to Eden, 8 Dec. 1951. Also Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 83.
24. *The Times* ('Gen. Eisenhower's Policy for Far East'), 22 Dec. 1952.
25. PREM 11/438, Harvey tel. 18, 15 Jan; FO 371/107434/4, Hayter tel. 43, 12 Feb. 1953.
26. PREM 11/436, record of Anglo-French talks, London, 12-13 Feb; PREM 11/431, Eden despatch 233 to Paris, 14 March; also CAB 129/59 C(53)73, 21 Feb; CAB 128/26 CC(53)14th meeting, 24 Feb. 1953.
27. Mr. J.G. Tahourdin, letter to author, 3 Jan. 1990.
28. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 20.
29. CAB 134/898 FE(O)(52)2nd meeting, 10 Feb. 1953.
30. Avon Papers, AP20, Diary entry, 9 Feb, 1953.
31. FO 371/106765/27, FO brief for Eden, 26 Feb. 1953.
32. FO 371/106765/7, Harvey despatch 36, 28 Jan. 1953.
33. FO 371/106751/12, Graves despatch 34, 19 Feb. 1953; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 85; Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 113.
34. FO 371/106751/12, Burrows min., 3 March 1953.
35. FO 371/106751/18, Sterndale-Bennett letter to Scott, 10 March 1953.
36. See Adamthwaite in Young, ed, *Churchill Administration*, pp. 1-28 *passim*.
37. FO 371/105182/5G, Eden tel. 193 to London, 7 March; also FO 371/106765/28G, Eden despatch 30, 19 March 1953.
38. PREM 11/323, Eden tel. 807 to London, 15 Nov. 1952.
39. FO 371/103513/31, Wilkinson (Washington) letter to Maitland (FO), 11 March 1953.
40. FO 371/105182/5G, Eden tel. 193 to London, 7 March 1953.
41. PREM 11/431, Eden tel. 475 to Churchill, 6 March; HCDebs, Vol. 511, cols. 2071-73, 17 March; *Economist*, leader comment, 21 March 1953.

42. PREM 11/431, Eden despatch 233 to Paris, 14 March 1953.
43. *FRUS 1952-545*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 281-83; Foliot, ed., *Documents 1953*, pp. 467-69, Franco-US *communiqué*, 28 March; FO 371/106765/36, Makins tel. 673, 30 March 1953.
44. FO 371/106765/36, Makins tel. 663, 28 March 1953; also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pps. 423, 429-32, 435-36.
45. FO 371/107443/11, Harvey tel. 115, 1 April 1953.
46. The French firmly maintained it was money not men that they needed, see *The Times* (French Ministers Case for Washington'), 15 March & FO 371/107434/8, Harvey tel. 111, 9 April 1953.
47. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 113; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 458-65.
48. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 302.
49. FO 371/106765/42 & 33, Tahourdin letter to Joy, 21 April, Hunt (CRO) letter to Selby (FO), 7 April & record of Letourneau meeting with Australian officials, passed from CRO to FO, 26 March 1953.
50. FO 371/106765/42, Tahourdin letter to Joy, 21 April 1953.
51. Werth, *France*, p. 602; also Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 151.
52. FO 371/106742/1, Graves despatch 6, 9 Jan. 1953.
53. FO 371/107433/1, Hayter despatch 30, 21 Jan. 1953.
54. FO 371/106765/55G, Tahourdin min., 17 April 1953.
55. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 111.
56. FO 371/106751/18, Tahourdin summary of COS views, 1 April 1953.
57. See Rhodes James, *Eden*, p. 362.

PART IV: THE VIET-MINH DIMENSION

CHAPTER EIGHT

A NEW DIRECTION
Churchill at the Foreign Office

April to June 1953

On 14 April 1953 Viet-Minh forces swept into Laos and quickly over-ran some 20,000 square miles of territory. By the start of May the rebels were before the Royal capital, Luang Prabang. The capture of the city would have been an important propaganda victory for the Viet-Minh but, with this object apparently within reach, their Commander, General Giap, suddenly ordered his forces to withdraw to their bases in Tonking and Annam. By 8 May, reports reaching London suggested that the threat to Luang Prabang was 'rapidly diminishing'.[1] The Viet-Minh did not in fact pull back completely from Laos but retained control of the province of Sam Neua where it installed the Resistance Government of Pathet Lao which later claimed to be the legal government of the country.[2] Even so, by mid-May the immediate crisis was over.[3] The Viet-Minh invasion had several possible aims: to sow political discord amongst the Laotian people, to extend control up to the Mekong river thereby threatening Cambodia from the rear and possibly Siam, to gain international prestige, to dismay public opinion in France, or more simply to seize the area's rice and opium crop. The French in turn advanced several theories for the rebel withdrawal - supply difficulties, fear of being trapped in Laos by the rains, and rapid French strengthening of key positions. Paris also claimed that the attack was part of the 'general communist campaign against the West' and that Ho Chi Minh had been acting 'on the orders of international Communism'.[4]

In London events were viewed less in terms of a sinister Kremlin design and more as a reflection of growing Viet-Minh strength and French military incapacity.[5] The invasion also demonstrated the speciousness of French claims in Washington the previous month that the war would be 'virtually' won within two years, while from a pragmatic British standpoint a rebel conquest of Laos would have serious repercussions for its neighbour Siam, the essential strategic buffer between a potentially communist Indo-China and the British territories of Malaya and Singapore.[6] Policy-makers feared that Siam would not remain neutral or anti-communist for very long in the event of a French defeat, succumbing either to a Chinese-backed Viet-Minh invasion or, more likely, a pro-communist regime taking power as a result of an externally incited or internally fomented *coup d'état*. This would bring communism to the threshold of Malaya.[7]

The Viet-Minh attack on Laos had an energising effect on British thinking about Indo-China. The uncomfortable realisation that the French grip was even looser than previously thought meant that by June the Churchill Government possessed for the first time what may be accurately termed an Indo-China *policy*. The timidity and reticence which had characterised earlier assessments of the problem was replaced by a new positive attitude, and the contradiction between desiring a non-communist Indo-China and watching impassivly as France pursued a strategy which seemed at times to be working against this objective was fully revealed. As the British *chargé d'affaires* in Saigon warned, 'I think I should say quite bluntly that, as seen from this post, in supporting the French effort as presently conceived, we are now backing an almost certain loser'.[8] If Indo-China was to be saved, Britain would have to play a more prominent role.

There were, however, few initial signs that a more vigorous approach was in the offing. Heightened concern over events in Laos was not mirrored by greater readiness to provide the French with assistance.[9] But as the threat to Luang Prabang mounted, leading Government officials began to question the wisdom of this decision. 'We seem to give a flat rejection to everything the French ask', lamented the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Selwyn Lloyd, 'cannot we be more positive?'[10] Anthony Head was even more dissatisfied, making known to Churchill on 30 April his 'very grave concern' at 'our decision that nothing whatsoever can be done to help'. Head maintained that because of the far reaching consequences of a French defeat, a greater level of British involvement was necessary: 'I cannot escape the conviction that a Communist triumph in Indo-China will in the long term lead to the loss of the whole of South-East Asia [with an] extremely serious effect not only on our British economy but on Western Europe'. He was 'more than aware of the intense difficulties with which we are confronted but the longer term consequences seem to be so serious as to justify the most strenuous efforts to avoid them'.[11]

Head and Lloyd expressed very clearly the wider issue which the Viet-Minh's invasion engendered in London - that the importance to Britain and the West of safeguarding Indo-China had to be reflected in the degree of help given to France. Also, on a practical day-to-day basis, British diplomacy had to be more assertive if the drift towards a *débâcle* was to be reversed. A decisive policy was required, not one which continually reacted to changing circumstances or was completely emasculated by the over-riding but self-defeating imperative of avoiding additional commitments. That within two months of the Laotian crisis the Churchill Administration possessed such a policy is remarkable, the more so when

juxtaposed with the indecision of the previous 20 months. What made it more remarkable still was that it evolved while Churchill was master of British foreign policy. Indeed at first sight Head would appear to have addressed his misgivings to the most unsympathetic person in the Government.

As we have seen, events in Asia held little fascination for Churchill at this time. The most important post-war event in the region, the advent of the People's Republic of China, had failed to impress him[12], as did the P.R.C.'s intervention in the Korean war in November 1950. 'I do not regard Communist China as a formidable adversary', he told Selwyn Lloyd in August 1952 ...

> Anyhow you can take it that for the next four or five years 400 million Chinese will be living where they are now. They cannot swim, they are not much good at flying and the Trans-Siberian rail-way is already overloaded.[13]

As for the Sino-Soviet Treaty, Churchill refused to accept that it had made the world a more dangerous place. 'Russia would start World War III when she wanted', he declared in 1951: 'she would certainly not do so merely to honour her pledge to China'.[14] Yet there was one, indirect, sense in which Asia was important. In July 1953, with an armistice in the offing, Churchill confessed to Montgomery that 'Korea does not really matter now ... [its] importance lies in the fact that it has led to the rearming of America' which, he felt, 'may have saved the peace of the world'.[15] This is the essence of Churchill's outlook in the early 1950's. Events in Asia had little significance in their own right but did acquire a relevance once they began to impinge on Europe or the Middle East, areas of more vital concern to Britain.

For Churchill, Korea had served a useful purpose as the catalyst which

prompted the rearmament of the West. It was the fact of the war rather than its course or even outcome that mattered. When in 1954 Churchill was reminded of the theory that if Communist China had been represented at the United Nations at the start of 1950, 'the North Korean aggression might never have occurred at all', his reaction was very much to the point: 'We were lucky. America rearmed'.[16] The corollary of this was a deep reluctance to take issue with the United States in Asia. A dispute over policy towards China might cause tension in unrelated but more important spheres. Eden, conversely, was much less inclined to follow an American lead, not because he disputed Churchill's estimate of defence priorities but because he recognised the danger that Washington's sometimes clumsy and belligerent policies might lead to a general war with China from which Britain would be unable to stand aloof. Hence Eden's concern about American unilateralism in Asia and his determination to establish some basic ground-rules about consultation with the Eisenhower Administration. This also underpinned his pursuit of a South-East Asian defence organisation. Churchill, though, rejected the notion that the region was important to Britain because it was important to the United States and that, as Eden maintained, American actions must have repercussions for British interests and even British security if they culminated in an unlimited conflagration. Instead the Prime Minister's theme-song remained: 'Do not let us be too hard on the Americans in this part of the world', and 'don't let us fall out with U.S. for the sake of Communist China'.[17]

As one might expect, Indo-China held little interest for Churchill. When the invasion of Laos forced him in his capacity as acting-Foreign Secretary to take notice of what was happening he reacted with irritation and complained, privately, that he had been able to 'remain ignorent about

these outlandish areas all his life; it was hard that they had come to tease him in his old age'.[18] Nor was it a surprise when Churchill replied on 2 May to Head's call for greater help for France by pointing out that there were 'a lot of things happening which we rightly view with anxiety' but this would not be diminished 'by our becoming involved in the immense regions concerned'.[19] A little later he remarked that Indo-China 'does not really matter'. Britain had given up India, '[w]hy shouldn't France give up Indo-China?[20]

Thus with Churchill steering British foreign policy one might assume that the prospects were slim indeed for the new and decisive approach to the Indo-China problem called for by concerned Ministers in Whitehall. Yet, ironically, it was Churchill who, far from hampering progress in this direction, actually led from the front with a sustained attack on French policy, first in private and later in public. In spite of what he himself said, Indo-China did matter for one good reason - the detrimental impact it was having on the security of Western Europe. Churchill gradually came to realise this. If Korea had been the justification for general Western rearmament, Indo-China was hampering the attainment of this objective in two ways. First, by making it difficult for France to meet its N.A.T.O. obligations and, second, because it was providing Paris with an excuse to defer E.D.C. ratification thereby preventing a German contribution to defence. In January 1952, Churchill had declared that if it were not for the 'strain' of Indo-China, 'the French could become stronger in Europe and therefore be willing to permit the Germans to become stronger. As it is, we could well lose both France's and Germany's contribution ...'.[21] By May 1953 sympathy had been replaced by frustration. In his response to Head on 2 May Churchill argued that ...

> The root of all evil in Europe and in Indo-China is the French refusal to adopt two years' national service, and send conscripts abroad as we do. Their political infirmities have prevented them from doing this and they have so weak an army that they can neither defend their own country nor their Empire overseas. They have however been successful in delaying the formation of a German army for three or four years, thus weakening NATO and all it stands for.[22]

It is perhaps inevitable that someone who takes only a tangental interest in a problem will produce simplistic solutions. So it was with Churchill who overlooked the many complexities with which the Foreign Office had been contending, notably the fact that the conscription solution 'would be an invitation to commit political suicide which no French Government would accept'.[23] Even so, Churchill's approach had the merits of being decisive and coherent, something which could not always be said of British policy since 1951. Throughout the spring of 1953 he continued to castigate the French system of National Service and to bemoan the effect which the war was having on Europe: France 'cannot be a great nation, still less an overseas Empire, without a good French Army' but, he argued, because of Indo-China, '[a]ll they have done in the last five years is to delay the formation of a German Army because they are not able to form one of their own. Western Europe gets neither'.[24] Hitherto these criticisms had been voiced in private, but on 11 May they spilled over in public. During the course of a speech in Parliament best remembered for his dramatic call for an East-West summit to explore *détente* in the post-Stalin world (the Soviet leader had died two months earlier), Churchill also warned that if France wished to 'preserve the authority and life of the French Union' it would have to take 'more effective steps'. In particular, if the French possessed the same system of National Service as Britain and sent their conscripts abroad they would have had 'much less difficulty in maintaining

their positions in Indo-China and could also have developed a far stronger army in defence of their own soil in line with their allies'.[25] René Massigli, the French Ambassador, was so distressed by these remarks that he requested a private message from Churchill to Premier Mayer saying that there had been 'no wish to hurt French feelings'. The Foreign Office objected: 'It must be assumed that the strictures made by the Prime Minister were intentional and that he would not now wish to water them down'.[26]

French sensitivity about conscription indicated that Churchill's aggressive one-theme approach had its limitations. At the same time the Prime Minister's positive attitude, when combined with the image of French military incapacity revealed during the Laotian crisis, had a galvanising effect in the Foreign Office. From May 1953, officials set out to break the negative mould of British policy. The consequences of eventual French defeat (for that was the uncomfortable spectacle foreshadowed by the Viet-Minh offensive) suddenly appeared very real rather than hypothetical. So much so that preparations for effecting the Songkhla strategy were stepped up. To date, matters had not been considered serious enough to contemplate finalising plans although in February a special Cabinet Committee had been set up to monitor the situation in Indo-China.[27] However, on 26 April, with the Viet-Minh advancing deep into Laos, Churchill ordered that the Songkhla position be occupied 'immediately if the security of Malaya on the landward side was in danger as a result of events in Indo-China or Siam'.[28] Unfortunately, the Foreign Office suspected that the acquiesence of the Bangkok Government was unlikely in 'any plan which is designed, as this is, to defend only a few square miles of Siamese territory, particularly as the Siamese traditionally suspect the British of wishing to incorporate the

southernmost provinces of Siam in Malaya'.[29]

A British 'invasion' of southern Siam was therefore likely to provoke outrage in the United Nations irrespective of its defensive nature. Also, because the predominant foreign influence in Siam was American, Washington might take a dim view of British actions. The Bangkok regime was supplied with substantial military and economic aid by the Americans who, in return, maintained a Military Assistance Advisory Group and a Special Technical Aid Mission in the country.[30] The British welcomed this and had no wish to dispute Washington's increasing predominance. However, the American reaction to the Songkhla strategy was difficult to predict, and officials were torn between giving Washington prior notice (and inviting a veto of the action) or presenting it with a *fait accompli* (thus risking a rift in relations). Following his directive of 26 April, Churchill was inclined to inform the Eisenhower Administration but, with the easing of the pressure on Laos, he changed his mind.[31] Templer, whose professional preoccupation was Malayan defence by the most effective means, and fearing a hostile American reaction, was particularly relieved at this.[32] On 2 May, Churchill ordered that the Songkhla strategy be kept 'in the planning stage' for the time being.[33]

Nevertheless a new sense of urgency was discernable in London, a belief that the true art of crisis management was to avoid the crisis in the first place. And that meant solving the Indo-China problem. As the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, put it in July, 'it should not be assumed that, if the whole of Indochina came under Communist control, we should be able to prevent a deterioration in the situation in Malaya'. It was 'vital to the security of Malaya that the French should achieve victory in Indochina'.[34] This would, simultaneously, obviate the necessity of the

Songkhla strategy with its unpredictable political repercussions and military and financial outlay. Somehow the French had to be made to face up to the failings of their present policy. Churchill may not have possessed any realistic ideas as to how this might be achieved, but his aggressive demeanour towards the French created an atmosphere in the Foreign Office conducive to constructive and positive thought.

As so often in the past, the dynamo of new thinking on South-East Asia was R. H. Scott, remembered by Eden as 'one of the ablest members of our Foreign Service'.[36] At the start of May, Scott tabled a discussion paper which argued that the war could still be won if four conditions were met: strong and inspiring military leadership in Viet-Nam and an offensive strategy; unstinting support from Paris; an imaginative approach to the political problems of Indo-China; and reinforcement of between two and three divisions from Europe. Scott called for an assertive British initiative to convince the French of the wisdom of such a course because 'important British, Commonwealth, and Western interests are at stake', a rebel victory would 'spur communist efforts everywhere, not least in France itself' and, lastly, because 'the defence of Malaya (unless we are prepared to abandon it) would involve heavier commitments ... than those resulting from efforts to save Indo-China'. This was the first time a senior Foreign Office official had looked at the problem from this perspective and taken account of the future military and economic difficulties for Britain of doing nothing to avert a catastrophe in Viet-Nam in the present. Scott suggested another radical departure: if the only way of persuading the French to adopt a more forward policy was for Britain to pay a 'price', then this should be accepted. The situation was not 'hopeless ...

> But it can be restored only if very strong pressure is brought to bear on the French Government to take effective steps to

suppress the rebellion ... and thereafter to reduce the French ... commitment ... I urge that we should bring this pressure to bear on the French, accepting the consequences for ourselves of this advice.[36]

Scott's paper received a sympathetic but cautious hearing in the Foreign Office. Its main flaw, however, was that the likeliest French 'price' for reinforcing its Expeditionary Corps was still unaffordable even if the willingness to meet it had increased.[37] Scott himself conceded this at a meeting of the Cabinet's Far East Committee on 13 May. The French, he said, might send reinforcements to Indo-China provided they were ...

replaced by us in Europe, but this would be a condition which we in the United Kingdom could not accept. With the world situation as it was, and particularly in view of developments in the Middle East, we could not enter into any agreement at this juncture which might lead to a fresh commitment of British troops.[38]

Nevertheless Scott's views struck a chord in the Foreign Office, for there was general agreement that something had to be done to stave off disaster in Indo-China even if the course he recommended was not to everyone's liking.

On 21 May a meeting was held of senior Foreign Office officials and devoted entirely to Indo-China, the first of its kind since October 1951 and a sign of mounting unease. It concluded that although pressure on Paris to take the offensive in Viet-Nam 'would lay us open to French counter-demands' which might include 'asking us to station more troops in Europe, or possibly a demand that we should join the European Defence Community', Britain should be prepared to 'answer such a riposte'. This did not mean, as Scott had originally intended, that French requests should be met. Instead officials decided that the French case against sending further troops should be nullified by force of reasoned argument. It was to be made clear that none of the obstacles were insurmountable, and that

France had within itself the power to take the requisite action without the help of others. The one problem with this latest variation on the theme of words-not-assistance was the 'presentation of the problem as we see it to the French'. Should it be at Ministerial or Ambassador level, or even lower?[39]

Once again it was Churchill who helped clear the path to progress. On 20 May, the French Prime Minister, worried that Churchill's call for an East-West Heads of State summit would produce a meeting from which France was excluded, called for a conference of Anglo-Franco-American leaders to discuss the issue in greater detail. Eisenhower quickly agreed, as did Churchill, and a meeting was arranged for Bermuda at the start of July.[40] To the Foreign Office, the Bermuda Conference provided a perfect opportunity to tackle the French at the very highest level. At their meeting on 21 May officials agreed that Churchill, on recent evidence, would probably wish to raise Indo-China at Bermuda and that a detailed brief should be prepared to embody the Foreign Office's new-found assertiveness.[41]

The brief took a month to compile. When it finally emerged it had the approval of all Foreign Office departments concerned with Indo-China as well as the Chiefs of Staff and thus constituted the most authoritative statement of official British thinking since Churchill's return to power. The paper began by summarising the importance of Indo-China in familiar terms ...

> Strategically, Indo-China is the key to the defence of South-East Asia and hence of the Indian Ocean. Economically, a threat to South-East Asia is a threat to Malaya, the most important single source of surplus dollars in the sterling bloc. Politic-ally, the loss of Indo-China would not only be a victory for world communism, but a catastrophe which would gravely affect France's world position and in particular in North Africa. Moreover, events in Indo-China are being increasingly watched by

> Australia and New Zealand; a worsening of the situation might make them more reluctant to commit their forces outside the Far Eastern theatre and more inclined to look to the U.S. for support.

In other words ...

> The threat to United Kingdom and other Commonwealth interests in South-East Asia, notably Malaya, increases as the position in Indo-China deteriorates. With their present policy the French are drifting towards an eventual defeat. The situation can only be saved by France and this year may be the last chance. A new lead from Paris and resolute decisions by the French Government are indispensible.

The problem in Indo-China was two-fold. Politically, disaffection with the existing degree of independence was widespread and the concessions granted to date had failed to convince 'even France's friends of the real independence of the Associate States'. This gave Ho Chi Minh a dangerous monopoly over Viet-Namese nationalist aspirations. Militarily, 'the initiative rests squarely with the Vietminh' and French claims that the withdrawal of their troops and the transfer of defence duties to the Viet-Namese army was a workable strategy were 'entirely fallacious' in the view of the Chiefs of Staff. It could only succeed if the threat from the Viet-Minh was first reduced to guerilla proportions, otherwise there would be 'a more rapid deterioration'. In working to avoid that situation there had to be a dual approach. Politically, France had to concede the Associate States an independent status equivalent to that of British Commonwealth countries including the right to secede from the French Union. Militarily, there had to be an offensive strategy via reinforcement.

The brief went on to chronicle the likely French objections. On the political front, Paris would probably maintain that it was 'impossible to justify the continued expenditure of French blood and treasure' on behalf of countries which could, at will, sever their links with France as soon as the war was over; the right of secession would undermine the French

position in North Africa; and finally, the Associate States were unready for independence. As British policy-makers had agreed on 21 May, these complaints were to be met with impregnable counter-arguments: independence for Indo-China would strengthen the French Union as a unity based on consent not coercion; if the present policy continued and the French suffered a decisive military reverse, the effect on national prestige 'would be at least as serious as that of loosening the bonds of the French Union'; and lastly, only the granting of greater autonomy 'can rally all non-Communist elements of the local population wholeheartedly behind the war' and so weaken the Viet-Minh's power-base.

On the military front, when confronted with the reinforcement thesis Paris would doubtless contend that there were no troops to spare from the regular French Army and that it was politically impossible to increase National Service and despatch conscripts to Viet-Nam; if the professional French Army in Europe were tapped it would upset the balance of power in relation to the Soviet bloc; the transfer of troops from the Continent was equally impossible 'in the face of a nascent German army, particularly so long as the United Kingdom declines to enter into more binding commitments in Europe'; and that if the French appeared to gain the upper hand in Viet-Nam 'this would provoke Chinese intervention'. Again the Foreign Office had a ready response - French willingness to make a greater effort, including amending the rules of National Service, 'would be the test of her claim to continued recognition as a Great Power'; as for the balance of power in Europe, 'two or three French divisions more or less would make no decisive difference' and 'French divisions would be serving the same cause in Indo-China as in Europe'; France 'has at least a clear 18 months grace before German rearmament would become effective' while

successive British pledges 'from the Dunkirk Treaty onwards' should have made it plain that 'we are already fully committed' to European security; finally, Chinese intervention was remote, but 'in any case this risk must be faced'.[42]

How the French would have responded to these proposals will never be known. On 23 June, Churchill suffered a serious stroke and the Bermuda Conference was postponed.[43] The Foreign Office was thus deprived of an opportunity to put its case to the French and the new positivism of British diplomacy found itself without a means of expression. Although a 'Little Bermuda' was hastily arranged for Washington at Foreign Minister level, Britain's representative, Lord Salisbury, had little time to prepare and concentrated inevitably on the dominant issues of the moment, Korea, Moscow's post-Stalin 'peace offensive', a German peace treaty and the possibility of an East-West summit.[44] As Salisbury privately conceded, though he had kept 'generally in touch' with international developments in recent years, 'it is a very different thing when one has to come to decisions for oneself, and especially when one has to go and negotiate at Washington over a number of horribly complicated problems only after a week in the Office'.[45] Through no fault of his own, Salisbury was not the man to confront the French on Indo-China. But would Churchill have been? It is certainly hard to imagine him, at seventy-eight, mastering so detailed a brief on a subject of limited interest, and he may have simply renewed his criticisms of the French system of National Service while ignoring the other arguments in favour of reinforcement from the professional French army. On the other hand, as Churchill mused on 6 July: 'Today we should have been at Bermuda ... I should have said things to the French no one else could say'.[46] Here, though, he was probably thinking more of the

E.D.C. than Indo-China. And even if not, there was still no certainty that the French would have responded favourably to the British prescription.

If the opinion of the Paris Embassy is accepted, Churchill's brief actually understated the likely scale of French opposition. 'You can safely dismiss any idea of its being possible to prevail on the French to put more resources into the war in Indo-China', the First Minister, Rumbold, informed a colleague in London on 30 May. 'Any idea of an increase in the French effort ... could be ruled out some time ago. Now public and parliamentary opinion is hardening against even the maintenance of the French effort on its existing scale'. Rumbold consequently advised that in drawing up a brief for Bermuda it should be assumed that 'the French will reduce rather than increase their effort in Indo-China in the months to come' and that they 'will sooner or later seek to end the war by negotiation ... We do not believe that any amount of cajolery or bribery will make much difference'.[47] Churchill's brief duly acknowledged the Embassy's view without giving it any great prominence.[48] A despatch from Harvey on 26 June arrived too late to be incorporated but was even blunter, arguing that the idea of reinforcing Indo-China 'can be ruled right out'. On the contrary, the Ambassador expected the 'French party at Bermuda to be more interested in discussing the possibilities of reaching a peaceful conclusion of the conflict than of considering whether fresh resources might be assembled in order to win a military victory'. Churchill and Eisenhower's task would be 'much more that of keeping the French up to their present mark than of persuading them to go beyond it'.[49]

The policy enshrined in Churchill's Bermuda brief was undoubtedly decisive when compared with official thinking since October 1951. But it still stopped short of advocating perhaps the one gesture which might have

persuaded the French to take the initiative, namely a British pledge to station sufficient troops on the Continent to make good the gap caused by any transfer of French forces to South-East Asia. Not only would this have eased French fears about a rearmed Germany, it would also have been a psychological boost, a clear expression of solidarity and understanding which might have dissipated the growing pressure in France for a negotiated settlement, even one reached from a position of weakness. But this was going too far for Britain whose want of manpower and position on the E.D.C. would have militated against such an undertaking even if the inclination had been present. Assertive as British thinking had become since April, advice without assistance was never going to impress the French. Moreover, as Rumbold and Harvey made clear, the French Government had just about given up any thought of a military solution to the war. Officials in London sensed this but were loath to accept it just yet. On 4 June, Dixon had minuted that 'Bermuda should be used for a supreme effort to rally the French to their responsibilities'. But if this failed (as it did through Churchill's misfortune) Britain should perhaps move towards 'a policy of salvaging what can be saved from the wreck'.[80]

The abortive Bermuda Conference of July 1953 may therefore be seen as a 'lost' opportunity for Britain to tell the French what ought to be done and for the French to act accordingly. It may also have been a 'last' opportunity in the sense that if France did not take a decision about firm action before the Viet-Minh renewed their campaign in October there were mounting fears in London that the military position in Viet-Nam would become wholly untenable. From the autumn of 1952 until February-March 1953, the British had considered French reinforcement essential if the Viet-Namese were to be presented with a going concern when, according to

the French time-table, the Expeditionary Corps withdrew at the end of 1954. But from April 1953, reinforcement assumed a more fundamental utility: the avoidance of defeat. The events of April 'can only make one most apprehensive as to the outcome should the Viet-Minh attack again', Tahourdin wrote to M. G. L. Joy in Saigon at the end of May. 'It may be that the French now have their last big chance'.[51] On 5 June, Assistant Under-Secretary W. D. Allen spoke to the Chiefs of Staff about the Foreign Office's concern that the 'steadily deteriorating situation' in Viet-Nam 'must again become critical in October after the monsoon'. The 'only solution' lay in the provision of 'further French forces, which would in practice have to come from Europe'. The Military agreed, Harding remarking that the French 'seemed to be adopting a policy of sitting still and hoping for some miracle to up the balance in their favour and save the situation'.[52] Ultimately, however, Bermuda was an 'illusory' opportunity in that the French had almost certainly taken a decision to negotiate their way out of Indo-China. The determining factor was the imminent Korean armistice and the sight of the United Nations and the rigidly anti-communist Eisenhower Administration coming to terms with the Chinese. And if the French were no longer thinking of a military solution, there was no point in the British doing so. Although a clear break with past vacillation, the policy laid down in Churchill's brief was out of date before it was written. It was a policy for war at a time when the French were beginning to think of peace, the right solution to the problem as it had stood six months earlier. For the French it was no longer a question of how to win but how to end the war.

NOTES

1. FO 371/106766/71, Joy tel. 113, 8 May 1953.
2. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, p. 281.
3. In general on the invasion see Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina* (Stanford 1954), pp. 292-94, hereafter, *Struggle for Indochina*; Calvocoressi, ibid, pp. 279-82 & 295-96; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 85; Dalloz, *Indo-China*, pp. 157-58.
4. FO 371/106766/61, UK Delegation Paris N.A.T.O. Council tel. 311, 24 April; FO 371/106765/52 & 56, Hayter tel. 133 (16 April) & Nutting letter to S.E.A. Dept. (22 April); FO 371/106766/70, Harvey tel. 182, 8 May & FO letter to Chancery Paris, 14 May 1953; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 559-60.
5. HCDebs, Vol 515, col. 885, 11 May 1953. Also FO 371/106775/55, Joy despatch 60, 22 April; FO 371/106765/52, Burrows min., 22 April 1953.
6. CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)5th meeting, 13 May 1953.
7. CAB 131/13, D(53)1, 22 Jan; DEFE 4/70, COS(53)70th meeting, 5 June 1953.
8. FO 371/106751/48, Joy letter to Tahourdin, 13 May 1953.
9. CAB 131/13, D(53)26, Staff Conference, Chequers, 26 April; CAB 131/13, D(53)7th meeting, 29 April; CAB 128/26 CC(53)30th meeting, 5 May; FO 371/106766/62, Harvey tel. 154, 25 April; PREM 11/645, Strang min. approved by Churchill, 28 April; FO 371/106776/68, CRO outward tel. 138, 6 May 1953.
10. FO 371/106767/116, Lloyd min., 1 May 1953.
11. PREM 11/645, Head min. to Churchill, 30 April 1953.
12. Mr. Anthony Montague Browne, interview, 13 Sept. 1989.
13. PREM 11/301, Churchill min. to Lloyd, 26 Aug. 1952.
14. PREM 11/112, record of COS(S)(51)3rd meeting, 30 Nov. 1951.
15. Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940-1965*, (London 1968 ed) pp. 446-47 (5 July 1953), hereafter *Struggle*.
16. PREM 11/789, Churchill mins., 14 & 19 Jan., Eden min. 19 Jan. 1954.
17. PREM 11/301, Churchill mins. to Lloyd (26 Aug) & Eden (2 Sept) 1952; also PREM 11/1074, Churchill letter to Eisenhower, 7 Dec. 1954.
18. Sir Pierson Dixon Papers (Mr. Piers Dixon), diary, 2 May 1953; HCDebs, Vol. 514, col. 1399 (23 April) & Vol. 515, col. 34 (4 May) 1953.
19. PREM 11/645, Churchill min. to Head, 2 May 1953.
20. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 447 (5 July 1953).
21. Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair: Winston S. Churchill 1945-1965*, (London 1988) p. 682, hereafter *Never Despair*
22. PREM 11/645, Churchill min. to Head, 2 May 1953.
23. FO 371/106767/120G, Harrison min., 15 May 1953.
24. FO 371/106751/43, Churchill min., 1 May 1953; also PREM 11/613, Churchill min. to Alexander, 16 May; Alexander min. to Churchill, 22 May; report on French Army by MOD, 26 June 1953; Moran, *Struggle*, p. 448 (6 July 1953).
25. HCDebs, Vol. 515, col. 891, 11 May 1953.
26. PREM 11/613, Lloyd letter to Churchill, 19 May; FO 371/106751/45, Tahourdin min., 20 May 1953.
27. CAB 128/26 CC(53)13th meeting, 19 Feb; also CAB 131/13, D(53)1, 22 Jan; CAB 131/13, D(53)2nd meeting, 11 Feb. 1953. The files relating to Salisbury's Committee (CAB 130/GEN425) are unavailable.
28. CAB 131/13, D(53)26 (26 April) & D(53)7 meeting (29 April) 1953.
29. FO 371/106999/11G, FO brief for Lloyd, 29 April 1953.

30. FO 371/106956/42, FO memo. on 'Siam', n.d. (Nov. 1953).
31. FO 371/106999/12G, Salisbury min. to Churchill, 1 May & Churchill min. to Salisbury, 2 May 1953; also Dixon min. to Churchill, 2 May 1953.
32. FO 371/106999/17G, Allen min., 20 May 1953.
33. FO 371/106999/12G, Churchill min. to Salisbury, 2 May; also DEFE 6/24 JP(53)79(Final), 4 May 1953.
34. CAB 128/26 CC(53)44th meeting, 6 July; FO 371/106768/134G, Lyttelton letter to Salisbury, 7 July 1953.
35. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 143.
36. FO 371/106767/120G, Scott submission on Indo-China, n.d. (early May).
37. FO 371/106767/120G, mins. by Reading (8 May), Harrison (15 May) & Dixon (15 May) 1953.
38. CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)5th meeting, 13 May; also FO 371/106767/120G, Dixon min., 7 May 1953.
39. FO 371/106767/122G, record of meeting in Strang's room, 21 May 1953.
40. See Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 61.
41. See note 41.
42. FO 371/106768/134G, FO brief on Indo-China, 25 June 1953.
43. Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp. 846-47.
44. The phrase is Ismay's, see Ismay Papers (Liddell Hart Centre, King's College, London), III/12/70, letter to Montgomery, 6 July 1953. The main topics for Washington were Germany and the Soviet Union, see CAB 129/59 C(53)187, 3 July; HLDebs, Vol. 183, col. 679, Salisbury speech, 21 July 1953.
45. Paul Emrys-Evans Papers (British Library), letter from Salisbury, 3 July 1953.
46. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 448 (6 July 1953).
47. FO 371/106752/60, Rumbold letter to Allen, 30 May 1953.
48. See note 42.
49. FO 371/107437/83, Harvey despatch 251, 26 June 1953.
50. FO 371/106752/60, Dixon min., 4 June 1952.
51. FO 371/106776/69, Tahourdin letter to Joy, 28 May 1953.
52. DEFE 4/63, COS(53)70th meeting, 5 June 1953. Similar concern is express -ed in FO 371/106776/69, Tahourdin letter to Joy, 28 May; FO 371/ 106777/83, Joy despatch 69, 16 May; CAB 134/898 FE(O)(53)5th meeting, 13 May; FO 371/106745/48, MacDonald despatch 28, 29 May; FO 371/107437/ 83, Harvey despatch 251, 26 June; FO 371/106752/60, Allen min., 3 June 1953.

PART IV: THE VIET-MINH DIMENSION

CHAPTER NINE

THE NAVARRE PLAN
A Strategy for War or Peace?

July to October 1953

The postponement of the Bermuda Conference deprived British diplomacy of what was increasingly thought of as a last chance to 'rally the French to their responsibilities as a Great Power'.[1] Time was running out if positive action was to be taken to forestall the Viet-Minh's autumn offensive. Whatever the ultimate French objective - outright victory, transfer of defence duties to the Viet-Namese and withdrawal, or a negotiated settlement - the immediate need was more troops. To British observers the war appeared to be entering its decisive phase.[2] Although the Viet-Minh might still be incapable of totally destroying the French in the field, the ease with which they had penetrated Laos in April suggested that the time might not be far off when they would be able to inflict a telling defeat and, by so doing, finally extinguish all political support in metropolitan France and pave the way for a negotiated settlement on Viet-Minh terms. To the chagrin of the British, the French seemed incapable of viewing matters in this serious light. And, because of Churchill's stroke, there was no foreseeable opportunity to approach the authorities in Paris at the highest level. However, just as a pall of fatalism was set to envelop the Foreign Office, the French suddenly and dramatically launched two initiatives within a fortnight of each other. Their combined objective was the complete defeat of the rebel forces. This was so remarkable a break with the past that one commentator has labelled

it a 'New Look' French policy.[3] In London, officials initially shared this sense of wonderment but concluded, after deeper reflection, that the 'New Look' promised rather more than it could deliver. The view gained currency that while ostensibly a strategy for victory, it was in reality a strategy for peace.

The first initiative came in the political sphere. In the years following the inception of the Bao Dai experiment the British had repeatedly urged the French to make Viet-Namese independence a reality or, at the very least, to make an unequivocal declaration of their commitment to complete the process once the war was over. Failure to do so was playing into the hands of the Viet-Minh who were able to draw on a wider core of indigenous support than might otherwise have been the case. After the Viet-Minh invasion of Laos the importance of an imaginative French political approach seemed greater than ever. During a visit to Viet-Nam in May, MacDonald found that the population was 'readily responsive to Vietminh subversion ... largely non-co-operative towards the French Union authorities, and that Bao Dai's troops lack the political inspiration necessary to light in them the flame of martial ardour as marks Ho Chi Minh's fighting men'. The principal reason was the French failure to convince the Viet-Namese they were fighting for themselves. This meant that 'Ho Chi Minh, the Moscow Communist, is enabled to grow strong not on the comparatively small Communist sentiment but on the widespread Nationalist sentiment of the population'.[4] MacDonald's strictures were echoed in Churchill's Bermuda brief which argued in favour of unfettered freedom for the Associate States.[5] Although events conspired to deny the British a chance to press the French on this, there were a number of encouraging signs that the new

French Administration of Joseph Laniel (formed on 26 June) was fully conscious of the intimate co-relation between political freedom in Viet-Nam and the fighting potential of the native army.[6] These signals were portentous. On 3 July, Laniel issued a 'solemn declaration' of France's intention to complete the 'independence and sovereignty of the Associated States'. Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia were invited to send delegations to Paris to commence negotiations immediately.[7]

As officials in London were attempting to digest the significance of this announcement, a speech by General Henri Navarre on 16 July suggested that it was merely the political face of a much broader French initiative. Navarre had replaced Salan as Commander-in-Chief in Indo-China following the invasion of Laos and, upon completion of a tour of inspection, had presented the French Government with his ideas for the future prosecution of the war.[8] Although these had yet to be formally approved, Navarre felt confident enough to outline their essence in public. The forces of France and the French Union had been 'in retreat for too long', he declared, and the Viet-Minh could attack virtually where they pleased at the end of the rainy season. Thus his first task was to forestall the enemy's autumn offensive. Later, after a period of consolidation, the French would themselves take the offensive. Integral to this aim was the further expansion of the Viet-Namese army so as to give it greater operational responsibility. Navarre was also alert to the politico-military nature of the problem, insisting that the independence foreshadowed in Laniel's declaration should be 'total'.[9]

At first sight the so-called Navarre Plan appeared to tally closely with the British estimate of what was required to restore the position in Viet-Nam and, for that reason, early discussion in the Foreign Office

centred on the likelihood of the Plan being accepted by the French Government.[10] To put it into effect Navarre had requested substantial reinforcements from Europe, both to meet the Viet-Minh's autumn onslaught and later provide the basis of a flexible reserve for offensive operations. The factors which had prohibited such a course in the past remained as formidable as ever.[11] It was with scarcely concealed surprise, therefore, that the Foreign Office learnt on 30 July that the French Committee of National Defence had agreed to provide Navarre with nearly all the extra troops he had asked for - nine infantry battalions (he had requested twelve) and an engineer battalion, as well as an increase in transport aircraft, naval support and artillery. The French Government informed London of this decision on 5 August, but added that there were no immediate plans to make it public on account of the likely outcry in France at the despatch of reinforcements. An incredulous Head of the South-East Asia Department concluded that '[t]he moral of all this is never say die!'[12] The Paris Embassy, its earlier assessments turned upside down, was forced to admit that the Laniel Administration had been 'far more forthcoming towards General Navarre than we and the Americans thought possible', but agreed that there would be 'an uproar when the news comes out'.[13]

A further reason why the French authorities were reticent about revealing details was that the implementation of the Plan was still dependent on American financial backing, particularly for the recruitment, training and arming of some 135,000 new Viet-Namese troops.[14] Indeed the 'solemn declaration' and Navarre's military blueprint were quite obviously the French response to the Eisenhower Administration's decision in March to make further assistance contingent upon a 'strategic and political plan' which held out a 'reasonable prospect of a successful end to the war within

a fairly short time'.[15] Both initiatives evidently fitted American requirements. On 9 September, the National Security Council recommended providing France with a further $385 million specifically for the implementation of the Navarre Plan.[16] The following day, Laniel made this news public without mentioning the despatch of reinforcements. The British estimated that this new appropriation, coming on top of the $400 million already allocated for Indo-China for 1953-54, would relieve the French Exchequer of almost the entire burden of training and equipping the native forces, leaving only the Expeditionary Corps to support.[17] Finally, on 30 September, the objective of the Navarre Plan was revealed (including the decision to reinforce) in a joint Franco-American *communiqué* issued simultaneously in New York and Paris. The French, it stated, would make every effort to 'disrupt and destroy the regular forces of the enemy', to bring to a 'successful conclusion the increase of the armed forces of the Associated States', and to adapt its own 'effective troops to the conditions necessary to the success of its military plans'. The purpose of the supplentary $385 million was to 'permit these objectives to be reached as rapidly and efficiently as possible'.[18] The approval of the French Government (and, by extension, the United States) for Navarre's military programme, as well as its more sympathetic appreciation of the political aspirations of the Associate States, suggested that at almost the last moment (the fighting season was only six weeks away) France had re-discovered the determination to succeed in Viet-Nam. Its politico-military initiative was presented as a departure from the negative and defensive policy of recent years. Now, with its new-found offensive spirit, France was preparing to turn the tables on the enemy.

Or so it seemed. In the Foreign Office, officials reflected that the

'New Look' stopped some way short of the measures necessary to stem the pending rebel offensive, let alone reverse the tide of Viet-Minh political and military success. For example, while Laniel's declaration of 3 July had been publicly welcomed by the Churchill Administration, in private serious reservations had been expressed.[19] Crucially, Laniel had implied in his announcement and subsequently made clear in conversation with Harvey that Indo-Chinese independence would only be discussed *within* the framework of the French Union.[20] This restriction virtually ensured the failure of the projected Franco-Associate States negotiations for, as Churchill's Bermuda brief observed, the right of secession from the Union was 'probably the minimum demand even of moderate nationalists'.[21] Yet from the French perspective Laniel's position had a certain logic. On the one hand, total freedom for Viet-Nam would do little to 'compensate Frenchmen for the sacrifices they are making on behalf of a country which they will ultimately have to leave'.[22] On the other, independence within the French Union held out at least some prospect of continuing French influence and possibly commercial gain. For example, according to the Union's Constitution, Viet-Nam would have to continue giving preference to manufactured goods from France which it could import more cheaply from elsewhere.[23] Predictably, therefore, Laniel's 'solemn declaration' received a cool reception in Indo-China.[24] The Foreign Office concluded that the Associate States were not going to be 'fobbed off with a liberal interpretation of existing agreements'. Though a step in the right direction, it was not likely to produce 'the necessary change of political atmosphere' unless energetically followed up.[25] In the event the opposite proved the case. While the scheduled talks got under way in Paris in the late summer, they quickly became bogged down and, by October, with the

Viet-Minh preparing to renew hostilities, little progress had been made.[26]

As for the Navarre Plan, the British had great difficulty in accepting it as a strategy for victory. Doubts were expressed as to whether the projected reinforcements would be sufficient to hold the present position never mind take the offensive, and their numbers were significantly less than the three-to-four divisons thought necessary by the British Chiefs of Staff. In the end, though Navarre requested twelve battalions and was promised nine, he only received seven.[27] Moreover, their quality was also open to question - the vast majority were North African and not metropolitan French as Navarre had wanted, a fact which diluted the expected 'uproar' in France when the details of the Plan were revealed. The professional French army in Europe went largely untapped.[28] For these reasons, officials in London sensed a confidence trick, a re-packaging of the old policy of holding the line in Viet-Nam pending the transfer of defence responsibility to the indigenous armed forces and the return of French troops to Europe. The rhetoric accompanying the Plan implied that the Viet-Minh would be defeated, or at least rendered militarily impotent, before French forces departed the scene. But to British policy-makers the limited manpower at Navarre's disposal, even after augmentation, was insufficient to achieve this objective. The probability remained that when the French finally withdrew in 1954 or 1955 the 'well organised, trained and equipped modern force' that was the Viet-Minh would rout the Viet-Namese army.[29] Tahourdin, voicing the consensus in the Foreign Office, minuted on 6 August that nothing had occurred in recent weeks to ...

