# DROPPING THE BATON: DECISIONS IN UNITED STATES POLICY ON INDOCHINA, 1943-1945

by

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SPECIAL TERMS

| | |
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| CLI | Corps Léger d'Intervention |
| DGER | French Clandestine Intelligence Agency (Direction Générale des Études er Recerches), akin to the U.S. Office of Strategic Services. |
| DGSS | French clandestine intelligence and special action organization (Direction Générale des Services Spéciaux) similar to the British Special Operations Executive. DGSS and other wartime French clandestine groups were combined to form the DGER on November 6, 1944. |
| EMBANKMENT | Code Name for OSS *Mercy Mission* for Saigon, September 1945 |
| 5thRIC | French Fifth Colonial Infantry Regiment |
| FO 371 | Foreign Office, General Correspondence, Political (United Kingdom) |
| Force 136 | The British Special Operations Executive detachment in Southeast Asia. |
| FRUS | Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers |
| Mercy Missions | OSS Teams Inserted into Indochina Following Japanese Surrender to Locate and Protect U.S. Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees Held by the Japanese |
| OSS | U.S. Office of Strategic Services |
| OWI | U.S. Office of War Information |
| PREM 3 | Prime Minister's Office Papers (United Kingdom) |
| SA | Service d'Action. A group of French officers organized and equipped by the British Special Operations Executive to conduct guerilla activity in Japanese-occupied Indochina. |
| SEAC | South East Asia Command |

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| WO 172 | War Office, War Diaries, South East Asia Command (United Kingdom) |
| WO 203 | Military Headquarters Papers, Far East (United Kingdom) |

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam Archive, located in Texas Tech University's Southwest Collection, holds what is possibly the world's premier collection of print, visual and sound records of the United States of America's involvement in Vietnam's multi-stage war for independence. Within that archive, the Peter Dunn Collection contains several linear feet of declassified British memoranda and official documents on the war in Vietnam, the strangest of which has to be the following memorandum sent on 12 March 1945 by Prime Minister Winston Spenser Churchill to his chief of staff, Hastings Ismay:[1]

> General Ismay
> Let me have a short note, not more than one page, on what has happened in Indo-China [sic] since the beginning of the war. How is it there are French troops and a Governor-General there now? Are they the survivors of the Vichy period? Have they not yet joined up with de Gaulle?[2] I have not followed the affairs of this country for some time.[3]
>
> W.S.C.

Winston Churchill's question, although somewhat surprising, considering his position, responsibilities, and his recorded discussions of the topic, is one of great interest even today. Certainly Churchill had other weighty problems to ponder, but he

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[1] General Hastings Lionel Ismay was Chief of Staff to Churchill and, later, Clement Atlee. In 1939 he was made Deputy Secretary of the British War Cabinet. He was promoted general in 1944 and was made baron in 1947.

[2] General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French, was also considered by the time of Churchill's note to be the head of the Provisional French Government.

[3] Prime Minister's Personal Minute, Serial No. D.72/5, 12 March 1945. Public Records Office, FO 371 46305 7984, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, folder 2.

repeatedly expressed his strong convictions concerning the maintenance of imperial possessions in the Far East and elsewhere. Churchill's question does raise an issue of central importance in regard to the "American War" in Vietnam: how *did* it happen that the French troops and the governor general were in Vietnam by the end of 1945? The next logical question for a student of U.S. history might be *how did United States policy and actions affect this, if at all?*[4]

In slightly over a quarter century since the final exodus of U.S. personnel from Vietnam with some of their Vietnamese associates and hundreds of thousands of clingers-on[5] from the dying Republic of Vietnam, countless studies, papers, and articles have been written on the various questions related to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Probably for political reasons as well as a tendency to look first at that which is most proximate, the studies have tended to work in retrograde, seeking reasons and answers first from the 1960s, then the 1950s, then the 1940s, attaching blame or causal relationships to various national leaders and national administrations beginning with the Johnson administration and working gradually back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Serious scholars do not seek causes from later administrations, but ironically, many

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[4] A note on terminology: Depending on the particular authority cited, Việt Nam has a recorded history of about three thousand years, including periods of virtual independence and long periods of domination by the Chinese. Through those years, the country, whose boundaries were constantly redefined, went through a long series of names ranging from Văn Lang to Âu Lạc to Giao Chỉ to An Nam to Nam Việt, and so forth. For the purposes of this paper, Vietnamese proper names and place names will be presented in Vietnamese form when they originally appear, but will subsequently be presented in the prevalent English form, e.g. Việt Nam becomes Vietnam. In addition, modern forms of place name will be used, e.g. Indochina vice Indo-China, except where direct quotes are employed.

[5] These included, among others, all of the girls from Kim Kelly's Bar on Cách Mạng Street in the suburbs of Saigon.

young minds of the 1980s and 1990s will forever associate Richard Millhouse Nixon with America's failures in Vietnam.