> invalidate the thesis on which we have hitherto been working, namely that to make a proper job in Indo-China the French require, inter alia, substantial reinforcements to defeat the regular Vietminh formations and hand over a going concern to the local armies ... The effort envisaged under the Navarre Plan falls considerably short of this. Thus, provided all goes

well, the most that we can hope for ... is the avoidance of what previously looked like almost certain military disaster next Oct-ober ... The overall situation may look better than it did two months ago, but clearly much has to be done if the dangers which threaten are to be not merely averted but eventually surmounted.[30]

Subsequent insights tend to confirm this estimate of the limited scope of the Plan. Navarre himself, recalling his *tour d'horizon* in Viet-Nam, wrote that 'it struck me immediately that there was no possibility of winning the war'.[31] As for the reinforcements granted him at the end of July, he had been forewarned that they were nothing more than 'early replacements for his projected 1953 losses'.[32] At the time, too, leading French figures were prone to express their private doubts to British listeners. General Ganeval, a senior adviser to Pleven at the Ministry of Defence, confided that 'optimistic ideas on the complete defeat of the Viet Minh were unreal', a view echoed by the new Commissioner-General in Indo-China, Maurice Dejean, who remarked to Graves on 11 September that the Plan was 'subject to the need for avoiding operations which might involve heavy casualties'.[33] This caveat hardly suggested that the French were steeling themselves for an intensification of the war effort. Even Navarre accepted that his strategy had 'still to be put to the test of battle'[34], all of which sustained the Foreign Office in its belief that the means available under the Plan did not warrant its grandiose end.

How then did the British make sense of this gap between rhetoric and reality? Had the French Government badly miscalculated the number of troops necessary to restore the position, or had it allotted the maximum number an increasingly restive public and parliament would stand for? The answer to both questions might well have been 'yes' had the Foreign Office truly believed that the Navarre Plan was what it purported to be, namely a springboard to victory. But so inadequate were its provisions that the

British came to suspect that the French Government privately and consciously saw it as a stop-gap expedient, a means to a rather different end. By September, the Foreign Office had concluded that the Navarre Plan was nothing more than a stabilising operation pending the commencement of negotiations with, initially, Peking and, inevitably, Ho Chi Minh. As we have seen, the Paris Embassy had gone on record in June to argue that this was the likely objective of French diplomacy.[35] The accuracy of this assessment was demonstrated the following month during the 'Little Bermuda' conference in Washington. French imagination was greatly exercised by the imminent negotiated end to the fighting in Korea, Georges Bidault, Laniel's Foreign Minister, arguing that 'it would not be possible for French opinion to accept a situation in which there was an armistice in Korea and a continuance of the war in Indo-China'. Specifically, Bidault wanted to extend the agenda of the Political Conference which was to follow the armistice to include discussion of Indo-China. This proposal was resisted by Salisbury who was determined that nothing should be done to complicate or endanger a lasting settlement in Korea. Bidault's idea, if accepted, might be 'fatal' in this respect. On the other hand, Britain had long been committed to a *modus vivendi* with Peking and to reducing tension throughout Asia as a whole once the fighting in Korea had ended. Salisbury therefore agreed that if good progress were made on Korea at the Political Conference and the Chinese then raised Indo-China of their own accord 'we should keep an open mind and be prepared to seize such opportunities as might offer'. This was also Dulles's opinion.[36]

Despite this half-concession, in private the Anglo-Americans were inclined to dismiss Bidault's suggestion on the grounds that meaningful discussions with China could only, and should only, be conducted from a

position of French military superiority, a pre-requisite conspiciously absent in Viet-Nam despite the Frenchman's protestation that the situation was 'not so unfavourable as was sometimes suggested'.[37] It is certainly not true that, following the Korean armistice, 'the notion swiftly spread among the big powers that the Indochina conflict should be settled [diplomatically] as well'.[38] On the Western side this was a solely French preoccupation. Moreoever, the French case was weakened by their inability to say exactly what they hoped to achieve through talks with the P.R.C. Indeed, if Paris was serious about negotiations, it was surely the Viet-Minh and not the Chinese who should be addressed. But this was something which successive French Governments had refused to countenance. Direct discussions with Ho Chi Minh could be interpreted as an admission of defeat and might encourage nationalists elsewhere in the French Union to pursue their aspirations through force of arms. Talks with the Chinese on, as it were, a Great Power basis, would avoid what was essentially an issue of prestige.[39] Therefore, as Harvey had informed Eden at the end of 1952, '[m]uch vague hope rests on some turn of the diplomatic wheel which would result in a _detente_ in Indo-China'. There was, he said, 'a good deal of wishful thinking to the effect that a general settlement in the Far East would result in a general slackening of Viet-Minh pressure'.[40] This 'wishful thinking' increased significantly when an armistice was finally signed in Korea on 27 July 1953, but so too did French vagueness as to what this should mean for Indo-China.

However, on 1 August matters began to clarify a little when Massigli called on Salisbury at the Foreign Office to tell him that 'the first object of French policy was to obtain a cessation of Chinese help to the Viet Minh, to be followed by a cessation of hostilities'. The problem was

how to bring Indo-China 'within the general ambit of the [Korean] Political Conference'.[41] A week later Joy was told by Dejean in Saigon that it was 'essential that the Chinese should be induced to disinterest themselves in Indo-China'. When Joy expressed scepticism, Dejean 'exclaimed that if China could not be brought to stop aid to the Vietminh he saw no hope'.[42] Collating and interpreting these and other signals, the Foreign Office concluded that what the French had earlier referred to as a sign of Chinese 'good will' was, in practice, a curtailment of the supply of equipment, money, refuge, training facilities and technical advice to the Viet-Minh, all of which Peking had made available in steadily increasing quantities since 1950. If successful in this, the French believed that the potency of the threat posed by the Viet-Minh would be greatly reduced.[43] In these altered circumstances the forces at Navarre's disposal might indeed prove adequate to launch a successful counter-offensive against a weakened adversary. On this reading, there was no contradiction between the Laniel Government's rhetoric of victory and its pursuit of negotiations with China. However, the British had reason to question whether the French, even if successful in regaining the initiative, would necessarily strive towards the complete destruction of the Viet-Minh. This was suggested in the first place by Navarre during a press conference in Hanoi on 6 August when he spoke of inflicting 'serious defeats on the Vietminh such as will create favourable conditions for negotiation'.[44] The following day Marc Jacquet, the new Minister for the Associate States, told Reilly in Paris that the denial of Chinese aid would be a 'severe blow for the Vietminh, with whom negotiations might [then] be possible'.[45] Reilly himself concluded on 10 August that 'nobody here seems to believe any longer in a complete defeat of the Viet Minh', and that the 'basic aims' of the French

Government were to 'find some diplomatic means of persuading the Chinese Government to withdraw their support from the Viet Minh', to 'regain the military initiative' and, if successful in these first two aims, 'to negotiate with the Viet Minh from strength'.[46]

Throughout August and September the French continued to complicate preparations for the Korean Political Conference by insisting on simultaneous discussion of Indo-China.[47] This, in turn, hardened the growing conviction in London that a negotiated settlement was at the forefront of French thinking. Further confirmatory evidence followed. On 25 September, Maurice Schumann, Minister of State at the Quai d'Orsay, revealed in public for the first time the French Government's hope that 'diplomatic negotiations might be opened either during or after the Korean Political Conference with a view to ending the aggression in Indo-China'. The next day Laniel declared that there was 'no dishonour in a strong people entering into negotiation'. Taken together, the Paris Embassy believed that these speeches underlined what it and the Foreign Office had suspected since June, namely 'that they [the French] no longer look for a complete military victory over the Viet Minh and that their hopes are pinned on the possibility of an honourable peace by negotiation at some time in the immediate future'. This objective had 'never before been so openly declared'.[48]

This, then, was the Foreign Office interpretation of the 'New Look'. However, it is important to draw a distinction between British understanding of, and agreement with, the apparent aims of French policy. In general, the Foreign Office considered the 'New Look' to be ill-conceived and fraught with risks. As early as 10 August, the Paris Embassy had cautioned that it was 'hardly possible to put very high the chances of

this policy's success' for it was 'certainly not backed by the majority of Frenchmen', there was a 'real danger' that the reinforcements would prove too few and the Viet-Namese army develop too slowly 'to prevent the long-threatened collapse of the French will to continue the war', there was too much reliance placed on China deserting the Viet-Minh and, lastly, the 'possibility of any acceptable compromise with such dyed-in-the-wool Communists as Ho Chi Minh and his main associates seems very remote'.[49] In the Foreign Office there was broad agreement with this forecast, most doubts focusing on the wisdom of basing a policy on Chinese compliance. Peking would undoubtedly demand a *quid pro quo* for terminating aid to the Viet-Minh (assuming it even countenanced the idea), but the French had little or nothing to offer. The China and Korea Department concluded that it was 'most improbable that short of offering a complete withdrawal from Indo-China the French could by bilateral negotiations persuade the Chinese to stop aid to the Viet-Minh', a view echoed by Makins in Washington. In London, the talk was of a 'Micawber-ish attitude' on the part of the Laniel Administration.[50]

The virtual certainty that the French would achieve little in talks with the Chinese gave rise to a fear in official British circles that public opinion in France, encouraged to think that Indo-China would be covered by a general post-Korean settlement, might react angrily when confronted with the opposite reality and force Laniel to commence direct negotiations with the Viet-Minh. Given that these would be conducted from a position of rebel military superiority, the outcome seemed all too obvious. From Saigon Joy warned that almost any compact reached under such circumstances 'would result, in a short space of time, in Communist control of Indochina just as inevitably as would a Vietminh military victory ...'

In London, too, Franco-Viet Minh talks were considered 'tantamount to giving Indo-China away'.[51]

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The three months following the cancellation of the Bermuda Conference saw the nature of the problem which Viet-Nam posed for British diplomacy complete its transformation from an issue of war to an issue of peace. Ironically, having only in June perfected a policy aimed at encouraging the French to press on to victory, the Foreign Office had by October to re-work this policy to accommodate the growing inevitability of a negotiated settlement. The period was characterised by confusion, with victory and compromise often uttered in the same - invariably French - breath. For this the 'New Look' itself was responsible, mirroring as it did the uncertainty and tensions within the French body politic as to the wisest way forward in, or way out of, Indo-China. But by the late summer of 1953 the Foreign Office believed it had a fairly clear idea of what the French were trying to do. The problem was how to deter Paris from embarking on precipitate negotiations and to persuade the Laniel Administration of the wisdom of prior military success.[52]

The period in question raises several interesting issues. Why did the French maintain that the Navarre Plan heralded victory when, as was increasingly obvious, the real emphasis was on a political solution? The reason seems to have been to extract further aid from the United States. To obtain this, the French simply told the Americans what they wanted to hear - that the war was still winnable. Paris may have reasoned that this was a small price to pay if most of the cost of its more limited objectives could be met by the American taxpayer. Without the trappings of victory, Washington's financial backing could not be assured. This might help to

explain the aggressive tone of the Franco-American communiqué of 30 September. As officials at the Quai d'Orsay admitted, because it was a joint communiqué, 'the reactions of the American public had to be taken into account' and they would expect 'the emphasis to be placed on French determination to fight hard'. In reality it remained 'the policy of the French Government to negotiate a peace in Indo-China as soon as their position is sufficiently favourable'.[53] There is also some evidence that Navarre was actually pressured by American advisers in Viet-Nam into making his recommendations rather more far-reaching than he himself desired.[54] Thus the ironic possibility exists that the Americans themselves may have primed Navarre to tell them - the Americans - what they wanted to hear.

This in turn raises a related issue: why did a budget-conscious U.S. Administration invest another $385 million in a project which, from the British standpoint, had little chance of succeeding in its declared aims? If the British could see the flaws in the Navarre Plan, why not the Americans? The answer seems to be that, far from blindly accepting French assurances of victory, the Eisenhower Administration endorsed the Navarre Plan fully conscious of its shortcomings. They did so, however, because there appeared to be no practicable alternative. The French had gone about as far as they could by way of reinforcement given the unpopularity of the conflict at home where the 'tide of opinion was running so strongly against the war' that the new American assistance in carrying it on 'aroused resentment rather than gratitude'.[55] Most importantly, the Americans (and the British for that matter) were by now convinced that Laniel's Administration was the last that would even contemplate a victorious conclusion. Any successor, the State Department concluded, would almost certainly be 'committed to seek a settlement on terms dangerous to the

security of the United States and the Free World'.[56] This consideration alone ensured support for the French Government's policy on a 'lesser of two evils' basis.

A subtle but decisive psychological factor may also have been at work in Washington. Because the Eisenhower Administration believed that there was no acceptable substitute to military victory, and because ensuring a non-communist future for the Associate States was now a foreign policy priority, to have admitted that the Navarre Plan could attain neither of these goals would have meant facing the unpalatable truth that only large-scale American intervention with air, sea and probably land forces could save the situation. But the Administration was unwilling, and the country at large unready, to accept another costly commitment on the Asian mainland so soon after the termination of the unhappy Korean experience. In August, a State Department paper urged support for the Navarre Plan, one main reason being that if the French 'actually decided to withdraw, the U.S. would have to consider most seriously whether to take over in this area'.[57] The problem with this line of thought, however, was posited by a leading U.S. General: 'If we go into Indo-China with American forces, we will be there for the long pull. Militarily and politically we would be in up to our necks'.[58] Washington may therefore have sought to convince itself that the Navarre Plan did hold (as the French for their own reasons said it did) a 'reasonable prospect of success' and that victory, as one commentator has written, 'was something that the French could have if the US paid'.[59] When a State Department study cast doubt on this assumption and assessed the alternative courses of action open to the Administration should the Navarre Plan fail, a senior official insisted: 'We cannot *let* the Navarre Plan fail'.[60]

A final and more cynical motive for French optimism was that American financial aid for Indo-China was helping to alleviate the problems of France's domestic economy. American appropriations, observes one scholar, 'although earmarked "Indo-China", could, in agreement with the USA, be transferred to France's account with the European Payments Union'.[61] A French historian has concluded that American assistance 'served largely as a means to balance the general finances of France at a time when Marshall Plan aid was running out, and this was a solid though unavowable reason for not ending the war'.[62] Jacques Dalloz also notes that some in France 'could talk of the war in Indo-China which fed the flow of American manna as the best French export'.[63] But in the end, whatever the reasons, the nett result was that the United States accepted the Navarre Plan. As Dulles put it, 'if the French acted resolutely they had the resources to defeat the Viet-Minh regular formations'. Thereafter, 'there would no doubt be a long drawn out guerilla war but it would be a guerilla war'.[64] Clearly, then, Britain and the United States differed significantly in their approach to the Navarre Plan. The Americans seem to have convinced themselves that it was a positive step towards an acceptable long-term military solution and hoped that its flaws would go unexposed. The British, conversely, doubted whether it would even be sufficient to maintain the present position after October and was, at best, a holding-operation with a view to commencing negotiations in the near future.

Focusing for a moment on the more realistic British assessment, what stands out is the absence of any attempt by the Foreign Office to convey to the French its doubts and concerns about the 'New Look' either as Paris projected it or as officials in London perceived it. Likewise, there was no effort to disabuse the Americans of their misguided faith in the

Navarre Plan. This passivity may be explained in terms of the reasons which had prevented positive British diplomacy since October 1951, notably the avoidance of additional commitments. It is, however, difficult to equate with the growing seriousness of the situation in Viet-Nam and with the more forthright attitude adopted prior to the aborted Bermuda Conference. Therefore, what additional constraints were operating at this time which might explain, though not excuse, diplomatic inertia? To begin with, the period witnessed a great many developments and it was perhaps inevitable that the Foreign Office should revert to observation and evaluation. It was only in September that officials began to form a clear picture of what the French were attempting to do. This also helps account for the lack of any considered position on negotiations other than reflex opposition to talking to the communists from weakness, politically and militarily, or jeopordising a Korean settlement. Indeed it is clear that the Foreign Office held on to visions of total military victory in Viet-Nam far longer than Eden has suggested in his memoirs. The only reference in Churchill's Bermuda brief (25 June 1953) to negotiations is a very general one.[65] Yet Eden claimed that he was personally working for a negotiated settlement from early-to-mid 1952.[66] In fact it was only in the late summer of 1953 that British diplomacy began to seriously consider this option, and then only in response to firm signals that the French themselves were no longer thinking of outright victory. Prior to this the British had perceived no pressing need for a fully thought out position on negotiations.

Another reason for British inaction was that foreign policy was in the hands of someone who can be forgiven for not investing Indo-China with any great importance given the myriad of other difficult and more immediately

pressing issues with which he had to deal. Salisbury was not the man to provoke French counter-demands by urging them to make even greater exertions in Viet-Nam. Such delicate matters could best be left for Eden to deal with on his return. The British had also to tread very carefully with the Americans on Asian issues in general following a serious disagreement concerning London's sponsorship of India for membership of the Korean Political Conference. A rejuvenated Churchill argued in Cabinet on 8 September that '[w]e should be well-advised to go to great lengths to avoid any further cause of Anglo-American misunderstanding at the present time'.[67] Salisbury, too, felt it was of the 'highest importance' to avoid immediately subjecting relations with Washington to such a 'strain'.[68] This in itself would have precluded an attempt, had London desired to make one, to question the wisdom of the Eisenhower Administration's Indo-China policy and its commitment to the Navarre Plan.

By October, however, British diplomacy faced a choice between continued silence, which would imply support for the 'New Look' in spite of deep misgivings about its workability and objectives, or to make known to the French and Americans its concern. To adopt the former position would be difficult to reconcile with the importance to Britain of sustaining a non-communist Indo-China. It would also do little to narrow the divergent approach of the British and the Americans to the Navarre Plan. As the *Pentagon Papers* make clear, the belief that the Plan was capable of 'turning the tide' and would lead to 'a decisive victory over the Viet Minh' had 'contributed to Washington's agreement to substantially raise the level of assistance' to France. More generally, the 'temptation to "go along" with the French until the Viet Minh was defeated was all the more attractive because of the *expectation* [original emphasis] of victory which

pervaded Washington'.[69] Britain on the other hand saw the main aim of French policy much as Navarre did: 'an honourable exit from the war' through the creation of a 'military situation that would allow an honourable political solution'.[70] One might even go so far as to suggest that the serious Anglo-American differences in 1954 before and during the Geneva Conference were rooted in their differing interpretations of the Navarre Plan in the autumn of 1953.

NOTES

1. PREM 11/645, Selwyn Lloyd min. to Churchill, 11 June 1953.
2. See pp. 165-66.
3. Hammer, *Struggle for Indochina*, p. 301.
4. FO 371/106745/48, MacDonald despatch 28, 29 May 1953.
5. FO 371/106768/134G, FO brief for Churchill, 25 June 1953.
6. FO 371/106753/110 & 116, Salisbury despatch 556 to Paris, 30 June & Allen min., 1 July 1953.
7. Full text in A. W. Cameron, ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis: A Documentary History* (New York 1971), Vol. I., pp. 199-200, hereafter *Viet-Nam Crisis*; also Hammer, *Struggle for Indochina*, p. 301; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, p. 285.
8. Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu* (London 1965), pp. 14-15.
9. *The Times*, 17 July 1953; Calvocoressi, ibid., pp. 285-86.
10. FO 371/106768/139, Tahourdin letter to Joy, 15 July 1953.
11. FO 371/106754/155 & 158, Harvey tel. 264, 20 July & Reilly letter to Allen, 21 July 1953.
12. FO 371/106754/184G, Reilly tel. 273, 30 July, Tahourdin min., 4 Aug; FO 371/106755/185G, Reilly tel. 255, 31 July, Burrows min., 4 Aug. & Selby min., 5 Aug. 1953.
13. FO 371/106754/184G, Reilly tel. 273, 30July 1953.
14. FO 371/106754/166, Reilly tel. 270, 23 July; FO 371/106768/150, Burrows min., 22 July; FO 371/106769/164, Reilly tel. 266, 7 Aug. 1953.
15. See pp. 143-44.
16. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 780-89; also pps. 767-70, 778-79; FO 371/106770/180, Makins tel. 754 11 Sept. 1953.
17. FO 371/106769/179, Harvey tel. 1053, 11 Sept; *The Economist* ('France and American aid'), 17 Oct. 1953.
18. Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 206-07.
19. HCDebs, Vol. 518, col. 213, Butler statement, 20 July 1953.
20. FO 371/106753/137 & 124, Harvey tels. 256 & 234, 9 & 4 July 1953.
21. See note 5.
22. FO 371/107433/1, Hayter despatch 30, 21 Jan. 1953.
23. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, p. 289.
24. FO 371/106768/148, Lloyd min., 7 July 1953.
25. FO 371/106753/ 122 & 123, Burrows mins., 6 July; FO 371/106754/162, Joy despatch 94, 15 July; FO 371/106768/148, Lloyd min., 7 July 1953.
26. FO 371/107434/19, Harvey tel. 319, 10 Sept. 1953; Calvocoressi, ed.,

Survey 1953, pp. 287-92.

27. FO 371/112780/60, Reilly despatch 241, 21 June 1954; also Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 29-30.
28. FO 371/106778/102 & 105, MA Paris letter to Stewart (WO), 11 July & Burrows min., 4 Aug; FO 371/106754/184G, Tahourdin min., 4 Aug; FO 371/106770/193, Reilly tel. 340, 2 Oct; FO 371/106778/110, Tahourdin min., 26 Aug; FO 371/106755/198G, Reading min., 6 Aug; FO 371/106746/76, Burrows min., 14 Aug; also DEFE 4/63, COS(53)70th meeting, 5 June 1953.
29. FO 371/106778/105, Burrows min., 4 Aug. 1953 (views of MA Saigon).
30. FO 371/106778/105, Tahourdin min., 6 Aug. 1953.
31. Cited in Michael Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* (London 1984), p. 28, hereafter *Vietnam*.
32. Melanie Billings Yun, *Decision Against War; Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu 1954* (New York 1988), p. 10, hereafter *Decision Against War*; also Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 29-31.
33. FO 371/106777/98, Reilly letter to Tahourdin, 11 July; FO 371/106756/246, Graves despatch 131, 14 Sept. 1953.
34. FO 371/106756/250, Graves letter to Tahourdin, 21 Sept. 1953.
35. See p. 164.
36. FO 371/106768/136 & 139, Salisbury tels. 1477 & 1485, 13 July, also record of Salisbury-Bidault & Salisbury-Dulles meetings, 12 July 1953; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pps. 667-68, 670-72.
37. FO 371/106768/139, Salisbury tel. 1485, 13 July 1953.
38. Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 191.
39. See also Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 35.
40. FO 371/101060/130, Harvey despatch 606, 19 Nov. 1952.
41. FO 800/784/87, Salisbury despatch 653 to Paris, 1 Aug. 1953.
42. FO 371/106755/215, Joy letter to Tahourdin, 7 Aug. 1953.
43. FO 371/106768/154, Reilly tel. 256, 31 July 1953.
44. FO 371/106769/163, Chancery Paris to S.E.A. Dept, 6 Aug. 1953.
45. FO 371/106749/164, Reilly tel. 266, 7 Aug. 1953.
46. FO 371/106769/165, Reilly despatch 342, 10 Aug. 1953.
47. FO 800/784/87, Salisbury despatch to Paris, 1 Aug; FO 371/106769/170, Strang min., 1 Sept; FO 371/106770/180, FO memo., 'Indo-China and the Political Conference on Korea', 18 Sept; also CAB 129/63 C(53)286, 16 Oct. & CAB 128/26 CC(53)59th meeting, 19 Oct. 1953.
48. FO 371/106770/187, Harvey tel. 352, 28 Sept. 1953; *The Economist* ('Peace Talks in Indo-China?'), 3 Oct. 1953.
49. FO 371/106769/165, Reilly despatch 342, 10 Aug. 1953.
50. FO 371/105753/138, Shattock min., 27 July; FO 371/106770/186, Makins tel. 784, 24 Sept. 1953; also FO 371/106753/138, Joy letter to Allen, 30 June; FO 371/106769/164, Reilly tel. 266, 7 Aug; FO 371/106755/215, Burrows min., 22 Aug. 1953.
51. FO 371/106753/138, Joy letter to Allen, 30 June & Tahourdin min., 15 July 1953.
52. FO 371/106753/124 & 137, Harvey tels. 234 & 256, 4 & 9 July; FO 371/106769/165, Reilly despatch 342, 10 Aug; FO 371/106778/105, Burrows min., 4 Aug. 1953.
53. FO 371/106770/193, Reilly tel. 340, 2 Oct. 1953.
54. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 116.
55. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, p. 295.
56. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 717.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid, p. 650.

59. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 118.
60. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 762-66; also Cable, *Geneva Conference* p. 27.
61. Werth, *France*, p. 644.
62. Grosser, *Western Alliance*, p. 132.
63. Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p. 144.
64. FO 371/106769/161, Scott (Washington) letter to Allen, 30 July 1953.
65. See note 5.
66. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 82.
67. CAB 128/26 CC(53)51st meeting, 8 Sept. 1953.
68. CAB 129/62 C(53)247, 4 Sept; CAB 128/26 CC(53)52nd meeting, 16 Sept; also FO 371/103518/23G & 24G, Lloyd letter to Salisbury, 23 Aug., memo. by Wright, 22 Aug. & Jebb letter to Salisbury, 25 Aug. 1953; Brian Porter, *Britain and the Rise of Communist China: A Study of British Attitudes 1945-54* (Oxford 1967), p. 139.
69. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I., pps. 77 & 79.
70. Maclear, *Vietnam*, p. 29.

PART IV: THE VIET-MINH DIMENSION

CHAPTER TEN

NO EASY WAY OUT

Britain, France and a negotiated settlement for Viet-Nam

October 1953 to January 1954

Faced with a choice between supporting the 'New Look' French policy for Indo-China or making its misgivings known to the French and U.S. Governments, British diplomacy ultimately adopted the former course. Why Eden and his officials did so given their doubts about the efficacy of the Navarre Plan and disappointment at the level of Indo-Chinese independence foreshadowed in Laniel's 'solemn declaration' demands some attempt at explanation. The first point to make is that Indo-China did not rate as a matter of priority for Eden when he resumed charge of the Foreign Office in October 1953. Even when it did assume a measure of importance towards the end of November, it was due mainly to its complicating effect on other related matters - a Korean Political Conference, Anglo-American differences over China, a meeting with the Russians to discuss Germany, and, once again, the fate of the E.D.C. As an issue in its own right Indo-China did not command the attention of the British Foreign Secretary. The relative but misleading stability of the military situation in Viet-Nam was a contributory factor in this connection: the expected Viet-Minh offensive had failed to materialise by the start of December owing to the fact that its probable target, the Tonking Delta, had remained flooded longer than usual after the rains. Navarre had also been able to disrupt Viet-Minh preparations by attacks on enemy lines of communication and sources of supply.[1] However, by the end of the year there were ominous signs that

the Viet-Minh, instead of concentrating on the Delta, would seek to divert French attention and resources from that vital area by renewing operations in Laos. One major obstacle stood in their way: the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu which straddled the natural invasion route. The French, far from viewing this development with suspicion, actually seemed to relish the prospect of engaging the enemy in a conventional set-piece battle on terms and terrain of their own choosing.[2]

The incipient crisis in Viet-Nam had also to vie with other more immediately pressing problems. Egypt, Iran, Trieste, the E.D.C., *détente* with the Soviet Union, even a squabble with Saudi Arabia over Buraimi, all had prior claims on Eden's attention.[3] In Asia it was the failure to convene a Korean Political Conference which caused most anxiety. This was mainly the result of communist prevarication and gave rise to uncertainty about future Chinese intentions. Was the armistice, after all, a tactical retreat allowing Peking to renew its strength before launching a new aggression? Consequently, when Eden spoke in Parliament on 5 November, it was to say that Asia was the 'theatre which causes us all most immediate concern' and that it was 'still the most dangerous of all the spheres with which we have to deal'.[4] As ever, it was the region's potential as a source of conflict between the West and China (and possibly the Soviet Union) which was the principal worry. Although Eden, as seen, was personally disinclined to believe that Peking would mount a second Korea, the danger could not be ruled out.[5] This in turn led Eden to focus his attention on the continued absence of a collective defence organisation for the region, the first time this issue had been examined with any seriousness for nearly a year. The main obstacle to progress was still the aloof American attitude - as apparent during the first ten months of

Republican rule as it had been under the Democrats. More so in fact when the Eisenhower Administration's aversion to consultation with allies and Dulles's fixation with freedom of manoeuvre was taken into account.[6] A Foreign Office memorandum in October concluded that there was 'still a long way to go before we can expect to see the United States committed to participation in any ... formal piece of defence machinery [in South-East Asia] with political strings attached, on the lines of NATO in Europe'.[7]

Spurred on by the tense post-armistice situation in Korea, Eden produced a memorandum for the Cabinet on 24 November in which he berated the American attitude. London and Washington saw a regional defence grouping as a means to quite differing ends, the former containment and compromise and the latter conflict with China. American policy was the product of domestic 'emotional, political and military pressures' which made it difficult for the Administration to frame a 'realistic policy towards China'. Eden feared that these pressures might 'push' Washington into 'ill-considered courses'. British policy was based on (and American policy opposed to) 'acceptance of the facts of the situation, the avoidance of provocation, gradual progress towards more normal trading and diplomatic relations, and the need to keep a toe in the door in case divergencies between China and Russia develop and can be exploited'. Britain should therefore seek to 'convince the United States Government, and encourage them to convince American opinion, of the rightness of our approach'. In other words, to construct a defence grouping on British terms. An Asian N.A.T.O. involving both Western and Asian nations remained Eden's long-term goal, but adherence to the doctrine of non-alignment meant that 'important Asian countries such as India and Indonesia are not yet ready to participate'. Moreover, Washington's support for militant anti-communists

like Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek, and the upholding of 'puppet' pro-Western regimes in Siam, the Philippines and to a lesser extent Pakistan, did little to persuade moderate Asian opinion of the merits of participation in a pact alongside either the United States or its so-called allies. For the time being, therefore, responsiblity for regional defence in an emergency remained with the five leading Western Powers and, in this respect, Eden called for the scope of the Five Power Staff Agency to be extended.[8]

For these reasons, therefore, Indo-China and the failings of French policy were not at the forefront of Eden's mind. Yet, paradoxically, in the Foreign Office itself there was as we have seen a sharp appreciation of the inadequacies of the Navarre Plan and the problems likely to stem from its failure.[9] Why then did Eden's advisers not bring this to his attention more forcibly? One answer is a lack of alternatives. The French had probably gone as far as they could in reinforcing Viet-Nam in terms of available manpower and what public opinion would accept. If they were to go further, Britain, in advocating a greater effort, would be vulnerable to French counter-demands for help. And there could be little doubt of the Foreign Secretary's response to any suggestion in favour of British sacrifices in Europe or South-East Asia. Yet if the picture had been painted in the black terms it deserved it might at least have encouraged Eden to approach the Eisenhower Administration in an effort to disabuse it of its belief in victory through the Navarre Plan. This in turn might have seen Washington link aid for Indo-China to a more vigorous and realistic French strategy. On the other hand, American pressure in this respect was always likely to have adverse repercussions so far as the French attitude towards the E.D.C. was concerned.

Another answer is that a degree of personal and professional rivalry amongst officials in the Foreign Office department responsible for Indo-China, the South-East Asia department, may have prevented Eden receiving reports about the situation which might have stirred him into action. According to later testimony, the Head of the department, J. G. Tahourdin, took a conscious decison not to be too alarmist and ensured that the more gloomy prognostications of officials under his jurisdiction did not filter upwards in the Foreign Office pyramid. A careerist apparently intent on self-advancement, Tahourdin is said to have preferred not to have papers leave his department expressing views which he knew to be unwelcome to the Foreign Secretary. In Tahourdin's opinion the department's duty was not to advise but to reflect Eden's personal judgments which meant, at this stage, accepting the optimistic French rhetoric accompanying the Navarre Plan. Junior officials - a number with experience of war in South-East Asia between 1942 and 1945 - were left to fret in silence. Their sense of frustration increased once the French chose Dien Bien Phu for a show-down with the Viet-Minh, for the inappropriateness of transposing military tactics designed for the European battlefield to South-East Asia was apparent to all with first-hand knowledge of conditions in the latter.[10] How much store should be placed on the foregoing is a matter for debate for, irrespective of the determinent, the end result was the same: British diplomacy did nothing to encourage the French to take greater stock of their position, nor the Americans to look anew at the Navarre Plan.

British policy thus rested on a hope - that the worst fears of officials would prove unfounded, that France would survive the next round of major military operations, and that somehow the elusive position of strength would be achieved from which negotiations might be undertaken.

Above all it was essential that the French did not negotiate too soon. As of October 1953 the Laniel Administration appeared to fully accept this fundamental premise, a situation which no doubt encouraged those who thought like Tahourdin. Additional factors suggested that the French would not rush headlong into negotiations. One was the continuing impossibility of talking directly with the Viet-Minh, for the French would have the greatest difficulty in presenting a meeting as anything but a tacit admission of defeat. The appearance of humiliation as much as the reality would have serious consequences for France's world position. Moreover, Bao Dai and his followers, aware that their mandate to rule stemmed directly from French support, were predictably 'dead against' parleying with Ho Chi Minh.[11]

This in turn presented Paris with a further problem. Because it had always maintained that it was fighting communism in Viet-Nam in order to preserve that country's present and future freedom to choose its own destiny, France could hardly make peace against the express wishes of the Bao Dai regime without conceding the colonial nature of the conflict. This, too, would have adverse repercussions for France beyond Viet-Nam - in North Africa, in its relations with its allies, particularly the United States, and in the United Nations. The Laniel Administration therefore tried to reconcile the unreconcilable: its commitment to a negotiated solution with its commitment to the Associate States. On 5 October, Schumann publicly declared that if it was down to France alone discussions with the rebels would already be in motion. But as things stood, these could only be 'conceived with the agreement and participation of the Associated States'.[12] Welcome as this statement was to British observers, the contradiction which it papered over was inescapable. This was quickly

shown as, first, France's commitment to involve the Associate States in the negotiating process and, second, its adherence to peace-through-strength was severely tested.

The first trial came in the context of Laniel's 'solemn declaration'. While negotiations with Laos had proceeded amicably, with Cambodia and Viet-Nam there had been only acrimony and scant progress.[13] In Viet-Nam the disparate anti-communist nationalist groupings, concerned that the Paris talks would yield nothing more than paper assurances, convened a Congress in Saigon. On 16 October it issued a resolution rejecting participation in the French Union. Although quickly amended to include the words 'in its present form', the sense of betrayal in France was acute and public bewilderment intensified as to what exactly their soliders were dying for in Viet-Nam.[14] In the National Assembly there was an 'outburst of bad temper in every political party'.[15] Bidault, in London for talks with Eden and Dulles, said that it would be difficult 'to convince French public opinion of the need for continued French military effort in Indo-China if the framework of the French Union were to disappear'.[16] During a full-scale debate in parliament at the end of October, Premier Laniel, while denouncing the resolution, also emphasised that France was not engaged in a 'crusade or a war of extermination', and that Viet-Minh proposals would receive 'every consideration'. Respect for the sensibilities of the Viet-Namese was becoming a diminishing inhibition in Paris so far as talking peace was concerned. The debate ended, however, with general endorsement of Laniel's policy of negotiation from strength and not, as some in London expected, the fall of his Government. The unity of Right and Left born of 'irritation with the Vietnamese' was only a 'transitory phenomenon' in Paris. There was still no majority for an

alternative policy.[17]

These events were followed on 29 November by the publication of Ho Chi Minh's celebrated interview with the Swedish magazine *Expressen*. Breaking with previous policy, he declared himself ready to discuss a peaceful solution to the war if the French Government made the first move. Ho even argued that a negotiated end to the war and the return of French troops to Europe would make German rearmament unnecessary.[18] Coming so soon after the Saigon Congress and with disenchantment with the war mounting in Paris, the Foreign Office wondered whether Laniel would be able to resist domestic pressure to explore this opening. The timing of Ho's statement was surely no coincidence, nor his by-passing of the Associate States in positing purely Franco-Viet Minh talks. Officials in London questioned the sincerity of Viet-Minh motives and speculated to what extent the interview represented Chinese and/or Soviet policy. Concern was also expressed about the adverse impact Ho's *demarche* would have on morale amongst the fighting forces in Viet-Nam as well as the confusion it would sow in France.[19] Eden took a different view, regarding it as a psychologically weakening preliminary to the expected but delayed rebel offensive.[20] There was even some suggestion that the *Expressen* interview had been arranged after secret contacts between the Swedish journalist concerned and French politicians from the peace lobby in Paris.[21] But whatever lay behind Ho's words, the worry in London was that Laniel would jump or be pushed into untimely negotiations. In the event the French response was as cautious as the British could reasonably have hoped for. Laniel himself thought the interview '98 per cent propaganda' and, on 2 December, the French Government called on the Viet-Minh to renew its proposals through formal channels. They would then be examined 'in consultation with the Associated

States'. Whether this would suffice to satisfy a 'peace-hungry people' angered by recent demonstrations of Viet-Namese ingratitude remained to be seen.[22] In Saigon, meanwhile, Ho's statement was greeted with dismay, and those same nationalists so recently critical of France now feared being left 'in the lurch to be supplanted and massacred by the Viet-Minh'.[23]

The fact that the Laniel Administration emerged from this trial with its loyalty to peace-through-strength intact was due to three main factors. The first was the uneasy military stand-off in Viet-Nam. Secondly, there was still a grudging but nonetheless widespread acknowledgement in the National Assembly of the disastrous consequences of negotiating with the Viet-Minh in present circumstances.[24] Finally, the French Cabinet continued to propagate the theory that a solution to the whole problem could be found through top-level discussions with the Chinese. Unlike a meeting with the Viet-Minh, Laniel believed that this course 'could not be considered as making a pact with the devil'.[25] Its ostensible purpose remained an end to Chinese help for the Viet-Minh and the pursuit of outright victory over a much weakened enemy.[26] But British policy-makers had long considered this a wildly optimistic appreciation based on the tenuous premise that Peking would play the part allotted it by the French scriptwriters. The extent of Chinese influence over the Viet-Minh was also unknown. Unlike Korea, Chinese involvement in Viet-Nam was indirect and there was no escaping the fact that it was 'the Vietminh and not the Chinese whom the French are fighting' and, by extension, the Viet-Minh to whom the French must eventually talk.[27] For the moment, though, Franco-Chinese discussions were not open to the same objections as Franco-Viet Minh talks and their pursuit, moreover, provided public opinion in France with a tangible sign of the Laniel Administration's professed determination

to give peace a chance.

This, then, was the situation prevailing in Paris and Viet-Nam in October-November 1953, observed closely by British officials but of little consequence as yet to the Foreign Secretary. However, from late November Indo-China did begin to intrude on Eden's thoughts by dint of its relationship to other issues. To begin with, French enthusiasm for negotiations with the P.R.C. irritated the British and Americans because of its linkage with the Korean Political Conference. Furthermore, by December Indo-China was having a complicating effect on efforts to arrange a meeting with the Soviets about the German problem and the E.D.C. Although the crisis which was to engulf the French in Viet-Nam in 1954 resulted from factors already present in Viet-Nam at the end of 1953 (an unsound politico-military policy compounded by shortage of manpower and increasing Viet-Minh strength), a number of the elements which combined to produce the parallel crisis in Anglo-American relations had their roots in this wider discussion of Korea, Germany and the E.D.C. Thus an examination of Anglo-Franco-American relations at this time is of considerable relevance. Indeed without such an exploration the British *rôle* in the Indo-China drama of 1954 is not fully understandable.

By November 1953 the logical forum for Franco-Chinese discussions, the Korean Political Conference, still showed few signs of materialising.[28] The Laniel Administration duly sought an alternative and, thanks to the Russians, it found one. Following Stalin's death the previous March the new Soviet leadership had launched a *détente* initiative calling for the signature of a peace treaty guaranteeing Germany's neutrality and providing for its reunification. The Western Alliance was thrown into confusion. In

Eisenhower's vulgar phraseology, it was a question of whether the Soviet 'woman of the streets' was, in her post-Stalinist change of dress, 'still the same whore underneath'.[29] At the official level the leading Western Powers were prone to caution. Public opinion in Britain and Western Europe, however, was greatly excited by the prospect of peaceful co-existence, a situation which Churchill took advantage of in May 1953 when calling for an East-West Heads of State summit.[30] Impelled by rising public expectations, Britain, France and the United States entered into what has been described as an 'elephantine minuet' with the Soviets in an effort to establish a date, time and agenda for a conference on the German problem.[31] Common ground was hard to find. On 4 August, Moscow, in rejecting the most recent Western proposal, complicated matters still more by insisting that it would now 'only agree to a conference that would include Communist China and discuss the problems of the world at large'.[32] This was predictably turned down by the Eisenhower Administration.

When the Soviets repeated their suggestion on 3 November, Churchill, keen to preserve the prospect of a summit and anxious for American support, telegraphed Eisenhower: 'Why not try Bermuda again?' Such a meeting might also be used to discuss other problematical issues like the E.D.C., Korea and Indo-China. Following French agreement, the Bermuda Conference was re-arranged for 4-8 December.[33] Then, quite unexpectedly, on 26 November the Soviets agreed to revert to a four-power meeting and, in consequence, the opening sessions at Bermuda were taken up with co-ordinating a tripartite response to this latest twist.[34] The French, with the prospect of meeting the Chinese across the Korean negotiating table receding, were attracted by the idea of five-power talks.[35] There was, however, little doubt that persistence in this view would damage Franco-American

relations.[36]

At Bermuda the three Western allies eventually agreed to invite the Russians to a Foreign Ministers conference at Berlin in January 1954, but the contentious issue of five-power talks remained.[37] The problem, as summed up by a Foreign Office official, was that it would be 'most difficult for the French to resist any attempt on the part of the Communist world, whether at Berlin or elsewhere, to propose five power talks on Far Eastern affairs, special mention being made of Indo-China'.[38] The Americans took a diametrically opposite view, and had no intention of admitting 'the bloody Chinese aggressor into the councils of peaceful nations'. At Bermuda, Eisenhower found Bidault's allusions to five-power talks a 'little cryptic': it was a phrase, he said, which had 'unpleasant connotations in the United States'.[39] For Britain the unwelcome dilemma which all of this posed was whom to side with - France or the United States - if the problem of five-power talks flared up at Berlin. Suddenly, because of Indo-China, the maintenance of Western unity was in jeopardy in the face of what appeared a co-ordinated Sino-Soviet manoeuvre.

Britain's position was made even more difficult by a natural loyalty to its long-established commitment to reaching a *modus vivendi* with China. Although sceptical as to what France could achieve in terms of Indo-China, Eden retained hopes of resolving other Asian problems through the inclusion of China in a major conference, an approach which at first sight implied support for France. On the other hand, the British had no desire to antagonise the Americans. Eden had confronted this thorny issue in a minute to Churchill on 25 November. Five-power talks had 'obvious attractions', he asserted, but the ...

> main obstacle at present is that in the existing state of American opinion the U.S. Administration would find it politcally impossible

> to sit down at a high level meeting with the Chinese Communist lead -ers and to recognise Communist China as one of the big Five ...
> The Americans need to accustom themselves by slow degrees to the idea of working with the Chinese Communists.

Eden maintained that the first step to wider discussions must be progress on a Korean Political Conference. To press 'prematurely' for five-power talks would 'increase our differences with the Americans over the Far East and thus play into Russia's hands'.[40]

All in all, then, Eden faced a thoroughly unpleasant choice at Berlin. Should Britain side with France in support of a five-power meeting at the risk of gravely damaging already brittle Anglo-American relations in Asia? Or should it side with the United States on the grounds that a break with Paris, though unfortunate, would not be as serious as a break with Washington? In the end the Foreign Office opted to try and avoid the choice altogether by ensuring that the French did not break rank at Berlin, an implicit acceptance of the American position on talks with China. However, as Harvey warned Eden on 12 January 1954, this would be no easy task for the Indo-China war was now 'exceedingly unpopular in France and the great majority of the French people would certainly be in favour of ending it on any tolerable terms'.[41] In the Foreign Office, Allen reflected that 'a Communist offer of Five-Power Talks baited with the promise of an Indo-China settlement would be difficult for any French Government to resist'. The Berlin Conference would be 'worth watching from this point of view'.[42] When Jacquet dropped a heavy hint that his Government would indeed be receptive to a Soviet offer, Burrows of the South-East Asia Department warned that if 'many people in the French Government share his attitude, Berlin may prove a trial for Western solidarity'.[43]

In briefing Eden for Berlin, his advisers therefore warned that the Soviets might well try to exploit the weakness of the French position regarding Indo-China in order to 'drive a wedge between France and the Western policy both in Europe and the Far East'. Accordingly, 'every effort should be made to sustain the French Government in its present policy of refusing to negotiate except on conditions which would safeguard the independence of the Associate States'.[44] In other words, France must fight on to a position of strength. Sir James Cable has dismissed this advice as unrealistic given the military situation in Viet-Nam[45], but in doing so he overlooks the need to judge it in the context of the five power meeting with China as well as the E.D.C. problem. To maintain a united front on both these issues it was necessary to argue against logic on Viet-Nam.

The prospect of Indo-China causing a breach in the Western front at Berlin was not the only example at this time of the war having an importance that extended beyond South-East Asia. This was again most clearly revealed at Bermuda where the exchanges on Indo-China were less significant than those on the E.D.C. and Korea in which Indo-China came up in a secondary sense. Direct references to the problem in Viet-Nam were anodyne in the extreme. Churchill, for example, was lavish in his praise for the effort France was making in the common cause, and there was little sign of his earlier annoyance at French reluctance to extend their period of conscription.[46] As Anthony Short has observed, Bermuda could have been an occasion when, 'instead of Churchill's extravagant comments, French prospects in Indo-China might realistically have been examined'.[47] But the British made no real effort to stiffen what was quite clearly a fragile French commitment

to peace-through-strength, nor to discuss with the Americans the shortcomings of the Navarre Plan. In holding back in this manner, Eden, in the absence of a brief stating in unequivocal terms the deficiences of the Navarre Plan, may have been seduced by Bidault's assurances that the situation in Viet-Nam was under control and improving. Laniel, who had never hidden his sympathy for the negotiation lobby in Paris, fell ill early on and Bidault, a 'notorious die-hard'[48] on Indo-China, spoke in subsequent meetings of the 'success to date of Navarre's tactics' and that talks with Ho Chi Minh alone would be 'useless'.[49]

Of far greater relevance to later events were Anglo-Franco-American exchanges on Korea and the E.D.C. The Korean phase at Bermuda was dominated by revelations about American plans for retaliation against China in the event of a communist breach of the armistice. Eisenhower and Dulles made it plain, Eden noted, that they would 'hit back with full power' and would 'go for China with all the weapons at [their] command', including atomic bombs.[50] Indeed the most worrying aspect of the Conference from the British standpoint was American insistence that atomic weapons had, by process of natural evolution, assumed the status of conventional weapons.[51] Eisenhower argued that 'the American public no longer distinguished between atomic and other weapons ... Why should they confine themselves to high explosives requiring thousands of aircraft in attacking Chinese bases when they can do it more cheaply and easily with atoms'.[52] As Colville noted in his diary on 5 December: 'Everybody greatly perturbed by the American attitude ... This question has such deep implications that it is undoubtedly the foremost matter at the conference'.[53] Eden was particularly worried, confiding to his wife his 'fear' that 'we shall end up committed to new perils without any advantage to peace anywhere'. He

was 'sad & tired' and concerned about the 'free world & what I fear lies ahead'.[54]

The focus of Eden's fears, as revealed in a series of minutes to Churchill during the Conference, was an American-engendered third world war with Soviet atomic attacks against American bases in East Anglia.[55] In sum, he told Shuckburgh, the prospect was 'too horrible for the human mind to contemplate'.[56] Although the Churchill Administration had accepted that British defence policy should in future be based on possession of an independent nuclear deterrent, this did not imply a greater readiness to see nuclear weapons employed. In coming to accept the basic tenets of the Service Chiefs much-discussed 1952 Global Strategy Paper, the Government was motivated by the relative cost effectiveness of nuclear deterrence over conventional defence, the need to maintain the country's standing in the world and to command attention in Washington. Considerations of military efficacy, though important, did not predominate. As a report by a Cabinet Committee on defence policy observed in July 1954, one of Britain's main objectives was to 'possess the most modern means of waging war, so that we may hold our place in the world councils on the issue of peace or war and play our part in deterring aggression'.[57] At Bermuda, while the Americans confined discussion of atomic warfare to Korea, there could be little doubt that they were also thinking of Indo-China. The U.S. Government had lately made no secret of its determination to resist Chinese intervention in Viet-Nam, most explicitly in a speech by Dulles in St. Louis on 2 September in which he warned that if 'Red China ... sends its own Army into Indo-China' there would be 'grave consequences which might not be confined to Indo-China'.[58] At Bermuda, Eisenhower and Dulles made plain that these consequences would be of an atomic variety. Thus Viet-Nam, as the

likeliest target of renewed Chinese aggression, assumed additional significance as a catalyst for nuclear as well as conventional war in Asia. Looking ahead, Eden's experience at Bermuda undoubtedly influenced his negative reaction to American calls for allied intervention in Viet-Nam in the spring of 1954. Although a Chinese military response to Western involvement could not, strictly speaking, be termed 'aggression', the British had learned enough of American thinking to suspect that Eisenhower and Dulles would not be deterred from action against China by such a technicality. Once American and Chinese forces were in opposition in Viet-Nam, and regardless of which side precipitated the collison, there was little confidence in London that the American Government or public opinion would be content to keep the fighting on a limited basis as in Korea.

Another important discussion at Bermuda concerned the E.D.C., the relevance of which for Indo-China was only revealed after the Conference. Despite Bidault's protestations that it was a 'jump into the abyss' for his country,[59] the British and Americans subjected the French to unremitting pressure to ratify the E.D.C. treaty without further delay. Churchill was particularly aroused by this debate, not from any great love of the E.D.C. but out of concern that a final French rejection might encourage the United States to radically revise it commitment to European defence. The British had arrived at Bermuda assuming that if the E.D.C. were to collapse the Americans would support direct German membership of N.A.T.O.[60] They were quickly disabused of this belief, Dixon noting in his diary that '[t]he view of the Eisenhower Admin. from the beginning has been that if EDC fails, Germany in NATO is not a practicable solution' and that they would instead 'fall back on a "perimeter defence", ie. abandonment of Europe between the Rhine & the Pyranees'.[61] Eisenhower explained to the N.A.T.O.

Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, that 'in his judgment, E.D.C. was not only the best, but also the only hope of a solution to the problem of a German contribution, without which NATO would fall down'.[62] Dulles, too, emphasised that a 'new arrangement in Europe' would not lead to American disassociation, but this might happen if 'old Europe went on'. It was 'precisely because US wishes to associate that U.S. welcomes E.D.C.'[63] This prompted Churchill to tell Bidault 'plainly' that 'if American troops were withdrawn from Europe British troops would leave too'.[64]

A week after Bermuda Dulles re-stated this position at a meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council in Paris and, at a press conference on 15 December, uttered his now infamous warning about an 'agonizing reappraisal' of American policy towards Western Europe if France repudiated the E.D.C.[65] Taking Washington's threats seriously, Churchill publicly supported Dulles's strong-arm tactics.[66] So too did Eden - privately - despite the suggestion in his memoirs that he had mixed feelings about the American approach.[67] Eden's support for the E.D.C. was more than ever a product of concern that the Americans meant what they said about leaving Europe. 'I am convinced that we are moving towards a real turning point in the whole relationship of the United States to Europe', he wrote to Alexander on 12 December; 'we must have recourse to all our imagination and ingenuity to help E.D.C. through'.[68] Thus at the point when the problem of Indo-China was on the verge of exploding, it was the E.D.C. which continued to dominate Eden's mind. This was to be of considerable significance at the Berlin Conference when the question of a further, five-power, meeting on Korea and Indo-China was discussed.

In France meanwhile Dulles's clumsy warning, far from having the desired effect, only exacerbated anti-American feeling, did little to help

the cause of E.D.C., and threatened for a time to unseat the Laniel Government. Moreover, there was some concern in London that American pressure over the E.D.C. might lead to a speedy French capitulation in Indo-China. Linking the two problems in this respect was the French Socialist Party. In a despatch on the eve of Bermuda, Harvey offered the opinion that the E.D.C. could yet be 'revived' in France under a centre-left Government that included the Socialists who, he argued, were not whole-heartedly against the E.D.C. although they would continue to vote against Laniel's 'reactionary majority' on ideological grounds. But a new coalition which incorporated the considerable voting strength of the Socialists might just tip the scales in favour of ratification. With the Laniel Government in trouble at the end of December, a new centre-left majority became one of a number of very real possibilities. 'I should however sound one note of warning', Harvey had added:

> The Socialist price for participation ... will include a real effort to end the war in Indo-China by negotiations, if necessary with Ho Chi Minh ... The price of the E.D.C. may well be a surrender in Indo-China in which nothing is saved except appearances.[69]

By 12 January Harvey had modified his opinion to affirm that the Socialists 'would like to end [the war] on any terms, so that a Left Centre Government including them would be much more likely than the present one to give up the struggle'.[70] Therefore, Dulles's bludgeoning tactics might conceivably have produced a majority in the French parliament in favour of E.D.C. but against maintaining the effort in Indo-China, an obviously unsatisfactory dichotomy from Washington's standpoint and one which illustrates again the basic contradiction of the American position at this time.

Essentially, the Eisenhower Administration was in pursuit of two mutually exclusive objectives, the success of the E.D.C and the security of

Indo-China. The key player in both games, the French, were prone to respond to pressure regarding the E.D.C. by threatening to pull out of Indo-China, and to pressure over Indo-China by threatening to destroy the E.D.C. As a prominent American official later reflected, '... we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both'.[71] Or, as Dulles put it, there was 'no point in slapping the French in the face [over Indo-China] and losing out on EDC'.[72] Dulles actually told Eden in Paris in December that 'it might be necessary to work for a French Government which would take office solely for the purpose of putting through E.D.C.',[73] which raises the possibility that the Americans might have been consciously seeking to undermine Laniel and pave the way for a centre-left coalition. If so, it is a mark of Dulles's lack of understanding of the French political scene that he did not foresee, as the British did, that any pro-E.D.C. Government was also likely to favour immediate negotiations or even surrender in Indo-China. He was, however, conscious of the obverse danger, warning Eisenhower that 'we must be on guard lest Indochina also carry the European Defense Community down the drain'.[74]

Laniel, whose hold on power was at one stage calculated in terms of days[75], was ultimately saved by the Kremlin. In a rare display of collective wisdom the National Assembly reasoned that it was ridiculous for France to have no Government at a time when major discussions with the Soviets about the future of Germany were in the offing. In short, the Berlin Conference breathed new life into Laniel's majority.[76] Britain, too, was saved from having to decide whether a communist Indo-China was an acceptable price for the E.D.C. But as we have seen, salvation was short-lived for, at Berlin, Britain faced the prospect of an equally unpleasant choice when the Russians again broached the subject of five-power talks and

if the French could not be restrained from supporting a meeting with China.

By the end of 1953 the factors which were to shape the crisis both in Viet-Nam and in Anglo-American relations in 1954 stood revealed: the inadequacy of French military strength and plans to deal with a concerted Viet-Minh offensive; British acceptance and U.S. rejection of the inevitability of a negotiated settlement which, in turn, reflected their differing estimates of the workability of the Navarre Plan; the extent to which French and American policy was linked to the vagaries of domestic opinion; the absence of a collective defence grouping for dealing with a major upheaval in South-East Asia; and competing Anglo-American views on the purpose of such a grouping which, at heart, were a manifestation of deeper differences over how best to handle the problem of Communist China *per se*. There was also the disturbing American attitude towards the use of atomic weapons, a result of Eisenhower's determination to cut defence spending.[77] Apparent, too, was the complex and confusing relationship between the war in Viet-Nam and the German/E.D.C. problem in Europe. But what was not so clearly defined was a British policy for dealing with this dangerous, fast-moving and fluid situation.

NOTES

1. FO 371/106778/129, MA Saigon tel. 1492 to WO, 8 Oct; FO 371/106771/211G & 219, record of Anglo-Franco-American talks, London, 17 Oct & FO brief for Eden for Foreign Affairs debate, 3-5 Nov; FO 371/106757/316 & 319, MacDonald tel. 693, 21 Dec. & Harvey tel. 466, 29 Dec; FO 371/112024/10 Fish (Hanoi) despatch 24 to Graves, 21 Dec. 1953.
2. Short, *Vietnam War*, p.121; Werth, *France*, p.652.
3. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p.104.
4. HCDebs, Vol. 520, cols. 311 & 309-11, 5 Nov. 1953.
5. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.87.
6. See pp.154-58.
7. Dixon papers, memo. on 'Anglo-American co-operation in South-East Asia' (revise), 15 Oct. 1953.
8. CAB 129/64 C(53)330, 24 Nov. approved at CAB 128/26 CC(53)72nd meeting, 26 Nov. 1953. Also FO 371/105180/26, FO brief for Eden, 4 Dec. 1953.
9. See Chap.9, *passim*. Also FO 371/106856/42, FO brief for Mallaig confer-

ence, Nov. 1953.
10. Mr. R.A.Burrows, interviews, 24 Oct. 1988 & 15 March 1990; Sir James Cable, interview, 19 July 1989; Sir Stephen Olver, letter to the author, 10 Feb. 1989. Cable refers to Tahourdin's role in oblique terms in *Geneva Conference*, pp. 39-40
11. FO 371/106771/206, Graves despatch 10119/19/53, 13 Oct. 1953.
12. FO 371/106770/195, Reilly tel. 344, 5 Oct. 1953.
13. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, pp. 287-92.
14. Ibid, pp. 289-90.
15. FO 371/107434/22, Harvey tel. 373, 22 Oct. 1953.
16. FO 371/106771/211G, record of Anglo-Franco-American talks, 17 Oct. 1953.
17. FO 371/106757/287, Harvey tel. 385, 28 Oct; FO 371/10743/23, Harvey tel. 398, 5 Nov; *The Times*, 28 Oct. 1953.
18. Text in CMD 2834, p. 64; see also Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 151-52.
19. FO 371/106749/44, 50 & 67, mins. by Burrows, Paterson & Allen (30 Nov), MacDonald tel. 666, 4 Dec., & Graves tel. 386, 12 Dec. 1953.
20. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 86.
21. FO 371/106749/55 & 56, Burrows min., 7 Dec. & Stevens (Stockholm) despatch 280, 3 Dec; FO 371/112033/1, Chancery (Saigon) letter to S.E.A. Dept., 4 Jan. 1954.
22. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 887; FO 371/106749/43, 53 & 56, S.E.A. Dept. letter to Chancery (Saigon), 3 Dec., Harvey tel. 434, 3 Dec., Burrows min., 7 Dec., Graves tel. 386, 12 Dec. 1953.
23. FO 371/106771/226, Harvey despatch 492, 10 Dec; *The Economist* ('Another Truce Without Peace?'), 12 Dec. 1953.
24. *The Economist* ('Paris on the Red River'), 7 Nov; *The Spectator* ('Indo-China and the EDC'), 13 Nov. 1953.
25. FO 371/106757/287, Harvey tel. 385, 28 Oct. 1953.
26. FO 371/106770/195, Reilly tel. 344, 5 Oct; Manchester Guardian, 9 Oct; also PREM 11/418, Harvey tel. 411, 25 Nov. 1953.
27. FO 371/106757/314, Crowe min., 7 Jan. 1954.
28. HCDebs, Vol. 520, cols. 310-11, Eden speech, 5 Nov 1953; also Vol. 521, col. 27 (23 Nov. 1953); Vol. 522, col. 1006 (20 Jan. 1954).
29. Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 683 (5 Dec. 1953).
30. See Young and Adamthwaite in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, pps. 59-62 & 7.
31. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 31. Also Young, ibid, pp. 62-63; Wilfred Loth, *The Division of the World, 1941-1955* (London 1988), pp. 273-75.
32. Foliot, ed., *Documents 1953*, pp. 81-89.
33. PREM 11/428, Churchill tel. to Eisenhower, 5 Nov; CAB 128/26 C(53)64th & 65th meetings, 9 & 10 Nov. 1953. Also Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp. 909-10; John Young, 'Churchill, the Russians and the Western Alliance: the three-power conference at Bermuda, December 1953' in *English Historical Review*, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 898, hereafter Vol. and number.
34. Foliot, ed., *Documents 1953*, p. 107.
35. *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Oct. 1953.
36. Young, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 901.
37. Avon Papers, diary, 6 Dec. 1953; Foliot, ed., *Documents 1953*, p. 111; CAB 128/26 CC(53)77th meeting, 8 Dec. 1953.
38. FO 371/106757/319, Burrows min., 31 Dec. 1953.
39. PREM 11/618, Eisenhower tel. to Churchill, 21 Dec; FO 371/106771/225, Eden tel. 157, Bermuda to FO, 9 Dec. 1953.
40. FO 800/784/95, Eden min. to Churchill, 25 Nov. 1953. See also PREM 11/418, Colville summary of Churchill's position, 5 Dec; FO 371/105180/22,

Allen min., 28 Nov. 1953.
41. FO 371/112038/5, Harvey despatch, 12 Jan. 1954.
42. FO 371/106750/17, Allen letter to Trevelyan (Peking), 8 Jan. 1954.
43. FO 371/112047/6, Harvey tel. 7, 7 Jan. & Burrows min., 11 Jan. 1954.
44. FO 371/112047/8, brief for Eden (Indo-China) for Berlin, 15 Jan. 1954.
45. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 41-42.
46. Gilbert, *Never Despair*, p. 934.
47. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 123.
48. Werth, *France*, p. 650.
49. FO 371/106771/225, Eden tel. 157, Bermuda to FO, 9 Dec. 1953.
50. Avon Papers, AP20/16/90 & 91, Eden mins. to Churchill, 4 & 7 Dec. 1953.
51. Ismay Papers, III/22/4a, record of tripartite discussion on NATO, 6 Dec; Colville. *Fringes of Power*, p. 695 (6 Dec) 1953.
52. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 114 (5 Dec. 1953).
53. Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 684 (5 Dec. 1953), also p. 685 (6 Dec).
54. Avon Papers, AP20/45/33 & 34, Eden letters to Clarissa, 5 & 6 Dec. 1953.
55. Avon Papers, AP20/16/90 & 91, Eden mins. to Churchill, 4 & 7 Dec. 1953.
56. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 114 (5 Dec. 1953).
57. CAB 129/69 C(54)250, 24 July 1954; on the 1952 Global Strategy paper see pps. 38-39, 51-52 (note 13).
58. Cameron, ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 204-06.
59. Dixon Papers, loose notes for 5 Dec. 1953.
60. CAB 128/26 CC(53)72nd meeting, 26 Nov. 1953.
61. Dixon Papers, notes at Bermuda, n. d.
62. Ismay Papers, III/22/6a, record of meeting with Eisenhower, 8 Dec. 1953. Also III/21/12/1a, Churchill letter to Ismay, 8 Feb. 1954.
63. Dixon Papers, loose notes for 6 Dec. 1953.
64. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 534 (6 Dec. 1953).
65. See Ernest R. May, 'The American Commitment to Germany, 1949-55', in *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1989); also Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1953*, p. 68-69; Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 57-58.
66. HCDebs, Vol. 522, cols. 579-82, Churchill speech, 17 Dec; also PREM 11/ 1074, Churchill tel. 5334 to Eisenhower, 19 Dec. 1953.
67. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 58; PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 5289 to Eisenhower, 16 Dec; Dixon Papers, Eden comment on loose notes for 6 Dec; Moran, *Struggle*, p. 542 (17 Dec) 1953.
68. FO 800/778/47, Eden min. to Alexander, 12 Dec. 1953.
69. FO 371/107439/136, Harvey despatch 472, 2 Dec. 1953. Also A. W. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers* (New Haven 1979), pp. 159-60.
70. FO 371/112038/5, Harvey despatch, 12 Jan. 1954.
71. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, p. 80. In July 1953 Bidault told Dulles that in the National Assembly 'those who support the Indo-chinese war... oppose the EDC and vice versa', *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 660.
72. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1508.
73. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 57.
74. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1025. See also Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-56* (London 1963), pp. 342-43.
75. FO 371/106757/316, Burrows min., 22 Dec. 1953.
76. FO 371/112038/4, Eden despatch 22, 11 Jan; FO 371/112778/1, 2, 3, 7 & 8, Harvey tel. 472 & despatch 508, 31 Dec. 1953, Harvey tel. 2, 4 Jan., Roberts min., 1 Jan. & Harvey tel. 9, 7 Jan. 1954.
77. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 153.

PART V: 1954 — ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BERLIN AND AFTER . . .

January to March 1954

The British Conservative Government entered the new year with an Indo-China policy composed of nothing more sophisticated than a strong aversion to the French negotiating with the Chinese or Viet-Minh from a position of military weakness. This, however, is not the impression one gains from Anthony Eden's memoirs. On the contrary, these suggest that his actions in the Indo-Chinese arena in 1954 were the culmination of a carefully considered strategy pursued for over two years with single-minded determination. He maintains, for example, that as early as June 1952 a military solution to the war had been rejected in London as unrealistic and that a negotiated settlement 'seemed to me to be the outcome to work for, distasteful as it must be to French feelings. Two years were to pass before it could be realised'.[1] In actual fact the British retained visions of complete French victory far beyond this point. It was only with the formation of the Laniel Administration in France in June 1953 and, thereafter, its insistence that peace was the 'supreme objective', that the Foreign Office began to contemplate the implications of a political solution to the war. In this connection Eden has further maintained that 'at the beginning of 1954 my thoughts began to turn to the possibility of some form of partition [of Viet-Nam] as a solution which might bring hostilities to an end and effect a settlement that would hold'. He was also 'convinced that the longer negotiation was delayed, the more difficult

the situation would become for the French' and, accordingly, the Berlin Conference 'provided me with an opportunity to develop this idea'.[2] None of these assertions stand up to close scrutiny. Why Eden's account should be at such variance with what really transpired will be considered in due course. For now, it is necessary to try and define the British attitude towards negotiations as 1954 opened.

Turning first to the position in the weeks leading up to the Berlin Conference, it is clear that Eden and his advisers strongly opposed a negotiated settlement. The most obvious reason was the absence in Viet-Nam of the *sine qua non* of French military superiority. On 2 December 1953, the South-East Asia Department, mindful of Ho Chi Minh's recent *Expressen* peace offer, argued that 'the essential point is that negotiations should only take place from a position of real strength', a view echoed in Eden's brief for the Bermuda Conference.[3] Early in January 1954, Assistant Under-Secretary Allen sought to codify Foreign Office thinking in a letter to the British *chargé d'affaires* in Peking. The ideal solution remained the 'decisive defeat of the regular Viet Minh forces' although this was now a remote possibility. The less satisfactory alternative was a negotiated end to the war. This would only be 'tolerable if the outcome was such as to safeguard the independence of the Associate States'. Admitting to the existence of a 'vicious circle', Allen added that this kind of result was only attainable if negotiations were 'carried out from a position of political and military strengh, and we do not consider that such a position has yet been reached'.[4]

Negotiations were resisted in the Foreign Office for a second, indirect, reason which centred on the probability that the Soviets would

renew their call for a five-power meeting when the Berlin Conference got underway.[5] In a Cabinet paper on 11 January Eden explained that whereas Britain and France were flexible about such a meeting the Americans were adamantly opposed to bestowing even limited legitimacy on the Chinese Communists by appearing with them at a high-profile international conference. Eden thought that the Soviets, conscious of this and anticipating a firm tripartite Western front on the question of Germany and the E.D.C., might indulge in wedge-driving tactics. These, he argued, could not be permitted to succeed for '[a]bove all, Western unity must survive the Conference unimpaired'.[6] Because of the strength of American opinion the plain import of this statement was that Eden and Bidualt would side with Dulles in opposing a meeting with China. However, if the Soviets hinted that Indo-China might be an issue ripe for discussion with the P.R.C., the British feared that Bidault would be under tremendous pressure from French domestic opinion to agree to a five-power meeting. This would place France at odds with the United States. Britain, in the middle, would be forced to take sides. Eden therefore chose to avoid this uncomfortable dilemma and maintain Western unity by ensuring that Bidault resisted Soviet designs. This was to be done by emphasising the absence of conditions in Viet-Nam under which an honourable settlement might be arrived at.[7] In other words, Eden approached Berlin determined to hinder, not further, the cause of a negotiated solution. Taking his cue from Eden's memoirs, a British historian has recently argued that Berlin was 'an opportunity to get the ball of negotiation rolling, and not a dangerous temptation for the war-weary French'.[8] In fact the opposite was the case.

It may of course be said that the outcome of the Berlin Conference belies this contention for, as the final *communiqué* specified on 18

February, the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that 'the problem of restoring peace in Indo-China' would be discussed at a further conference at Geneva beginning on 26 April at which the P.R.C. and 'other interested States' would also be present.[9] However, the fact that Berlin led directly to Geneva does not affect the argument that Eden opposed a negotiated settlement. Indeed his eventual support at Berlin for a five-power meeting must be seen in the context of Anglo-American tensions and differences over China policy. Likewise his agreement to place Indo-China on the Geneva agenda had more to do with Britain's attitude towards the E.D.C. than any acknowledgement of the inevitability of a political solution to the war. Thus we may now turn to consider the course and results of the Berlin Conference.

Proceedings commenced on 25 January 1954 when Molotov tabled a three-point agenda: Germany, Austria and, predictably, '[m]easures for reducing international tension and convening a five-power conference'.[10] What was less predictable was Eden's response. As Churchill informed the Cabinet on 26 January, the Foreign Secretary now felt that 'the French would be embarassed if their Western allies adopted a wholly unconstructive attitude' and he was consequently inclined to 'accept the proposal [for five-power talks], if the Americans could be persuaded to agree to it'.[11] Importantly, there was no mention of Indo-China as an agenda item for the projected talks though the French might have reasonably expected it to be raised in back-channel discussions with the Chinese. With the full backing of Churchill and the Cabinet, and by an admixture of perserverance and adept manoeuvering, Eden obtained Dulles's tentative approval to raise with Molotov the possibility of limiting the agenda of any five-power conference to Asian rather than global problems and, within this framework, to Korea

in particular - an issue which Dulles conceded might be 'appropriate' for the United States to talk to the Chinese about. Molotov proved amenable and the foundations of what became the Geneva Conference were duly laid.[12]

Why did Eden abandon his Berlin brief so quickly and with it his pre-determined opposition to Soviet proposals for five-power talks? In considering this question it is important to keep in mind his well-chronicled unhappiness at Britain's junior *rôle* within the Anglo-American partnership in the 1950's. According to one of his recent biographers, although Eden 'realized intellectually that Britain was a poor country which was grossly overstretched as a major colonial power and must face harsh realities, he could not accept that she had become a satellite of the United States ...'[13] Another has written that Churchill was 'more willing' than Eden 'to face the realities of the reduced British role in the world and hence when the Americans showed sufficient signs of having made a firm choice on a policy question, he was usually more prepared than Eden to subordinate British views to theirs'.[14] It is within this context that Eden's *volte-face* at Berlin is explicable. To start with, it is possible that it was only when the Conference opened that Eden was able to guage just how badly Bidault desired a meeting with the Chinese. Though personally opposed to compromise on Viet-Nam, Bidault was clearly in need of a sop to appease the growing peace lobby in the National Assembly. This, in turn, reflected the mood of France where, according to an opinion poll in February 1954, only 7 per cent of the population were in favour of fighting to keep Indo-China.[15] Eden thus found himself in a position to dictate to the Americans - to orchestrate matters so that Western unity could only be maintained if Dulles adopted the Anglo-French position and not *vice versa*. Dulles himself reported to Washington that the French were

'insistent', and that the British were pressing him 'strongly', on the issue of five-power talks.[16] The U.S. Secretary of State was, in addition, no less keen than Eden to maintain a united front.[17] Therefore, by the end of the Berlin Conference, Eden, as a result of the French predicament in Indo-China, had scored a rare but worthwhile victory for Britain's policy of accommodation and dialogue with China over the American one of hostility and diplomatic ostracism.

There was, however, some disquiet amongst the British delegation at this outcome, with Shuckburgh questioning Eden's motives. 'I am worried about [Eden's] attitude towards the Far East business', he confided to his diary on 17 February. 'He is so keen to get a conference, so as to have some "success" to go home with [there had been total deadlock on Germany and Austria], that he seems to forget how terribly dangerous this topic is for Dulles'. On an earlier occasion Shuckburgh observed that 'American public opinion might easily turn on [Dulles] for agreeing too readily to sit down with the Chinese Communists', while even Eden himself accepted that Dulles had taken 'a considerable political risk' in agreeing to five-power talks.[18] Despite the inclusion in the Berlin *communiqué* of the water-tight caveat that the holding of the Geneva Conference should not 'be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition in any case where it has not already been accorded'[19], Dulles still faced considerable criticism on his return to the United States, with rumours at one point that he might be replaced by someone 'more rigid on the China issue'.[20] Therefore, while Dulles's later unhelpful attitude towards the Geneva Conference can be attributed to domestic political pressures and to a dogmatic anti-communist personality, it may have been aggravated by resentment at the way in which Eden had manoeuvred him into agreeing to the Conference in the first place. It is

interesting to note that in *Full Circle* many of Eden's criticisms of Dulles - a 'preacher in a world of politics' - are to be found in the chapter dealing with Berlin. Eden's comment that the 'lesson' to be learnt from dealing with Washington 'may be that allies should subordinate their interests more closely to the opinions of their stronger partner, but an alliance does not gather strength that way', is leant added piquancy when considered in conjunction with what Harold Macmillan later referred to as Eden's 'success' over Dulles.[21]

It will be apparent that Indo-China played only a secondary role in Eden's diplomacy at Berlin in that it ensured Bidault's support on the question of five-power talks. Perhaps it was a sense of debt which finally persuaded Eden to bow to the Frenchman's pleas to have the issue considered alongside Korea at Geneva. What may be said with more certainty is that the Churchill Administration felt Bidault deserved a reward for his strong defence of the E.D.C. in the face of Soviet threats and cajolary to renounce it once and for all. On 10 February, Selwyn Lloyd relayed to Eden the Cabinet's appreciation of 'how important it was to meet Bidault's point of view on Indo-China in order to strengthen his hand over E.D.C. when the conference is finished'.[22] Bidault's performance at Berlin seemed destined to go down badly in France where opinion was hardening fast against the project. As Macmillan told the Cabinet, Bidault would need 'all the help we could give him in persuading the French Parliament to proceed to its ratification'.[23] An obvious way to do this was to permit him a success in relation to Indo-China, for if Bidault fell from power due to his attitude on the latter issue so too would the Laniel Administration, viewed in London as probably the last pro-E.D.C. French coalition. But whatever the decisive motive, it is plain that Eden's agreement to have Indo-China

discussed at Geneva was not born of an unequivocal commitment to bring peace to that troubled area.

The American attitude also deserves some attention in this respect. It was one thing for Dulles to agree to meet the Chinese to discuss Korea (there had after all been contacts for some time at Panmunjom) but quite another for him to consent to tackle Indo-China. As the *Pentagon Papers* make clear, Dulles 'did not want to negotiate on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation'.[24] Why then did he agree rather than simply settle for talks on Korea? The likeliest answer is to be found once more in the incompatability of what were the 'two main planks' of the Eisenhower Administration's foreign policy, a non-communist Indo-China and the successful launch of the E.D.C.[25] As seen elsewhere, the French played the key *rôle* in both spheres, a fact they were prone to exploit. Thus the *Pentagon Papers* observe that at Berlin Bidault warned Dulles that if Indo-China was not discussed at Geneva the E.D.C. would 'doubtlessly be scuttled'.[26] Against this a French historian has suggested that Bidault promised that the E.D.C. would be ratified as opposed to scuttled if Dulles was compliant on Indo-China.[27] A third account observes that Dulles only agreed on 'condition' that the E.D.C. would be put up for ratification in the French parliament 'by Easter'.[28] Dulles, like the British, appreciated the need to help Bidault counter domestic criticism in France, for he was 'our main reliance both for EDC and Indochina'. In reporting to the National Security Council on the results of Berlin, Dulles said that it was ...

> apparent that if Bidault had not gone back to Paris with something to show on Indochina, the Laniel Government would have fallen at once and would have been replaced by a government which would not only have a mandate to end the war in Indochina on any terms, but also to oppose French ratification of EDC.[29]

The reality, later obscured by Eden, was that British (and American) acquiesence in Indo-China's inclusion on the Geneva agenda owed more to considerations arising out of the Cold War in Europe than in South-East Asia. Nor did it necessarily imply British support for a negotiated settlement. It is worth remembering that the Geneva Conference, as conceived at Berlin, was seen in the Foreign Office as the much-delayed Korean Political Conference and was not intended to provide for more than a tentative sounding-out of the Chinese attitude to the Indo-China problem.[30] As a senior official explained, so far as Viet-Nam was concerned, the West was 'not necessarily committed to working out a final settlement by negotiation but rather to discussing where and how the first steps towards a negotiated settlement might be taken'.[31] The French likewise saw its primary object as being to 'define appropriate means' of ending the war.[32] At the end of January, Ambassador Harvey reported that although few in France still thought in terms of complete victory 'and a settlement by negotiation was the Government's declared policy', there was no obvious means of achieving this 'without capitulating and betraying the Associated States. No French Government was yet ready to contemplate such a surrender'.[33]

This account of the origins and purpose of the Geneva Conference seriously undermines Eden's contention that he actively sought a negotiated settlement from the start of 1954 based on partition. Further evidence of the misleading nature of Eden's memoirs is to be found, in the weeks after Berlin, in negative and generally gloomy Foreign Office assessments of the likely compromise solutions for Viet-Nam. One such was a cessation of Chinese assistance to the Viet-Minh, a French objective since at least the conclusion of the Korean armistice and, to begin with, their goal at

Geneva. This was obvious from their early preference for restricting participation to the five main powers and, ignoring the Berlin *communiqué*, to exclude 'other interested States' including the Associate States.[34] The principal flaw in what became known as the Markos hypothosis (Markos was the Greek communist leader 'dropped' by Stalin in 1946-47[35]) was that France had little or nothing to offer Peking by way of inducement.[36] Aware of this, the French leadership tended to look to the United States to provide the necessary concessions on their behalf whether in the shape of diplomatic recognition, support for China's admission to the United Nations, a solution to the Formosa question or a normalisation of trading relations. This, however, was asking the U.S. Government to turn its China policy on its head and was, in consequence, utterly unrealistic. The French nevertheless believed they had some leverage in this connection due to Washington's undisguised enthusiasm for the E.D.C., the final fate of which would be decided in Paris. Yet again the Eisenhower Administration's commitment to the European Army was perceived by the French as a diplomatic crowbar for prising additional concessions in relation to Indo-China.[37]

On 16 March, in a detailed exposition of current French thinking, Rumbold of the Paris Embassy declared that Laniel's Cabinet were 'overwhelmingly in favour' of the Markos hypothosis and hoped that Washington 'might think it worth making concessions [to China] if they thought that in return the French would ratify the E.D.C. Treaty'. 'It mirrors the hopeless instability of French thought - no principles and no idea even of where expediency lies', was the testy reaction of the new Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, while Eden lamented that the French 'become daily more hopeless and contemptible'.[38] The Americans evidently felt the same way. On 27 March, Dulles firmly rejected the idea

that the United States should support Communist China's admission to the United Nations in return for a cessation of hostilities in Viet-Nam, telling Makins that his Government planned to 'stop the spread of such misconceptions'.[39] A week later the Eisenhower Administration presented the British with a formal statement of its position. This maintained that there was 'no possibility whatsoever' of concessions to China and that the 'exchange of performance for Communist promises is a swindle'.[40] The French Government, however, continued to keep faith with the Markos hypothosis. Unwilling to yet countenance direct negotiations with the Viet-Minh, this at least allowed it to convey to the French public the impression that it was seriously interested in peace. The corollary of which - much resented by the British - was that Laniel refused to place the E.D.C. before the National Assembly for ratification before Geneva opened. A decisive vote either for or against would have deprived Paris of what leverage it might still have over the Americans.[41]

The conviction of British policy-makers that nothing could possibly come of the Markos hypothosis was accompanied by concern about the reaction of French opinion once this was fully revealed. Even before Berlin, the Laniel Administration had encouraged the belief that some form of compromise with China was likely. British officials reluctantly concluded that public disappointment would probably manifest itself in near-irresistible pressure for direct negotiations with the Viet-Minh. These seemed destined to produce one of two outcomes, neither of which found favour in London. The first, a coalition Government in Viet-Nam, was originally raised by Graves who reported on 23 February that nationalist sources claimed to have learned that Ho Chi Minh would 'readily agree' to an armistice '<u>provided</u> that he and one or two colleagues were guaranteed

key positions in a reformed government'. The Viet-Namese, Graves said, were worried that the French would 'fall for an arrangement of this kind, since the basis for the armistice could be made to appear favourable to French interests'. When Graves put this to Pleven, then touring Indo-China, the latter was 'much disturbed' and agreed that 'a move of this kind would be very difficult for the French Government to counter'. Dejean, too, felt that the 'political climate in Paris was such that the French Government would almost certainly be forced to flirt seriously with a proposition of this nature'. Graves suspected that the Viet-Minh might make such an offer just prior to Geneva and could 'depend on defeatists in Paris taking the bait' thereby converting the Conference from an opportunity to *discuss* the problem with the Chinese to one in which a French evacuation and the future political configuration of Viet-Nam might be *agreed.*[42] In a later communication Graves declared that 'if Ho Chi Minh got into Viet Nam Government he would have the country under his thumb in about six months. Negotiations with Ho Chi Minh would not be a solution: it would be a capitulation.'[43] In the Foreign Office these fears were reciprocated, with talk of a 'Trojan Horse', the swift subversion of an all-Viet Nam Government from within, and parallels with the Prague *coup* of 1948.[44] The degree of official cognizance in London may be measured by the fact that Graves's reporting received two separate personal commendations from Eden at this time.[45]

The other likely outcome of Franco-Viet Minh discussions, a partition of Viet-Nam, was equally unwelcome in London. Here, again, Eden's memoirs are a false guide to the evolution of British thinking. As already noted, there is no evidence that Eden or his advisers were thinking in terms of partition before or during the Berlin Conference or that their general

approach was any more developed than opposition to negotiation from weakness. When partition was first discussed at any length in mid-March it was largely in response to a series of reports which suggested that this was the solution favoured by the Soviet Government - one might even argue that the Kremlin, not Eden, was the progenitor of partition.[46] The first detailed analysis came in a paper produced by Professor Pearn of the Foreign Office Research Department which, though dated 26 February, was only discussed outside the Research Department some four weeks later. Pearn's initial premise was that 'a termination of the struggle by military victory on the part of the French Union and Associate States forces is not be be expected' and that, in seeking a compromise solution, the 'key' was the attitude of the Peking Government for whom Viet-Minh control of Indo-China was an 'essential' goal of its foreign policy. As the Chinese saw things:

> the collapse of the Viet Minh would involve the establishment, indirectly, of American power on the very frontier of China, and they can accept such a situation no more in the case of Vietnam than they could in the case of Korea. The Chinese, surely, will continue to give the Viet Minh their support and will be satisfied with nothing less than the perpetuation of a satellite regime on their southern border.

Pearn went on to discuss whether there was any solution which would satisfy the Chinese while saving something from 'the wreck of the Associate State system', eventually submitting that if these competing objectives were to be reconciled there was 'no recourse but a partition of Vietnam'. However, he was quick to point out that this might only prove a temporary solution, that the urge for reunification would be strong, and that the greater dynamism of the communist leaders, in contrast to the uninspiring Bao Dai regime, 'will in the upshot result in a reunion under Viet Minh auspices'. Ultimately all that partition could do was buy time to strengthen southern

Viet-Nam, Laos, Cambodia and Siam in preparation for a renewed communist assault once the Viet-Minh had consolidated its hold on the north. But even if short-lived, partition would 'at least gain time and would at least enable the French to escape, without excessive discredit, from the burden which is having such grave consequences elsewhere than in Indo-China'. Pearn concluded: 'The policy of partition ... is far from attractive' and 'its justification would be that the only probable alternative is a surrender of all Indo-China instead of only a part'.[47]

This memorandum established the tone of ensuing deliberations. While unsatisfactory, partition's saving grace was that it was better than a coalition and a slower route to the communisation of the rest of Indo-China, a point made by the Chiefs of Staff on 31 March when otherwise decrying partition as 'a victory for Communism' and a 'serious strategic defeat' in the Cold War.[48] Graves, whose views clearly had some impact on Eden at this time, was '*very far from being confident* [emphasis in original] that partition would result in anything other than defeat by instalments and the creation of a Communist Vietnam'.[49] MacDonald, too, in a telegram from Singapore on 19 March referring to the coalition-partition debate, spoke of 'a choice between two evils, both so evil that I hope that neither of them will be seriously pursued' although, if a choice had to be made, partition 'strikes me as the lesser evil'.[50] MacDonald's conclusion was quickly endorsed by the British Defence Co-ordination Committee for the Far East.[51] The Foreign Office, and Eden himself, generally agreed with the opinions radiating from posts in South-East Asia. When Allen warned a member of the Soviet Embassy that 'any solution which left Communism in a position of influence in Indochina was unsatisfactory to us', Eden's approving comment was 'Good'.[52]

To recapitulate, Eden had no intention of utilising the Berlin Conference to propagate his ideas for a political solution to the Indo-China war for the simple reason that he had no ideas. Moreover, the fact that Indo-China was to be discussed at Geneva at all was due to several factors the least decisive being a preconceived commitment to a negotiated peace. This in turn was a reflection of anxiety in London at the precariousness of the French military position and the linked realisation that any compromise engineered under such unpropitious conditions would lead sooner or later to communist control of all of Indo-China. Interestingly, this conclusion also applied to partition, the long-term implications of which were omitted from Eden's 1960 account of events. Why, then, did Eden paint so different a picture? One reason may have been personal vanity and a desire to remove the 'retrospective blight'[53] that Suez had cast on his earlier achievements. His 'success' at Geneva in July 1954 becomes all the more meritorious if it is depicted as the culmination of a far-sighted grand design for bringing peace to war-torn Viet-Nam. It also implies that Eden was fully in control of events all along which, though untrue, still bolsters the 'scale' of his accomplishment.

The truth is that Eden neither welcomed the Geneva Conference in its Indo-China form nor regarded with favour any of the solutions likely to be on offer there. This included partition which, as all who expressed an opinion in London, Saigon and Singapore agreed, was a postponement not a prevention of communist hegemony. On 9 March, a Foreign Office brief for Eden defined British policy as 'peace in Indo-China but only on terms ... that do not expose the whole of the country to Communist domination'.[54] No compromise then under contemplation in London fulfilled this fundamental condition. Yet, ironically, it is on Geneva and partition that Eden's

reputation as a peacemaker in Indo-China is founded: on, that is, a Conference which, in terms of Indo-China, he did not really want, and on a solution he knew to be a temporary expedient. What, then, caused Eden and the Foreign Office, if not exactly to embrace, certainly to look more favourably on partition by the time the Geneva Conference opened? Two catalysts stand out: a serious deterioration in the French military position in Viet-Nam from mid-March and, most importantly, far-reaching American ideas for dealing with this situation.

Focusing first on military developments, Viet-Minh operations during the 1953-54 campaigning season appear to have been conceived and conducted with political objectives very much in mind.[55] Short of a complete victory over the French, the aim seems to have been to so demoralise metropolitan French opinion that Laniel, faced with a complete erosion of support for the war effort, would be forced to sue for peace from the weakest of bargaining positions and, in the process, transform the function of the Geneva Conference. As Graves had cautioned in October, '[t]his war can be lost very easily by a spate of defeatism in Paris'.[56] The timing of Viet-Minh operations is interesting. Giap's first major offensive came in early December 1953, within days of the publication of Ho Chi Minh's interview with *Expressen*. This was followed up towards the end of the month by a new incursion into Laos. The Viet-Minh quickly reached the Mekong river, the border with Siam, thus splitting Laos, Annam and hence Indo-China in half. Militarily, this move had little strategic value.[57] Its real importance was 'the depressing effect on those in France who lean towards escaping from the Indo-China commitment' and where public opinion was more impressed by the dramatic image of Indo-China rent in half by a rampant enemy than by Government assurances that the military balance had not been altered.[58] It

can also have been no coincidence that the invasion took place just prior to the Berlin Conference thus placing Bidault under increased pressure to secure a five-power meeting.[59]

Strategically unimportant but valuable propaganda operations continued for the duration of the Conference. It was, however, the outcome of the battle shaping up at Dien Bien Phu that would decide whether France had even a short-term future in Indo-China. In London, Dien Bien Phu was coming to be seen as the decisive confrontation of the war such was the level of French and Viet-Minh prestige invested in the defence and capture respectively of this isolated outpost in north-west Tonking.[60] In simple military terms the French could survive its loss: only 6 per cent of total French Union forces were involved; it had already changed hands several times in the war without affecting the strategic situation; and even if lost again it would be a serious blow 'but would not necessarily mean defeat' according the the British Military Attaché in Saigon.[61] But in terms of the morale of the French nation its loss threatened to be catastrophic.