Various reasons are offered for how a great democracy could become mired in war against a people seeking democracy and the right to independence from colonial domination. These explanations range from the U.S. desire to achieve economic hegemony in the Pacific to misguided support of traditional capitalist allies to the notion of *containment* as first articulated publicly by George F. Kennan in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947.[6] Scholars have placed blame on Lyndon Baines Johnson for the massive escalation of the war; on the Kennedy brothers for their amateurish dabbling in war; on Eisenhower either for failing to provide sufficient help for the French to "finish the job" or for failing to end America's advisory role before America became too deeply involved; and on Truman for failing to carry on with Roosevelt's policies of trusteeships and freedom for the captured colonies in the Pacific.

Before all of these notions, however, runs a strain of simple logic. Simple logic dictates that had there been no French military presence in Indochina in 1945 and 1946, the United States would have been less inclined to become interested or deeply involved, faced as it was with Soviet encroachments in areas of greater importance. There *was*, of course, a French presence during the war, the Vichy. That presence remained largely toothless, however, until the final days of the war when

[6] See George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947), 566–587. This article is based on The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United State, 1946*, Vol. VI (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), 697–709.

something changed. With peace almost in reach, there was a series of events that brought about the renewal of the French presence in a way that guaranteed another twenty odd years of strife and misery for the people of Vietnam and many others as well.

The intention here is to examine the influence of U.S. policy on that first basic step toward the Franco-Vietnam War, how that U.S. policy was defined and how it was executed. The principal years of focus will be 1944-1945. This examination concerns U.S. policy and action rather than Vietnam herself or her revolution. The study makes several assumptions. First, there is an assumption that for reasons of economic welfare and world position, any French government was inclined to attempt to re-establish control in Indochina; second, is the assumption that for protection of its own colonial and economic interests, any government in Britain was inclined to support French aspirations in Indochina; third, and most fundamental to any rational approach to international relations historical or current, is that any government of any nation state is primarily motivated by what appears to be the good of that nation state.

With the great significance of Vietnam in following years, it is natural that there are diverse views on intent, process, and results. Scholars differ, for example, in regard to the perceived change in U.S. policy from the early years of World War II through the first years of Harry S Truman's presidency. This might be called the "Lost Dream Debate." One such interpretation is that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's death brought a dramatic change in U.S. policy that facilitated the French return to Indochina; another is that U.S. policy had already changed, if it had ever been truly established, before the

death of Roosevelt towards support of France's return to Indochina; and a third, not necessarily exclusive of the first two, is that the United States failed to grasp a golden opportunity to further its own interests in world democracy and peace afforded by direct U.S. contact with the Vietnamese people, particularly Ho Chi Minh and his allies (hence the "Lost Dream").

Historian George Herring declared that a change in U.S. policy "came as the result of a decision, made by several top State Department officials in May 1945, to accept the restoration of French sovereignty in Indochina."[7] This, according to Herring, was done to gain French support at the San Francisco Conference on the United Nations and also, more generally, to gain leverage in combating Soviet expansion in Europe. Christopher Thorne and Walter LaFeber, on the other hand, argue that a change actually began in the final year of the Roosevelt presidency.[8] While they choose to disagree on the roles played by the Europeans and others in this change,[9] they both note changing international balances recognized at the Department of State and by analysts of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).[10] Thorne cites an OSS analysis prepared shortly before Roosevelt's death that argued, "The United States should realize its interest in

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[7] George S. Herring, "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," *Diplomatic History*, I (1977), 97-117.

[8] Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-45," *American Historical Review* 80, no. 5 (Dec. 1975), 1277-95.

[9] For Thorne's comments on this, see unnumbered footnote in Christopher Thorne, "Indochina and Anglo-American Relations, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLV, (February 1976), 73; also see La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina, 1292-1293.

[10] The OSS, headed by William J. Donovan, was disbanded by President Harry S. Truman on 1 October 1945 but was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.

the maintenance of the British, French, and Dutch colonial empires. We should encourage liberalization of the colonial regimes in order the better to maintain them, and to check Soviet influence in the stimulation of colonial revolt."[11]

In a master's thesis defended at Cornell University in 1991, Shannon Smith Loane examines President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's attitude toward Indochina and the prospect of French re-occupation of their Indochina colonies. Loane suggests that Indochina initially took on an exaggerated role because of Franklin Roosevelt's interest in the issue of post-war trusteeships. According to Loane, Roosevelt showed a clear inclination to oppose the return of the French to Indochina but had failed to settle the issue with America's European allies at the outset and then saw the underpinnings of this nascent policy weaken steadily as other objectives, defeat of Germany, defeat of Japan, and the establishment of a world body to prevent future world conflict, took priority and required that he give ground on the issue of the Asian colonies.[12]

One of the best documented but also most ambitious interpretations of President Roosevelt's intentions vis-à-vis post-war Vietnam is offered by Stein Tønnesson in *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945.*[13] In his introduction, Tønnesson summarizes the views of several historians, particularly Herring, Thorne, Donald Cameron Watt, Lloyd Gardner, Jacques Valette, Arthur Schlesinger, Gary R. Hess, Joseph M. Siracusa, and

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[11] OSS memo, 2 April 1945, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, cited in Thorne, *Indochina*, 96.