The French had occupied Dien Bien Phu towards the end of November 1953 in the hope of engaging the Viet-Minh in a 'battle on the grand scale ... to inflict a sizeable defeat on the enemy' rather than continue the war on a counter-insurgency footing thereby playing to the Viet-Minh's strength in guerilla warfare.[62] To begin with Giap refused to respond to this obvious ruse ('the goat tethered in the jungle to attract the tiger'[63]) and, instead, his forces encircled the garrison until, by mid-January, it was completely beseiged.[64] Then, possibly discovering the true size of French dispositions (some 12,000 men) and calculating that a frontal assault would be immensely costly, or, as already suggested, timing his move to coincide

with Berlin, Giap suddenly withdrew a third of his force for action in Laos and 'easier and more spectacular gains'.[65] The remaining rebel forces at Dien Bien Phu ensured that French troops could not break free to counter these activities, while a series of co-ordinated Viet-Minh actions elsewhere in Viet-Nam tied down all remaining French reserves.[66] When the Berlin Conference ended the Viet-Minh, doubtless conscious of the importance of embarking on the forthcoming meeting at Geneva from a position of overwhelming military strength, devoted its entire attention to Dien Bien Phu. For some three weeks there was an uneasy stand-off as Giap fully established his position - including a menacing array of artillery - on the hillside surrounding the fortress. Then, on 13 March, the storm broke when the rebels, now with a three-fold advantage in numbers and with heavier fire-power, launched a frontal attack.[67]

To British observers the assault seemed calculated to bring the French to their knees before Geneva and permit the Viet-Minh to offer terms at the Conference which, if accepted by the French, would amount to a communist victory throughout Viet-Nam. On 16 March, Harvey informed the Foreign Office that the battle was being fought for 'high stakes'. If the fortress fell 'the result would be most serious from the military point of view and politically might be calamatous ...

> I should warn you that the Government are obviously worried. If the fortress is carried by assault the effect will not only be to weaken the French bargaining position at Geneva, but radically to change the attitude of the French Government towards the conference. There will be such an outcry in Parliament and in the country that the Government will probably be faced with the alternatives of either resigning or virtually adopting the Left-wing Opposition policy of negotiations with Ho Chi-minh at almost any price.[68]

On 19 March Graves reported that the first Viet-Minh attack had been repulsed, but that another was expected shortly.[69] It came on 30 March. A

telegram from Graves the following day recorded: 'Full scale attack is in progress and casualties are large on both sides. Garrison is putting up valiant defence and has so far made the enemy pay heavily for minor gains. But the bitter struggle will continue and the issue is likely to remain in doubt for several days'.[70]

The unhappy realisation that the French might be in danger of a major military defeat had a two-fold effect in the Foreign Office. Firstly, it encouraged officials to look more positively on the Geneva Conference as a means of perhaps preserving by diplomacy some of Indo-China which, if military events ran their course, might be lost in its entirity.[71] Secondly, it prompted a new look at partition for, as Eden later wrote, this would if nothing else 'ensure an effective barrier as far to the north of [Malaya] as possible'.[72] At the same time, however, doubts persisted about about the longevity of such a solution as well as the moral rectitude of appeasing the Viet-Minh at the expense of the Bao Dai regime.

The factor which finally convinced Eden and his officials that partition was the solution to work for in Viet-Nam was the reaction of the Eisenhower Administration to the situation developing at Dien Bien Phu. The consensus in official U.S. circles was that there was no acceptable substitute to French victory. On 12 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had expressed a widely held view when insisting that the United States should on no account be associated with a compromise peace.[73] Unlike Britain, the United States had - or thought it had - the power to reverse the downward spiral of French fortunes. Since the end of 1953 the possibility of some form of military intervention to encourage or, if need be, prop up the French had been debated in Washington. These deliberations obviously intensified as the tide of battle at Dien Bien Phu began to turn against

the defenders. Until then the general assumption had been that the fortress 'could withstand any kind of attack the Vietminh are capable of launching'.[74] But during February and March, reports began to reach London hinting at deep American unease at the mounting crisis as well as far-reaching plans to avert a French disaster. One might assume that this news was welcomed in London. Eden had after all made considerable efforts since 1951 to encourage deeper American interest and participation in South-East Asian defence under, preferably, the aegis of a collective defence organisation. It was also only large-scale American intervention that could ensure with any certainty a non-communist Viet-Nam which was, by extension, the surest means of safeguarding Malaya's external security, a point made by MacDonald on 18 March in a telegram from Singapore.[75]

In the final analysis, however, the British attitude was defined almost entirely in terms of the risk that overt American military involvement might lead Communist China to retaliate setting off a chain-reaction culminating in a global conflagration. All potential benefits of American intervention paled beside this danger and, in consequence, the Churchill Government determined to dampen Washington's military zeal. Importantly, at just the moment that American intervention began to look like a reality, the British attitude towards Geneva, a negotiated settlement and partition began to shift. Enthusiasm for a political solution grew in direct relation to the mounting threat of American action in Viet-Nam. Faced with a straight choice between a negotiated settlement, even one based on so distasteful a compact as partition, or an extension of the war, perhaps even a third world war, Eden accepted the former course. Geneva, in other words, became a means of preventing American intervention. This conclusion paralleled the one reached by Eden in November 1952 when, on learning that

President-elect Eisenhower was contemplating an intensification of operations in Korea, even bombing targets within China, he confided to his diary that 'on this basis an armistice was to be preferred & every advantage to be gained from seeking one'.[76]

Although today it seems doubtful whether China would have risked a major war with the United States for the sake of the Viet-Minh, still less that the Soviet Union would have become embroiled, at the time British fears were real and deeply-held even when the kind of action contemplated in Washington was indirect - for example, the use of Chinese Nationalist forces[77], or the Administration's insistence that American ground crews servicing U.S. aircraft employed by the French should wear U.S. Army uniform.[78] But of far greater concern was the possible deployment of American air, sea or even ground forces in Viet-Nam. During the first months of 1954 mixed signals reached London about the state of American thinking in this respect. On 8 February, Walter Bedell Smith, U.S. Under-Secretary of State, admitted to Makins that he had been appointed by the President to head a select group of officials investigating the options open to the Administration. Echoing the conclusion reached in London six months earlier, he observed that the French 'were not aiming so much to win a war, as to get in a position in which they could negotiate'. The Americans were thus 'doing all they could to persuade the French that their negotiating position would be pretty hopeless unless they negotiated from strength'. Bedell Smith added that there was 'no intention of sending American troops to Indo-China' and that the President 'would not do it even if he had the power'.[79] Two days later Eisenhower himself publicly declared that he was 'bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States in a hot war' in South-East Asia.[80] Other sources suggested that there was

'not the slightest chance of Congressional approval' for military action.[81] But on 13 February, a senior member of the Washington Embassy staff reported that American public opinion, hitherto opposed to intervention, would ultimately support the President if he decided deeper involvement was necessary. Admiral Radford, the hawkish new Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, was amongst those in the Administration 'convinced that deeper involvement is coming' and felt that 'if necessary American troops should go in'. The report concluded: 'Deep down in much Republican thinking there is the feeling that China was disastrously thrown away: a stitch in time would have saved nine ... The application of this (partly emotional) doctrine to Indochina is clear.'[82] Makins, too, detected a 'growing conviction that the United States could not idly stand by if the threat of a Communist Indo-China became acute'.[83]

These conflicting signals no doubt reflected the fluctuations of the inter-agency debate in Washington.[84] In London, though, the attitude of the Foreign Office was evolving rapidly. On 24 February, Allen wrote to R.H. Scott, now First Minister in the Washington Embassy, outlining the emerging position. Massive U.S. intervention ...

> would not necessarily help the military situation if its only result was to bring about a corresponding increase in the scale of Chinese intervention ... [U]ntil the Geneva Conference has met this country would be reluctant to see the United States involve themselves further in Indochina on a scale which seemed to increase the risk of Chinese intervention and thus of extending the war.

Perhaps without fully appreciating the portentous content of his 'ill-formed and non-committal thoughts', Allen gave clear notice that the Foreign Office attitude towards negotiations was changing. They now began to appear as the most effective weapon available if it became necessary to restrain the Americans from widening the war. A compromise in present

circumstances was still unsatisfactory in that it must perforce leave 'either a communist share in the Government of [Viet-Nam] or complete communist control over part of the country'. However, the obvious risk of losing all of Indo-China through subversion inherent in such a settlement 'might have to be accepted if the only alternative seemed to be the enlargement of the war through increased intervention from the outside'. Parliament, Allen concluded, 'might in the last resort take some convincing that the risk was not one that we ought to accept in the interests of peace'.[85] Suddenly a negotiated settlement assumed a noble quality when contrasted with what was shaping up as the alternative, the internationalisation of the war.[86] Britain's soundest justification for resisting American military action lay in support for a political solution.

British concern about the consequences of American intervention was heightened by a number of wider developments in the realm of American foreign policy. Foremost of these was the disturbing glibness of the U.S. Administration in viewing its steadily increasing nuclear capability in terms of 'conventional' weapons. This had first surfaced at Bermuda in December 1953 where, as Eden later noted, the Americans showed themselves determined to retaliate 'with the most effective weapons at their disposal', including 'the use of atomic weapons', in the event of a communist breach of the Korean armistice. These, Eden said, were now 'evidently regarded ... as established weapons of war' and he therefore proposed to inform the U.S. Government that the consequences of their use 'against an enemy in the Far East might be so serious for the United Kingdom that we cannot agree to such action in advance and must insist upon being consulted at the time before it is taken'.[87] Eden's open-ended reference to 'an enemy in the Far East' was recognition that Korea was not

the only area where the Americans might choose to confront communism with the ultimate weapon. Indeed it was in Viet-Nam if anywhere that the Eisenhower Administration's new doctrine of massive retaliation seemed likely to have its first practical application. This doctrine had been foreshadowed in Eisenhower's State of the Union address to Congress on 8 January 1954.[28] Then, four days later, Dulles spoke in New York about the deterrent effect of 'massive retaliatory power' and how the Administration had taken a 'basic decision' to 'depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our choosing'. The rationale was economic necessity: the replacement of an enormous and costly standing army with the cheaper alternative of reliance on nuclear weapons, the 'maximum deterrent at a bearable cost'.[29]

This blurring of the distinction between atomic and conventional weapons, and the Administration's determination to rely predominantly on the former, obviously reinforced the resistance of the British Government to American intervention in Indo-China. For if China pre-empted or reacted to such a move, 'the very nature of the retaliatory power at the Americans' disposal is such that any decision to retaliate becomes one of cataclysmic potentialities'.[30] The British were further unnerved by a letter from Eisenhower to Churchill on 9 February. The President's tone was highly emotive in its depiction of the struggle between good and evil that was for him the Cold War, with references to 'the salvation of liberty', 'the stupid and savage individuals in the Kremlin', 'the Russian menace' and the need to 'throw back the Russian threat and allow civilization, as we know it, to continue its progress'. What alarmed Churchill and Eden most was the President's conclusion that it was only when one contemplated the ...

> picture of an atheistic materialism in complete domination of all human life, that he fully appreciates how necessary it is to seek

> renewed faith and strength from his God, and sharpen up his sword for the struggle that cannot possibly be escaped.

Eden insisted that this remark should not go unchallenged and proposed that Churchill reply in the following terms: 'I take it that you are referring there to the spiritual struggle. Otherwise your words might suggest that you believe war to be inevitable. I certainly do not think so and I am sure you do not either'.[91] Churchill accepted this advice but before he could respond it was revealed that the United States had tested the largest thermo-nuclear device yet built. This gave rise to public unease in Britain and elsewhere that the H-Bomb was 'out of control'.[92] In his reply to Eisenhower Churchill therefore added a lengthy passage outlining his fears in this connection. 'I am told that several million people would certainly be obliterated by four or five of these latest H bombs', he wrote. 'Our smallness and density of population emphasize this danger to us'.[93] Clearly Eisenhower's earlier assurance that he was only 'testing my thoughts against yours' had failed to impress the British Prime Minister.[94]

This, then, was the sombre context in which the crisis over intervention of April 1954 was to be played out. By the end of March, the Eisenhower Administration, fearful that the French were on the verge of a crushing military defeat or that war-weariness in Paris would result in the appeasement of the Viet-Minh and China, was seriously considering some form of military intervention in Viet-Nam. The French had to be 'prevented from capitulating either politically at Geneva or militarily in Indo-China'.[95] Two distinct but related forms of action were under discussion. First, the formation of a coalition of powers to deter or, failing that, halt the further extension of communism in South-East Asia - an expedient

to solve the immediate problem in Viet-Nam and thereafter form the nucleus of a regional defence pact. Second, because many in Washington were worried that defeat at Dien Bien Phu would lead swiftly to defeat for France throughout the whole of Indo-China, consideration was given to an air strike by the U.S. Air Force in or around the battle-zone to relieve the beleagured garrison and to generally boost flagging French morale.[26] The U.S. Administration, despite private French entreaties for action at Dien Bien Phu, chose to act on the former basis first. On 29 March, Dulles, in a much publicised speech in New York, declared that

> ... the imposition on South-East Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally by whatever means would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks but these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute to-day'.[27]

Two days earlier Dulles had warned Eden through Makins of the content of his speech because he was 'not sure that what he was going to say would be in complete harmony with your views'.[28] This was an understatement. The following chapter will show how Eden used the prospect of a negotiated settlement as a device for resisting American plans for 'united action'.

NOTES

1. Eden, *Full Circle*, p.82.
2. Ibid., p.87.
3. FO 371/106749/43, Burrows min., 2 Dec., S.E.A.Dept. letter to Chancery, Saigon, 3 Dec; FO 371/105180/26, FO brief for Eden, 4 Dec. 1953.
4. FO 371/106750/17, Allen letter to Trevelyan, 8 Jan. 1954.
5. For the background to this issue see pp.200-04.
6. CAB 129/65 C(54)13, 11 Jan; also CAB 128/27 CC(54)3rd meeting, 18 Jan. 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, p.61.
7. FO 371/112047/8, FO brief on Indo-China for Berlin, 15 Jan. 1954.
8. Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p.238; also Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, p.172.
9. CMD 2834, p.65.
10. CMD 9080, p.24.
11. CAB 128/27 CC(54)5th meeting, 26 Jan. 1954.
12. PREM 11/664, Churchill tels. 40 & 199 to Eden, 27 Jan. & 13 Feb; PREM

11/665, Churchill tel. 134 to Eden, 8 Feb. 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 87-89.

13. Rhodes James, *Eden*, pp. 352-53.
14. Carlton, *Eden*, p. 300. On this theme see also Verrier, *Looking Glass*, p. 85; Watt, *John Bull*, p. 129; Shlaim et al, *British Foreign Secretaries* pp. 95-96.
15. FO 371/112047/12, record of meeting of Anglo-Franco-American officials, 26 Jan; Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front* (Oxford 1988), p. 240. Also Werth, *France*, pps. 662 & 664-65; Raymond Aron, (French Thoughts on the Berlin Conference'), *The Listener*, 11 March 1954.
16. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 1020-21.
17. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, p. 342.
18. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pps. 133 & 132-33 (17 & 11 Feb. 1954); CAB 128/27 CC(54)10th meeting, 22 Feb. 1954.
19. See note 9.
20. PREM 11/649, Makins tel. 465, 19 March 1954. Also FO 371/109100/11 & 15, Makins tels. 94 & 141, 27 Feb. & 27 March 1954; Townshend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (London 1974), pp. 206-07.
21. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 63-64; Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune, 1945-1955* (London 1969), p. 530.
22. FO 800/785/9, Lloyd tel. 160 to Eden, 10 Feb; CAB 128/27 CC(54)8th meeting, 10 Feb. 1954.
23. CAB 128/27 CC(54)8th meeting, 10 Feb 1953; also Georges Bidault, *Resistance* (London 1967), pp. 189-90; Werth, *France*, pp. 662-64..
24. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, p. 80; also FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 372 -73.
25. Avon Papers, AP20/17/18A, Makins letter to Eden, 21 May 1954.
26. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, pps. 56 & 80.
27. Werth, *France*, pp. 664ff.
28. Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 239.
29. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pps. 1021, 1080-81, 1057.
30. J. M. Addis Papers (S. O. A. S.), memo., 12 March 1954.
31. FO 371/112047/35, Allen min., 22 Feb. 1954.
32. Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 230-31.
33. FO 371/112774/1, Harvey despatch 49, 30 Jan. 1954.
34. FO 371/112048/48 & 59, Tahourdin min., 4 March, & letter to Rumbold, 18 March; FO 371/112049/103G, Tahourdin memo., 25 March 1954.
35. Werth, *France*, pp. 664-66; *The New Statesman* ('The Markos Hypothosis'), 13 March 1954.
36. FO 371/112048/43 & 85, Allen mins., 1 & 16 March 1954.
37. For a fuller discussion of this question see *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, pps. 53-54 & 78-81; Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 111.
38. FO 371/112048/63, Rumbold letter to Tahourdin, 16 March, Kirkpatrick & Eden mins., 24 & 26 March; also FO 371/112049/98, Rumbold letter to Tahourdin, 26 March 1954.
39. FO 371/112049/100, Makins tel. 524, 27 March 1954.
40. FO 371/112050/143G, US memo., 6 April 1954.
41. FO 371/112047/38, Rumbold letter to Tahourdin, 24 March; PREM 11/618, Eden tel. 379 to Paris, 26 Feb; PREM 11/649, Eden tel. 969 to Washington, 16 March 1954.
42. FO 371/112033/13G, Graves tel. 64, 23 Feb; also FO 371/112034/24, Graves letter to Tahourdin, 24 Feb. 1954.
43. FO 371/112049/87G, Graves tel. 106, 25 March; also FO 371/112034/28G, Graves letter to Allen, 27 Feb. 1954.

44. FO 371/112033/22 & 13G, Pearn memo., 26 Feb. & mins by Cable (25 Feb), Selby (26 Feb) & Paterson (26 Feb); FO 371/112034/28G, Burrows min., 12 March 1954.
45. FO 371/112033/18, Eden min., n.d. (late Feb); FO 371/112103/32G, Eden min., 20 March 1854.
46. FO 371/112048/50, Tahourdin min., 5 March, Hohler letter to S.E.A. Dept., 8 March, Tahourdin letter to Graves, 10 March; FO 371/112048/68, Tahourdin min., 18 March; FO 371/112049/104, Allen min., 23 March 1954.
47. FO 371/112033/22, Pearn memo., 26 Feb. 1954.
48. DEFE 4/69, COS(54)36th meeting, 31 March; FO 371/112037/6, Trevelyan letter to Allen, 15 Feb; FO 371/112048/63, Burrows min., 18 March; FO 371/112033/22, Burrows min., 18 March 1954.
49. FO 371/112048/69, Graves letter to Allen, 15 March 1954.
50. FO 371/112048/61, MacDonald tel. 129, 19 March 1954.
51. FO 371/112049/89, MacDonald tel. 143, 26 March 1954.
52. FO 371/112049/104, Allen min., 23 March, Eden min., 25 March 1954.
53. Adamthwaite in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 1
54. FO 371/112034/30, FO brief for Eden, 9 March 1954.
55. For a detailed account of military developments see P. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey of International Affairs 1954* (Oxford 1957), pp. 12-21, hereafter *Survey 1954*.
56. FO 371/106771/206, Graves despatch 10119/19/53, 13 Oct. 1953.
57. FO 371/112047/3, record of Dulles press conference, 29 Dec. 1953.
58. FO 371/112022/1, Graves despatch 2, 5 Jan. 1954. Also FO 371/106757/319, Harvey tel. 466, 29 Dec; FO 371/106749/68, Burrows min., 29 Dec. 1953; FO 371/112033/3, Information Research Dept. memo., 8 Jan. 1954; *The Economist* ('Scare on the Mekong'), 2 Jan. 1954.
59. Giap, however, makes no mention of 'political' objectives in General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War People's Army* (London 1967).
60. FO 371/112024/8, Graves tel. 9, 12 Jan; FO 371/112102/12, Tahourdin min., 3 Feb; FO 371/112048/61, MacDonald tel. 129, 18 March; PREM 11/645, C.I.G.S. min. Alexander, 19 March; FO 371/112103/33, M.A. Saigon tel. MA2 to WO, 22 March 1954.
61. PREM 11/645, Graves tel. 99, 19 March; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, p. 12; FO 371/102103/33, M.A. Saigon tel. MA2 to WO, 22 March 1954.
62. FO 371/112102/21, record of meeting of Anglo-French officials 21 Feb. 1954. The phrase is Pleven's. Also Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p. 216.
63. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, p. 16.
64. FO 371/112023/5, Graves tel. 3, 30 Jan. 1954.
65. FO 371/112102/9, Graves despatch 13, 1 Feb; FO 371/112024/22, Fish (Hanoi) despatch to Graves, 8 Feb. 1954.
66. FO 371/112102/9, Redfern (WO) letter to Burrows, 5 Feb. 1954.
67. PREM 11/645, Graves tel. 97, 18 March 1954.
68. FO 371/112103/22, Harvey tel. 135, 16 March 1954.
69. PREM 11/645, Graves tel. 99, 19 March 1954.
70. FO 371/112103/35, Graves tel. 113, 30 March 1954.
71. See FO 371/112049/103G, FO memo., 31 March 1954.
72. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 87.
73. Short, *Vietnam War*, pp. 118-128.
74. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 175.
75. FO 371/112048/61, MacDonald tel. 129, 18 March 1954.
76. Avon Papers, AP20, Diary entry, 9 Nov. 1952.
77. FO 371/106770/198G, mins by Shuckbrugh (5 Oct), Burrows (12 Oct) & Crowe (15 Oct); FO 371/106757/314, Burrows min., 18 Dec. 1953.

78. See FO 371/112047/10, 13 & 24, Makins tel. 189, 27 Jan., Burrows min., 1 Feb., Eden tel. 51, Berlin to FO, 31 Jan. & Graves tel. 45, 12 Feb; FO 371/112024/37, Fish despatch to Graves, 10 March 1954.
79. FO 371/112047/19, Makins tel. 241, 8 Feb. 1954.
80. Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 228-29.
81. FO 371/109100/9, Makins tel. 87, 20 Feb. 1954.
82. FO 371/112026/26, Joy letter to Tahourdin, 13 Feb. 1954.
83. FO 371/112047/28, Makins tel. 288, 17 Feb. 1954.
84. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 88-92; Short, *Vietnam War*, pp. 124-37.
85. FO 371/112047/28, Allen letter to Scott, 24 Feb. 1954.
86. See for example FO 371/112048/53, Scott letter to Allen, 10 March, circulated to Cabinet as CAB 129/67 C(54)108, 18 March 1954.
87. CAB 131/14, D(54)8, 1 Feb. 1954; see also pp. 205-07.
88. FO 371/109100/2, Makins tel. 8, 9 Jan. 1954.
89. D. Foliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1954* (Oxford 1957), pp. 265-67, hereafter *Documents 1954*.
90. FO 371/109135/1, Maitland letter to Ross (CRO), 2 Feb. 1954.
91. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower letter to Churchill, 9 Feb., Eden min. to Churchill, 2 March; also FO 800/766/3, Shuckburgh min., 1 March 1954.
92. Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pps. 952, 957 & 959-60; Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, pp. 182-84.
93. Churchill's reply is unavailable at the P.R.O. but is in Gilbert, ibid, p. 959-60. See also Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pps. 143-44 & 147 (8 & 12 March 1954).
94. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower message to Churchill, 2 March 1954.
95. FO 371/112060/437, Scott despatch 207, 3 May 1954.
96. Geoffrey Warner, 'The United States and Vietnam: Two episodes', in *International Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (1989), hereafter Vol. & No.
97. Foliot, ed., *Documents 1954*, pp. 144-45.
98. FO 371/112049/100, Makins tel. 524, 27 March 1954.

PART V: 1954 – ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

CHAPTER TWELVE

INTERVENTION OR NEGOTIATION

Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva Conference and Anglo-American relations

April 1954

With Dulles's speech of 29 March 1954 the Eisenhower Administration appeared to take a firm decision to actively resist communist expansion in South-East Asia - provided it had the support of other nations. Action had to be truly 'united action' if the experience of Korea (when the U.S. assumed by far the greatest burden in what was ostensibly a collective 'free world' enterprise) was not to be repeated. Despite what Administration officials would later tell the British, both the Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that action in Viet-Nam could probably not be limited to air and sea if substantive results were to be achieved and must in the end include the deployment of ground forces. An estimated 12 divisions might be necessary, but the United States alone could not provide them without reducing its contribution to N.A.T.O. and embarking on a high level of military and industrial mobilisation. Obviously these unwelcome consequences could be offset if the requisite action was taken in concert with other like-minded powers. Without such a multilateral framework there was no guarantee that the U.S. Congress would sanction military action.[1]

Of particular importance to the Eisenhower Administration's plans was the support of its foremost ally, Britain. However, at just the moment that Dulles was issuing his call for united action, and when a State Department analysis was arguing that the British Government was 'disposed

to be benevolent towards the idea of local U.S. armed intervention in Indochina'[2], a major Foreign Office study paper was reaching a rather different conclusion. The paper, entitled 'Policy towards Indo-China', had been drawn up with Geneva in mind and approved by Eden and the Chiefs of Staff. One of its central conclusions was that ...

> [a]ny direct intervention by the armed forces of any external nation [in Viet-Nam] would probably result in Chinese intervention, with the danger that this might ultimately lead to global war. Our influence should therefore be used against these more dangerous forms of deeper United States involvement'.[3]

Contained in this statement is the essence of the crisis over intervention which consumed Anglo-American relations in the spring of 1954. The Americans wanted to act, but not without allied agreement in general and British support in particular. This the Churchill Administration refused to extend. At the same time the British sought to justify their opposition lest they be accused in Washington of abrogating their responibility as a Great Power or of appeasing communism. This was done by insisting that the Geneva Conference be given every possible chance to effect a political solution to the Indo-China problem. In Viet-Nam this meant partition. A military solution was only to be contemplated - if at all - if discussions at Geneva proved barren.[4] This constituted a significant shift in British thinking which had hitherto emitted little enthusiasm for compromise. However, a political solution, even a poor one, had one major attraction for the British after 29 March: it was infinitely preferable to the high-risk military solution which Washington evidently favoured. In the final analysis, the sound of falling dominoes in South-East Asia was to be preferred to the sound of falling H-Bombs on East Anglia. As Eden put it, 'we do not want to bring a greater disaster upon our heads by trying to avert the immediate one'.[5]

The first difficulty facing British policy-makers in formulating a response to Dulles's statement was to establish what he meant by 'united action'. On 2 April, Makins called on Dulles and Bedell Smith at the State Department. What he had in mind, Dulles said, was a tangible act of solidarity with the French in order to stiffen their resolve to continue the fight in Indo-China even if Dien Bien Phu were lost. In the first instance this would entail a warning to Peking to stop aiding the Viet-Minh. The Americans presupposed that deprived of Chinese support, the threat from the Viet-Minh could be quickly nullified by the French - in other words the Markos hypothosis based on coercion of, rather than concessions to, the Chinese. Dulles admitted, however, that if the warning was ignored there should be direct (though not ground) intervention in Viet-Nam as well as air and naval action against the Chinese mainland. While this involved a risk of general war, the adverse consequences of 'letting Indo-China go were greater'. Besides which, this risk would be 'diminished if a group of countries joined the warning'. Bedell Smith indicated that this scheme was the product of the Administration's prior rejection of any kind of negotiated solution for Viet-Nam. Partition had been discussed, he said, but dismissed as a 'temporary palliative' which would lead to 'Communist domination of South-East Asia'. All other political permutations had been likewise rejected. At this juncture, therefore, the American assessment of partition mirrored that of the British, a Foreign Office paper on 9 April concurring that partition was 'unlikely to check the further advance of communism' in Indo-China 'and our whole strategic position in the Far East would be gravely imperilled in consequence'.[6]

On 5 April American plans began to fill out. In a personal letter to

Churchill, Eisenhower said he wished to see the formation of an *ad hoc* coalition of nations in South-East Asia to check communist expansion. This would comprise the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Siam, the Philippines and the three Associate States of Indo-China. It was this grouping which would issue the warning spoken of by Dulles. 'If we grasp this one together I believe that we will enormously increase our chances of bringing the Chinese to believe that their interests lie in the direction of a discreet disengagement', wrote Eisenhower. 'The important thing is that the coalition must be strong and it must be willing to join the fight if necessary'.[7] The next day brought added evidence that the counterpoise in Washington to united action was a rejection of any negotiated compromise. A memorandum left at the Foreign Office by the U.S. Ambassador stated that in view of 'the military and political situation in Indo-China, any settlement negotiated in the immediate future could only result in ultimate complete control of all Indo-China by the Communists'.[8] While the worry that Geneva would produce no acceptable compromise did not prevent the British giving the Conference at least a chance, in Washington negative public comments by Eisenhower and Dulles tended to confirm the Foreign Office in its opinion that the Americans 'have decided that no acceptable settlement in Indo-China is possible by negotiation'.[9] The French, too, felt that recent talk of united action had reduced the scope for agreement at Geneva.[10] In consequence the idea that American thinking was partly motivated by a desire to strengthen the French hand at the Conference was never seriously entertained in the Foreign Office.[11]

The dilemma facing the Churchill Government was succinctly expressed by Makins on 4 April when he observed that 'a decision to range ourselves with the fundamental American decision or dissociate ourselves from it cannot be

long delayed and will have a profound effect over the whole field of Anglo-American relations'.[12] In the Foreign Office, however, the emphasis placed on the Chinese dimension by the Americans was viewed as a distraction. There was also scepticism about the effectiveness of a warning to China to refrain from activity it had been engaged in for some years, doubts that it amounted (as the Americans implied) to overt aggression, and concern that the consequence of a warning might be to provoke Peking into taking action it might not otherwise consider. On the other hand, a flat rejection of Washington's proposal was made difficult by the mechanism by which a warning was to be delivered. The idea of an anti-communist coalition was not far removed from the long-standing British goal of a permanent collective defence system for South-East Asia that would remove the 'anomaly' of Britain's exclusion from A.N.Z.U.S., contribute to the external security of Malaya, Singapore and possibly Hong Kong, as well as safeguard the region as a whole.[13] It was also, as seen, a means of arresting the erosion of British influence at a time of military and economic enervation, and of reducing the scope of American unilateralism in Asia. Hitherto Washington had shown a marked reluctance to become involved in collective defence. Now, however, it was the Americans themselves who were proposing a project which, if successfully launched, might provide the basis of a formal defence system.

Despite these benefits, Eden felt he had no option but to oppose American plans in their present form and, in the process, turn his back on what he had been working towards for nearly 30 months. Ironically, subsequent American behaviour during the intervention crisis was to serve as a salutary reminder to Eden and his staff of their failure to tie Washington into a formal defence structure for South-East Asia in which

decisions on policy could be first discussed on an inter-allied basis and not, as was the case in April 1954, unilaterally and publicly announced by Washington. This put the other Western allies in the invidious position of choosing between supporting the United States in action they might disapprove of, or openly divorcing themselves from Washington with obvious implications for Western unity. This in fact was the difficulty the British Government now found itself in. Forced to choose, it took the latter course, irrespective of the damage to Anglo-American relations.

On 7 April, Eden explained to the Cabinet that it was not the idea of a defence coalition which worried him but the likely *offensive* use the Americans might put it to. He 'feared' that Washington was 'less interested in the creation of this coalition as a permanent security system than in the declaration which they wished to make before the Geneva Conference'. Here was a pointer to the future, for the prospect of Geneva was now assuming an additional utility in Eden's mind as a means of resisting worrying American designs. If China ignored an allied declaration and continued to support the Viet-Minh (which Eden thought probable), 'the coalition would be compelled either to withdraw ignominiously or to embark on warlike action against China'. This, he judged, would give China 'every excuse for invoking the Sino-Soviet Treaty, and might lead to a world war'. Eden accordingly argued against accepting Washington's scheme as presently conceived and in favour of persuading the Americans to 're-shape their plan so that it could be made to give security in South-East Asia in the future without endangering the Geneva Conference'. The time to contemplate a warning was after Geneva when it might be used to guarantee a settlement. Peking could be told, for example, that 'further Communist encroachment in Indo-China would entail

retaliation, and possibly even war'.[14]

Eden's position was thus clearly defined as early as 7 April. He rejected British or even allied military involvement in Viet-Nam in favour of a political solution. He also opposed the American idea of a coalition if its primary function (as Washington intimated) was cover for such intervention. At the same time, Eden approved of the concept of a regional defence mechanism but felt it should only come into being after Geneva had attempted to restore peace in Viet-Nam. A defence grouping might yet be the most appropriate and effective method of guaranteeing a political settlement. This idea had not been seriously considered in London before 7 April, but thereafter it was to help remove what doubts Eden may have held as to the moral implications of advocating a course which he and his advisers privately expected to culminate in communist absorption of all of Indo-China. For, if underpinned by an international guarantee, partition in Viet-Nam might prove to be a lasting contribution to peace and stability and not merely a short-term expedient or, worse, conscious appeasement, a charge Eden would wish to avoid.

Working on this premise, by the middle of April many of Eden's qualms had been exorcised. When MacDonald telegraphed to express the hope that the Foreign Office would not contemplate either partition or Viet-Minh participation in a Viet-Namese Government because both solutions 'would involve the most serious dangers of Communist domination sooner or later of much of South East Asia', Eden reacted angrily to what was an unwitting indictment of his now chosen course. Three weeks earlier MacDonald would have accurately reflected opinion in London. Now he received only a personal rebuke. 'I wish this man would keep quiet', Eden railed. 'He only confuses counsel'.[15] This was harsh on MacDonald who was only

reporting the views of the British Defence Co-ordination Committee for the Far East. But Eden was now far from convinced that 'no concession could be made to the Communists in Indo-China without inevitably leading to Communist domination of the whole of South-East Asia; particularly if we have the proposed security pact'.[16] His enthusiasm for negotiations had clearly increased since Berlin, the corollary of which was a modification of the British interpretation of the domino theory.

The success of Eden's strategy obviously depended on making Geneva work, for agreement there would deny the Americans a pretext for internationalising the conflict. Concern to avoid a wider war was Eden's guiding motive. But considerable groundwork had to be done before the Conference opened on 26 April. For one thing, the Americans had to be persuaded to drop their idea of a warning to China which, assuming it did not spark a major war in Asia, might well cause Peking to boycott the negotiations. The Americans would also have to agree to delay forming a coalition while Geneva was in session. Precipitate progress towards an alliance would antagonise the Chinese who might (correctly) perceive it as directed against them. This would do nothing to engender an atmosphere at Geneva conducive to fruitful discussion. Most importantly, the Americans had to be restrained from becoming actively involved in the present fighting in Viet-Nam, either unilaterally or under cover of 'united action'. Early consultation with the U.S. Government was therefore important. At their meeting on 7 April the Cabinet, while fully supporting Eden, decided to reserve final judgment on American plans and took up an offer from Eisenhower to send Dulles to London to explain the Administration's thinking first-hand. A visit was duly arranged for 11-13 April.[17]

While the U.S. Secretary of State was awaited a number of developments strengthened Eden's hand. At a meeting on 10 April the British Chiefs of Staff demonstrated that they too saw the problem in terms of a choice between a potentially unsatisfactory political settlement in Viet-Nam or a high-risk military solution. In their opinion, an end to Chinese interference would not in itself solve France's difficulties, nor would the threat of military retaliation cause them to desist anyway. To retain credibility the Western powers would have to make good their warning and take action against China. Though the Americans maintained that this could be limited to air and sea, the British Military demurred, arguing that the use of ground forces would be inevitable. Even then it was probably only 'all-out atomic war' that could produce a decisive result. Unwilling to support the American initiative for these reasons, the Service Chiefs tentatively raised the possibility of a 'negotiated settlement based on partition' even though this would 'gravely weaken our military and political situation throughout South East Asia and would gravely increase our difficulties in Malaya'. While they hoped it would not come to a straight choice, the Military experts hinted that the 'risk of undermining our position in South East Asia' was preferable to 'the serious risk of war with China'.[18]

On learning of this military appreciation Eden's determination to oppose American plans can only have hardened. The chances of him succeeding in this appeared to have increased with Dulles's confession to Makins on 4 April that there were 'two indispensible conditions' to progress on united action - the granting by France of full independence for the Associate States and, importantly, active British involvement. Both provisos resulted from pressure on Dulles from Congressional leaders

concerned that the United States should not be seen to be upholding French colonialism and that, unlike the Korean war, the material and physical cost of containing communism in Asia would be shared equally by the 'Free World'.[19] Useful as this knowledge was, however, it is doubtful whether Eden ever consciously relied on a British 'veto' over American action, and events as they unfolded tended to confirm the correctness of this approach. By far the surest method of avoiding an escalation of the Indo-China war remained a peace settlement at Geneva for, as Makins was wont to point out, the 'determination of the Administration is such that they will go ahead, if possible with us, but if necessary without us'.[20]

There had also been indications in the days leading up to Dulles's arrival that although the Administration's 'campaign to create an atmosphere in which Congress and the public could be brought to accept increased American participation in Indo-China' was making 'considerable headway', official enthusiasm in Washington for a warning to China was receding.[21] This was duly confirmed by Dulles himself when Anglo-American talks got underway in London on 11-13 April. The British were given a detailed exposition of the now modified American position on Indo-China. The French, Dulles said, 'could no longer deal with the situation, either politically or militarily on the present basis and on their own resources'. If their position collapsed, the consequences for the rest of South-East Asia were grave [four days earlier Eisenhower had publicly enunciated the 'domino' theory for the first time[22]]. Therefore, at the end of March and with events at Dien Bien Phu going badly, the U.S. Military had recommended air and naval intervention in Viet-Nam to prop up the French. On reflection, the Administration felt it should not act alone, hence its call for united action. Dulles then formally stated the two essential

conditions upon which action rested and also urged the swift formation of an anti-communist coalition, the mere existence of which might bring China to drop the Viet-Minh and simultaneously strengthen the French bargaining position at Geneva. Dulles took a pessimistic view of the chances of Britain holding Malaya if Viet-Nam were lost, and seemed to think that this would encourage Eden to support united action. But with plans - not yet fully disclosed to the Americans - already drawn up for Malayan defence based on the Songkhla position, this was not the persuasive argument Dulles imagined.[23]

Eden, in response, drew a clear distinction between the two main aspects of the American scheme which Dulles had confusingly and possibly deliberately intertwined. On one level he welcomed the prospect of a South-East Asian defence grouping. On another, he was opposed to British involvement in the current conflict in Viet-Nam, and to internationalising the war *per se*. It was apparent from Dulles's remarks that whatever a coalition might develop into in the future, in the present the Americans saw it primarily as a contrivance to permit direct intervention in Viet-Nam. Dulles was 'confident' that provided the conditions for action were fulfilled, 'Congress would authorise the President to use United States air and naval forces, and possibly even land forces'.[24] This co-relation met with Eden's disapproval. The furthest he would go in support of the American proposals was to declare, in a joint *communiqué* issued after the talks on 13 April, that Britain was ready to 'consider with the other Governments principally concerned, the *possibility* [emphasis added] of establishing a system of collective defence for South-East Asia and the Western Pacific'.[25] When Dulles left London for talks with French Ministers in Paris Eden seemed satisfied that British opposition to any

plan for widening the Indo-China war had been brought home to the Americans. As for an anti-communist coalition, Eden believed that he had Dulles's agreement that the tentative examination foreshadowed in the *communiqué* should not proceed either before or during the Geneva Conference, and certainly not without further Anglo-American consultation. Speaking in Parliament on 13 April, Eden declared that the 'effective outcome' of any examination of a defence pact 'will be greatly influenced by what happens at Geneva'.[26]

Eden had also stressed to Dulles the great importance he attached to securing the widest possible Asian support for any defence association.[27] This was a reaction to the American disposition to bring in only Siam, the Philippines and the Associate States of Indo-China, countries which were seen by the rest of Asia as Western client-states.[28] Eden therefore hoped to avoid any public announcement on the composition of a pact, and was undoubtedly correct in regarding as worthless any arrangement in Asia lacking the membership or at least the acquiescence of India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia. To go ahead with only the five 'puppet' states would, the British feared, outrage the anti-colonial sentiment of non-aligned Asia and ensure its enduring hostility. To prevent this, firm decisions about composition had to be avoided. Eden was determined that neutral Asian governments should be kept fully informed if progress was made in private on the general outline of a pact. This would hopefully minimise their scope for criticism and maximise that for approval if a pact came into being. Cultivating Indian opinion was thought to be the key: 'No defence arrangement in South-East Asia is likely to be fully and permanently effective without at least a benevolent Indian attitude towards it, if only because Indian opinion has such influence on the other

countries in the area'.[29] The Foreign Office was aware that the Indian leader, Nehru, had been incensed by Dulles's recent declarations which he regarded as an attempt to sabotage Geneva. Great care would have to be taken to prevent him publicly denouncing a coalition from the outset and causing a breach in relations between Britain and the Asian Commonwealth.[30] During their talks, Dulles appeared to accept Eden's position and to understand the other factors which combined to produce a cautious and measured British reaction. According to Shuckburgh, Dulles left London having settled for a 'much milder statement on S.E. Asia - *not* committing us to fight in Indo-China - than we had feared ... [T]he actual agreement is so favourable to us, and so far from what Dulles's speeches before he came here led everyone to suppose he would demand ...'[31]

Eden was therefore astonished to learn on 16 April that Dulles had invited the Ambassadors of Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Siam the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia and Viet-Nam to a meeting in Washington on 20 April to begin discussions on a defence grouping. He indignantly denied that he had approved such action, and reiterated that he had only agreed to look at the 'possibility' of establishing a pact.[32] As well as jeopardising the Geneva Conference the American *fait accompli* (especially with regard to composition) threatened to estrange the neutral Asian nations. Eden feared that a meeting of the five Western Ambassadors and the five 'puppet' Asian goverments would, despite Washington's claim that membership could be later extended, crystallise composition in a manner that would be 'fatal to the whole plan'.[33] 'Americans may think the time past when they need consider the feelings or difficulties of their allies', Eden telegraphed to Makins, more in regret than anger. 'It is the conviction that this tendency becomes more pronounced every week that is

creating mounting difficulties for anyone in this country who wants to maintain close Anglo-American relations'.[34] Faced with this unexpectedly hostile reaction Dulles backed down, agreeing to reconstitute the meeting (which had become public knowledge) as a briefing session for Geneva.[35] But, privately, he was convinced that Eden had gone back on a clear undertaking to begin work on a pact *before* Geneva. 'Eden has double-crossed me', Dulles told his sister. 'He lied to me!'[36] Makins, basing his judgment on a British account of the London talks, was 'almost as taken aback ... as the Americans' by Eden's response, an admission which earned the Ambassador a strong reprimand from a nettled Foreign Secretary.[37]

It is reasonable to suppose that this 'monumental misunderstanding'[38] hardened Dulles still further against Geneva and a negotiated solution and, by implication, against what Eden hoped to achieve there. Some two months later Makins reported that the incident still 'rankles with Dulles and his senior advisers' who were feeling 'sore'. A 'smouldering resentment' was discernable in Washington.[39] Apportioning blame for this unfortunate incident has captivated historians in recent years. On balance, Eden has emerged as the villain of the piece. Those who adhere to this view cite in evidence Makins's discomfiture and a telling entry in Shuckburgh's diary for 3 May: 'According to what Denis [Allen] says, we are getting very near having cheated the Americans on this question of starting talks on SEA security. Denis [said] ... when Dulles was in London A[nthony].E[den]. *did* indicate that we should be willing to start such talks at once, provided we were not committed to any action in Indo-China. The American record showed that, but ours was obscure on the point and A.E. has always denied it'.[40] Makins appears to have been granted access to this 'American record' and found it 'unequivocal in the sense that it had been agreed that

consultation should take place as soon as possible, and in any case before the Geneva Conference, in Washington on the question of establishing collective defence for South-East Asia'.[41]

There are, however, a number of things to be said in Eden's defence. To start with, another valid contemporary source to place alongside Shuckburgh and Makins is Kirkpatrick who sided with Eden throughout the controversy.[42] More importantly, the American record (contained in Volume XIII of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series) is by no means as clear as Shuckburgh and Makins suggested and is, at best, ambiguous. Dulles was certainly in bouyant mood when he telegraphed Eisenhower on the last day of his London visit, 13 April, and talked of 'two days of very satisfactory talks' and of moving the British 'away from their original position that nothing can be done before Geneva' on united action.[43] Only twenty four hours earlier, however, Dulles had informed the President that although Eden 'indicated a real willingness to consider defence arrangements in SE Asia on the basis of united action', the British Foreign Secretary was 'obviously against implementation of any coalition prior to Geneva'.[44] Clearly something happened in the interval between these two messages to give Dulles the impression that Eden had altered his stance and was now ready to enter into immediate pre-Geneva defence negotiations. What had happened, of course, was that agreement had been reached on the wording of the joint *communiqué*, in particular the statement that Britain, alongside other interested parties, would consider the 'possibility of establishing a system of collective defence'. But nothing was said about when or how that possibility should be converted into reality. The question of timing was left entirely unresolved. Close scrutiny of the British and American records show that Dulles merely *assumed* that Eden was willing to act

immediately. At no stage did Eden actually say this. Yet, on 14 April, Dulles told the French in Paris that the British had 'indicated they would take part at once in an informal working group in Washington'.[45] When Dulles proceeded to act on his understanding and convene a working group, Eden, as noted, reacted violently.

On what had Dulles based his assumption? While even the American account of the London talks fails to link Eden to an agreement on a 'working group', it does show that Denis Allen, the central figure in Shuckburgh's critical diary entry, floated this possibility during a meeting of Anglo-American officials on 12 April. Allen said that 'one of the ways to get along with the like-minded people who wish to save Southeast Asia was to establish a working group similar to the old NATO group which for over a year worked on the formulation of the Treaty prior to its signing in April 1949'. Allen, therefore, appears to have sown the idea of a working group in American minds, not Eden. As for timing, while Allen said nothing definite, he did not dispute the American view that the situation in South-East Asia did not permit the luxury of year-long deliberation.[46] Not for the first time in diplomatic history, silence may have been taken as assent.

One might reasonably assume that the Foreign Secretary was aware of what his Assistant Under-Secretary had said in this meeting, but the possibility cannot be discounted that Eden was not properly informed or, alternatively, that he failed to appreciate the importance which the Americans attached to Allen's remarks. The latter appears the more likely, for the American record includes a further telegram from Dulles to Eisenhower on 13 April in which Eden is said to have agreed that the establishment of 'an informal working group in Washington' was a 'good

idea', and added that 'Makins would be available'.[47] Therefore Eden's outburst three days later cannot have been the result of shocked ignorence about Dulles's plans. It may, rather, have been a reaction against the unfortunate timing of the ten-power meeting. Moreover, such a formal high-profile gathering of Ambassadors in the public spotlight was far removed from the 'informal working group' suggested by Dulles, and Eden may have been expecting a series of bilateral (and private) exchanges before moving on to broader discussion. In general, therefore, the American record of the London meeting tends to confuse as much a clarify.

Speculating further, it seems inconceivable that Eden, given his evolving expectations and objectives for Geneva, would have consciously agreed to hasty and destructive action on a defence coalition prior to the Conference. In this connection he has been criticised for not 'frankly' explaining his position to the Americans 'who were left to discover it for themselves in instalments'.[48] If so, then Dulles was guilty of the same crime. Rather than Eden indulging in a 'subtle but unmistakeable act of sabotage of American plans'[49], there is probably a simpler, non-conspiritorial, explanation - assuming, that is, Dulles had not deliberately acted to 'sabotage' Eden's plans. The London *communiqué* emerges as the prime culprit, for it was so imprecise on the question of the next move *vis-a-vis* a coalition that both Eden and Dulles may well have interpreted it to suit their individual (and evidently crossed) purposes.[50] To this may be added the assumption on the part of the Americans that Allen spoke for Eden. What is beyond doubt, though, is Dulles's conviction that he had been given the green light to proceed and his sense of injustice when Eden appeared to backtrack.

The two men were given an early opportunity to iron out their

differences when they met in Paris on 22-24 April for a session of the N.A.T.O. Council. In the event little by way of a reconciliation was achieved. Eden repeated that a collective defence system in South-East Asia was certainly necessary but that it should have the widest possible Asian support. He had discovered that on the day that Geneva was due to open, the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia were to meet in Colombo and he was anxious to avoid any action which might cause them to 'come out publicly against our security proposals' and, to this end, to refrain from issuing any list of countries to be invited to join a pact 'until we had been able to see more clearly the trend of Asian opinion'. Recent reports from New Delhi suggested that Nehru still harboured deep doubts about the project, and Eden derived some satisfaction from the knowledge that through his efforts to keep in touch with the neutral Asian nations 'I had been able to restrain them from any unfavourable expression of opinion'.[51] Eden was however prepared to discuss 'very secretly' with the Americans the 'form and outline' of a security arrangement. Presumably this would enable the Anglo-Americans to come forward at the conclusion of the Geneva Conference with a well thought out proposal. Dulles, though, 'still adhered to his idea of launching S.E.A.T.O. with a small nucleus of members, and of doing this at the earliest possible moment'.[52] There was thus an Anglo-American stand-off.

It is worth pausing at this point to reflect on the extent to which Eden's insistence on general Asian support was perhaps a device to frustrate American plans for action in Viet-Nam. Winning over the non-aligned Asian nations to the idea of a defence consortium was likely to be a delicate and lengthy diplomatic process, a point Eden had made in Cabinet in November 1953.[53] Little had happened over the following five months to

cause the Foreign Office to alter this opinion. On 8 April, Allen noted that 'India, Burma and Indonesia are so deeply committed for the time being to their policy of neutrality that it is hard to conceive of them agreeing to go in [to a coalition] from the outset'. But the Foreign Secretary demurred, insisting: 'But we ought to try and get them'.[54] Hence, while not disputing the genuineness of Eden's desire to proceed with general Asian support and his efforts to get Washington to think similarly, he may actually have welcomed the difficulty of this task in that it provided an additional and legitimate brake on American adventurism.[55]

Before the British and Americans could attempt to narrow their differences the crisis over intervention assumed a new, dramatic and more specific character. While the N.A.T.O. Council was still sitting reports began to reach Paris that the garrison at Dien Bien Phu was close to capitulation.[56] On 23 April, General Navarre warned the French Government that only a 'powerful air strike by the American air force in the next 72 hours could save the situation'. Eden's first reaction was that air intervention at such a late stage could not possibly affect the outcome of the battle. While sharing these doubts, Dulles was still worried by the possibility of a general French collapse if nothing was done. This would extinguish all hope of limiting American and/or allied intervention to air and sea. Dulles was therefore inclined to support Navarre and was prepared, if Eden 'felt able to stand with him', to recommend that Eisenhower should approach Congress for 'war powers'. What this meant was unclear although Eden's understanding was that the President would seek 'power of the widest character to move armed forces'. 'I am fairly hardened to crises', he later wrote, 'but I went to bed that night a troubled man'.[57]

The following day brought him little relief although Dulles - after consultation with Washington - appeared to have second thoughts about a symbolic air strike. Yet he was simultaneously convinced that there was 'no chance' of preventing a total disaster in Indo-China when (rather than if) Dien Bien Phu fell unless Britain and the United States entered the war. According to conversations Dulles had had with French officials, it 'would not be enough if we were to assure them that we would join them in defending the rest of Indo-China; unless we had participated (by an air strike) in the battle for the fortress itself, that would be "their last battle"'. This the United States was not ready to do but, irrespective of the Laniel Administration's threats, Dulles felt that an Anglo-American assurance to help France defend the *remainder* of Indo-China might in fact suffice to keep them in the war. Admiral Radford, who Shuckburgh thought 'not very intelligent ... obviously raring for a scrap'[58], suggested the Churchill Government despatch a number of R.A.F. units from Malaya to Viet-Nam and, if possible, an aircraft carrier. Eden's reaction was blunt: 'had they thought what would be the effect on world opinion and how the Chinese would react? I assumed they had not forgotten the Russo-Chinese alliance. Was it not possible that if we went into Indo-China we should find ourselves fighting Viet Nam [nationalists] as well as Viet Minh, and heading in addition for a world war?'[59]

Later in the day, Dulles presented Bidault with a formal note declaring his readiness to 'proceed with the machinery necessary to obtain special powers for the President to move armed forces into Indo-China'.[60] All now seemed to hinge on the British reaction. Unlike the earlier dispute concerning a coalition when British support, though important, was sought in conjunction with that of at least another eight countries, the approval

of London for immediate intervention in Viet-Nam was considerably more significant given the need for speedy action. By the time a multilateral operation could be devised and executed, Dien Bien Phu might already have succumbed and the related defeatist malaise so feared by Dulles and his advisers taken an unrelinquishable grip on France and Viet-Nam. Eden therefore flew back to London on 24 April for an emergency Cabinet meeting the next day. Reflecting on what had occurred, he felt that Dulles was 'confronting British opinion with as difficult a decision as it would be possible to find', and that the Government would have to 'take a decision of first-class importance, namely whether to tell the Americans that we are prepared to go along with their plan or not'.[67]

In reporting to his Ministerial colleagues and the Chiefs of Staff it was concern about the unpredictable consequences of widening the war which once more dominated Eden's thinking and ultimately impelled him to urge rejection of this latest American initiative. Summarising the position, Eden said that because Congress was more likely to approve intervention if it were on an Anglo-American footing, Dulles wanted to give the French an assurance that Britain and the United States 'would join in the defence of Indo-China against Communist aggression' and, as earnest of this, there should be some 'immediate military assistance, including participation by token British forces'. Eden, however, shared the Chiefs of Staff's view that air and sea action would not be effective in retrieving the military situation in Viet-Nam. Nor did he feel it would restore French or Viet-Namese morale. Moreover, the Cabinet as a whole were convinced that Anglo-American intervention 'was bound to lead to our committing ground forces in this theatre', a prospect which would be anathema to British public opinion (an opinion poll in May 1954 showed 73 per cent of those questioned opposed

to sending British forces to Viet-Nam[62]). There was also a strong suspicion that the Americans might use the issue of Indo-China to drag Britain into a full-scale war with China. Or, more precisely, that the bellicose Radford might do so. It had recently emerged that three weeks earlier the French, on Radford's personal encouragement, had asked the U.S. Government for air support at Dien Bien Phu. This had been turned down, the Administration preferring to act through a coalition, which suggested that Radford's opinion was not decisive in Washington. But his threatening mien still worried the British, especially his views on checking Chinese support for communism in Asia by 'vigorous military action against the Chinese mainland', and his conviction that this could be taken 'without drawing the Soviet Union into the conflict'. Eden rated 'very much more highly' the risks inherent in such an enterprise and argued that 'anything like open war with China might well involve the Soviet Union and lead to a third world war'.

Eden thus recommended that the Cabinet 'decline to give any immediate undertaking to afford military assistance to the French in Indo-China' and to stress to the Americans that the Eden-Dulles *communiqué* of 13 April did not, as Washington fondly supposed, commit Britain to intervention. Importantly, the Geneva Conference was the basic justification for British opposition. In a paper submitted simultaneously for Cabinet approval, Eden argued against undertaking any commitments with regard to military action before Geneva, that France should be given 'all possible diplomatic support' to obtain a settlement once the Conference opened, and that Britain should give no pledges about what it might or might not do should Geneva fail. Yet Eden's sense of realism meant he had no objection to joining with the Americans 'now' in 'studying measures to ensure the

defence of Siam and the rest of South-East Asia including Malaya in the event of all or part of Indo-China being lost'. As for the idea of a South-East Asia defence arrangement, Eden continued to see it in the first instance as a mechanism by which a Geneva agreement might be guaranteed and, in the longer-term, as a platform on which to construct a permanent organisation. Everything, however, depended on success at Geneva and a vital first step in this direction was to ensure that the Americans did not indulge in war-like action in Viet-Nam before the Conference opened. In refusing to be drawn into the war and in giving primacy to Geneva Eden enjoyed the full support of the Cabinet and the Service Chiefs.[63]

Before this decision could be relayed to the French and American Governments, Massigli arrived at the Foreign Office with news which prolonged the drama and required the Cabinet to meet for a second time that day. According to Massigli, the Laniel Administration still believed that Dien Bien Phu could be saved. More importantly (and to the surprise of the British) the Americans, too, seemed to have come round to this view. Earlier in the day the French Ambassador to Washington had been informed by the State Department that an immediate declaration should be issued by the United States, Britain, France, the Philippines and the Associate States proclaiming their joint determination to resist communist expansion in South-East Asia and to use 'eventual military means' to this end. The French were instructed to do 'everything in their power' to bring the British along. Once assured of London's compliance, Eisenhower was ready to go before Congress to request approval for an air strike at Dien Bien Phu, possibly on 28 April.[64] In the Foreign Office, officials were 'furious at being ... used as whipping-boys in this way' in the sense that the Americans had manufactured a situation in which any failure to act

could be portrayed as the sole responsibility of their weak and spineless British partner.[65] The Cabinet and Service Chiefs were equally unimpressed and stuck to their decision to refuse to support or participate in any allied intervention in Viet-Nam. Churchill, speaking for all, said ...

> what we were being asked to do was in effect to aid in misleading Congress into approving a military operation which would itself be ineffective and might well bring the world to the verge of a major war. He had no doubts that this request must be rejected.[66]

As soon as the Cabinet ended Eden left for Geneva for the opening of the Conference. En route he stopped off in Paris where Bidault was informed of the Cabinet's decision. Though disappointed, the French Foreign Minister was not altogether surprised. The news from Dien Bien Phu was slightly better, he said, and there was 'a feeling that the fortress could be held for a little while longer if help were in prospect'. Bidault still hoped that the Americans would agree to an air strike, but he must privately have accepted that the uncompromising position adopted by the British had almost destroyed this likelihood.[67] Eden continued his journey to Geneva where, as soon as he arrived, there was what Shuckburgh described as a 'disagreeable session' with the American delegation led by Dulles.[68] Eden, recapitulating the Cabinet's view, said that 'if an acceptable settlement could be arrived at [at Geneva], we were ready to gurantee it. If the attempt failed, we were prepared to examine that situation. But we were not prepared to intervene now'. For his part Dulles agreed that air action could not save Dien Bien Phu but emphasised that the French would probably 'throw in the sponge' everywhere if there was not some show of Anglo-American solidarity.[69] Thus the question was: would the Americans go ahead without the British? Eden thought it possible, commenting on 26 April that he was 'beginning to think the Americans quite ready to supplant French and

see themselves in the role of liberators of Viet Nam patriotism and expulsors or redeemers of Communist insurgents in Indo-China. If so they are in for a painful awakening'.[70]

Events in London also suggested that British approval might still be decisive. On 26 April, Radford arrived for talks with the British Chiefs of Staff. He argued in favour of 'immediate intervention, coupled with the rapid formation of a coalition' and, like Dulles, saw an air strike at Dien Bien Phu as possessing a psychological rather than military value. Pressed by the British, Radford conceded that ground forces would also have to be used, but that the United States would not provide the latter - the 'majority of land forces would come from Asian countries who had plenty of manpower'. But which Asian countries? Surely not the Viet-Namese army which was woefully deficient in ability and motivation? Irrespective of Radford's disclaimer, the British Chiefs of Staff found it hard to escape the conclusion that the use of Western ground forces would in the end be inevitable if intervention was not to degenerate into a Korean-style stalemate. In this connection, Radford played down the danger of China and its Soviet ally being stung into retaliative action. But even if he was wrong, he said, 'Russia and the Communist bloc are going to get relatively stronger, and ... it was in our interests to take a risk now'. Contrary to the British understanding of Radford's postion, but hardly surprisingly, the Admiral made no reference to using Viet-Nam as a stepping stone to direct action against China.[71]

Radford's mission to persuade the British Government to alter its position proved a signal failure. So too did the visit of an emissary from the French General Staff[72], while a plea from French Premier Laniel to Churchill to fall in with the Americans was also given short shrift.[73]

Despite this, the prospect of a private Churchill-Radford dinner at Chequers on the evening of 26 April had filled the Chiefs of Staff and the British delegation at Geneva with 'the terrors' lest the Prime Minister, in the interest of Anglo-American harmony, agree to Radford's design.[74] In the event these fears proved groundless. Radford spoke of Dien Bien Phu as 'a turning point in history' and that now was 'the critical moment at which to make a stand against China'. But Churchill was not swayed, countering that ...

> The British people would not be easily influenced by what happened in the distant jungles of S. E. Asia; but they did know that there was a powerful American base in East Anglia and that war with China, who would invoke the Sino-Russian Pact, might mean an assault by Hydrogen bombs on these islands. We could not commit ourselves at this moment, when all these matters were about to be discussed at Geneva, to a policy which might lead by slow stages to a catastrophe.

'Good', wrote a relieved Eden on the record of this meeting.[75] Radford was given so little encouragement in London that he returned home 'depressed and disappointed' and, in Makins' opinion, likely to advocate 'going ahead without us but plus the South Koreans, the Formosans and hoc genus omne'.[76] Privately, Eisenhower was even weighing up the advantages of unilateral action. If America's allies 'were going to fall away in any case', he remarked, 'it might be better for the United States to leap over the small obstacles [Viet-Nam] and hit the biggest one [China] with all the power we had'.[77] Meanwhile, in the House of Commons on 27 April, Churchill stated unequivocally that his Government was 'not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indo-China in advance of the results of Geneva', and in what may have been a reference to the Americans, the Prime Minister observed that 'the siege of the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu ... creates a violent tension in many minds at a time when calm judgment is most needed'. It was important, he said, to

keep a 'sense of world proportion'.[78]

However, as April drew to a close it became apparent that Washington had been dissuaded from immediate action in Viet-Nam, at least for the time being. From the American delegation's early handling of the press at Geneva, Makins concluded that 'they are now soft pedalling the possibility and prospects of ... intervention in South East Asia as much as possible'. In Washington, 'the support which was certainly building up for a policy of intervention seems to be ebbing'.[79] How far the British stance was responsible for this is a matter for conjecture.[80] One may contend that Eisenhower and Dulles, by publicly insisting that no action could be taken on a unilateral basis, had made life difficult for themselves once Britain refused to participate, especially in terms of Congressional approval. In this connection, one British authority has argued strongly that the 'major obstacle' to American plans was indeed 'Britain's reluctance to commit itself to possible military action before the outcome of the Geneva Conference was known'.[81] This view is borne out by a telegram from Dulles to the State Department, drafted on his arrival at Geneva on 25 April, in which he said that '[i]mmediate intervention without UK concurrence would gravely strain relations with both UK and Australia and New Zealand, and would make much more difficult future cooperation both Asia and Europe [sic]'.[82] Thus the negative stance of the Churchill Administration would appear to have had some bearing on American decision-making. On the other hand, Eisenhower emphasised at a press conference on 29 April that 'British advice has not affected what the United States should do in any specific instance for giving aid to the French'.[83] Of course the President was unlikely to admit publicly that the attitude of another country had determined his policy one way or another. But it seems equally plausible

that French unwillingness to comply with the condition on unfettered independence for the Associate States was what induced the Eisenhower Administration to leave Dien Bien Phu to its fate for, as Lloyd C. Gardner has observed, this would have been seen in Washington as 'a lesser evil than risking American prestige in support of a lost fortress of colonialism'.[84] Eisenhower certainly implied this in a letter to General Gruenther on 26 April, pointing out that because France had not yet given full and unequivocal independence to the Associate States, any unilateral U.S. intervention would be 'to lay ourselves open to the charge of imperialism and colonialism or - at the very best - of objectionable paternalism'.[85] In this context, Radford's later testimony (which must be treated with some caution) is interesting in that he agreed that the Administration's plans were 'blocked largely by the British' but even if this had not been the case the French themselves might still have opposed intervention because they had 'this terrific fear that we were trying to take Indochina away from them'.[86] Conversely, French resistance might well have sprung from the widespread public and parliamentary desire to be rid of the burden of Indo-China. Internationalising the conflict would have meant France fighting on albeit under different circumstances and for what would have been mainly American objectives.

All of which assumes that the Eisenhower Administration meant what it said about military action. There is, however, a school of thought, created initially by Louis J. Halle and developed by Robert F. Randle and others, that the Administration was actually opposed to intervention in Viet-Nam, but because of its public anti-communist image, it had to give firm evidence of its determination to stem the tide of communist expansionism in Asia or else lose popularity at home. Therefore, by

insisting on 'united action', and in particular on British support which it knew would never be forthcoming (that is, by making the conditions for intervention deliberately impossible to fulfill), the Eisenhower Administration was able to retain its anti-Communist credibility in the eyes of domestic opinion by, ultimately, placing responsibility for a policy of inaction on London.[87] However, Anthony Short's recent exhaustive study of events, based largely on American archival material, has concluded that 'there is too much evidence to permit the more comfortable conclusion that [talk of intervention and united action] was only intended for effect'.[88] Nor is there any evidence that the British believed they were being cynically manipulated. They certainly felt *used* in the sense that the United States had orchestrated the crisis so that a failure to act in Viet-Nam could be blamed on London playing the role of a weak sister. But criticism in the United States was a small price to pay for averting a major disaster. What there is no evidence to suggest is that the British felt they were deterring the Administration from taking action which it never planned to take in the first place, a very different matter altogether.

In the end the important thing from Eden's standpoint was that the prospect of a negotiated settlement, though slim, remained intact as Geneva got underway. A political solution continued to be the best means of ensuring that the issue of intervention did not flare up again in the near future. On 26 April, Makins reported that the 'Americans seem to have been knocked off the idea of immediate intervention at Dien Bien Phu' but added, ominously, that it was 'quite on the cards' that they would at some point decide to press ahead without Britain and construct a collective defence system 'with whatever support they can pick up'. This in turn might be

used as a vehicle for intervention in Viet-Nam and possibly war with China. 'Congressional reaction to a request involving American action without the participation of the United Kingdom cannot be foreseen with certainty', Makins observed. 'But I think it is true that, at the moment, the President is likely to have greater volume of Congressional support for action ... to stop the spread of Communism in South East Asia than for almost any other measure he could propose'.[89] Three days later Makins reported (accurately according to Eisenhower's diary) that the Administration were now 'giving the most serious consideration' to action without Britain.[90] This only reinforced the conviction of Eden and the Foreign Office that at Geneva '[o]ur object should ... be to provide the French with sufficient bargaining power to negotiate a partition settlement', something which would not be served 'by actual military intervention before negotiation'.[91]

The same went for precipitate progress on a defence pact while Geneva was in session. Eden certainly sought a grouping of powers to police any partition line which might be drawn in Viet-Nam in order that the questionable compact which was partition might, through diplomatic alchemy, be transformed into a viable and lasting settlement. But such a grouping was very different to the full-blown pact desired by the Americans, although Eden conceded that the former might, in the future, provide the basis for the latter. The success of Eden's Geneva strategy depended on reaching agreement with the communists first, addressing the question of a guarantee second, and the issue of a regional security pact third. An agreement also depended on more than communist compliance: persuading the Americans to accept any compromise was destined to be an equally difficult problem. With Washington profoundly unhappy about negotiating from

weakness on Viet-Nam and thus prejudiced against Geneva, as well as far from convinced that military action could not yet achieve more than diplomacy, the early portents were not good. Overhanging Anglo-American deliberations at Geneva was a pall of tension caused by divergencies over a defence pact, the London *communiqué* and an air strike at Dien Bien Phu: 'our relations are bad', Shuckburgh recorded on 28 April, 'and we shall have to be very careful'.[92] 'I find it difficult to assess what the Americans have in mind', Eden mused as he settled to his task, 'but it is certainly not, in the first place, the Geneva Conference.'[93]

NOTES

1. *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 88-93; FO 371/109100/17, Makins tel. 164, 10 April 1954; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1625; also Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 46-7.
2. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1196.
3. FO 371/112049/103G, FO memo., 'Policy Towards Indo-China', 31 March; DEFE 4/69 COS(54)36th meeting, 31 March 1954.
4. FO 371/112049/103G, FO memo., 31 March 1954.
5. Avon Papers, AP20/17/15A, Eden letter to Lloyd, 21 May 1954.
6. FO 371/112049/121G, Makins tel. 579, 3 April; verbatim record in FO 371/112050/134G; FO 371/112052/202G, FO brief for Eden, 9 April 1954; see also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 1214-17.
7. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower letter to Churchill, 5 April 1954.
8. FO 371/112050/143G, Eden despatch to Makins & U.S. memo., 6 April 1954
9. FO 371/112052/202G, brief for Eden, 9 April; FO 371/112051/167, Makins tel. 633, 8 April 1954; Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 236-38; Leonard Mosley, *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and their Family Network* (New York 1978), p. 355, hereafter *Dulles*.
10. FO 371/112049/115, Reilly letter to Allen, 31 March; FO 371/112050/133G & 149, Selwyn Lloyd min., 2 April & Reilly tel. 194, 7 April 1954; FO 371/112051/182G, FO tels. to Paris, 741 & 773, 9 & 12 April 1954.
11. On US thinking in this respect see *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 427; Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pps. 1319, 1363; Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 161 (8 April 1954).
12. FO 371/112050/122G, Makins tel. 588, 4 April 1954.
13. FO 371/112051/183, Tahourdin min., 7 April; also CAB 129/67 C(54)134, 7 April 1954
14. CAB 128/27 CC(54)26th meeting, 7 April 1954; CAB 129/67 C(54)134, 7 April 1954.
15. FO 371/112053/230G, MacDonald tel. 176 and Eden min., 16 April 1954.
16. FO 371/112053/223G, Eden tel. 1627 to Washington, 14 April 1954.
17. CAB 128/27 CC(54)26th meeting, 7 April; PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower letter to Churchill, 5 April, Churchill tel. T70/54, 7 April 1954.
18. DEFE 4/69, COS(54)40th meeting, 10 April; FO 371/112051/199, Allen min.

10 April 1954; see also DEFE 4/69, COS(54)36th meeting, 31 March 1954.
19. FO 371/112050/129G, 130G, Makins tels. 595 & 596, 4 & 5 April; FO371/112051/164G Reading min., 7 April. See also FO 371/112052/208G, Whitely (BJSM Washington) to MOD, 8 April 1954.
20. Avon Papers, AP20/17/18A, Makins letter to Eden, 21 May 1954.
21. FO 371/112051/173, 174, 175, Makins tels. 679, 680, 686, 10 April 1954.
22. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, p. 37.
23. Only on 25 April did the Cabinet authorised Eden and the COS to disclose to the Americans 'our military plans for sealing off Malaya against infiltration from the north' and to 'enlist their support for them', CAB 128/68 CC(54)155, 27 April 1954. On 30 April Salisbury, chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Malayan Defence, told Alexander that if Indo-China were lost Britain should 'be ready to move, with the Americans, in Siam', PREM 11/645, Salisbury min. 30 April 1954.
24. FO 371/112054/267G & 268G, record of Anglo-American disucssions, London, 11 & 12 April 1954; see also FO 371/112051/177, Tahourdin min., 7 April; FO 371/112052/202G, FO brief for Eden, 9 April 1954.
25. CAB 130/101, GEN463/1st meeting, record of Ministerial meeting, 10 Downing St., 12 April; FO 371/112054/268G, record of Anglo-American discussion, London, 12 April 1954; also Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 95-98; *communique* in Foliot, ed., *Documents 1954*, pp. 145-46.
26. HCDebs, Vol. 526, cols. 971-74, 13 April 1954.
27. FO 371/112054/252G, FO record of Eden-Dulles meeting, 13 April 1954.
28. FO 371/112053/238G, Eden tel. 1696 to Makins, 19 April 1954.
29. FO 371/112052/202G, CRO memo., 'India and Indo-China', 10 April 1954. Indian influence may have been over-rated, see Anita Inder Singh, 'Britain, India and the Cold War in Indochina, 1954-56' in *South Asia in International Affairs 1947-56* (LSE publication, 1987).
30. See tels. from Indian High Commission (New Delhi) to CRO in FO 371/112051/181 (350, 10 April); FO 371/202G, 229G (348 & 366, 9 & 14 April); FO 371/112053/232G, Eden tel. 614 to Nehru, 16 April 1954. FO 371/112053/232G, Eden tel. 614 to Nehru, 16 April 1954.
31. CAB 128/27 CC(54)28th meeting, 13 April; FO 371/112053/248, Reading min., 13 April; Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 164 (12-13 April 1954).
32. FO 371/112053/232G, Makins tel. 742, 16 April, Eden tel. 1675 to Washington, 17 April 1954.
33. FO 371/112085/1018, Annex A, Eden despatch No. 535 to Washington, 12 June 1954; FO 800/785/18, Eden tel. 1676 to Washington, 17 April 1954.
34. FO 371/112053/238G, Eden tel. 1696 to Washington, 19 April 1954.
35. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 1349-50; FO 371/112053/238G, Makins tel. 754, 18 April 1954.
36. Mosley, *Dulles*, p. 358.
37. FO 371/112059/409G, Makins letter to Kirkpatrick, 21 April; FO 371/112053/238G, Makins tel. 755, 18 April, Eden tel. 1691 to Washington, 19 April 1954; Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 167 (16-19 April 1954).
38. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 138.
39. FO 800/842/59, Makins tel. 1094, 4 June 1954.
40. Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 189 (3 May 1954); US record in *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pps. 1307-15, 1319-23. Among those who pronounce against Eden are Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 59-60 and Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 341-44. Rhodes James, *Eden*, p. 377 comes out, not surprisingly, in Eden's favour. One who sees fault on both sides is Geoffrey Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, pp. 244-47.
41. FO 371/112053/238G, Makins tel. 753, 18 April 1954.

42. FO 371/112059/409G, Kirkpatrick letter to Makins, 30 April 1954.
43. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1322.
44. Ibid, p. 1308.
45. Ibid, pp. 1330-31.
46. Ibid, p. 1313.
47. Ibid, p. 1322.
48. Carlton, *Eden*, p. 340.
49. Ibid, p. 342.
50. See Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 139.
51. FO 371/112052/218, Indian High Commission tels 374 & 376 to CRO, 16 & 17 April 1954; FO 361/112054/256, Nehru tel. 386 to Eden, 20 April 1954; Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 166 (15 April 1954)
52. FO 371/112054/279G, Eden tel. 244, 22 April 1954; FO 371/112057/364, record of Anglo-French-US meeting, Quai d'Orsay, 23 April 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 99.
53. CAB 129/64 C(53)330, 'Policy in the Far East', 24 Nov. 1953.
54. FO 371/112051/197, Allen min., 8 April, Eden min., n.d., 1954. See also FO 371/112052/218, 223, High Commission India tel. 376 to CRO, 17 April, Eden tel. 1627 to Makins, 14 April 1954.
55. For an alternative perspective see Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 132.
56. FO 371/112055/280G, 281G, 282G, Eden tels. 245, 246, 247, 22 April 1954
57. FO 371/112055/305G, Eden tel. 257, 23 April 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 102.
58. Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 172 (24 April 1954).
59. FO 371/112056/314G, Eden tel. 262 to Churchill, 24 April 1954.
60. FO 371/112056/315G, 320G Eden tel. 267, 24 April, Jebb tel. 274, 25 April 1954.
61. FO 371/112056/314G, Eden tel. 262 to Churchill, 24 April; FO 371/112056/315G, Eden tel. 267, 24 April 1954.
62. See Robert Boardman, *Britain and the People's Republic of China 1949-1974* (London 1976), pp. 174-75.
63. CAB 128/27 CC(54)30th and 31st meetings, 28 April and 3 May 1954. CAB 129/68 C(54)155, 27 April (record of Cabinet, 11am, 25 April) 1954. Also Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 104-06; Moran, *Struggle*, p. 571 (28 April 1954). On Radford's dealings with the French see FO 371/112050/159G, Kirkpatrick min., 7 April; FO/112104/50G, Reilly tel. 206, 10 April 1954. Also Warner, *International Affairs* Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 517.
64. FO 371/112056/321G, Eden tel. 275 to Paris, 25 April 1954. The US record tends to confirm this, *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 1403-04.
65. Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 175 (25 April 1954).
66. CAB 129/68 C(54)155, 27 April (record of Cabinet, 4pm, 25 April) 1954.
67. FO 371/112055/308G, Eden tel. 6, 25 April 1954.
68. Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 176 (25 April 1954); *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1401.
69. FO 371/112055/309G, Eden tel. 7, 26 April 1954.
70. FO 371/112056/315G, Eden tel. 9, 26 April 1954.
71. PREM 11/645, Brownjohn min. to Churchill, 26 April 1954.
72. PREM 11/645, Brownjohn min. to Churchill, 27 April; Memo. by Vice COS, 27 April 1954, 'Air Support to French Forces in Indo-China'.
73. FO 800/790/2, Churchill tel. 37 to Eden, 27 April 1954.
74. PREM 11/666, Colville letter to Makins, 28 April 1954.
75. FO 371/112057/360G, Colville min., 26 April 1954.
76. PREM 11/666, Makins letter to Colville, 29 April 1954.
77. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1441.

78. HCDebs Vol. 526, Cols. 1455-56, 27 April 1954.
79. FO 371/112056/334, Makins tel. 807, 26 April and FO 371/112057/350, Makins tel. 825, 28 April 1954. See also FO 371/109100/20, Makins tel. 200, 1 May 1954; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, pp. 38-39.
80. See Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 103-04.
81. Geoffrey Warner, *International Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 3, pp. 517-18. See also George C. Herring & Richard H. Immerman, 'Eisenhower, Dulles and Dienbienphu: "The Day We Didn't Go To War" Revisited', in *Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (1984) p. 353, hereafter Vol. & No.
82. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, pt. 1, pp. 1404-05.
83. Calvocoressi, *Survey 1954*, p. 42.
84. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, p. 247; also Watt, *John Bull*, p. 243
85. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1419.
86. Mosely, *Dulles*, p. 358; see also *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. I, p. 56; Herring & Immerman, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2., p. 363.
87. Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York 1967), p. 297; Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton 1969), pp. 94-101; Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, Chap. 7; G. Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York 1985), pp. 81-82; Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p. 172. In general, Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York 1988).
88. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 136; also Herring & Immerman, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2, p. 363.
89. FO 371/112056/324G, Makins tel. 801, 26 April; also FO 371/112060/437 Makins despatch 207, 3 May 1954.
90. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York 1981), pp. 279-80, (27 April 1954); *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, pp. 1422-23; FO 371/112057/366, Makins tel. 832, 29 April 1954.
91. FO 371/112056/323G, Shuckburgh notes for Eden in Cabinet, 25 April 1954; Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 174 (25 April 1954).
92. Shuckburgh, *Descent To Suez*, p. 180 (28 April 1954).
93. FO 371/112056/326G, Eden tel. 19, 26 April 1954.

PART V: 1954 – ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

April to June 1954

Eden and the British delegation embarked on the Geneva Conference conscious that only a successful political *dénouement* could defuse Indo-China's potential as a catalyst for war between the major powers. By April 1954, the combined facts of Viet-Minh strength and French weakness meant that the maintenance of Laos and Cambodia as independent entities and, in Viet-Nam, partition, was the very best that could be hoped for. One initial difficulty, however, was that partition was virtually a taboo subject on the Western side. The British were reticent about raising it lest they be accused of appeasement.[1] The French were reluctant to do so because it would be a betrayal of the Viet-Namese whose Government resolutely opposed dismemberment and whose territorial integrity had been guaranteed by France.[2] Hence Bidault's promise to Bao Dai that 'France has no intention ... of paving the way for two internationally recognised states, at the expense of Vietnamese unity'.[3] As for the Americans, they had no intention of endorsing any compromise which conceded territory to the Communists.[4] Dulles saw ...

> no possible negotiated solution ... which did not boil down to: (1) a face-saving formula to disguise the surrender of the French Union forces and the subsequent loss of the area to the Communists; or (2) a face-saving formula to cover the retreat of the Viet Minh.[5]

Given the realities of the Viet-Nam problem there was no doubting which scenario Dulles considered the more likely.

The British were consequently reduced to hoping that the Russians, the

Chinese or even the Viet-Minh could be manoeuvred into proposing a 'Palestine' solution of their own volition.[6] Communist objectives, however, were clouded in uncertainty although the Russians had earlier indicated that partition might be acceptable to them.[7] The Viet-Minh, by issuing the *Expressen* 'peace' offer and then stepping-up military operations in the interval between Berlin and Geneva, signalled that a negotiated solution might have some attraction and that it sought to extend its military and political grip on Tonking - and hence its bargaining power - prior to any armistice talks. As for the Chinese, little was known of their thinking or the extent to which they controlled the Viet-Minh although the P.R.C. clearly viewed Geneva as an opportunity to stand up diplomatically as a *de facto* Great Power.[8] Assuming that a partition solution could be effected, the second British objective was to have the demarcation line guaranteed by the principal Western powers in association with the leading states of South-East Asia. This grouping was to have the specific task of policing a settlement. Only in time should it be developed into a more formal regional defence system with a wider relevance. Eden was convinced that this broader design should await the outcome of Geneva: earlier action would antagonise the Chinese, estrange neutral Asian opinion and probably ensure that there was no agreement worth guaranteeing.[9]

These were, generally speaking, the goals which British diplomacy had evolved for Geneva. However, what was always going to be a difficult Conference was rendered doubly so by the unhelpful attitude of Britain's two principal allies. The Laniel Administration, and Foreign Minister Bidault in particular, were prone to vacillation, unable to decide whether war or peace was the correct policy. Whether, that is, it was worth

holding on in Viet-Nam in the hope of active American involvement or facing up to what threatened to be a diplomatic humiliation. The Americans, as a result of their ill-concealed antipathy towards all negotiated solutions, seemed at times determined to undermine Eden's efforts and to be actually working towards the collapse of the Conference by their continued fascination with unilateral or collective military action. A British diplomat closely involved with Indo-China at the time has categorised American behaviour as 'awkward and mischievous throughout'.[10] This if anything is an understatement. 'As there was, prima facie, no settlement in view which would not mean some loss of territory to communist control there was, by the same token, no possibility of an acceptable settlement', writes Anthony Short. 'Thus, even though the US would be present at the negotiations, it would be essentially in the role of an associated power with no responsibility for upholding an agreement nor even for securing one in the first place'.[11] The inference drawn by British policy-makers at the time was that a dangerous American-inspired escalation of the war would be the inevitable consequence of a diplomatic failure at Geneva. This underlined the urgency of obtaining some form of workable agreement with the communists. But during May and June 1954, this seemed possible only at the expense of lasting damage to Anglo-American relations. As Eden confessed on 5 May: 'Position at this conference is about as difficult and dangerous to Western unity as anything I have ever seen'.[12]

To develop the foregoing, the first two weeks of the Geneva Conference were dominated by the question of a Korean political settlement while, behind the scenes, the machinery of negotiation for the Indo-China phase (notably participation and chairmanship) was established. These deliberations took

place against the backdrop of the continuing battle at Dien Bien Phu and in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty as to whether the United States, or a United States-led coalition, might yet intervene in Viet-Nam. Although, as already seen, by the end of April the Americans had opted against immediate action and in favour of a wait-and-see approach both in terms of what Geneva might produce and how the French would react to the loss of Dien Bien Phu, the question of intervention was still very much alive. Dulles made this clear on 1 May when, during a heated discussion, he asked Eden bluntly whether the British were prepared to support action in Indo-China under any circumstances, adding (in a significant shift of emphasis) that he was not asking for any 'material assistance' only 'moral support' for intervention. Eden agreed that this was 'quite a new approach', but because Dulles was unable to spell out exactly what kind of action Britain was being asked to condone and because, in whatever form it took, 'the Chinese themselves would inevitably step up their participation' and 'in all probability' bring about a third world war, the Foreign Secretary was again compelled to rebuff the Americans.[13] 'I am conscious of the effect of our differences over this question upon Anglo-American relations', he informed London on 2 May.

> But I am sure our only wise course is to follow a consistent line. This means we must refuse, pending the outcome of negotiations here, not only to allow ourselves to be drawn into the Indo-China war, but also to promise our moral support for measures of which we do not yet know the full scope.

More positively, Eden was keen to assure the Americans 'that we are eager to work with them in building a collective defence with the widest possible Asian support to guarantee and support whatever settlement can be achieved in Indo-China and to assure the security of the rest of the area'.[14] The following day the Cabinet gave its approval to this approach.[15]

On 3 May Dulles left the Conference never to return. This was widely regarded as further evidence of Washington's lack of enthusiasm for a negotiated settlement. Eden was at first reluctant to see it as such - as far back as Berlin Dulles had said he could only stay at Geneva for a 'few days'.[16] Somewhat later, however, Bedell Smith, in charge of the U.S. delegation in the absence of the Secretary of State, admitted that Dulles's departure was a wrecking tactic and that he had 'confidently expected Molotov and Chou En-lai [the Chinese Premier/Foreign Minister] to follow suit and he had been considerably disappointed when they had not done so'.[17] By that time Eden, too, had concluded that Dulles's action was a 'miscalculation' which had 'failed to produce the effect he anticipated'.[18]

Although Eden subsequently struck up a far closer working relationship with Bedell Smith than he could ever have done with Dulles, it was clear that American policy was being made in Washington and not at Geneva.[19] This was demonstrated early on in the Conference. Following a meeting with Bedell Smith on 3 May designed to establish common ground, Eden asserted that as far as intervention was concerned 'we have now got this affair back on to a realistic basis'. In contrast to Dulles, Bedell Smith appeared to reject direct American action in Viet-Nam whilst the Conference was in session and agreed that a South-East Asian defence grouping should be viewed initially as an adjunct of any compromise hammered out at Geneva. Impressed with this softening of the American position, Eden presented Bedell Smith with a memorandum advocating that the Five Power Staff Agency should begin a study of the implications of 'support for an Indo-China settlement'. The leading Asian nations were to be kept informed of developments, and he suggested issuing a public statement to encourage the French and give them something to fight on for. Bedell Smith undertook to

'do his best' to secure Washington's acceptance of these proposals. Meanwhile, on 5 May, Eden's initiative was endorsed by the Cabinet in London and the British Military planners got down to work.[20]

These military talks were, from Eden's viewpoint, quite distinct from the American project for a South-East Asian defence pact - a limited exercise without commitment 'to assist us in assessing what might be involved both militarily and otherwise in guaranteeing any settlement that might be reached'. It would also 'be useful in considering implications if after all no settlement could be arrived at'.[21] To Eden's surprise, however, Bedell Smith, having consulted Washington, returned to say that his Government was now unhappy about examining measures to 'support' a settlement in case this committed them to uphold an agreement they disliked. After lengthy discussion (during which Eden felt he had 'gone as far as I can to meet [the Americans] & maybe too far'[22]) this hurdle was overcome and agreement reached that the five-power military talks should be a *preliminary* discussion of 'measures to promote a stable peace in South-East Asia'.[23]

But this still failed to settle the matter. On 11 May it emerged that the Americans now wished the military talks to proceed simultaneously with formal negotiations between the states interested in constructing a defence pact.[24] This news dismayed Eden whose Geneva strategy rested on keeping this last matter largely under wraps until the Conference was over.[25] As ever, it was the need to avoid alienating neutral Asian opinion which influenced Eden. Through his efforts to keep India and the other leading Asian states informed, the Colombo Conference had concluded with a *communiqué* which, if it did not portend fulsome support for a South-East Asian defence pact, did at least suggest that the five Colombo powers would

play their part in guaranteeing any Geneva agreement.[26] Now, however, all this stood to be destroyed by Washington's insistence on immediate negotiations on a defence system involving the five Western powers and the five 'suspect' regimes of Siam, the Philippines and Indo-China, 'a white man's pact imposed from the outside and robbed of popular support'. Eden's 'strong view' remained that 'it would be fatal at this stage to begin discussion with a ten-Power group ... To do this before the results of the conference are known would destroy any prospect of bringing along the Asian powers who really matter'.[27] In the end Eden won his point in Washington and progress towards a formal defence arrangement was delayed once more.[28] But the episode was a reminder to the British that Bedell Smith's personal views could not always be taken as representative of Administration opinion.

By the same token, an assurance by Bedell Smith that the United States would not consider intervening militarily in Viet-Nam while the Conference was sitting and his insistence that American ground forces would only be deployed 'over his dead body', could not be taken as immutable statements of intent.[29] Indeed during the first fortnight at Geneva the issue of intervention overhung all discussion. Then, on 7 May, came news that the garrison at Dien Bien Phu had at last succumbed.[30] This in itself did not lead to renewed American demands for military action. The disease of defeatism so feared in Washington was never going to grip the French body politic overnight. Sir Gladwyn Jebb, the new Ambassador to Paris, observed on 8 May that 'the fall of the fortress has had for the moment a salutary effect on a considerable section of French public opinion' and that those who might have been tempted to advocate peace at any price were deterred by 'the thought that they might be accused of ... betraying the

heroic members of the garrison'. But Jebb doubted whether this mood would persist.[31] In Washington, Dulles greeted the Viet-Minh victory by publicly declaring that 'present conditions' did not provide 'a suitable basis for the United States to participate with its armed forces'.[32] Although in private Dulles told the New Zealand Ambassador that the use of American forces had not been completely rejected, the latter concluded that Dulles believed 'the moment for intervention to save Viet-Nam had gone'.[33] Reassuring as this was for the British at Geneva, there was little doubt that an apposite 'moment' for intervention might yet occur.

There were a number of ways in which the issue of intervention might resurface. One was the failure of Geneva to produce a political solution thereby removing a major obstacle to military action by the United States. A second was that the Laniel Administration, under pressure from public opinion in France, would agree to terms at Geneva (partition for example) which Washington could not accept.[34] To pre-empt this the Americans might seek to keep the war going on an international basis. Finally, there was the possibility that the Viet-Minh might tighten its grip on northern and central Viet-Nam at the expense of a defeatist native population (a 'spineless people headed by a flabby octopus' in Graves's barbed phraseology[35]), a disintegrating Viet-Namese army and a demoralised French Expeditionary Corps. In the event it was this latter scenario which, by materialising, rekindled the flames of intervention.

In the absence of a cease-fire agreement at Geneva which might have frozen the post-Dien Bien Phu military configuration, and defying the onset of the rains, the Viet-Minh turned its attention to the Tonking Delta and Hanoi where the French and Viet-Namese defenders, already struggling to combat rebel infiltration and subversion and weakened by the loss of those

men allocated to Dien Bien Phu, now faced 'General Giap's victorious army, rather less mangled by its casualties than the French reports had suggested, elated by victory and much better equipped with Chinese aid and the captured weapons of the fortress than they had ever been before'.[36] By the beginning of June Giap's forces had reached the periphery of the Delta and, by the middle of the month, appeared ready to launch a major assault on Hanoi, the administrative capital of Tonking and a prize far exceeding that of Dien Bien Phu - the 'Berlin of Southeast Asia' as de Lattre had called it.[37] The mounting Viet-Minh threat emphasised to the British at Geneva the continued importance of securing some measure of success. A negotiated settlement preceded by an cease-fire would stem the Viet-Minh tide. It would also deter the Americans from embarking on pre-emptive military action and, by extension, reduce the risk of major war with China and the Soviet Union. Harold Caccia, a close *confidénte* of Eden, thought that the Viet-Minh would be 'playing with world war III if they try to take too much advantage of their temporary military position in Indo-China'.[38]

Unfortunately for Eden's strategy, even a modest measure of success at Geneva seemed remote in the weeks following the fall of Dien Bien Phu. After the commencement of formal discussions on Indo-China on 8 May there had been deceptively easy agreement on procedural issues: for example, chairmanship (in which capacity Eden and Molotov were to alternate) and participation (nine parties were involved - Britain, France, the United States, China, the Soviet Union, Laos, Cambodia, Viet-Nam and the Viet-Minh).[39] But difficulties soon arose concerning the provisions for a possible cease-fire and the composition of a body to supervise it. Another problem was the principle of separate treatment for Laos and Cambodia. The communists wanted blanket agreements covering all three Associate States

while the Western powers maintained that the situation in Viet-Nam was the sole issue in question: the 'civil war' there was different to the situation in Laos and Cambodia, independent states which had been invaded by the Viet-Minh which should, in consequence, withdraw its forces.[40] Deadlock on all these issues persisted during May and early June. Nothing could be done about a final substantive political settlement until agreement was reached on these preliminary matters. And what little progress was made was often diminished by the spoiling tactics of the Americans. For example, at the end of May, Eden, after considerable effort, managed to get the French and Viet-Minh Commands to meet each other via representatives at Geneva and on the spot in Viet-Nam in order to discuss the ground-rules for an armistice. This was a significant if unspectacular step forward, yet Bedell Smith, who had supported Eden in private, refused to make any comment to the press, a reticence the British thought certain to 'reduce the public effect of our agreement'. Eden concluded that the 'truth seems to be that the Americans are mortally afraid of any agreement, however innocuous, reached with the Communists'.[41]

British unhappiness was accentuated by simultaneous indications that Washington was once more attempting to prepare the way for intervention in Viet-Nam. On 15 May Makins warned that 'in the Pentagon the army view as well as that of Radford now is that American military intervention is necessary'.[42] The same day, Eden learnt through a Swiss newspaper report that the French and American Governments had been engaged since 10 May in secret discussions about the conditions under which the latter might enter the war. When confronted by an angry Eden, Bedell Smith denied everything. The French, however, were more forthcoming, revealing that the Americans had decided upon certain pre-conditions for action (the American record

suggests that the French asked the U.S. Government to state its terms for intervention[43]). If these were met, Eisenhower was ready to go before Congress to seek approval for military intervention in the event of Geneva coming to nothing or, before then, if the authorities in Paris requested immediate assistance. The French said that Eisenhower 'clearly hoped' there would be an early invitation. Among the American conditions were the concurrence - 'if possible' - of the British, full independence for the Associate States including the right to secede from the French Union, and a French undertaking to maintain its war effort at a set proportion of the American effort, thus ensuring that any increase in the latter would not be matched by a relative decrease in the former. The French Government was considering its response.[44]

Armed with this information, Eden again approached Bedell Smith who this time confirmed what the French had said. He was visibly upset that Eden had been kept in the dark and, in an attempt to make amends, revealed the contents of two confidential telegrams from Washington. These underlined the extent of Franco-American collusion and indicated that 'the intention was that we should not be informed of [the discussions] until they had been concluded'.[45] In other words, the British were to be presented with a *fait accompli* with regard to intervention. Bedell Smith's disclaimer that the form of intervention under discussion was limited to holding the position during the time it took the Viet-Namese army to become strong enough to assume the defence of Viet-Nam unaided did not impress Eden nor alter the fact that 'this new talk of intervention will have weakened what chances remain at this conference'. In the Foreign Secretary's opinion, the 'Chinese, and to a lesser extent the Russians, have all along suspected that the Americans intend to intervene in Indo-

China whatever arrangements we try to arrive at here'. The British had been assured earlier by Dulles and Bedell Smith that Admiral Radford's strident opinions did not reflect the general view in Washington. Now, however, Eden thought that 'the Radford policy has won through. Perhaps Dulles has been supporting it all the time'.[46] Eden wrote to Salisbury in similar vein on 16 May. 'You know that Radford's policy has for some time been intervention in Indo-China, and in China too. Some aspects of American policy are only comprehensible to me if that view is held by others in addition to Radford'. This conviction was bolstered by the fact that the Americans had 'never really put their weight behind this conference and made an effort to get an agreement'.[47] Three days later, unknown to the British, Dulles drew up a draft Congressional resolution authorising the President to send air and naval forces to Indo-China if invited to do so by the French.[48] On 21 May, Dulles informed the U.S. Embassy in Paris that 'we would not exclude sending some marines, if this made military sense'.[49] Although the Congressional resolution was never tabled, these developments suggest that intervention was still a serious option in Washington and that Eden's complaints and misgivings were entirely justified.

With the American Ambassador to Paris due to meet Laniel and in search of a 'definitive answer'[50], the future of Eden's strategy at Geneva, as well as the Conference itself, seemed to rest on the French reaction to Washington's conditions. The early signs were not encouraging. According to the Americans, Laniel approved the intention to proceed with or without Britain, and had apparently requested American intervention with M.I.G. fighters, artillery and 'if possible marines': in other words, action of the most provocative nature.[51] To Eden's relief, however, the sting was quickly taken out of this latest crisis when the State Department admitted

that even if the French agreed to the conditions, the 'next steps have not been thought through' and that it was probable that wider allied support would be sought.[52] Eden was further assuaged when Bidault asserted that there was 'no question' of his Government asking the United States for help before the Conference ended. If, that was, it asked at all. The conditions relating to Indo-China's status in the French Union and the maintenance of the French war effort at a set level were likely to cause problems in the National Assembly. The French delegation at Geneva did not expect their Government to give Washington an answer either way for two weeks. Eden was sufficiently satisfied by this news and, more generally, by 'some relaxation of Anglo-American tension', to consent to British participation in the projected five-power military talks on South-East Asian defence which, when this 'disconcerting incident' had first broken, he had placed on hold.[53] These - secret - talks were now due to open in Washington in June with Chiefs of Staff representation.[54]

From the British standpoint, welcome as Bidault's assurances were, they could not be relied upon, and a breakthrough at Geneva remained the surest way of avoiding a wider war. As Eden had earlier warned Molotov ...

> If the Indo-China situation was not effectively handled here there was real danger that the supporters of each side would go on increasing the degree of their participation until finally there was a clash between them, and if that happened it might well be the beginning of the third world war.

Although this was partly a gambit to ensure the Soviet Government's good offices with regard to a diplomatic solution, it still constituted a fairly accurate expression of Eden's attitude. Indeed Eden's frankness in his dealings with Molotov, as well as his readiness to admit to divisions in the Western camp, caused his advisers some disquiet.[55]

Eden's preoccupation with the worrying American-engendered military

consequences of diplomatic failure at Geneva, and the extent to which his policy at the Conference reflected this concern, was explicitly stated in a letter to his wife on 22 May. 'It is still even money we may reach an armistice', he wrote. 'I am more than ever convinced of dangers of 3rd world war if we don't'.[56] Two days later he returned briefly to London where he explained his fears to the Cabinet. Although the chances of agreement were now only 'fair', Eden was still determined to pursue this objective because he was 'gravely concerned about the dangers of the alternative courses of action which the United States Government were likely to favour if a settlement were not now secured by negotiation' and because many leading Americans considered that 'this was the moment to challenge the ambitions of Communist China, if necessary by force'.[57] This concern heightened on his return to Geneva. In a personal letter on 29 May, Ambassador Makins warned that 'we are approaching another dangerous corner' for it now seemed 'likely' that the French would accede to the American criteria for intervention. The catalyst was the steadily deteriorating position in Tonking. Makins concluded that 'the situation is quite likely to get out of hand if some agreement is not reached within ten days or a fortnight'.[58] The same day, Eden was informed by Jebb that full Franco-American agreement had been reached on the 'despatch of American marine divisions to Indo-China', a decision which, if true, Eden considered 'dynamite'.[59] Although the French and Americans had been discussing this behind the backs of the British for some time, negotiations were not as advanced as Jebb suggested and intervention still depended on French acceptance of U.S. conditions, something that was far from certain.[60] Jebb's report nevertheless contained some truth and contributed to an

ascending spiral of rumour and tension. This was added to on 4 June when Graves reported from Saigon that the initiative was ...

> firmly held by Viet Minh in all parts of the country. If enemy attacks in latter half of June it is extremely doubtful whether Hanoi can be held. If Hanoi falls the blow to the prestige of the Western Powers will be felt throughout Asia.[61]

Graves was voicing not just a personal opinion but a widely held fear in Viet-Nam, Paris and Washington.[62] Navarre had earlier declared that there should either be agreement at Geneva by 15 June or the Conference should break up thereby freeing the Western powers to take the necessary action to save Tonking.[63] All the signs thus pointed to a fresh crisis in mid-June. Jebb concluded that if all that American or American-led action did was to bring about Chinese intervention, the situation would be one in which the 'operation could well be successful but the patiant die'.[64] Jean Chauvel, a leading member of the French delegation, told the British that latest reports from Washington suggested that Dulles was like 'a man who had been bitten by a mosquito' and that he appeared 'determined on action of some kind'.[65] Eden thought the American 'war party' was looking 'very powerful ... It is all grim & disheartening'.[66]

Eden thus found himself working to a time limit. Or, as a French official at Geneva depicted it, a 'race between war and peace'.[67] But just when success at Geneva as an antidote to internationalisation was more urgent than ever, such success had never appeared more remote with no apparent way round the impasse on which negotiations had been stalled for nearly a month.[68] The Viet-Minh had been inflexible, certainly, but then why should it have been anything else when, militarily-speaking, it seemd poised to extend control over most of Viet-Nam? Eden was arguably more disappointed with the Americans for enveloping the negotiations in a

threatening cloud of uncertainty over intervention, for refusing to countenence the slightest compromise, and for working surrepticiously to undermine the work of the Conference.[69] On 1 June, a troubled Foreign Secretary sent a telegram to Churchill urging that a planned visit by the two men to Washington on 18 June be postponed. His reasoning provides a telling indictment of the American attitude ...

> There is only too much evidence here that the main American concern is not now, if it has ever been, for the success of the conference, but with preparations for intervention ... [T]he result may be that we would arrive in Washington just when the French were in grievous trouble and the American desire to intervene at its height. The call for us to take part in such an adventure would be intensified and the strain on Anglo-American relations, when we had to decline, could be all the worse'.

It was, Eden lamented, 'the most troubled international scene I can ever recall'.[70] The following day he confided to his wife: 'I am struggling with the world's ills'.[71]

On 5 June, Eden, again in London to address the Cabinet, felt that the chances of a favourable outcome at Geneva had dwindled. A major hindrance continued to be the American delegation which was 'operating under close instructions from Washington, where there now seemed to be no desire to see a successful outcome from the negotiations ... It was evident that influential sections of opinion in Washington were now interested only in the question of military intervention in South-East Asia'. The French, too, were causing difficulties, unable to decide what kind of political solution, if any, they could accept. Eden nonetheless ended his report in upbeat mood, encouraged by indications that the U.S. Government now considered 'unprovoked military aggression' by China as the only justification for intervention. Since the British had long since dismissed this as a likely scenario, Eden concluded that the Americans 'now seemed to

be seeking to relate the political pressures for military intervention in Indo-China to a situation which was most unlikely to arise in practice'.[72] In his diary, Eden noted Makins's conclusion that 'Radford ... and other interventionists, probably including Dulles, have had a setback'.[73]

Although Dulles appeared to confirm the new thrust of American policy at a press conference on 8 June[74], misgivings about future American intentions were banking up again in British circles. On 4 June, Harding, in Washington, was told by Radford that the choice still lay between 'full scale intervention aimed at defeating the Vietminh forces in the field' and a steady deterioration in the situation 'resulting in the loss of the whole of Vietnam to the Communists'. When Harding suggested a middle course - a political solution, possibly partition - Radford was unimpressed, maintaining that the effect on French and Viet-Namese morale would make it impossible to create a stable independent state in the south.[75] Eden's confidence in the new-found sagacity of American thinking also proved transitory. By 15 June he was warning the Prime Minister that the U.S. delegation at Geneva 'appear to be building up to a situation in which they will discuss nothing ... with the Chinese. This can only lead to war'.[76]

Despite these concerns, and irrespective of the boost it would give the intervention lobby in Washington, from the start of June Eden had begun to face the possibility that his efforts at Geneva had been to no avail and to turn his attention to how the Conference might be brought to a swift and painless end.[77] As seen, deadlock at Geneva had been matched in Viet-Nam by Viet-Minh military advances, a situation which Salisbury felt made Eden 'look ridiculous, talking to Molotov and Chou En-lai while the French are being chased out of Indo-China'.[78] This had no doubt occurred to the Foreign Secretary who must have been keen to avoid any lasting damage to

his reputation as an international statesman, particularly in view of his need to maintain support within the Conservative Party for his claim to the Premiership when Churchill stood down. Dulles personally believed Eden was 'treading water' at Geneva, and 'playing a cagey game, so as not to upset his succeeding Churchill'.[79] Yet Eden was already in a hapless position. Because Geneva had come to be seen very much as Eden's Conference, both in Britain and the United States, its failure must perforce reflect badly on him personally. In the United States in particular Eden was aware that he would be criticised whatever happened. A negotiated settlement would leave him tarred with the brush of appeasement. Failure would leave him open to charges that he had used the prospect of an always unrealisable peace to prevent the Americans acting decisively in Viet-Nam in April or, equally, that he had allowed an obviously hopeless conference to drag on too long and, through his failure to secure an armistice, to permit the Viet-Minh to create a position in Tonking from which to seriously endanger Hanoi and possibly the whole of Indo-China.[80] It was this last factor which persuaded the Foreign Office, as well as the Prime Minister, that it might be as well to curtail the talks.[81] But even this was no simple matter given the importance of demonstrating to world opinion that it was the communists who were responsible for the breakdown.[82] Any hint that the West, and Britain in particular, was to blame would, Churchill warned, allow the Viet-Minh with greater justification to 'ensure the doom of Hanoi'. In which case the Prime Minister feared that 'you [Eden] or we may be charged with having been sucked in by very obvious manoeuvres'.[83]

Eden, however, was already satisfied by 9 June that a point had been reached 'where there are three definite issues on which the conference is divided [the means of supervising an armistice agreement, composition of a

supervising authority, separate treatment for Laos and Cambodia] ... if we have to break, these are clear issues which world opinion will be able to understand'[84]. The following day Eden made a statement at Geneva to all delegations emphasising that 'if the positions remain as they are today, then it is our clear duty to say so to the world, and to admit that we have failed'.[85] 'Rather to my surprise', he wrote to his wife on 11 June, 'it seems to have shaken the Communists' but, four days later, he was forced to admit that the Conference was 'nearer to breakdown than it had ever been'.[86] Worryingly, American intervention also seemed closer than at any point since April although Paris had still to give Washington a final decision regarding the conditions for action.[87] Bedell Smith spoke of reports that the French were actually preparing to evacuate the whole of Viet-Nam and that 'only the presence of American ground forces could restore the position'. Eisenhower had also sent him a telegram urging that the Conference be brought to a rapid conclusion so that a line could be drawn in South-East Asia and the Communists told 'thus far and no further'. The President apparently argued that because the British would not agree to joint action while Geneva was in session, this was an added incentive to wind things down.[88]

Eden read the worst into these developments, telling Churchill again that it was 'perfectly clear that we shall be asked, when in Washington, to discuss the possibility of intervention in Viet-Nam' and implying that the visit should be postponed.[89] In fact it had already been put back a week to 25 June and Churchill, keen to talk to Eisenhower about *détente* with Moscow, problems in Egypt and the Hydrogen bomb, would brook no further delay.[90] Besides, if things were as bleak as Eden said, Churchill was 'sure a meeting between us and the President could not occur at a more

opportune and even vital moment'.[91] The Prime Minister was much troubled by Anglo-American disagreements over Indo-China and feared that they might cause permanent ill-feeling. Hence he relished the chance to restore relations.[92]

But then, suddenly and dramatically, a combination of developments transformed the atmosphere at Geneva, converting British gloom into cautious optimism. On 15 June, Molotov came to Eden with some minor concessions on the issue of an armistice supervisory commission which 'at least indicated that he still had an interest in reaching agreement'.[93] The following day, a more substantive concession was made when, for the first time, Chou En-lai intimated that Laos and Cambodia were indeed separate issues and should be treated accordingly. As long as there were no American military bases in either country, and some accommodation could be reached with the indigenous communist resistance movements, China might be prepared to recognise the existing royal governments. Eden gained the strong impression that 'the man spoke and acted as though he wanted agreement'.[94] On the evidence of this meeting and a subsequent one between Bidault and Chou, Eden decided to delay his departure from Geneva although a protracted stay was still out of the question.[95] Arrangements were made for the Conference to continue on an inter-delegation basis in the absence of the Foreign Ministers. If the new communist attitude did indeed herald a breakthrough it could be fully tested at this lower level and, after perhaps a fortnight, the Foreign Ministers could assess whether it was worth their while returning. The Franco-Viet Minh military talks on Viet-Nam were subsequently widened to examine 'questions relating to the cessation of hostilities in Laos and Cambodia' despite a last minute attempt by the American delegation to hinder progress by what Eden

described as a 'clumsy and abrupt ... wrecking speech'. The Foreign Secretary was congratulated by Churchill on having 'turned war into jaw'.[96]

In Washington, meanwhile, the Five Power Staff talks on South-East Asia had finally opened (3-11 June). The terms of reference under which the Military experts worked were far removed from those which Eden had originally envisaged, namely to discuss the means by which an Indo-China settlement might be guaranteed. Instead, because of American concern to avoid a situation in which they might be committed to upholding a political solution which they disliked, the focus was on planning to 'recommend possible courses of [military] action to enable an effective line of resistance to further Communist aggression or infiltration in South-East Asia to be established'.[97] Three possible courses of action emerged: French reinforcement of the Tonking Delta, intervention by allied forces with a view to defeating the Viet-Minh (this was expected to run a 'grave risk of war with China'), or French evacuation of the Delta. If nothing were done the British Chiefs of Staff felt it was 'almost certain that the French will be faced with a major disaster in the Tonkging Delta in September or early October'.[98]

So far as Eden was concerned, these talks had been unsatisfactory in that they concentrated on planning for continued war rather than peace although he clearly saw the value of making contingency plans should Geneva fail. But there was one compensation in the shape of the reasoning offered by the British Service Chiefs for giving serious consideration to evacuating the Delta. 'Although the retention of the Tongking Delta is of the greatest importance to the defence of South-East Asia as a whole', they argued, 'its loss should not automatically result in the loss of South-East

Asia to Communism'. This was an important refinement of the British version of the domino theory which hitherto had not only regarded Indo-China as the strategic key to South-East Asia, but Tonking as the key to the defence of Indo-China. What the Chiefs of Staff did, therefore, was to lend further implicit support to the pursuit of a compromise at Geneva based on partition.[99] They also reflected what Eden himself had come to think. As he wrote to Selwyn Lloyd on 21 May, 'I do not personally agree with the people who suggest that if Indo-China were to go, Siam, Malaya etc., must be indefensible. They would obviously be much more difficult to defend, but that is not in itself a reason for intervening in Indo-China'.[100] How genuinely Eden believed this is difficult to tell. The domino theory had, after all, gone unquestioned until the spring of 1954. Perhaps to have admitted that its precepts still held good would have cast doubt on the wisdom and propriety of compromise in Viet-Nam. By rejecting some of the hitherto sacrosanct tenets of the domino theory, however, the British could pursue a compromise in Viet-Nam without leaving themselves open to charges - from Washington in particular - of moral cowardice. For, in truth, the Churchill Administration had taken a firm decision that Indo-China, and South-East Asia, important though they were, were not worth risking a world war to preserve.

Significant as these developments were in reviving the prospect of a settlement at Geneva, the most important advance of all occurred in Paris. On 12 June the Laniel Administration had fallen.[101] It had been living on borrowed time since the loss of Dien Bien Phu. Although Laniel had been the first French Premier to 'recognise the inevitable and admit willingness to make a negotiated peace on specified terms'[102], the actions of his Government since April, particularly its efforts to secure American

intervention, cast doubt on the sincerity of its commitment to peace. It is probably fair to say that Laniel and his Ministers were genuine in their desire for peace, but quite incapable of accepting a humilation for France at the conference table. Thus they procrastinated at Geneva, Bidault being the personification of this uncertainty. In the meantime the war had to continue on a French and French Union basis. This was clearly not good enough for public or parliamentary opinion and Laniel's coalition was defeated on a motion of no confidence.[103] Ironically, as recently as May, Dulles had spoken of U.S. intervention in Viet-Nam as a means of sustaining the life of Laniel's Administration.[104]

On 18 June a new French Government was formed by the Radical Deputy, Pierre Mendès-France. 'This is on the whole encouraging news', Eden wrote in his dairy, 'for Bidault had really dithered long enough, and for a month or two at any rate a new government would be willing to take decisions'.[105] One of the Laniel Cabinet's sternest critics, and a long-time advocate of a negotiated solution, Mendès-France, in securing a majority in the National Assembly, told the French nation what it wanted to hear: he would seek a cease-fire in Indo-China within four weeks or resign. In pursuit of this objective he would personally lead the French delegation at Geneva.[106] No political grouping capable of forming a government had previously had the courage to commit itself unequivocally to peace and accept the 'disgrace' of having to negotiate what amounted to surrender terms in Viet-Nam. Such an undertaking, despite initial popular appeal, might be later used as a weapon by parliamentary opponents. Mendès-France, very much a political loner with no firm party alleigance, laboured under no such constraints. As Eden recollected, Mendès-France 'was the man for the short lap'.[107]

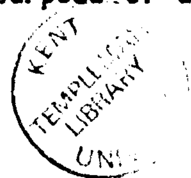
Bidault's desultory approach at Geneva had given rise to the suspicion

that he was 'consciously playing for a failure ... in the belief that, confronted with such a failure, the Americans will arrive in force [in Viet-Nam], in which case he could be representated as the saviour of the country'.[108] At the end of May, some members of the French delegation admitted that Bidault was 'convinced with his mind' that a negotiated settlement was necessary but found it 'temperamentally distasteful'. Eden was 'somewhat reassured' by this that the Frenchman 'still has an aim at this Conference', but in truth Bidualt was a major hindrance to Eden's objectives.[109] This was all the more apparent when, in mid-June, the Viet-Minh, possibly under pressure from the Chinese and the Soviets and unknown to the Viet-Namese delegation, hinted during secret back-channel military talks with the French that some form of partition of Viet-Nam might be acceptable to them.[110] Relieved that it was the communists who first officially aired this idea, a number of eminent French military and diplomatic figures at Geneva were quick to indicate their enthusiasm. One such was Chauvel although he admitted that he was 'still having great difficulty in persuading M. Bidault to face the prospect'.[111]

The emergence of Mendès-France in the dual role of French Premier and Foreign Minister was thus welcomed by Eden, the more so since it followed so closely on signals from the Soviet, Chinese and Viet-Minh camps that progress might at last be made on the issues which, just a few days earlier, seemed certain to condemn the Conference to failure. Eden wasted no time in meeting Mendès-France. Leaving the Geneva Conference on 20 June to operate as arranged on an inter-delegation level, Eden stopped off for talks in Paris on his way back to London. The two men immediately established a personal and professional rapport which, by the end of their meeting, had produced a firm Anglo-French front in favour of peace at

Geneva and, by implication, directed against the U.S. Government and its *penchant* for spoiling tactics. Mendès-France stressed that he was no neutralist (a widespread allegation made by his opponents) and that he had no wish to endanger the Western Alliance, but it had to be made clear to Washington that France was not willing to continue the war and was committed to negotiating peace. To this end, he wished to meet with Chou En-lai but confided that he was 'nervous about the reactions of the Americans'. Eden agreed that such a meeting was a vital pre-requisite to progress, adding that if it were 'made conditional on American consent it would never take place since the Americans were bound to advise against it'. Eden therefore argued against giving Washington any say in the matter. Mendès-France was also encouraged to think in terms of a direct meeting with a representative of the Viet-Minh, something which Bidault had studiously avoided during his time at Geneva. On the subject of a final political settlement, Eden suggested that partition of Viet-Nam might be the best solution although - and here he was still wary of admitting to the fatherhood of partition despite recent Viet-Minh overtures - it was 'not for him to advise the French'[112]

Peace was back on the agenda and Eden's return to Geneva assured. Before then, however, there was a visit to the United States to be undertaken. This threatened to be an unpleasant mission. Differences concerning Indo-China since the end of March had fused with continuing tension over atomic policy, Europe and Egypt to produce 'greater Anglo-American friction than for years' and Churchill welcomed the trip as an opportunity to rebuild relations.[113] How successful it would be in this respect was another matter. A wide gap existed over the timing, membership and purpose of a



defence pact for South-East Asia. There was also great uncertainty about American intentions in the event of a Viet-Minh offensive in Tonking. Finally, there was the issue of the American attitude to an agreement with the communists at Geneva. This was all the more relevant now that partition was being discussed by both sides. However, the signs were that this, too, would be a source of Anglo-American disunity. Bedell Smith, in taking leave of Eden at Geneva, had said that 'if the French bargained away the [Tonking] Delta and agreed to straight partition the United States Government would not give such a settlement their support'. Bedell Smith accepted that Hanoi might well have to be evacuated, but dismissed the arguments of France's 'intellectual generals' that the rest of the Delta would have to be relinquished as well.'[114]

Eden found it hard to decide whether the American was encouraging the French to drive a hard bargain or whether it was a firm statement of American policy. 'If the latter then the position might be serious', he reflected. Bedell Smith seemed to be 'clinging to the hope that Haiphong [the main port of Tonking] might be held as a bridgehead for an eventual attempt to recover northern Indo-China'.[115] This issue arose again in Eden's meeting with Mèndes-France on 20 June, by which time the British Foreign Secretary thought it was 'quite clear' that 'the Americans would be opposed to any arrangement which could be come to with the other side as regards Indo-China generally. The best that could be hoped for was that they would do nothing to prevent it or to cause it to break down once it had been achieved'.[116] Given this, Eden might be forgiven for wishing that the removal of an obstructionist French Foreign Minister had been matched by the departure of a similar impediment in Washington.

NOTES

1. FO 371/112059/401, Jebb tel. 305, 3 May, Cloake min., 4 May; FO 371/12062/484, Eden tel. 329 to Swinton, 11 May; DEFE 4/70, COS(54)68th meeting, 8 June 1954.
2. FO 371/112049/95, Reilly letter to Tahourdin, 25 March; FO 371/112039/51, Jebb tel. 286, 27 April, Cloake min., 29 April; FO 371/112058/378G, Eden tel., 30 April; FO 371/112059/411, Jebb tel. 304, 3 May; FO 371/112059/418G, Harding tel. to WO, 29 April, Paterson min., 30 April 1954. See also Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 110; Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p. 176.
3. Dalloz, ibid.
4. See Chap. 12, *passim*.
5. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 1226.
6. The phrase is Jebb's: FO 371/112069/635G, letter to Eden, 29 May 1954.
7. See p. 226.
8. John Gittings, *The World and China 1922-72* (London 1974), pp. 192-95, hereafter *The World and China*.
9. FO 371/112058/374G, Eden tel. 87, 30 April, enclosing text of memo. given to Dulles; CAB 128/27 CC(54)35th meeting, 24 May 1954; FO 800/785/30, Lloyd tel. 202 to Eden, 5 May 1954.
10. Mr R. A. Burrows, interview, 24 Oct. 1988.
11. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 148.
12. Avon Papers, AP20/17/35A, Eden tel. 144 to Churchill, 5 May 1954.
13. FO 371/112058/379G, Eden tel. 110, 2 May 1954.
14. FO 371/112068/379G, Eden tel. 113, 2 May 1954.
15. CAB 128/27, CC(54)31st meeting, 3 May 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 114.
16. PREM 11/666, Eden tel. 266, 13 May; FO 371/112051/166, Makins letter to Eden, 29 March, Cable min., 2 April 1954.
17. FO 371/112073/727G, Eden tel. 770, 17 June 1954.
18. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 586 (24 June 1954).
19. On the tense nature of Eden's relations with Dulles at Geneva see Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pps. 185 (30 April) and 186 (1 May); FO 371/112064/522G, Makins letter to Kirkpatrick, 6 May 1954.
20. FO 371/112059/416G, Eden tels. 137 & 138, 4 May; CAB 128/27 CC(54)32nd meeting, 5 May; DEFE 6/25 JP(54)46(Final), 10 May 1954 See also Shuck-burgh, *Descent to Suez*, pps. 190 (3 May) and 190-91 (4 May 1954).
21. FO 371/112061/470G, Eden tels. 175 to Swinton and 176 to PMs of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, 7 May 1954; FO 371/112062/483, UK High Commission New Delhi to CRO tel. 453, 8 May 1954.
22. Avon Papers, AP20/1, diary entry, 5 May 1954.
23. FO 371/112060/432G, Eden tels. 155 & 156 (5 May) and 162 (6 May); FO 371/112061/466G, Eden tels. 182 & 183, 7 May, Lloyd tel. 299, 8 May and Eden tel. 206, 9 May 1954; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 452-58.
24. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 466-68.
25. FO 371/112063/505G, Eden tels. 229, 230, 231 & 232, 11 May 1954.
26. FO 800/785/56, Eden tel. 2353 to Washington, 23 May 1954. On Eden's continued enthusiasm for wide Asian support, etc ... FO 371/112057/338G, 341 Eden tels. 24 & 25, 27 April; FO 371/112058/374G, Eden tel. 86, 30 April; FO 371/112060/439, 459, 464, Nehru message to Eden, 5 May, PM of Ceylon message to Eden and Colombo Conference *communiqué*, 3 May, UK High Commission tel. 449 to CRO, 6 May; FO 371/112062/481, Eden tel. 208, 9 May; FO 371/112067/562, Eden tel. 346, 18 May 1954.
27. Avon Papers, AP20/17/18B, Eden letter to Makins, 26 May; FO 371/112063/

505G, Eden tel. 231, enclosing text of letter to Bedell Smith, 11 May; also FO 371/112085/1018, Eden tel. 125 to Washington, 22 May 1954.
28. See *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XII, Pt.1, p.570.
29. FO 371/112059/416G, Eden tel. 137, 4 May 1954.
30. FO 371/112105/71, Eden message to Bidault, 7 May 1954; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, pp. 17-19; Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p.217..
31. FO 371/112039/58, Jebb tel. 329, 8 May 1954. Also FO 371/112775/10, Jebb tel. 181, 6 May 1954.
32. FO 371/112062/479, Makins tel. 883, 8 May 1954; also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt.1, p.448.
33. FO 371/112062/480, Makins tel. 895, 9 May 1954.
34. See FO 371/112049/103G, FO memo., 'Policy Towards Indo-China', 31 March 1954.
35. CAB 129/69 C(54)202, 18 June 1954. Also FO 371/112106/95, Graves desp -atch 70, 24 May 1954; FO 371/112059/417G, Graves tel. 151, 4 May 1954.
36. Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, pp.19-20; Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p.217
37. Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p.174; R.E.M.Irving, *The First Indochina War: French and American Policy, 1945-54* (London 1975), p.103.
38. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p.201 (12 May 1954)
39. CMD 2834, p.13.
40. FO 371/112067/572, Eden tel. 369, 19 May; FO 371/112068/595, 599, Eden tels. 465 & 476, 27 May; FO 371/112069/623, 642, Eden tel. 551 (2 June) and Reading tel. 621 (7 June 1954).
41. FO 371/112068/611, Eden tel. 507, 29 May 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 125-27.
42. PREM 11/666, Makins tel. 930, 15 May 1954.
43. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XIII, Pt.2, p.1527.
44. FO 371/112065/540G, Eden tels. 293 & 294, 15 May 1954.
45. FO 371/112065/543G, Eden tel. 301, 15 May 1954.
46. FO 371/112066/548G, Eden tel. 308, 16 May 1954; FO 371/112058/374G, 381, Eden tels. 86 & 106, 30 April & 1 May; FO 371/112059/416G, Eden tel. 137, 4 May 1954; Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 186 (1 May 1954).
47. Avon Papers, AP20/17/118A, Eden letter to Salisbury, 16 May 1954.
48. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XIII, Pt.2, p.1585.
49. Ibid, p.1594.
50. FO 371/112066/559G, Makins tel. 947, 17 May 1954.
51. FO 371/112066/543G, Eden tel. 301, 15 May 1954. This was independently confirmed in FO 371/112105/84G, Mayall letter to Paterson, 20 May 1954.
52. FO 371/112066/559G, Makins tel. 948, 17 May 1954; also *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XIII, Pt.2, pp.1526-28.
53. Avon Papers, AP20/1, Geneva diary, 17 May; FO 371/112067/561G, Eden tel. 329, 17 May; FO 800/841/42, Eden tel. 311, 16 May; PREM 11/649, Eden tel. 339, 18 May; FO 371/112066/553G, Eden tel. 333, 17 May 1954; FO 371/112085/1018, Eden despatch 535 to Washington, 12 June 1954.
54. PREM 11/649, Alexander letter to Lloyd and Colville min., 27 May 1954.
55. FO 371/112060/446G, Eden tel. 161, 6 May 1954; Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pp.192-94 (5-6 May 1954).
56. Avon Papers, AP20/45/49, Eden letter to Clarissa, 22 May 1954.
57. CAB 128/27 CC(54)35th meeting, 24 May 1954; CAB 129/68 C(54)177, 24 May 1954. See also Iveragh McDonald, *A Man of 'The Times'* (London 1976), p.136.
58. FO 800/841/57, Makins letter to Eden, 29 May 1954. Also FO 371/112085/1018, Eden tel. 527, 31 May 1954.
59. Avon Papers, AP/45/50, Eden letter to Clarissa, 31 May 1954.

60. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XIII, Pt.2, pps. 1580, 1594-95, 1635.
61. FO 371/112106/101, Graves tel. 208, 4 June 1954.
62. FO 371/112106/95, Graves despatch 70, 24 May; FO 371/112107/116, War Office appreciation of military situation, 22 June 1954; FO 371/112068/618, Eden tel. 543, 1 June 1954.
63. FO 371/112068/607G, Eden tel. 480, 28 May 1954. Also FO 371/112106/85, Graves tel. 11, 17 May 1954.
64. FO 371/112069/635G, Jebb letter to Eden, 29 May 1954.
65. FO 371/112069/620, Eden tel. 547, 1 June 1954.
66. Avon Papers, AP20/45/50, Eden letter to Clarissa, 31 May 1954.
67. FO 371/112069/620, Eden tel. 547, 1 June 1954.
68. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp.127-28.
69. PREM 11/649, Eden tel. 248, 12 May 1954.
70. PREM 11/666, Eden tel. 540, 1 June 1954. On planned visit to US see PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 1752 to Eisenhower, 22 April; Eisenhower message to Churchill, 27 April; Churchill tel. 2360, 13 May 1954. Also Moran, *Struggle*, p.581 (2 June 1954).
71. Avon Papers, AP20/45/51, Eden letter to Clarissa, 2 June 1954.
72. CAB 128/27 CC(54)39th meeting, 5 June 1954.
73. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva diary, 6 June 1954.
74. Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp.271-72; FO 371/112070/653, Makins tel. 1135, 8 June 1954.
75. FO 371/112069/646G, Harding tel. JH2, BJSM to MOD, 4 June 1954. See also DEFE 4/70, COS(54)68th meeting, 8 June 1954.
76. FO 800/785/65, Eden tel. 731 to Churchill, 15 June 1954.
77. FO 371/112068/618, Eden tel. 543, 1 June; FO 371/112070/651, FO brief for Churchill for Parliamentary Question on Geneva, 2 June; PREM 11/666 Eden tel. 628, 9 June 1954.
78. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p.220 (11 June 1954)
79. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol.XII, Pt.1, p.449.
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83. PREM 11/666, Churchill tel. 1083 to Eden, 13 June 1954.
84. FO 371/112070/659G, Eden tel. 635, 9 June 1954.
85. FO 371/112071/688, Eden's statement to Conference, 10 June 1954.
86. Avon Papers, AP20/45/56, Eden letter to Clarissa, 11 June; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 128.
87. FO 371/112070/664, Eden tel. 640, 9 June 1954.
88. FO 371/112071/691, Eden tel. 677, 12 June 1954.
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90. CAB 128/27 CC(54)39th & 40th meetings, 5 & 15 June; PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 2680 to Eisenhower, 10 June 1954.
91. PREM 11/666, Churchill tel. 1083 to Eden, 13 June 1954; Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp.993-94.
92. Carlton, *Eden*, p.351.
93. FO 371/112073/709 & 715, Eden tels. 726 & 727, 15 June 1954.
94. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva diary, 16 June; FO 371/112073/719G,

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100. Avon Papers, AP20/17/15A, Eden letter to Lloyd, 21 May 1954.
101. See FO 371/112775/13, Jebb tel. 225, 17 June 1954.
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103. FO 371/112039/56, Jebb tel. 327, 8 May; FO 371/112040/63, Jebb tel. 195 14 May; FO 371/112105/72 & 84G, Jebb tel. 333, 10 May, Mayall letter to Paterson, 20 May; FO 371/112775/12, Jebb tel. 218, 3 June; FO 371/112779/39, Jebb tel. 406, 10 June 1954. See also FO 371/112805/1, Jebb tel. 383, 29 May; FO 371/112069/635G, Jebb letter to Eden, 29 May 1954. Also Werth, *France*, p. 673.
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105. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva diary, 17 June 1954.
106. Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 275; Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, pp. 224-25.
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108. FO 371/112068/601, Jebb tel. 376, 27 May 1954.
109. FO 371/112068/607G, Eden tel. 480, 28 May 1954.
110. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, p. 298; Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 153.
111. FO 371/112071/687G, Eden tel. 691, 13 June; FO 371/112073/727G, Eden tel. 770, 17 June; FO 371/112074/735, Eden tel. 790, 18 June 1954.
112. FO 800/785/70, FO record of Eden/Mèndes-France meeting, 20 June 1954.
113. Colville in J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, ed., *Action This Day: Working with Churchill* (London 1968), p. 131, hereafter *Action This Day*; Moran, *Struggle*, pps. 573 (4 May) & 580 (27 May 1954).
114. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva diary, 17 June 1954.
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PART V: 1954 — ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EDEN AND THE SETTLEMENT OF THE INDO-CHINA WAR

June to July 1954

Eden returned directly to London following his meeting with Mendès-France and, on 22 June, told the Cabinet that the belated softening of the communist position at Geneva had encouraged him to believe that a negotiated settlement 'was not beyond reach'. Much depended, however, on the attitude of the Americans who were expected to argue during the forthcoming talks in Washington for early and open (as distinct from preliminary and secret) Anglo-American action to establish a South-East Asia defence organisation. If Britain acquiesced in such an exercise the prospect of agreement at Geneva would be 'seriously damaged' and neutral Asian opinion alienated. As for the exact form a settlement might take, the views of the Eisenhower Administration on partition in Viet-Nam would be high on the agenda. The British sought a solution on the basis of 'excluding from Communist control the southern region of Viet Nam, including Saigon, as well as Laos and Cambodia'. To mitigate the danger that partition would be only a temporary hiatus in the communist conquest of Viet-Nam, Eden also sought 'an international guarantee of any settlement that may emerge ...' By the time that the Conference went into partial recess on 20 June the Americans, along with the Viet-Namese, were the only hardened opponents of this kind of settlement.[1]

One of Eden's major aims during his visit to Washington was thus to 'sell' partition to a U.S. Government averse to conceding any territory

whatsoever to the communists. Although their wholehearted approval was too much to expect, Eden hoped to at least deter the Americans from blocking an agreement on this basis or, later, working towards its destruction. Success also depended on persuading the Eisenhower Administration to renounce military intervention in Viet-Nam as an answer to the present problem, for an escalation of the fighting would destroy any chance of a negotiated settlement. At the same time such a settlement was, paradoxically, the best insurance against an American-led escalation in the future. Speaking of Indo-China in the House of Commons on the eve of his departure, Eden said he had 'seldom known a situation in which the risks of a wider conflagration should be more apparent'.[2]

Eden's Geneva strategy and his Washington *desiderata* - rapidly becoming indistinguishable - were encapsulated in a memorandum endorsed by the Cabinet at their meeting on 22 June ...

> (a) We must persuade the Americans to give the French at least a chance of reaching a settlement in the next few weeks.
>
> (b) We must continue to make it clear that we cannot consider intervening in Indo-China and we must do our best to restrain the Americans from doing so.
>
> (c) We must again make it plain that we can accept no further commitments in regard to "united action" in South-East Asia until the outcome of Geneva is known.
>
> (d) But we can express willingness to examine at once and in secret how best we can proceed to strengthen our common defences.
>
> (e) We should discuss how the principal Asian powers ... can best be associated with this work.
>
> (f) But we should not agree, before Geneva is over, to any wider and more publicised meeting, at which Siam and the Philippines would be the only Asian countries present, to plan and proclaim an anti-Communist alliance.[3]

In addition to being a blueprint for the future, this memorandum was also a remarkable demonstration of how consistent British policy had been since

the onset of the intervention crisis in late March.

Indo-China was obviously amongst the most urgent items on the Washington agenda for, in addition to its intrinsic importance, it was also responsible for a general souring of Anglo-American relations - indeed in September 1954 the U.S. Congress was to halve Special Aircraft Assistance to Britain on the grounds that there had been 'adverse reactions as a result of divergencies in policy on South-East Asia'.[4] This was a matter of especial concern to Churchill who was never happy when events in Asia, an area of low value in his world-view, unsettled the 'special relationship'. Contemplating events at Geneva during May he had been 'depressed by the general bloodiness of things'.[5] Accordingly, as Colville noted in his diary on 24 June, 'owing to Anglo-American disagreement over S.E. Asia, reflected very noticeably at the Geneva Conference, the [Washington] meeting has become in the eyes of the world (and the Foreign Secretary) an occasion for clearing the air and re-creating good feeling'.[6] Important as this was, however, Eden was not prepared to compromise the British line on Viet-Nam in order to achieve it although, from past experience, he may have been concerned that Churchill, acting on his own initiative, might be tempted to do so.[7] But in fairness to the Prime Minister, he had given Eden strong support in opposing American designs during and subsequent to the April crisis.[8] This did not indicate that, late in the day, Indo-China had assumed priority-status in the Prime Minister's mind, rather it was another example of an Asian issue assuming significance only through its adverse impact on matters of more vital import.[9]

Churchill was particularly alert to Viet-Nam's potential as a source of general war in Asia, a war which could only be waged if essential manpower

and material resources were diverted from Europe and the Middle East. Moreover, should the Soviet Union become involved this risked unleashing what Churchill called the 'nuclear monster' and he was well aware that Britain, unlike the United States, was vulnerable to air attack from Soviet bombers.[10] If these concerns prompted support for Eden, Churchill was less than happy about the solution to the problem in Viet-Nam pursued by his Foreign Secretary, namely compromise with the communists and 'Anthony's appeasement' which he liked 'up to a point, but only up to a point'.[11] Ultimately, however, Churchill - like Eden - was forced to accept that a poor peace was better than a major war. When Eisenhower enquired of him on 18 June whether he saw the 'elevation of Mendès-France and the pledges he has made as evidence of a readiness on his part to surrender completely in Southeast Asia', Churchill replied in the affirmative: 'personally I think Mendès-France ... has made up his mind to clear out on the best terms available. If that is so, I think he is right'. Moreover, '[i]n no feasible circumstances except possibly a local rescue could British troops be used in Indo-China and if we were asked our opinion we should advise against United States local intervention except for rescue'. Eden could therefore contemplate the Washington visit reasonably confident that the Prime Minister would not consciously undermine his Geneva strategy.[12]

The talks eventually got underway on 25 June and, contrary to most expectations, produced a considerable meeting of Anglo-American minds on many outstanding issues. Colville observed on the opening day that 'first impressions were surprisingly and immediately satisfactory while the world in general believes that there is at this moment greater Anglo-American friction than ever in history and that these talks are fraught with every possible complication and difficulty'. Churchill was 'elated by success

and in a state of excited good humour' and, by the close of the conference, his objective of dissipating tension had been substantially achieved. 'I have never had a more agreeable or fruitful visit than on this occasion', he told the House of Commons on 12 July.[13] Of help in this respect was what appeared to be a reconcilation of previously divergent positions on Indo-China and South-East Asian defence. Importantly, this had come about, not as a result of any real British concessions, but because of a novel readiness on the part of the Americans to modify their outlook. Dulles, moreover, proved to be anything but the 'awkward old buster' with 'pachydermatous qualities' that Makins had earlier depicted.[14]

The first of several lengthy Eden-Dulles exchanges on Indo-China took place at the State Department on 26 June. Dulles, without prompting, immediately met a number of Eden's pre-Washington *desiderata*. Firstly, he hinted that armed intervention in Viet-Nam was virtually extinct as a serious option. Secondly, having weighed up the merits of partition and nationwide elections in Viet-Nam, Dulles 'agreed that the former was preferable'.[15] As Geoffrey Warner has noted, this was 'the first time an authoritative American spokesperson had been prepared to comment favourably on either alternative in conversation with the British'.[16] Dulles's remarks implied that the Administration was at last ready to view the Indo-China problem realistically, to accept that the retention of northern Viet-Nam was a lost cause, and to seek the most favourable negotiated settlement at Geneva based on a divided Viet-Nam and, thereafter, to prepare the defence of the remainder (and still the greater part) of non-communist South-East Asia. 'I <u>believe</u> it is not going too badly, though I am not enjoying it', Eden wrote to his wife at the close of this first session.[17]

There had in fact been hints in recent weeks that alongside the bluster

about intervention the Eisenhower Administration had privately conceded that a partition solution was inevitable though for domestic political reasons this could not be openly admitted. Officials did however attempt to condition public opinion. At a press conference as early as 11 May, Dulles asserted that 'the loss of some or all of [Viet-Nam] would not necessarily bring the loss of all South-East Asia', which suggested that, like the British, the Americans were in the process of modifying the domino-theory to justify the abandonment of northern Viet-Nam. What was now being sought, said Dulles, 'was a unifying influence so that the row of dominoes could withstand the fall of one, if one had to fall'.[18] But by far the frankest revelation was provided by Bedell Smith who, in a conversation with the Australian Foreign Minister at Geneva on 18 June, admitted that there had been 'no real clear-cut American policy on Indo-China until quite recently' ...

> They had swung from one extreme to the other. Widely varying public statements had been made in consequence which had no doubt confused their friends as much as the enemy. However, their minds had gradually crystallised on the need to salvage Laos and Cambodia from the wreck with as much as possible of Vietnam. Intervention with American forces was "out", although they did not want the Chinese to realise this too clearly ... [T]he mystery about "partition" [was] that the Americans objected only to the word partition. They fully recognised that the fact of partition was inevitable, but they wanted it called "division of authority" or some such phrase.[19]

Given the past tendency of Bedell Smith's utterances to be amended after consultation with Washington it must have been with some satisfaction that Eden noted Dulles's tentative sanctioning of partition at their meeting on 26 June. Even then, however, Eden remained suspicious: 'Dulles outwardly quite correct & almost friendly, but I suspect otherwise within - I cannot tell'.[20] The modification of the American position which, to judge from Bedell Smith, had been under consideration for some weeks, was lent

momentum by the emergence in France of a leader unequivocal in his commitment to peace and, shortly afterwards, a message from the new French Government to its American counterpart that 'as no French Parliament would approve the conditions which the US laid down for intervention, France had no choice but to make the best deal [at Geneva] she could'.[21] This left the U.S. Administration facing the dilemma it had all along hoped to avoid - intervention with little or no allied support and, because of the deterioration in the military situation, a 'great pouring in of U.S. ground forces.[22] Partition consequently assumed relevance as a *pis aller*.

During his time in Washington Eden talked a great deal about how an Indo-China settlement might be guaranteed and, in the process, showed how his thinking had developed since early April. In a speech in the House of Commons on the eve of his departure he had raised the possibility of 'a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides take part, such as Locarno'. By this method, 'if the settlement were broken, guarantors could act without waiting for unanimity'.[23] Eden was doubtless conscious that India and the neutral Asian powers, whose association with a gurantee would be important, would be unwilling to renounce non-alignment by entering into an arrangement which either excluded or was obviously directed against the Chinese Communists and the Viet-Minh. Hence Eden's evocation of the Locarno precedent. But in the United States Eden's statement caused a furore and he was charged with wanting to guarantee the fruits of communist aggression and, as the original Locarno treaty had led to Germany's admission to the League of Nations, of working to bring Communist China into the United Nations. Eden, believing that it was his terminology rather than the idea behind it which caused this reaction, declared at one

point: '[C]hange the name Locarno if it stinks in the United States'.[24] This, however, is too simplistic an assessment. The Eisenhower Administration's principal objection was to participation on an equal footing with the P.R.C. in an arrangement it disapproved of.[25] Writing some years later, Eden thought that by the end of his Washington visit the Americans 'not only understood what it [the Locarno guarantee] meant, but seemed to like the idea'. In this he was badly mistaken. At their meeting on 26 June Dulles stated the problem clearly: it would be 'difficult', he said, 'to persuade Congress to guarantee, in effect, the communist domination of North Vietnam'.[26]

With Dulles having seemingly renounced a military solution to the problem in Viet-Nam, and having accepted in principle the need for partition, Eden felt beholden to offer something in return. Therefore, in re-stating his view that there should be a 'collective defence agreement, which would be limited to those powers willing to undertake specific commitments for military action, in the event of renewed Communist aggression', Eden added that he was now ready to examine this matter at once.[27] Dulles was clearly pleased, having complained earlier that ...

> the Stalinist policy of securing control of the colonial areas of the world was, in the absence of a clear policy on the part of the West, only too likely to succeed, first in South East Asia then in Africa and later perhaps in South America ... We in the West were like mourners at a funeral who were laying the wreaths while someone else was grabbing the inheritance.[28]

The meeting concluded with agreement to establish an Anglo-American Study Group to examine in detail the question of a regional defence mechanism.[29] The two Foreign Ministers also thought it would be useful to supply Mendès-France with an outline of the type of settlement for Indo-China which their respective Governments would consider acceptable.[30]

By 29 June British and American officials had completed a seven-point memorandum. The Anglo-Americans would 'respect' a settlement that:

1. Preserves the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assures the withdrawal of Vietminh forces therefrom.

2. Preserves at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the delta ...

3. Does not impose on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers.

4. Does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to communist control.

5. Does not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means.

6. Provides for the peaceful and humane transfer, under internatonal supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another in Vietnam.

7. Provides effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement.[31]

This statement was to be relayed to Mendès-France via the British and American Ambassadors in Paris. However, it was apparent that the Americans still harboured misgivings about any such settlement despite their intimate involvement in drafting the document. While Eden undertook to instruct Jebb to add an oral, eighth, point about Britain's willingness to give diplomatic support to France at Geneva to obtain a settlement based on this criteria, Dulles felt unable to do likewise. The U.S. Government 'could accept a settlement which passed the agreed tests', he said, but they 'would not wish to be associated as one of its promoters'.[32] In other words, having laid down what they considered to be an acceptable compromise, the Americans refused to help the French obtain it. What this would portend for the Geneva Conference was, according to Denis Allen,

'that on the day the Americans will be looking for reasons to disapprove the agreement whereas our inclination will be to find good grounds for approving it'.[33] Eden's suspicion that Dulles's more forthcoming approach concealed more than it revealed was largely confirmed.[34]

At the close of the talks on 29 June, Churchill accepted an earlier suggestion of Eisenhower's that the two leaders issue a declaration on the lines of the Atlantic Charter (the 'Potomac Charter') setting out the common aims their two Governments were pursuing in world affairs.[35] This was testimony to the unease with which both men viewed the strain imposed on the 'special relationship' as a result of recent events in and to do with South-East Asia. The *communiqué* itself was an anodyne document though it did include a noteworthy concession by Eden - a public announcement that the Anglo-Americans were to 'press forward with plans for collective defence' in South-East Asia to meet the situation arising either through success or failure at Geneva. This contrasted with the 'secret' examination foreshadowed in his Cabinet memorandum of 22 June.[36] Eden, however, was conscious that the opportunity to secure a firm American commitment to regional defence (his goal since October 1951) might be receding as a result of his persistent insistence that a pact must await the outcome of Geneva. In this connection, Makins had written on 21 June imploring Eden to begin negotiations immediately. The Ambassador spoke of Washington's 'historic decision to accept far reaching commitments on the mainland of Asia' but warned that this ...

> particular wave broke before it reached the shore and spent its force on the reefs of internal indecision and real or fancied diff -erences with the Allies ... Now a strong undertow has set in; the trend is reversed; the "reappraisal" is beginning.

A reversion to total isolation was unlikely, rather the emphasis would be

on 'peripheral defence'. Britain might find itself 'having to deal with a powerful, nationalistic and frustrated America', answerable only to itself for its actions. 'To take a concrete example', Makins continued, 'what I fear is that when we come to the point of wanting to organise security arrangements in South East Asia, the Americans will have lost interest'. Eden's initial reaction was 'I don't mind!', but this instinctive release of frustration should not be taken too seriously, for Eden fully accepted that, difficult as they sometimes were to work with, American participation in any regional defence arrangement was essential.[37]

It is not possible to tell whether it was Makins's arguments that caused Eden to relent in Washington on 'public' announcements although it is fair to say that the Foreign Secretary would have been receptive to the Ambassador's warning. At Bermuda in December 1953 the Americans had plainly lost patience with France over E.D.C. ratification, and Dulles's subsequent reference to an 'agonizing reappraisal' had greatly alarmed Eden who re-doubled British efforts to persuade the French to ratify.[38] Now, with Makins talking of a reappraisal with regard to Asia, Eden may have reasoned that American interest in regional defence was indeed waning. Hence his readiness to offer them some evidence of British willingness to get things moving. On another reading, however, Eden may have judged that the Study Group could not possibly report before the make-or-break deadline of 20 July, and that the Washington *communiqué* only signalled an intention to proceed. In reality nothing concrete regarding composition or purpose would develop before the Geneva Conference ended, a point which could be made to the neutral Asian nations. Also in the *communiqué* was a veiled threat that if France was presented with unacceptable demands at Geneva (the communists seeking perhaps to exploit what they might perceive as a

weak and defeatist Government in Paris) 'the international situation will be seriously aggravated'.[39] Mendès-France had requested such a statement, believing that a satisfactory solution depended to some extent on 'the menace of American, and indeed wider, military intervention should the ... conversations break down'. However, 'no immediate threat should appear to issue from Washington' for this would jeopardise a settlement. What should be made clear, the French Premier urged, was that failure at Geneva 'would leave everyone free to take other decisions which might be extremely unpalatable to the Communists'.[40]

Judged against the objectives laid down in his Cabinet memorandum of 22 June, Eden must have left Washington with mixed feelings and still doubtful about the exact nature of American intentions. The U.S. Administration accepted partition in principle, but would do nothing to help the French achieve a settlement on that basis. Nor would it associate itself with an agreement if one was reached. This also ruled out any hope of the United States joining in an international guarantee of partition, something the British had all along perceived as the key to a lasting solution. Even Dulles's assurances about non-intervention could not be taken as inviolate and, were the Viet-Minh to launch their anticipated assault on Hanoi, it was impossible to say with any certainty that the United States would stand aside and accept the situation. On 8 July, Churchill wrote to Eisenhower of his 'fear that grave military events impend in the Tonkin Delta and indeed throughout Indo-China ... I well understand [that] the sense of disaster and defeat may produce a profound effect in the United States ...', by which he presumably meant a renewal of calls for military action. 'I find no reason for taking a brighter view of the Tonkin Delta situation', Eisenhower replied the same day.[41] In the State Department,

meanwhile, there was growing unanimity on the need fo U.S. intervention, 'with or without the French', to stop the rot[42].

Interestingly, the fact that the Viet-Minh had so far held their hand in the Delta seems to have been due in part at least to Eden's influence on Chou En-lai through Nehru. Eden had learnt on 22 June that Chou planned to stop off in New Delhi on his way back to China from Geneva.[43] The following day Eden contacted Nehru asking him to, firstly, obtain from Chou an assurance that Laos and Cambodia would indeed be recognised by Peking as independent entities and, secondly, to stress that 'our whole effort will be imperilled if new large scale attacks are launched in Indo-China while the [Franco-Viet Minh] military committees [at Geneva] are trying to work out the terms of a cease fire'.[44] Nehru did as Eden asked, and although Chou retorted that 'the main reason for any increase in Viet Minh activity had been the increase in French bombing', the point may well have registered.[45] Mendès-France was certainly convinced that, by mid-July, only 'Anglo-French diplomatic efforts backed by Nehru had prevented an attack on Hanoi. If it took place it must succeed in a matter of days and the only hope of averting it was a cease-fire'.[46]

As Eden prepared to return to Geneva the Americans again, through a series of negatively interpretable actions, endangered the prospect of peace and demonstrated that the Anglo-American *rapprochement* on Indo-China was more apparent than real. In the first place, the Eisenhower Administration refused to send Bedell Smith or any high-ranking official back to Geneva. Doubtful whether Mendès-France would be able or willing to adhere to the 'seven points', the Americans felt it would be wiser if they refrained from placing themselves in a position whereby they might have to publicly dissociate themselves from their allies. On a cynical reading one

might suggest that the Administration sought to manoeuvre Britain and France into obtaining the kind of solution which it now privately favoured while, by standing aloof in public, it could defend itself from charges that it had knowingly acquiesced in appeasement. The fact that the mid-term Congressional elections were only four months away may help account for the Administration's behaviour in this respect, for the Democrats, recalling Republican jibes in 1952 of 'who lost China', might respond with 'who lost Indo-China' in 1954. Secondly, and less surprisingly, the U.S. Government still refused to alter its position with regard to participating in any guarantee of a Geneva agreement. The most that was contemplated was a unilateral declaration taking note of what transpired. This was a blow to Eden. The chances of any agreement proving durable would be seriously diminished by the non-participation of the United States in a guarantee: on one level this might discourage the other Geneva conferees, communist or otherwise, from involvement thereby rendering any partition line in Viet-Nam hopelessly porous; on another, the British would be most reluctant to assume defence obligations with regard to Indo-China via a guarantee which the United States did not share. Eden, one may assume wearily, undertook to try and make the Americans change their minds.[47] On a more optimistic note, on 8 July Chou En-lai had informed Eden that he had 'reached agreement with Ho chi Minh on the way in which the Indo Chinese question could be settled, and that ... this would make it easier to get agreement at Geneva'.[48] Once more it was the Americans rather than the communists who were making life difficult for Eden.

When Eden arrived at Geneva on 12 July he found Mendès-France already installed. In marked contrast to the U.S. authorities, the Mendès-France

Administration had worked energetically in pursuit of a negotiated settlement during the recess. On 20 June, the French Premier had sounded out Bedell Smith on his Government's attitude to a meeting with Chou En-lai. The American, while admitting it would be 'headline news' in the United States, could raise no formal objection.[49] Three days later Mendès-France travelled to Berne for talks with the Chinese Prime Minister during which Chou's 'comparative moderation' helped confirm the Frenchman in his view that 'it may just be possible to get an honourable settlement within a month'.[50] Shortly after this meeting, the French delegation at Geneva was instructed to commence direct and highly secret 'political' talks with the Viet-Minh (as distinct from the official military dialogue currently in progress in Franco-Viet Minh committees) on a post-armistice political settlement. Here the most contentious issue proved to be the line of partition in Viet-Nam: the French wanted it as far north as possible, the Viet-Minh as far south.[51] Meanwhile, on 1 July, the French public had been 'shocked but scarcely surprised' when the entire southern portion of the Tonking Delta was evacuated, conceding an area inhabited by about two million people to the Viet-Minh.[52] The withdrawal was also deplored by Viet-Namese nationalists.[53] However, Mendès-France took simultaneous action which demonstrated that he was not prepared to simply surrender. On 30 June, the French Cabinet issued a *communiqué* stating that steps would soon be taken to reinforce the Expeditionary Corps in Viet-Nam and, the following day, the Foreign Office learnt that the French Government was contemplating going before the National Assembly to seek approval for the despatch of conscripts for non-combative duties in the war zone.[54] Paradoxically, it was probably Mendès-France's firm commitment to peace which allowed him to even consider these extensive measures of war.

Whereas the Laniel Administration might have been seen as favouring reinforcement as an alternative to negotiation, it was hard to doubt Mendès-France's motives 'in taking steps to reinforce ... in case the negotiations failed'.[55]

One of Mendès-France's early priorities at Geneva was to try and secure high-level American representation for the final phase of the talks. Apart from the need to present the communists with a united Western front, this would also discourage disaffected Viet-Namese nationalists from resisting an agreement, an important consideration since, ostensibly, it was on their behalf that the Conference was deliberating. American aloofness might be used by the Saigon Government to justify its own disapproval. Eden, as seen, agreed with Mendès-France: 'It seems to me most important that in the difficult concluding stages of the negotiations we should go out of our way to show a united front to the Communists'.[56] On 11 July Dulles had sent Mendès-France a detailed exposition of the American position which argued that it was precisely the absence of a united front, and doubts as to whether France (or Britain) were ready to stand by the seven points, that accounted for the American decision on non-participation.[57] As Makins put it, Dulles did not want to be confronted with 'the choice of "doing something dramatic" e.g. walking out of the conference or, by remaining, giving the impression that the United States in some way accepts, or at least is associated with, a disastrous settlement'.[58] The following day, 12 July, Dulles suddenly declared himself willing to travel to Paris (but not Geneva) to explain his Government's thinking in person to Mendès-France and Eden. The latter was reluctant to leave the Conference so soon after returning ('the work has to be done here and time is short') but, after entreaties from Mendès-France, he eventually agreed to a meeting on 13-14

July. 'I clearly had no option but to fall in with these arrangements', Eden told Churchill. 'Indeed some good may come out of them. We may even be able to persuade Mr. Dulles to follow us back to Geneva'. Equally, Eden accepted that Dulles's purpose might be 'to persuade the French to stand out for conditions they cannot hope to get'.[59]

In Paris on 13 July Dulles was presented with a well-reasoned Anglo-French *critique* of American aloofness. Eden thought that Mendès-France 'fought his corner brilliantly', while Dulles 'cut a sorry figure ... in his attempts to explain why the Americans could not face the responsibilities of any Geneva decisions'. Dulles merely restated his concern that France would deviate from the Washington memorandum on minimum terms. He also made clear that his Government would never guarantee a settlement, even one based on the seven points, since American public opinion would not tolerate 'the subjugation of millions of Viet Namese to Communist rule'. At the same time he offered the French little hope of American military assistance if a settlement either failed to materialise or was wholly unacceptable. The military problem had altered fundamentally since April, Dulles said, and now 'nothing but a large scale intervention of ground troops could hope to succeed'. In this connection Dulles did not think that it would be to the 'strategic advantage' of the Western world for the United States to become thus committed in Viet-Nam: 'After all Russia was enemy No. 1, China was enemy No. 2, and Viet Minh were only a bad third'.[60]

This was a new argument reflecting a new outlook in Washington. With the benefit of hindsight it is not difficult to discern the direction in which Administration policy was moving. Military involvement in the present struggle had all but been rejected now that the United States

looked like having little support from its principal allies and since the use of ground troops was regarded as inevitable. This left no alternative but to accept whatever emerged from Geneva. Indeed privately American policy-makers may well have 'welcomed the return of stability to Indochina' offered by the division of Viet-Nam although, publicly, they would be obliged to deplore the 'loss' of any territory to communism.[81] In other words, Washington could reap the benefits of Anglo-French efforts at Geneva without itself being seen to compromise with communism. Thereafter it could protest that it had been presented with a *fait accompli* by its allies and concentrate on establishing a regional defence pact to cover the remainder of South-East Asia. At the same time it could work to strengthen the area of Viet-Nam south of a partition line, possibly with a view to the reconquest of the northern sector using the native anti-communist armed forces but, initially, to prevent Viet-Minh encroachment.

There were already signs that Washington had found a willing accomplice in Viet-Nam in the shape of the ultra-nationalist Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem, appointed by Bao Dai as Prime Minister on 18 June. Even if the Russians, the Chinese and the Viet-Minh, together with Britain, reached agreement at Geneva, there was still the problem of Diem, 'a passionate and uncompromising nationalist whose violent dislike of the French was exceeded only by the intensity of his opposition to communism'.[82] Diem was utterly opposed to partition, Tonking being the source of much of his - Catholic - support. At Eden's first meeting with Mendès-France on 20 June, the latter had spoken of his desire to negotiate directly with the Viet-Minh but that if he did so 'the position might become quite impossible for the French in the French-occupied districts of Indo-China' in terms of local animosity and possibly violence against French officials. Concessions to

the Viet-Minh might also lead to wide-scale desertions from the Viet-Namese army thereby weakening the ability of southern Viet-Nam to defend itself. In this context, Mendès-France said that 'the new Vietnam Prime Minister ... was a fanatical Catholic and not at all well-disposed towards the French. If things went wrong in the army the Americans might well be tempted to do some deal with this gentleman over the heads of the French themselves'.[63] This, generally speaking, is what Washington was preparing to do. Within ten days of Diem assuming the Premiership the French began to sense that he was being primed by the Americans, an official from their London Embassy informing the Foreign Office that without the Diem Government's acquiescence there could be no successful outcome to the Geneva Conference and that the Americans might therefore 'encourage Vietnam to take an unduly rigid attitude'.[64] Fearing a 'violent and irrational reaction on the part of Vietnamese patriots' to a partition solution, the Mendès-France Administration sought an assurance that the Americans would do nothing 'which might even implicitly encourage such a reaction'. This could only destroy 'all hope of seeing Vietnam consolidate itself in such a way as to create in the face of the Viet Minh an authentically national and independent force'.[65] For its part, the Eisenhower Administration made clear that its attitude to any Indo-China settlement was now contingent upon its acceptance by Diem.[66]

Washington's cultivation of Diem was a safety-net. Were he to disown a Geneva settlement it would be all the easier for the United States to do so without being seen to break with the British and French, the principal architects on the Western side of such an agreement. At the time, however, and in spite of French unease, the British failed to appreciate the import of Diem's rise to power for Washington's future Viet-Nam policy. Instead

of viewing its interest in Diem as a disingenuous means of vetoing a Geneva settlement, the British continued to press for high-level American representation during the latter stages of the Conference to boost the chances of attaining that very end. Anglo-French entreaties met with success when, on 14 July, Dulles finally relented and agreed that Bedell Smith should return to Geneva provided he would not be 'asked or expected by the French to respect terms which in [his] opinion differ materially from [the 'seven points'] and ... may publicly disassociate [himself] from such differing terms'.[67] Mendès-France evidently convinced Dulles that he would not capitulate to the communists simply to achieve a success before the expiry of his self-imposed deadline. Viewed from the American side, if the presence of Bedell Smith could help bring about a solution based on the seven points, including a partition line as far north as possible, then so much the better for Washington's evolving Diem-oriented policy for Viet-Nam. Dulles, however, was 'not optimistic'.[68]

With the presence, if not the active participation, of Bedell Smith assured for the remainder of the Conference, Eden was at last able to concentrate on matters in hand. During the absence of the principal players the Franco-Viet Minh talks, official or otherwise, had failed to make much progress.[69] This came as no great surprise to Eden who never expected the communists 'to play any cards, even a small one, before the final round'.[70] There were three main areas of dispute. The first was where to draw a partition line in Viet-Nam. Next was the question of the form, composition and functions of an international supervisory body to oversee cease-fire arrangements. Should there be, for example, three separate bodies for the three Associate States or one all-embracing commission? On composition, Eden personally favoured the five Colombo

Powers while the communists followed the Korean precedent and pressed for a commission comprising two communist and two non-communist states. The rest of the Conference preferred a body capable of avoiding deadlock by taking majority decisions. Finally, there was the matter of elections in Viet-Nam designed to unite the country. However unattractive this prospect was given the strong likelihood of a Viet-Minh triumph, the earlier insistence of the Western powers on nation-wide elections in Korea with a view to creating a united and democratic state in that country had set a precedent which could not be resisted in the context of Viet-Nam and which the communists were not slow to exploit. The British and French, in a damage-limitation exercise, sought to defer the elections for at least two years during which time the authorities in southern Viet-Nam could work to increase their popular appeal. The Viet-Minh for obvious reasons pressed for a date in early 1955.[71] An important Chinese concern was aired by Chou En-lai during a meeting with Eden on 17 July. Referring to the Anglo-Franco-American discussions in Paris three days earlier and the *communiqué* declaring the intention to press ahead with plans for a South-East Asian defence pact, Chou wished to know if the three Associate States were to be members. If so, Chou warned, 'the outlook for a peaceful settlement would not be good'. Eden replied that to the best of his knowledge this was not in contemplation, nor did he believe the Americans had any plans to establish military bases in Laos or Cambodia, another well-chronicled Chinese worry.[72] Eden subsequently sought and obtained Bedell Smith's confirmation of this and, when relayed to the Chinese delegation, they reciprocated by promising that the Associate States would be debarred from membership of a military pact with China.[73]

One should not assume from this that Anglo-American differences

concerning a defence organisation had been overcome. On the contrary, they dogged Eden's efforts at Geneva to the very end. The special Anglo-American Study Group engendered at a point of superficial reconciliation during the Washington talks in June turned out in practice to be a forum for continued dispute. The British wished to undertake a provisional study of the problems relating to a pact and make some interim recommendations. The Americans sought something far more binding - an actual draft treaty and, to bridge the gap until this could be negotiated, a joint declaration by the prospective members of their intention to work together in the defence of South-East Asia.[74] Eden complained that this went 'far beyond the understanding which we reached in Washington' while, on 18 July, Makins concluded that 'it is abundantly clear that we still face, as we have faced since April, the prospect of a serious rift with the Americans over Asian policy'. By then the Study Group had completed its work, but Makins did not exclude the possibility 'that on July 21 we may be faced with an invitation to send a representative to a multilateral Working Party to be set up in Washington to draft the treaty and declaration whatever happens at Geneva ... The trouble as always with the Americans is that they want to act at once primarily for the sake of doing something and they will not [sic] longer brook delay in this case'.[75]

Reacting to this news, on 20 July Eden gave the American delegation at Geneva a memorandum outlining a programme of action to be followed if agreement was reached at the Conference. This stressed that every effort should be made to persuade all the countries of South-East Asia to associate themselves in some way with the Geneva accords. However, irrespective of the eventual response, invitations should be addressed to the Governments of France, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Ceylon,

Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and Siam no later than 7 August to attend a conference no later than 1 September to prepare the way for a South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (S.E.A.T.O.). Eden's thinking was to allow time for the Colombo Powers to associate themselves with a Geneva settlement before moving on to a Pact.[76] Parallel action was to be avoided. The Colombo Powers were more likely to acknowledge a Geneva agreement than join a defence pact, thus if the two issues were seen to be somehow linked, even in timing, they might reject both the Geneva compromise *and* S.E.A.T.O. The Americans grudgingly accepted Eden's memorandum subject to minor amendment.[77]

The two days leading up to the 20 July deadline witnessed frenetic activity at Geneva as, one by one, the outstanding problems were resolved. 'The first indication that the Conference might be on the verge of success', Eden later wrote, 'came on the afternoon of July 18th when Chou En-lai proposed to me that the supervisory commission [one for each of the three Associate States] should consist of India, Canada and Poland'.[78] Bedell Smith, Molotov and Mendès-France quickly gave their assent and the odds on a successful conclusion, which Eden had earlier in the day estimated at 'no better than a fifty-fifty chance', had shortened somewhat.[79] He noted in his diary that at one stage it looked as though the communists were 'going to give us all the presents from the Christmas tree'.[80] On the afternoon of 20 July the French and Viet-Minh agreed that the demarcation line in Viet-Nam should be 'fixed on a river just before the 17th Parallel'. Elections were to be held in July 1956. The armistice agreements for Viet-Nam and Laos were signed early on the morning of 21 July. The armistice for Cambodia followed at noon.[81]

In the event these were the only documents actually signed at Geneva. Several unilateral declarations were made, notably by France respecting the independence of the Associate States and promising withdrawal of its armed forces on request, and by the United States which, consistent with its stated position, merely took note of the agreements reached and consented to 'refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them', and stated that it would view any renewal of aggression in Indo-China 'with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security'. Arguably the most important product of the Conference, the 'Final Declaration', was not initialled. This document recapitulated the military agreements arrived at and went on to outline Indo-China's political future. Importantly, 'the military demarcation line [in Viet-Nam] is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary'. It also expressed the hope that the nation-wide elections would be held as agreed in July 1956 and, thereafter, Viet-Nam would be re-unified.[82] But the refusal of the U.S. delegation (as well as the Viet-Namese) to sign this declaration meant that the Chinese and the Soviets also sought to limit their obligations. In the end Eden and Molotov agreed that the declaration should be prefaced by 'a heading in which all the participating countries would be listed', a solution later accepted by the rest of the Conference.[83] The unfortunate result of this compromise was that, juridically, no party was bound to fulfill the provisions of the Final Declaration. In short, the Geneva Conference did not settle the Indo-China war, it simply arranged a cease-fire. There was no binding agreement to reach a political settlement.

At 3pm on 21 July, Eden chaired the final plenary session of the Conference. 'The result was not completely satisfactory', he conceded,

'but we had stopped an eight year war and reduced international tension at a point of instant danger to world peace. This achievement was well worth while. All now depended on the spirit in which the agreements were carried out'.[64] This was a clear allusion to the potential for evading a political settlement inherent in the unsigned Final Declaration. Eden might have addressed this last comment specifically to the United States which was already preparing to circumvent the accords. On 22 July, Premier Diem, with full American support, denounced the arrangements for Viet-Nam. This boded ill for the 1956 elections.[65] The private relief of the U.S. Government that so much of Indo-China had been preserved from communism was implicit in its public reactions to the results of Geneva. On 23 July, Bedell Smith made his celebrated remark that 'diplomacy is rarely able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield'. Two days earlier, Eisenhower had refrained from labelling the British and French as appeasers on the grounds that 'if I have no better plan I am not going to criticize what they have done'. But it was left to Dulles to point the way ahead: 'The important thing from now is not to mourn the past but to seize the future opportunity to prevent the loss of Northern Viet Nam from leading to the extension of Communism throughout South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific'.[66]

In practice, this meant ignoring the fact that in terms of international law southern Viet-Nam was not a legitimate State, building up Diem as a Viet-Namese version of Syngman Rhee, and ensuring the permanent postponement of the nation-wide elections thereby rendering the division of Viet-Nam permanent. To provide the South Viet-Namese with the necessary motivation to play a strong and effective role in the containment of communism, the Americans sought to 'liberate the country from colonialism'

by dealing direct with the Diem Government over the heads of the hapless French who had hoped to retain some influence and prestige.[87] 'We shall stay in the Far East', Mendès-France had declared in the National Assembly on 17 June, 'let our allies and our opponents make no mistake about it'.[88] In reality, though, the French, tainted by colonialism, had no part in the U.S. design for South Viet-Nam's future.

The process of by-passing the French gained momentum from 25 October 1954 with a letter from Eisenhower to Diem promising 'an intelligent programme of American aid' direct to his Government in Saigon.[89] The following month the so-called Collins mission culminated in French agreement to transfer full responsibility for the training of the South Viet-Namese army to U.S. advisers in January 1955.[90] A little over a year later the last French troops left South Viet-Nam.[91] A 'few months had been sufficient to dissipate the hopes built up at Geneva of injecting new life into the French Union in Indo-China', writes a leading French scholar. France had withdrawn 'completely and without honour'.[92]

Given this sequence of events, it is interesting to note Shuckburgh's diary entry for 2 May 1954 recording Eden's 'conviction ... that all the Americans want to do is to replace the French and run Indo-China themselves'. Eden also thought they wanted to replace Britain in Egypt - 'They want to run the world!'[93] While Eden's interpretation of American motives is open to debate, it is certainly true to say that the eventual refusal of the Diem regime to hold elections in Viet-Nam in 1956 was due, in the first instance, to the nebulous, non-committal, Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference and, secondly, to the alacrity with which the United States encouraged Saigon to exploit this fact. To draw on Marshal Foch's

response to the Versailles Treaty in 1919, this was not an armistice, it was a cease-fire for six years.

NOTES

1. CAB 128/27 CC(54)43rd meeting, 22 June; CAB 129/69 C(54)205, 21 June; HCDebs, Vol. 529, col. 433, Eden statement, 23 June 1954.
2. HCDebs, Vol. 529, col. 429, 23 June 1954.
3. CAB 129/69 C(54)207, 22 June 1954.
4. See Boyle in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 43.
5. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 580 (27 May 1954).
6. Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 691 (24 June 1954).
7. See Moran, *Struggle*, pp. 586-87 (24 June 1954)
8. Sir James Cable, interview, 19 July 1989.
9. Mr. Anthony Montague Browne, interview, 13 Sept. 1989.
10. Churchill letter to Eisenhower, March 1954, in Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp. 959-60.
11. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 577 (18 May 1954).
12. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower message to Churchill, 18 June, Churchill tel. 2883 to Eisenhower, 21 June 1954. See also FO 800/785/67, Churchill tel. 1148 to Eden, 16 June 1954, and an interesting passage in D. R. Thorpe, *Selwyn Lloyd* (London 1989), p. 172.
13. Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 692 (25 & 26 June); Moran, *Struggle*, p. 589 (25 June); HDebs, Vol. 530, col. 35, 12 July 1954.
14. FO 800/842/80, Makins letter to Eden, 18 June 1954.
15. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 576-80; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 131-32.
16. Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 255.
17. Avon Papers, AP20/45/59, Eden letter to Clarissa, 26 June 1954.
18. FO 371/112063/507, Makins tel. 908, 11 May 1954. Also US press cuttings in FO 371/112066/549.
19. FO 371/112075/766G, R. G. Casey tel. to Canberra, 18 June 1954.
20. Avon Papers, AP20/45/60, Eden letter to Clarissa, 28 June 1954.
21. See Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 164.
22. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1689.
23. HCDebs, Vol. 529, col. 433, 23 June 1954.
24. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 572.
25. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 133; Carlton, *Eden*, p. 352; Short, *Vietnam War*, pp. 166-67.
26. Eden, *ibid*, pp. 132-33.
27. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 574-76.
28. PREM 11/667, Makins tel. 1259, 24 June 1954.
29. See CAB 129/69 C(54)225, 7 July 1954.
30. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 131-32.
31. FO 371/112075/786, Makins tel. 1326, 29 June 1954.
32. FO 371/112075/786, record of Anglo-American discussion on Indo-China, 29 June 1954.
33. FO 371/112076/807, Allen letter to Jebb, 1 July 1954.
34. See note 20.
35. Text in CAB 129/69 C(54)214, 1 July 1954. See also CAB 128/27 CC(54)44th meeting, 29 June; PREM 11/667, Churchill tel. 1306 to Butler, 28 June 1954.
36. Text of *communiqué* in Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 281-82.

37. FO 800/842/82, Makins letter to Eden, 21 June 1954. Also PREM 11/667, Makins tel. 1257, 24 June 1954.
38. See p. 208; also FO 800/778/47, Eden min., 12 Dec. 1953; Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, pp. 133-38.
39. See note 36.
40. FO 371/112076/800, Roberts min., 28 June; FO 371/112075/785, FO tel. 375 to Saigon, 29 June 1954.
41. PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 249/54 to Eisenhower, 8 July, Eisenhower message to Churchill via Makins, 8 July 1954.
42. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XVI, p. 1281.
43. FO 371/112074/754G, Reading tel. 837, Geneva to FO, 22 June 1954.
44. FO 371/112074/764, CRO tel. 1073 to New Delhi, 23 June 1954.
45. FO 371/112075/788, Gore-Booth (Rangoon) tel. 318, 29 June 1954.
46. FO 371/112077/846G, Eden tel. 488, Paris to FO, 14 July 1954.
47. CAB 128/27 CC(54)49th meeting, 9 July; FO 371/112076/829, Eden tels. 3232 (8 July) and 3250 (9 July), Makins tel. 1426 (8 July); FO 371/112077/836, Makins tel. 1412, 7 July, and Dulles message to Eden, 11 July; FO 371/112080/903G, Eden despatch 635 to Washington, 8 July, Dulles messages to Eden, 7 and 9 July 1954.
48. FO 371/112076/825, Trevelyan (Peking) tel. 453, 8 July 1954; Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, p. 283; also Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 153-54.
49. FO 371/112074/745G, Jebb tel. 435, 20 June 1954.
50. FO 371/112775/14, Jebb tel. 251, 1 July; FO 371/112075/765G, Reading tel. 848, 24 June, Reilly tel. 440, 24 June 1954.
51. FO 371/112075/773G & 785, UK Delegation Geneva tel. 859, 25 June & FO tel. 375 to Saigon, 29 June 1954.
52. FO 371/112775/15, Jebb tel. 274, 16 July 1954; Calvocoressi, ed., *Survey 1954*, p. 20; .
53. FO 371/112025/82, Graves tel. 277, 8 July 1954.
54. FO 371/112107/117, 121 & 122, Reilly tel. 450, 26 June, Jebb tels. 462 (30 June) & 466 (1 July) 1954; *Survey 1954*, p. 63.
55. FO 371/112775/14, Jebb tel. 251, 1 July 1954.
56. FO 371/112076/829, Eden tel. 3250 to Washington, 9 July 1954.
57. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, pp. 1807-10, also pps. 1780-82, 1788, 1791; FO 371/112077/842G, Eden tel. 891, 12 July 1954. Also Ferrell, ed., *Eisenhower Diaries*, p. 283 (10 July 1954).
58. FO 371/112077/836, Makins tel. 1412, 7 July 1954.
59. FO 371/112077/840 & 841, Makins tel. 1458 & Eden tel. 893, 12 July; FO 800/790/14, Eden tel. 901 to Churchill, 12 July; PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower message to Churchill, 13 July 1954.
60. FO 371/846G, 854G & 855G, Eden tels. 488, 490 & 491, 14 July 1954.
61. Smith, Vol. I, p. 25; also Herring & Immerman, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2, p. 362.
62. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 170.
63. FO 800/780/80, record of Eden-Mendes France meeting, 20 June 1954.
64. FO 371/112076/800 & 802G, Roberts & Paterson mins., 28 June 1954.
65. Aide memoire in FO 371/112075/785, FO tel. 375 to Saigon, 29 June 1954.
66. FO 371/112078/861 & 870, FO tel. 1385 to Geneva, 12 July, Graves tel. 295, 15 July; FO 371/112077/852, Graves tel. 291, 14 July 1954.
67. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1834; FO 371/112077/857G, 858G & 859G, Eden tels. 496, 497 & 498, 14 July 1954. Communique in Cameron, *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 283-84.
68. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1837.
69. FO 371/112075/798, Jebb tel. 461, 30 June; FO 371/112076/815, Cable

tels. 44 & 45, 5 July 1954.

70. FO 371/112077/831G, Eden despatch 501 to Paris, 8 July 1954.
71. FO 371/112077/831G & 848, Eden despatch 501 to Paris, 8 July & Eden tel. 910, 13 July; FO 371/112079/883, Tahourdin min. for Eden, 'Points Requiring Ministerial Decision before July 20', 16 July 1954; Sir James Cable, 'Improvising International Supervision in Indochina', paper in possession of author. Also PREM 11/1074, Churchill tel. 3228 to Eisen-hower, 8 July 1954; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, p. 449.
72. FO 371/112078/880, Eden tel. 956, 17 July; FO 371/112080/907, Allen letter and enclosure to Paterson, 18 July 1954.
73. FO 371/112079/885, Eden tel. 959, 17 July; FO 371/112080/902, Eden tel. 982, 19 July 1954.
74. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 642
75. PREM 11/650, Makins tel. 1516, 18 July 1954; Warner in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 256.
76. PREM 11/650, Eden tel. 987, 20 July; FO 371/112079/887, 888 & 890, Eden tels. 962, 963 & 967, 18 July 1954.
77. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, pp. 644-45; FO 371/112085/1018, Eden tel. 995, 20 July 1954.
78. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 141.
79. FO 371/112079/889 & 887, Eden tels. 966 & 962 18 July 1954.
80. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva diary, 18 July 1954.
81. FO 371/112080/912, 915, 919, Eden tels. 996, 1000, 1007, 20-21 July 1954.
82. All relevant texts are to be found in full in CMD 2834 & 9239; Cameron *Viet-Nam Crisis*, pp. 286-318.
83. FO 371/112080/919, Edel tel. 1007, 21 July 1954; Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 142.
84. FO 317/112081/927, Eden tel. 1017, 21 July 1954.
85. Smith, Vol. I, pps. 23 & 30.
86. FO 371/112081/923, Makins tels. 1545 & 1570, 21 & 23 July; FO 371/112082/953, Makins tel. 1578, 23 July 1954.
87. Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p. 191; also Grosser, *Western Alliance*, pp. 135-37.
88. G. A. Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis 1947-62* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 53.
89. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, pp. 2166-67.
90. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 197.
91. Dalloz, *Indo-China*, p. 197.
92. Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, pp. 231-32.
93. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 187 (2 May 1954).

EDEN, THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND THE INDO-CHINA WAR

CONCLUSION

If judged solely in terms of its actions in the Indo-China arena in 1954, the Churchill Administration, and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in particular, have been justifiably *fêted.*[1] The British did indeed follow a 'more statesmanlike course than the Americans' in resisting the attractions of a military solution to the problem in Viet-Nam and, at the Geneva Conference, striving for a peaceful, negotiated, settlement.[2] However, if it is accepted that the real art of crisis management is to avoid the crisis in the first place, then one must begin to qualify such praise. British policy between October 1951 and March 1954 was, according to its self-defined objectives, a catalogue of indecision and failure. This is the compelling conclusion obtained through a medium-term analytical approach. But the reasons for this failure only become apparent when Indo-China is placed within the wider framework of British foreign policy as a whole. In effect, the Churchill Administration possessed two Indo-China policies, one pursued down to March 1954 with scant success, and one thereafter which merits approval. The question is whether the earlier failure should detract from the later success. Whether, that is, the convening of the Geneva Conference marked the failure of British Indo-China policy.

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Historians often focus on 'lost' opportunities which if grasped by the object of their study - governments or individuals - might have altered the future course of events. Often, however, it was not as clear to

contemporary decision-makers as to future writers that important choices were confronting them. Unfortunately, this was not so in the case of British Indo-China policy between 1951 and mid-1953. During that time an opportunity to help shift the military balance in Viet-Nam in favour of France was clearly discerned by policy-makers in London and, after due deliberation, rejected. At the root of this decision was the incompatability of Britain's desired objective in Viet-Nam, French victory, and the European imperative of making German rearmament operative.

There is little doubt that Eden was genuinely concerned to see the E.D.C. come to fruition and, within the limitations of British association rather than membership, he made considerable efforts to ensure this.[3] After May 1952, these efforts were directed almost exclusively at allaying French misgivings about a rearmed Germany. As Sir Patrick Reilly, *chargé d'affaires* at the Paris Embassy in 1954, has recently recalled, Eden 'certainly wanted the French to ratify [the E.D.C. Treaty]' and, at Ambassador Harvey's farewell meeting with Foreign Minister Bidault in March 1954 ('which should have been a happy occasion'), the Frenchman was soundly 'lectured' about the E.D.C.[4] As already seen, this did not indicate any great liking for the concept on the part of the British. Eden was far from happy about the supranational aspect of the plan and preferred a looser system for controlling German rearmament. He also questioned the military efficacy of a multinational force or, as Churchill put it, a 'sludgy amalgam'.[5] British support instead stemmed from concern that the United States would revise its commitment to Western European security if the E.D.C. collapsed, possibly even withdrawing U.S. armed forces to a position of 'peripheral' defence. The implications of this for British security were self-evident.

British anxiety increased after January 1953 when the new Eisenhower Administration made clear that the choice for its European partners lay between the E.D.C. or an 'agonizing reappraisal' of American policy towards the Continent. The Europeans had to make greater progress towards politico-economic unity, and take on a larger share of responsibility for the defence of their homelands, if U.S. military - and even economic - support was to continue at existing levels. Aid, as Eisenhower remarked, was 'bound to be weakened unless they [the Europeans] move definitely in the direction of greater unification'.[6] The successful functioning of the E.D.C. was regarded as an important test-case in this respect. The British were surprised and alarmed when, at the Bermuda Conference at the end of 1953, Eisenhower and Dulles rejected the idea of direct West German entry into N.A.T.O. if the E.D.C. collapsed. It was the European Army or nothing.[7] Nor did the British think the Americans were necessarily bluffing. The assessment of one British historian that the 'need for German military integration within NATO was not in question', and that if it did not come about through the E.D.C. some other way of solving the problem would be found, would have been rejected by Churchill and Eden as far too sanguine.[8] In August 1954, Churchill, anticipating the E.D.C.'s rejection in France, confided to Cabinet colleagues his unease about the future ...

> The danger which I fear most is Mr. Dulles's 'agonised [sic] reappraisal'. Peripheral defence may well be doom-laden. Its possibility has not receded.[9]

Eden, when the French Parliament finally threw out the E.D.C. on 30 August 1954, feared that the Americans were on the brink of 'losing faith' not just in any alternative path to German rearmament but in N.A.T.O. generally.[10]

The principal stumbling block to bringing the E.D.C. into being had always been French prevarication over ratification. In this connection events in Viet-Nam were regularly cited by French Ministers and officials to excuse or justify a policy of inaction in Europe. While the war continued to drain their military resources, the argument ran, E.D.C. ratification (tantamount to sanctioning German military predominance in Europe) was impossible and, in consequence, should be deferred until French forces could return from Indo-China. This might have been less unacceptable to the Churchill Government if the French had displayed any sign of coming to terms with the second element in the equation, their struggle against Ho Chi Minh's rebel forces. Ironically, the absence of a forward strategy in Viet-Nam was excused by the fact that France could not further diminish its military capacity in Europe at a time when the Germans were about to be rearmed. Therefore, from the moment that the E.D.C. treaty was signed in May 1952 it was Indo-China rather than Korea which truly linked the Cold War in Europe with the Cold War in Asia. Though this connection was recognised in London, the E.D.C. enjoyed greater importance in Foreign Office thinking than Indo-China if only because the former was an immediate problem and the latter a latent one. This judgement persisted up to and during the Berlin Conference where, interestingly, the decision to include Indo-China on the Geneva agenda was based on concern to ensure the continuation in power in Paris of what appeared to be the last pro-E.D.C. Government. Nor was this a purely British preoccupation. The Americans, too, regarded the preservation of Laniel's majority as a priority for, as Dulles predicted the future, its downfall would probably lead to a ...

> capitulation in Indochina and greater hostility to the EDC ...
> with the distinct possibility of a French Government which would

> collaborate with the Soviets just as the French Government of the summer of 1940 collaborated with the Germans.[11]

Despite the fact that Geneva ultimately succeeded in terminating hostilities, the Berlin Conference demonstrated yet again that British policy towards Indo-China was in thrall to the requirements of European policy and, as a result, effectively disabled.

This, it may be argued, is as it should have been given Britain's geographical position and the requirements of national security. However, it is still ironic that the consequences of the final collapse of the E.D.C. in August 1954 were negligible compared to those arising out of the subsequent and gradual destruction of the agreements reached at Geneva the previous month. For, as James Cable vividly observes in the context of continuing problems in Cambodia, war in Indo-China 'has lasted longer, involved more nations, had wider repercussions and perhaps reshuffled more coalitions than the Thirty Years War in seventeenth-century Europe ... Distant governments fell from power, remote peoples were agitated, the quivering kaleidascope of international relations early acquired and still in part retains a distinctively Indochinese rhythm to complicate its shifting patterns'.[12] It would of course have been asking the impossible of British policy-makers in the early 1950s to have foreseen the full extent of the Viet-Nam tragedy of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet there was one point in 1952-1953 when the British Government contemplated reversing its Euro-Asian priorities. A point at which France might have been persuaded to despatch the level of reinforcements from Europe to Viet-Nam which the British Military, supported by powerful political and diplomatic voices, believed capable of decisively defeating the Viet-Minh. The British Chiefs of Staff called on the Foreign Office to persuade the French Government to

adopt the reinforcement thesis: officials deliberated: European priorities prevailed: the Foreign Office rejected the thesis. This was the consciously squandered 'opportunity' referred to earlier.

It is worth pausing to reflect on the factors which produced this outcome. Eden and his officials calculated that the French Government would demand a price for acting on British advice to strengthen its Expeditionary Force. They also calculated (without, it should be noted, ever discussing the issue with the French) that this price was unaffordable. Only a British guarantee against German military predominace in Europe in the absence of French forces in South-East Asia and backed up either by membership of the E.D.C. or the stationing of additional troops on the continent was thought capable of persuading the French Government to intensify its effort in Viet-Nam. For Eden, the complicating effect which French reinforcement would have on his E.D.C. policy seems to have been the decisive factor in the rejection of the arguments of the Chiefs of Staff, of Graves in Saigon, MacDonald in Singapore, the British Defence Co-ordination Committee (Far East) and the Paris Embassy. In the final analysis, a modification of E.D.C. policy was too high a price to pay for French victory in Viet-Nam in 1952-1953 just as in 1954 a possible world war was too high a price to pay for avoiding a French defeat.

If the British position on the E.D.C. reduced the scope and flexibility of its Indo-China policy there is some irony, as we have seen, in the fact that the E.D.C. came to nothing while Viet-Nam drifted towards its bloody apogee over the next two decades. The decision by the French National Assembly to turn its back on the E.D.C. in August 1954 (a 'deplorable vote' in Eden's opinion'[13]) plunged the Western Alliance into confusion and crisis.[14] Eden, after a month of frenetic diplomatic activity, skilfully

secured allied agreement on West Germany's direct entry into N.A.T.O. However, to ensure French approval it was considered necessary to expand the 1948 Brussels Treaty with its in-built commitment for members to regard an aggression against one of their number as an aggression against all. West Germany and Italy were to join the original members, Britain, France and the Benelux countries, in what became known as the Western European Union (W.E.U.). This would in theory insure against the possibility of West Germany using its restored military capacity to threaten any of its ostensible European allies.[15] But this was still not quite enough for the French and, at a major conference in London at the end of September, Mendès-France appeared set to create further difficulties. Eden, anticipating this, had proposed to the Cabinet on 27 September that Britain offer 'some striking *quid pro quo*' in the event of deadlock. This should take the form of a commitment to retain henceforth its forces on the Continent at their existing levels (four divisons and the Tactical Air Force) for as long as a majority of the members of the W.E.U. so desired. The Foreign Secretary admitted that this was an 'unprecedented commitment', but the 'hard fact is that it is impossible to organise an effective defence system in Western Europe, which in turn is essential for the security of the United Kingdom, without a major British contribution'.[16] On 29 September, Eden, with full Cabinet support, played what Churchill called '[o]ur only trump card'.[17] The concession on troop levels, sought for so long by the French in the context of the E.D.C., proved decisive. 'It was absolutely essential in saving the whole thing', a leading figure in the negotiations, Sir Frank Roberts, has recalled.[18] In December 1954, the French National Assembly - still somewhat hesitantly - approved the new arrangement and, the following May, West Germany was admitted to N.A.T.O.[19]

The question which this raises in terms of Indo-China is, crudely speaking, could Eden not have made a similar concession to the French two years earlier and, as well as possibly saving the E.D.C. and avoiding the crisis of August-September 1954, provided the psychological crutch necessary for France to reinforce in Viet-Nam? After all, the concessions of September 1954 were, in reality, extremely limited. For example, the proviso about maintaining forces or their 'equivalent fighting ability', and another which cited 'balance of payment difficulties' as just cause for limiting military commitments in Europe, permitted the withdrawal of some 22,000 troops from the British Army on the Rhine in 1957-58 and their replacement, in line with the cost-cutting Sandys White Paper on Defence, by tactical nuclear weapons.[20] British forces were also entitled to be withdrawn in the event of an 'acute emergency' overseas about which Britain was to be the sole judge and without requiring a majority in favour in the W.E.U.[21] This caveat, when first discussed in London, puzzled Churchill who observed, correctly, that it 'seems to take away with one hand what has been given with the other'.[22] On 1 October, following the success of the London conference, he reflected that the pledge ...

> can be cancelled at any time ... It does not mean anything ... No one in their senses thought we could bring our troops home from the Continent. No one imagined that if Russia decided to march to the West we could sit still and do nothing ... Never was the leadership of Europe so cheaply won.[23]

While Churchill was wrong about the leadership of Europe, and although it was the Germans more than the Russians who concerned the French, this still tends to confirm the psychological value of the British commitment. Why then could the same guarantee have not been made in the autumn of 1952 or early in 1953 with regard to the E.D.C. and with similar provisos about the removal of British forces? Had the existing state of affairs been

formalised it might have smoothed the path to French ratification of the E.D.C. and, in addition, provided the French with just the kind of concrete show of support necessary if they were to contemplate a further weakening of their forces on the continent through reinforcement of Viet-Nam. Nor was it dissimilar to the anticipated French 'price' in the latter respect. Could not a commitment to the E.D.C. have been packaged in such a way as to double-up as an encouragement to the French in Indo-China given the intimate co-relation between the two issues?

There are of course a number of reasons why this scenario did not materialise. One was a basic shortage of manpower: in 1954, as opposed to 1952-53, Britain could look forward to a reduction of its commitment in Korea and Egypt. More fundamentally, Eden, as much as Margaret Thatcher in later years, drew the line at British entanglement in supranational European organisations. It is surely no coincidence that concessions were made in the context of the W.E.U., a looser inter-governmental arrangement, than to the E.D.C. When the French first requested a guarantee on British troop levels in 1952-53, Eden reacted like a 'kicking mule', and when the proposal was resurrected during the death-throes of the E.D.C. he condemned it as 'shop-soiled'.[24] Another answer is that Eden simply did not make the connection between investing militarily in Europe in the present to reap rewards both there and in South-East Asia in the future. This required long-term vision and a *penchant* for 'grand designs', neither of which Eden really possessed, preferring instead to pursue the Kitchener creed: 'One cannot conduct foreign policy as one would but only as one can'.[25] In consequence, French reinforcement neither took place early enough or - when it did under the Navarre Plan - in sufficient numbers or calibre.

Whether the additional three or four European divisions pressed for by

the British Chiefs of Staff would have altered the downward spiral of French fortunes must be open to doubt. However, two contentions still stand. Firstly, Eden and the Foreign Office were repeatedly told by the military experts that more French troops *would* make a difference. It is in this context that the failure to act must be judged and the inclination to temper criticism of British diplomacy resisted. Secondly, reinforcement could hardly have made things worse. If the French could have commenced negotiations from something resembling a position of strength and achieved the same result as they did at Geneva from weakness (a result which was 'by any standard the least unfavourable'[26]) the Americans might have felt better disposed to respect the agreements. Although this is a study of the Indo-China war from the British perspective, and extrapolations about American thinking are therefore based on poor foundations, one important question remains: if, like the Korean armistice, the Geneva agreements had had the appearance of being dictated by France and her allies rather than by the communists - and could be looked on as a tactical victory - would the subsequent course of American policy have been altered? The answer is probably not, for this would have implied U.S. support for the political provisions of the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, and it is difficult to envisage the Eisenhower Administration agreeing to nationwide elections in Viet-Nam in 1956 under any circumstances.

If the Churchill Government's Indo-China policy was often constructed, and at times placed on hold, in accordance with the requirements of E.D.C. policy, what then influenced the British approach once the situation in Viet-Nam assumed priority status in April 1954? Once more the longer-term

and contextual method of enquiry is instructive in providing an answer. The evidence examined leaves little room for doubt that Eden sought a political settlement at Geneva in order to deny the United States the pretext (continuing hostilities in Viet-Nam) for internationalising the war and attempting a high-risk military solution. The preceding three years had provided the British with enough experience of the strident nature of American policy in Asia, and towards the P.R.C. in particular, for them to take the issue of intervention in Viet-Nam with the utmost seriousness. Dulles spoke no less than the truth when telling the National Security Council on 29 April 1954 that 'fear of atomic attack has badly frightened them [the British]', and when asserting a few days later that the British were 'scared to death by the spector of nuclear bombs in the hands of the Russians'.[27] It is certainly not true, as Victor Rothwell has recently suggested, that there was 'some complacency' on the part of the British in 1954 in viewing nuclear weapons as so 'terrible that they had made war between the great powers unlikely'.[28] In October 1953, the British Chiefs of Staff had concluded that Soviet policy, at least for the foreseeable future, was designed to minimise the risk of a general war. But they warned that such a conflict might result 'unintentionally from some situation that obliged the Western Powers to take military action against the Soviet Union or China'.[29] In the Foreign Office, though this analysis was accepted, an additional factor was being weighed up: that through ill-advised and unilateral action the United States would precipitate a show-down in Asia with the P.R.C. which would embroil Britain and the Soviet Union and culminate in a third world war.

From 1951, Eden had sought to involve the United States in a collective defence grouping for South-East Asia alongside Britain, France, Australia

and New Zealand. The ideal of an Asian N.A.T.O. with the inclusion of India and the other leading regional powers was unattainable while so many of the latter were wedded to non-alignment, retained sympathy for the P.R.C. or, as in the case of India and Pakistan, were engaged in rivalry bordering on actual war. The effective security of South-East Asia thus rested with the five Western Powers. The objective of defence co-ordination was, initially, the containment of Communist China. Gradually, however, as the threat of Chinese aggression receded, a defence grouping came to be seen in London as a means of controlling the excesses of American policy. This concern had been highlighted during 1952 by the on-going Anglo-American dispute about how best to respond to a Chinese invasion of Tonking, a dispute which was a symptom of wider disagreements over policy towards the P.R.C. *per se*. The British desire for a *modus videndi* and its adherence to a dual policy of containment and compromise came into collision with the unaccommodating and confrontational attitude of the United States. The worry in London was that a local crisis in Asia would be used in Washington as an excuse for all-out war in and against China. While Eisenhower's Republican Administration, and to a slightly lesser degree itS Democratic predecessor, framed their China policy to accord with the agitated, sinophobe, state of public and Congressional opinion, and although in private Administration officials might show themselves less strident in their attitude, this did not alter the fact that the policy which emerged - and that with which the British had to deal - was often profoundly disturbing.[30] As Ambassador Franks had observed in 1952, '[a]s things are at present, if Chinese aggression occurred the Americans would very likely rush into action which we would feel ill-advised'.[31] Or, alternatively, in the words of a Foreign Office official,

'hanging over all our heads [is] the danger that the Americans may, by unilateral action, drag the western world into a full-scale war with China - or worse'.[32]

By the spring of 1954 the preferred method of insuring against this, a collective defence mechanism, had failed to materialise. Also by then it was no longer Chinese aggression that was the issue but American action in Viet-Nam: the idea that Chinese aid to the Viet-Minh constituted 'aggression', as the Americans sometimes argued, was utterly rejected in London. The intervention crisis of April-June involved the possibility of the U.S., or a U.S.-led coalition, taking action in Viet-Nam which Peking might itself consider aggression and a threat to its southern frontier.[33] Krishna Menon, *confidante* of the Indian leader Nehru, got to the heart of the matter when justifying India's subsequent non-participation in S.E.A.T.O. 'No country wants aggression against itself or its friends', he said. 'And yet the steps they take in the name of preventing aggression itself encourages aggression'.[34] The danger of Chinese *counter-intervention* was thus ever-present in British appreciations. So too was the possible activation of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the prospect of a third, nuclear, world war in which the British stood to suffer far more than the Americans. This concern was exacerbated by the Eisenhower Administration's insistence that nuclear weapons, having assumed the status of conventional arms, would be utilised accordingly. Therefore, as the British viewed matters in the spring of 1954, if the situation in Viet-Nam was to escalate into a major East-West confrontation - if the accidental world war mooted by the Chiefs of Staff were to occur - it was more likely to be the Americans than the communists who would trigger it. The Soviets had no desire for such a war, while the Chinese had no reason to intervene

in Viet-Nam while the Viet-Minh were doing so well on their own. But American or Western intervention might turn such calculations upside down.

It appears to be no coincidence that British thinking on a negotiated settlement, partition in Viet-Nam and the Geneva Conference began to assume a more favourable complexion in direct relation to the increasing danger of American military action. Although Malaya was a major British preoccupation, it is interesting that - contrary to Eden's memoirs - the security of the colony did not impinge greatly on British calculations during and after the April crisis. This may be because of confidence in the effectiveness of the Songkhla strategy in insulating the colony from infiltration. A direct military threat, however, was a different matter and, while plans existed to counter this contingency as well, the prospects for successful defence must have been considerably less. Ultimately, the external security of Malaya depended on avoiding a general war with China across the whole of Asia. Eden did not promote partition in Viet-Nam solely to ensure a non-communist buffer as far to the north of Malaya as possible but, primarily, as the only acceptable expedient by which the immediate crisis could be defused and the threat of a wider war averted. While Malaya would 'obviously be much more difficult to defend' if Indo-China fell to communism, Eden conceded, this was 'not in itself a reason for intervening in Indo-China even if we could do so effectively ...'[38]

From early April, Eden, hitherto far more ambivalent about a negotiated settlement than his memoirs suggest, made a virtue out of the unwelcome prospect of Geneva. The dangers of quoting out of context accepted, there are three key statements which, when juxtaposed, convey the essence of Eden's motives. Firstly, as he explained to Selwyn Lloyd, 'we do not want to bring a greater disaster upon our heads by trying to avert the immediate

one'.[36] This was implict acceptance that important as Viet-Nam was, it was not worth saving at the price of major war. Secondly, as Eden confided in a letter to his wife from Geneva on 22 May, '[i]t is still even money we may reach an armistice. I am more than ever convinced of dangers of 3rd world war if we don't'.[37] Two days later he made clear in Cabinet that it was not the Soviets or the Chinese that worried him in this respect. He was, rather, 'gravely concerned about the dangers of the alternative courses of action which the United States Government were likely to favour if a settlement were not now secured by negotiation'.[38] As far as the British were concerned, American intervention remained a real danger almost to the end of the Conference and was for Eden the strongest possible motivation for pushing the claims of a diplomatic settlement.

However, if one is to argue that Eden sought a political solution primarily to deny the Americans a pretext for applying a military alternative, there are a number of counter-arguments to be addressed. Firstly, an entry in Shuckburgh's Geneva diary for 14 May: Eden said ...

> he had never been to so difficult a conference, and that he felt the situation was very dangerous; but when I said that I could not get the *feeling* [emphasis in original] of acute danger, he agreed. He thinks the Russians do not want war, and will have to prevent the Chinese from bringing one upon their heads.[39]

This, though, is an exception to the otherwise consistent view held by Eden between April and July that it was the Americans who had to be restrained from bringing war upon British heads. Equally, it contradicts the maxim that a good diplomat leaves little to chance: relying on Soviet influence over the Chinese, and Chinese influence over the Viet-Minh, was a risky strategy and Eden was a very good diplomat. No doubt his hopes and expectations, as well as his fears, oscillated during the course of a lengthy conference, and Shuckburgh's record, while probably an accurate

record of his master's thoughts at a given moment, should be viewed in relation to the overwhelming weight of evidence testifying to Eden's deep concern about American intentions. Also, only a week after Shuckburgh's notes were compiled, Eden made his unequivocal confession to his wife about his fear of a third world war. One may assume that in doing so he was being nothing but frank.

A related counter-argument is that it was only American threats about intervention in Viet-Nam and action against China which forced the communists to compromise at Geneva. According to this argument, the Soviets in particular feared a major conflict and so placed pressure on the Chinese to in turn urge moderation on the Viet-Minh. Paradoxically, therefore, only the threat of an American-engendered war made it possible for Eden to achieve a result at Geneva which in his mind was designed to prevent just that scenario. It would be wrong to suggest that there is no validity in this argument. However, while Eden undoubtedly recognised the value of American 'noises off' in keeping the communists guessing as to Western intentions, there was a very fine line between bluff and having to make good that bluff in order to retain credibility. If, as Dulles later suggested, the Americans were indulging in brinksmanhip in 1954, it was not to Eden's liking.[40] The risk was simply too high and at no stage was Eden convinced that the Americans did not mean what they said. As noted in the narrative, there is a school of thought which suggests that the Eisenhower Administration was never serious about intervention.[41] This has yet to be proved conclusively, but even if it were it does not alter the fact that Eden reacted to a situation as he then perceived it, not as hindsight now paints it. In his memoirs Eden conceded the importance of not overplaying his hand about the dangers of world war. 'If I were to cry 'Wolf! Wolf!'

too frequently, I would suffer the fate of alarmists in diplomacy and not be believed'.[42] This was no doubt true, but here Eden was talking of his dealings with the Soviets and Chinese. The bulk of the evidence cited in this thesis was, at the time, the preserve of closed British circles where the need to cry 'Wolf!' was unnecessary. Rather, when the dangers of world war were talked of, they were those likely to be generated by United States policy. Lord Salisbury's later reflection that in 1954 the Americans posed a greater threat to world peace than the Soviet Union was more than a personal subjective assessment.[43]

A third point is Eden's contention, also in his memoirs, that if it had not been for the deterrent power of the Hydrogen bomb, 'I do not believe that we should have got through the Geneva Conference and avoided a major war ...'[44] Eden's recollections have already been shown to be a faulty guide to the evolution of British thinking between 1951 and 1954. So it is with this statement. For the question must be asked, who was deterred by the Hydrogen Bomb? The real issue with regard to deterrence rested on preventing the Americans rather than the Soviets from escalating the war. Yet Eden, in a confusing and contradictory aside in *Full Circle*, admits that the effect of the H-Bomb 'was least on United States policy ... since America could not at that time be reached by bombs from Soviet Russia'.[45] As for the idea that the Chinese were either persuaded against intervening in Viet-Nam or that they compromised their agenda at Geneva rather than face the risk of American nuclear retaliation, this too may be questioned. For one thing, China had no reason to intervene - unless in response to American or Western intervention. For another, neither Eden or Eisenhower seem to have believed that the spectre of the H-Bomb carried great weight in Peking. In June 1954, Eden argued with Churchill that 'China is

a more formidable power than you will admit ... Unlike the Russians the Chinese do not seem to be frightened by the hydrogen bomb'.[46] Eisenhower wrote to Churchill at the end of 1954 in the context of the Quemoy and Matsu crisis that China could 'pay any price in manpower, with complete indifference to the amount' in pursuit of its regional objectives.[47]

One might go further and suggest that because the final settlement at Geneva married closely with what Peking appears to have sought from the Conference from the start, American threats were less than decisive. In a despatch to Eden on 31 August 1954, Trevelyan, observing the reaction in Peking, concluded that on Indo-China 'the Chinese obtained what one may guess to have been their minimum demands, with the prospect of something more'. A communist buffer-state had been established on their southern border adding to the regime's security; in the all-Vietnam elections of 1956 there was a strong likelihood of extending that buffer-state through a sweeping Viet-Minh victory; the armistice freed Peking from supplying 'ever increasing military and civil supplies' to Ho Chi Minh and from the 'danger of American intervention with all its possible consequences'; the cause of communism in South-East Asia had suffered 'no set-back'; and China could now enjoy a respite from external problems to concentrate on internal industrialisation and socialisation. Equally importantly, the manner in which Chou En-lai and his delegation conducted themselves at Geneva went a long way towards the P.R.C. gaining universal acceptance (the United States excepted) as the 'only real Chinese Government'.[48] Trevelyan's analysis, backed up by a number of historians, makes it difficult to accept that Chou En-lai was frightened or bullied by American nuclear power into embracing such a favourable settlement.[49]

As for the Soviets, they may also have assumed that China had a more

extensive agenda for Geneva and so urged Chou to press the Viet-Minh to accept the final compromise for fear of being drawn into a general war should Chinese diplomacy prove inflexible. Yet Molotov himself admitted at Geneva that China was 'very much her own master'.[50] And, to repeat, how much pressurising did it take for Chou to accept what was eventually offered? Cause and effect in this context became hopelessly muddled on the Western side. The point therefore stands that Eden's analysis of the deterrent power of the H-Bomb is not without its flaws. Writing as he was in 1960, Eden may have applied a later conversion to the concept of mutually assured destruction to the earlier events he was describing. There is, importantly, no clear contemporary evidence that he ever wholly and deliberately relied on the American nuclear arsenal to assist him in his disucssions with the communists. On one level, threats from the Americans might serve some purpose in making the communist side more receptive to Western proposals, on another this benefit was cancelled out by the danger was that such threats, if ignored, might have to be activated. By far the safest method of preserving world peace was to end the fighting in Viet-Nam by old-fashioned negotiation rather than the newer nuclear diplomacy.

Even then Eden needed the help of Mendés-France, 'the one man with the strength of purpose to effect a drastic surgical operation', as Jebb reflected in the wake of Geneva, and without whom France would 'probably be engaged in [the war] still and for many months to come'. This was subsequently acknowledged by Eden.[51] Nor should the willingness of the Viet-Minh to compromise be underestimated. Bouyed up by the triumph of Dien Bien Phu, to have retroceded 20 per cent of territory under its control and nearly a million-and-a-half people was a considerable act of

self denial.[52] Was it the result of Chinese pressure - of Viet-Minh objectives compromised in the interests of its powerful northern supporter? Possibly. On the other hand, the 1956 elections offered the prospect of complete victory by peaceful means, something which must have been attractive to the Viet-Minh after eight years of exhausting and destructive war. One may surmise that later accusations by Hanoi of a Chinese and Soviet 'betrayal' had as much to do with their failure to fully protest the abandonment of all-Vietnam elections in 1955-56 as with the decision to hold them in the first place for, by then, neither Peking or Moscow wished to re-open the Viet-Nam problem. Only time was to prove that the Viet-Minh were the real losers at Geneva.[53] Therefore, according to this reading, Eden's *rôle* at Geneva was that of a facilitator rather than problem-solver. His efforts to keep the Conference alive over a period of two months meant that when the principal parties concerned finally accepted that a peaceful settlement was in all their interests there was a ready-made forum in which to discuss terms.

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On 21 May 1954, Eden wrote to Selwyn Lloyd from Geneva that it was 'the cessation of hostilities in Indo-China which I regard as my primary objective'.[54] This objective was limited and specific, designed to eradicate the Indo-China problem as a source of Sino-American, even general East-West, friction and conflict. Beyond this, his thinking was imprecise. As Anthony Short has written, the lesson slowly gleaned from the conflicts of the 20th century is that 'wars tend to arise out of preceding peace settlements'.[55] Eden ignored this lesson in 1954. Making peace in Indo-China in its fullest sense came a poor second to ending the fighting. The blame for the conflict which engulfed Viet-Nam in the 1960's cannot be laid

at the feet of any one individual, including Eden. Nevertheless, as Short also observes, the accuracy of the notion that poor peace settlements produce renewed conflict was never more 'obvious than in respect to the Geneva Conference of 1954'.[56] Eden, as co-chairman of that Conference, was in a position to press for a more intensive study by all concerned of the post-war political settlement, or even to call for a new - political - conference as had been written into the Korean armistice agreements. This did not happen. Instead Eden, his 'primary objective' secured on 21 July, made a speedy and no doubt welcome exit from Geneva. The post-hostilities arrangements were hastily contrived and, for that reason, imprecise and open to all manner of evasions.

There was, admittedly, more to this than Eden's reluctance to look too far into the future. A member of the British delegation at Geneva has recalled that another reason was the 'decay of traditional diplomacy ...

> This had once allowed diplomats, sometimes quite junior diplomats, to cooperate in working out the minor details while their superiors were still deadlocked on the major issues. At Geneva - only the second East-West ministerial conference since the death of Stalin and the first to include China - there was little readiness to delegate. What the Foreign Ministers had no time for was often left undone.[57]

Yet even this assessment brings one back to Eden's lack of long-term vision for, as stated, one of the principal matters left 'undone' was a carefully worked-out blueprint for Viet-Nam's political future.

Similarly, in the circumstances prevailing in the spring of 1954, Eden's estimate of the value of a South-East Asia defence grouping was also narrowly based. He saw such a grouping complementing or acting as an adjunct of his 'primary objective'. It was, in short, to guarantee any armistice agreement emerging from Geneva and so hopefully insure against a

recrudescence of Viet-Nam as a catalyst for general war in the future. But this was the limit of his vision. There was no broad sophisticated strategy or, if there was, it rested with Eden's cherished ideal of an Asian N.A.T.O., something which, in the form he wished it to take, was still a long way off in 1954.

It followed that if the aim of a coalition was simply to police an Indo-China settlement, its formation had to await agreement at Geneva. Such hesitancy, however, brought Eden into conflict with the American desire for an instantaneous, all-embracing and wide-ranging alliance. This disturbed him for three reasons: first, it would jeopardise the prospects for peace at Geneva rather than enhance them as the Americans argued; second, he could not be sure if the Eisenhower Administration meant it to be anything more than cover, or legitimisation, for American intervention in Viet-Nam; and third, in terms of involving the neutral Asian powers and establishing a future alliance on the lines of N.A.T.O., it was premature. Moreover, the context in which it was being discussed would give the impression that it was an offensive grouping directed against China and, as such, alienate those Asian powers determined to retain their non-aligned status.

Eden rightly regarded any South-East Asian security pact as worthless and devoid of credibility without the participation of all the important Asian states. He therefore responded to American pressure for immediate action in such a way as to appease Washington's impatience while at the same time preserving his Asian N.A.T.O.-ideal for the time when conditions would permit fuller Asian adherence. He sought, for example, to resist the American predilection for bringing in as founder members the Philippines, Siam and the Associate States thereby aggravating the anti-colonial

sensibilities of the other Asian powers; he tried to ensure that the aim of an alliance was initially restricted to upholding a settlement for Indo-China; and in the latter connection, and again to avoid sending unfortunate signals to the rest of Asia, he sought in Washington in June 1954 to dilute the anti-communist character of such an alliance by involving the Soviets and Chinese in a Locarno-type guarantee. But as Eden resisted American pressure to go further and faster than he wanted, considerable tensions were released within the 'special relationship'. On balance, however, Eden's more restrained approach triumphed. At the end of the Geneva Conference he succeeded in persuading the U.S. Government to separate the planned invitation to all Asian countries to recognise and respect the agreements on Indo-China from the invitation to those same nations to commence immediate talks on a defence pact. Linking the two in the minds of men like Nehru might have resulted in rejection of both, not just the latter as proved the case.[58]

The S.E.A.T.O Treaty that was finally signed in Manila in September 1954 had enough advantages from Eden's viewpoint to make it rather more than 'the price paid by the British for American acquiescence at Geneva'.[59] On the debit side, however, was composition. This was so heavily weighted towards the white Western powers and their satellite Asian partners that four out of five of the so-called Colombo Powers (Pakistan was the exception) were effectively excluded from future involvement. Conversely, and assuming that they would ever have consented to participate, to have included countries like India and Indonesia while excluding Siam and the Philippines would have led to American disassociation. Or, if not, Washington would probably have pressed (as it did from time to time) for the inclusion of Japan, South Korea and Formosa to counterbalance Asian

Commonwealth membership. These countries, more even than Siam or the Philippines, would have inflamed neutral Asian opinion. In other words, the kind of Asian membership desired in London was incompatible with that desired in Washington and *vice versa*. A further problem was the Eisenhower Administration's disdain for India, its equation of neutralism with pro-communism, and mistrust of Nehru. As an American scholar notes, 'many US officials believed that the fastest way to send information to Peking was to whisper it confidentially in New Delhi'.[80]

If Eden reflected that S.E.A.T.O. was nothing like the Asian N.A.T.O. he had originally envisaged, certainly in terms of membership, he did approve of the special protocol extending protection to Laos, Cambodia and South Viet-Nam and which, in effect, guaranteed the partition line in the latter. This, however, technically flouted the undertaking he had given the Chinese at Geneva, namely that the Indo-Chinese states would be debarred from joining any millitary alliance whether pro-Chinese or pro-Western. Yet even as he gave this promise Eden was in the process of breaking it. 'Although we naturally said nothing to the Chinese', he informed London on 19 July 1954, 'General Bedell-Smith and I recognized that the territory of Laos, Cambodia and Southern Viet-Nam might be covered by the South-East Asia Pact even if the Associated States could not themselves be members'.[81] On 21 July, Chou En-lai again sought Eden's assurance that the 'United States would not ... seek to upset the understandings' reached at Geneva, particularly concerning the establishment of American military bases in Indo-China. This the Chinese Premier obtained, though privately Eden, in line with what he had said two days earlier, was still contemplating ways in which Laos, Cambodia and retained Viet-Nam might be covered by S.E.A.T.O. without them formally

joining the organisation. Their direct membership, he conceded, would be 'contrary to the spirit of these [Geneva] agreements as well as being political folly'.[62]

A month later, as S.E.A.T.O. planning reached a climax, Eden accepted an American draft Treaty which extended protection to the Associate States.[63] Thus his undertaking to the Chinese had been neatly sidestepped, a manoeuvre Eden presumably felt was within the letter as well as the 'spirit' of Geneva for he later implied that South Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia had been genuinely neutralised.[64] Nor, as is sometimes suggested[65], was the S.E.A.T.O. protocol an entirely American initiative. Eden actually pressed for the widening of the protocol to include S.E.A.T.O. protection for the Associates States if they were endangered through 'subversion' or 'threats to territorial integrity otherwise than by armed attack'. Just how such protection could be extended was not specified.[66] Was Eden perhaps suggesting that in the event of an electoral victory for the Viet-Minh in 1956 (something he fully expected[67]), the S.E.A.T.O. powers should refuse to recognise the result?

Eden's insistence that the security of the Associate States be bolstered from internal danger can be seen as an admission that, so far as Viet-Nam was concerned, partition had never been anything but an unsavoury expedient to ensure that the greater danger of American-led escalation was averted. Having achieved that end Eden seems to have viewed S.E.A.T.O. as a means by which partition might prove something more than a staging-post on the road to an all-communist Indo-China. British support for the Manila protocol may even be viewed as tacit support for the abandonment of the 1956 elections in Viet-Nam. The Diem regime did not take much prompting, while Washington was provided with ample justification for its subsequent

actions by the looseness of the - unsigned - Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference. Eden's attitude, whether he intended it or not, may have been a further factor. The evidence would suggest conscious intent. In January 1955, a Foreign Office memorandum warned that British interests in South-East Asia would not be served by a Viet-Minh electoral triumph. With the Hanoi and Saigon authorities due to meet on 20 July to make arrangements for the election, the paper argued that 'it might be best' if these negotiations were to 'drift into deadlock and if deadlock were in turn to lead gradually to acceptance by both sides of the idea of a semi-permanent division of Vietnam'. This, though, 'would need very discreet handling indeed to avoid the charge of violating Geneva'. Eden fully endorsed this proposal which therefore implicates one of the principal architects of the Geneva Agreements and, along with the Soviet Union, one of the powers responsible for overseeing their implementation, in their ultimate destruction.[58]

A further noteworthy feature of the events of 1954, at least from April, was that British Indo-China policy was very much Eden's policy. There is thus good reason for talking specifically of Eden rather than British diplomacy in general when discussing the Geneva Conference. The pace of events and seriousness of the situation demanded instant decisions from the Foreign Secretary. Confident of his own judgement, Eden was happy to operate in this uncomplicated manner. One consequence, however, was a tendency to ride rough-shod over the opinions of those advisers who, for the previous two-and-a-half years, had been far more closely involved with South-East Asian affairs. This meant, for example, ignoring the repeated entreaties of Makins to fall in with American plans for immediate progress

on a regional defence pact, a view endorsed by other senior figures like Salisbury, Nutting, Shuckburgh, Caccia and Allen. Eden's officials also frowned on his frankness when dealing with Molotov at Geneva. On other occasions he ignored Foreign Office doubts about the point and likelihood of bringing India and the other neutral Asian nations into the decision-making process, and differed with Shuckburgh over the value of the 'very nasty faces the Americans are making' with regard to nuclear weapons.[69]

Many of Eden's key decisions were thus the product of personal intuition rather than collective diplomatic wisdom. They were also to some extent a reflection of his personally limited objectives competing with the Foreign Office's more long-range ambitions, particularly with regard to S.E.A.T.O. His advisers, led by the unreservedly Atlanticist Makins, argued from the start in favour of moving ahead on S.E.A.T.O. planning in tandem with the Americans on the grounds that, though premature and likely to go down badly amongst the Asian Commonwealth, the danger of a pact being formed without Britain was greater. Within an alliance, Makins protested, Britain could exert some influence over American policy; on the other hand, for Britain to deliberately sideline itself could be disastrous and 'affect our relations with the United States everywhere'.[70] Salisbury, one of Eden's few close friends in politics, also warned that '[w]e shall have no control over them [the Americans] ... They might drop the H-Bomb'.[71] Such arguments must have appealed to Eden who, since 1952, had accepted that a regional defence mechanism was necessary to curtail the excesses of American policy as much as to contain China. However, the Makins thesis cut across Eden's personal agenda for Geneva on two levels: first, Eden was never convinced that the Americans would not use a pact as a device for immediate intervention in Viet-Nam thus bringing about a dangerous

escalation of the problem; second, it would have threatened his 'primary objective' if, as might well have heppened, the Chinese walked out of Geneva in protest. It was not that Eden and his officials were divided on aims at the Conference, merely methods and the extent to which British policy in South-East Asia should be subordinated to that of the United States in the interest of harmonious Anglo-American relations in their widest sense. Britain, Eden maintained, was 'no less aware of the dangers of Communist expansion in South-East Asia' than the United States, but when it came to dealing with this danger, 'we have, and are entitled to have, our own ideas on how it can best be done'.[72]

Eden, it is argued in some quarters, lacked the broad vision and imagination which characterise a 'great' Foreign Secretary. He was, rather, a thoroughly efficient professional diplomat adept at the day-to-day running of British diplomacy.[73] Though Eden's official biographer refutes the charge that he was 'a potentially great civil servant or ambassador'[74], his performance during the Indo-China crisis of 1954 suggests otherwise. In his first address to the Commons after his return to office in 1951, Eden described the approach he would adopt in international affairs. He planned to take 'a number of definite, but limited, problems' and, by solving them one by one, contribute to an improvement in the atmosphere of East-West relations and 'from this small beginning move into a wider and more hopeful field'.[75] On another occasion he spoke of a ...

> step-by-step' approach to foreign affairs. Preparation, conference and agreement: starting from small issues and working to the great. A steady pursuit, with a fixed determination and a real good will.[76]

Indo-China in 1954 was certainly a 'definite' problem and Eden approached it in a 'limited' manner. Unfortunately, Indo-China was a bigger problem

than Eden realised and his approach, effective in the short-term, did little to ease matters in the future.

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The day after the Geneva Conference ended, a special Cabinet Committee, appointed earlier in the year to review British defence policy in the light of developments in nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons, presented its findings in a Cabinet memorandum. It concluded as follows:

> Our primary aim must be to prevent a major war. To that end we must strengthen our position and influence as a world Power and maintain and consolidate our alliance with the United States.[77]

This was a succinct summary of the central conclusion of Eden's Cabinet memorandum of June 1952 on 'Overseas Obligations' and from which the concept of power-by-proxy emerged.[78] However, as a design for offsetting Britain's postwar decline - as a means by which American power could be channeled towards the attainment of British foreign policy goals - this concept proved to be based on two false premises: that American aims were compatible with those of Britain; and, if not, that American policy could be brought into line through exposure to British political and diplomatic opinion. These misconceptions were exposed in the context of the Indo-China problem between 1951 and 1954. Anglo-American attitudes differed considerably and, with the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations lukewarm about close liaison and 'ganging up' with Britain, opportunities to influence official opinion in Washington were rare. The central conclusion of the Cabinet's 1954 defence review was similarly flawed. Events in Indo-China and at the Geneva Conference had demonstrated this even before it was presented to Ministers. The contradictions were glaring. While it was Britain's 'primary aim' to avoid a major war, and while the key to success in this respect lay in consolidating the Anglo-American partnership, what

was to be done when it was the United States itself which appeared the most likely cause of a widespread conflict? What happened when Britain resisted the more disturbing aspects of American policy thus causing Anglo-American tension and mistrust? How would that 'maintain and consolidate' relations between the two? And, since the key to strengthening Britain's 'position and influence as a world Power' also rested, according to Eden's earlier analysis, on a close working relationship with Washington, what did this say for power-by-proxy?

Ultimately, it said that there was no substitute for real power. This would be brutally revealed in Egypt in 1956 when, ironically, the means by which Eden in 1952-54 saw Britain continuing to wield power, the United States, proved to be the means by which Britain's want of power was exposed. An element of hyperbole notwithstanding, there may be something in Lord Boothby's retrospective assessment of the 1951-56 period that 'with the best intention in the world, Eden brought about the worst relationship between Britain and the United States this century'.[79]

NOTES

1. See Preface, p. i. and p. x, notes 1-4.
2. Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 95.
3. Saki Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, pp. 147-48, and in Dockrill & Young, eds., *British Foreign Policy*, p. 166; Young in Young, ed., *Church-ill Administration*, pp. 101-02; Geoffrey Warner, 'The Anglo-American Special Relationship' in *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 485.
4. Sir Patrick Reilly, letter to the author, 11 Oct. 1989.
5. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Action This Day: Working with Churchill* (London 1968), p. 41; also Michael Charlton, *The Price of Victory* (London 1983), p. 151.
6. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President*, p. 49.
7. See pp. 207-08.
8. Joseph Smith, *The Cold War 1945-65* (Oxford 1989), p. 35.
9. CAB 129/70 C(54)271, 18 Aug. 1954.
10. Ismay Papers, IV/AVO/10, Eden letter to Ismay, 18 Sept. 1954.
11. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, p. 1549.
12. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 1.
13. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 823.
14. It also gave rise to speculation that Mendès-France had made a secret

deal with Molotov at Geneva, namely the destruction of the E.D.C. in return for Soviet support for a favourable Indo-China settlement. This 'myth' has now been firmly debunked by Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 129-32. It was also dismissed at the time by Eden, see PREM 11/990, Eden min. to Churchill, 29 Sept., in response to Churchill min. 24 Sept. 1954.

15. Young in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, pp. 94-98.
16. CAB 129/70 C(54)298, 27 Sept. 1954; CMD 9289.
17. CAB 129/71 C(54)302, 30 Sept; FO 800/779 (Eden Papers), Churchill min. to Eden, 27 Sept. 1954.
18. Sir Frank Roberts, interview, 21 Nov. 1989. Also FO 371/118105/1, Jebb despatch 54, 5 Jan. 1955.
19. Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, pp. 232-33; Dockrill, *West German Rearmament*, pp. 133-50; Northedge, *Descent From Power*, pp. 166-70; Wilfred Loth, *The Division of the World 1941-45* (London 1988), pp. 282-94.
20. CAB 129/70 C(54)298, 27 Sept. 1954; Dockrill, *British Defence*, pps. 65-71, 80-81.
21. CMD 9289, pp. 17-18.
22. FO 800/779 (Eden Papers), Churchill min. to Eden, 27 Sept. 1954.
23. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 633 (1 Oct. 1954).
24. Charlton, *Price of Victory*, p. 150; Gladwyn, *Memoirs*, p. 273.
25. Shlaim, et al, *British Foreign Secretaries*, p. 88; also Selden, *Indian Summer*, p. 415.
26. Rioux, *Fourth Republic*, p. 228.
27. *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 2, pps. 1433, 1467.
28. Rothwell in Crockatt & Smith, *Cold War*, p. 68.
29. CAB 131/13 D(53)45, 1 Oct 1953; see also D(53)3, 28 Jan. 1953.
30. CAB 129/64 C(53)330, 24 Nov. 1953.
31. FO 371/101263/77G, Franks tel. 1485, 5 Aug. 1952 - see p. 48
32. FO 371/ 101263/101G, Tahourdin min., 19 Sept. 1952 - see p. 85.
33. Rhodes James wrongly concentrates on the danger of Chinese intervention in *Eden*, p. 376.
34. Cited in Robert Boardman, *Britain and the People's Republic of China 1949-1974* (London 1976), p. 61.
35. Avon Papers, AP20/17/15A, Eden letter to Lloyd, 21 May 1954.
36. Ibid.
37. Avon Papers, AP20/45/49, Eden letter to Clarissa, 22 May 1954. For context see p. 290.
38. CAB 128/27 CC(54)35th meeting, 24 May 1954. For context see p. 290.
39. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, p. 203 (14 May 1954).
40. Halle, *Cold War as History*, p. 296.
41. See pp. 270-71.
42. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 124.
43. See Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 102.
44. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 123-24; also Bartlett, ibid, p. 102.
45. Eden, ibid.
46. Moran, *Struggle*, p. 586 (24 June 1954)
47. PREM 11/1074, Eisenhower message to Churchill, 15 Dec. 1954.
48. FO 371/110216/9, Trevelyan despatch 284, 31 Aug. 1954.
49. John Gittings, The World and China, pp. 192-95; Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-73* (New York 1974), p. 552; also FO 371/112077/838, Reilly letter to Allen, 8 July 1954.
50. Avon Papers, AP20/17/231, Geneva Diary, 20 May 1954.
51. FO 371/112040/85, Jebb despatch 356, 25 Aug. 1954; see also FO 371/

118105/1, Jebb despatch 54, 5 Feb. 1955; HCDebs, Vol. 530, cols. 1571-72 (22 July 1954).

52. Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 154.
53. Lacouture, ibid, pps. 151-55, 221-22; Smith, *Vietnam*, Vol. I., pp. 59-60; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, pp. 62-63
54. Avon Papers, AP20/17/15A, Eden letter to Lloyd, 21 May 1954.
55. Short, *Vietnam War*, p. 153.
56. Ibid.
57. Sir James Cable, 'Improvising Peace in Indo-China', unpublished paper in possession of the author.
58. See pp. 328-29; *FRUS 1952-54*, Vol. XII, Pt. 1, p. 643-45.
59. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 139; CMD 9282.
60. Brands Jnr, *International History Review*, Vol. IX, No. 2, p. 263.
61. FO 371/112080/902, Eden tel. 982, 19 July 1954.
62. FO 371/112080/921, Eden tel. 1009, 21 July 1954.
63. CAB 129/70 C(54)275, 26 Aug. 1954.
64. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 141; HCDebs, Vol. 530, cols. 1570-71 (22 July 1954); also Warner in Young ed., *Churchill Administration*, pp. 257-58.
65. Warner, ibid.
66. CAB 129/70 C(54)275, 26 Aug. 1954.
67. CAB 128/27 CC(54)52nd meeting, 23 July 1954.
68. FO 371/117176/10, Allen memo. ('Our Policy in Vietnam'), 17 Jan. & Eden min. and marginal notes, 18 Jan. 1955.
69. Avon Papers, AP20/27/18A, Makins letter to Eden, 21 May; FO 371/112068/615, Nutting letter to Reading; Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, pps. 188 (2 May), 188-90 (3 May), 193 (5 May) & 198 ((May 1954).
70. FO 371/112050/122G, Makins tel. 1558, 4 April; Avon Papers, AP20/17/18A Makins letter to Eden, 21 May; FO 800/785/38 & 39 (Eden Papers), Makins tels. 893 & 894, 9 May; FO 800/842/82 (Eden Papers), Makins letter to Eden, 21 June 1954.
71. Avon Papers, AP20/17/118, Salisbury letter to Eden, 9 May 1954.
72. Avon Papers, AP20/17/18B, Eden letter to Makins, 26 May 1954.
73. Sir Anthony Nutting in Charlton, *Price of Victory*, p. 141; Shlaim et al, *British Foreign Secretaries*, pp. 86-89, 10; Adamthwaite in Young, ed., *Churchill Administration*, p. 13.
74. Rhodes James, *Eden*, p. 624.
75. HCDebs, Vol. 494, col. 36 (19 Nov. 1951)
76. Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 11-12.
77. CAB 129/69 C(54)250, 22 July 1954.
78. CAB 129/53 C(52)202, 18 June 1952.
79. Lord Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel* (London 1978), p. 211.

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