[12]Shannon Smith Loane, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and Indochina: United States Policy During World War II," M.A. Thesis, Cornell University, 1991.

[13] Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1991).

others. While Tønnesson's study focuses more on the Vietnamese revolution itself, he makes a case that U.S. actions actually supported Ho Chi Minh's position even after the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He summarizes the "lost dream" debate, claiming general

> consensus in three points: (1) Franklin D. Roosevelt abandoned or seriously moderated his anti-French Indochina policy before he died.....(2) In a continuation of Roosevelt's own revision of his policy, the Truman Administration endorsed the French return to Indochina; (3) Lacking clear directives from Truman, U.S. military and intelligence agencies remained uncertain of their government's Indochina policy. Some of them therefore continued to apply Roosevelt's anti-French policy.[14]

Tønnesson goes on to present a case based on his own research to the effect that Roosevelt had actually left himself a route to his anti-French Indochina goal in the agreements reached at the Yalta Conference.[15]

An entirely different perspective on U.S. policy comes from Americans who were at the scene of the action in Vietnam. Interpretations of U.S. policy in action vis-à-vis the return of French authority to Vietnam run along a continuum ranging from the assertion that there was no policy, to the assertion that U.S. diplomatic and military officials on the scene failed to adhere to a new policy in the first months following victory over Japan, and, finally, to the assertion that officers in the field were indeed following the "real" policy. As will be shown here, Franklin Roosevelt did in a number of cases personally brief military, diplomatic, and intelligence personnel to make known his priorities before they departed for the field. Those individuals, at least initially, had

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[14] Ibid., 19.

[15] Ibid., 200-203.

every reason to believe that they understood U.S. policy at the time.[16] In relation to the actions of these individuals, wide divergences also exist in judgment of their objectives and actions in Vietnam just prior to and after the end of World War II.

In his *The First Vietnam War*, British historian Peter Dunn focuses on British leadership in Vietnam at the end of World War II, but Dunn also takes time to be critical of U.S. conduct at several levels. Dunn suggests that the United States may have operated all along with the intention of freezing Britain and France out of the region. He cites then British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on Roosevelt "...going back on his promises..." concerning restoration of the French empire.[17] Dunn also describes the early U.S. intelligence presence in southern Vietnam as being irresponsible.[18] Whether or not Dunn's point of view is accepted, his study serves to emphasize the importance of action as an element of policy.

In terms of *action in the field*, there are several definitions of *field*. In the case of Vietnam in 1945-1946, this might include not only the area of Vietnam and contiguous countries, but also the working levels at the Departments of War and State and at the White House. This would range from high-level civilian and military leaders such a Generals George C. Marshall, Joseph Stilwell, and Albert C. Wedemeyer[19] and

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[16] These numbered, among others, Ambassador Hurley and General Albert Wedemeyer.

[17] Peter M. Dunn, *The First Vietnam War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 156.

[18] Ibid., 214-223.

[19] George C. Marshall held the post of Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army for the duration of World War II and later held the post of Secretary of State under President Harry S. Truman. During the war he was responsible, among other things, for finding and placing highly talented U.S. Army officers who played major roles in the war such as Dwight Eisenhower, Mark Clark, Stilwell, and Wedemeyer. Joseph

diplomats such as Secretaries of State Cordell Hull, Edward R. Stettinius, and James F. Byrnes, Assistant Secretaries of State Joseph C. Grew and James C. Dunn,[20] Ambassadors Clarence E. Gauss, Jefferson Caffrey, and Patrick J. Hurley[21] to State Department desk officers and branch chiefs in Washington such as H. Freeman Matthews, Edwin F. Stanton and Abbot Low Moffat,[22] and military, diplomatic, and intelligence officers on the ground in Indochina and China. The last category, including

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Stilwell was a veteran of World War I, had served several tours in China, and was selected for the almost impossible task of serving concurrently as Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Commander of U.S. Ground Troops in the U.S. China-Burma-India area. To make things even more difficult, when SEAC was formed in 1943, Stilwell was also assigned to concurrent duties as Deputy Supreme Commander of SEAC. An astute soldier, but acerbic in nature (thus the nickname "Vinegar Joe"), Stilwell fell out of favor with Chiang Kai-shek, and was recalled to the United States in 1944. Wedemeyer had served on strategic planning staffs at the War Department in the early years of the war. He had no China experience but was highly regarded by General Marshall and chosen, as a major general, to be Deputy Chief of Staff of SEAC in October 1943. Several months after the recall of Stilwell from China-India-Burma, that area was broken into segments. Wedemeyer was promoted to Lieutenant General and replaced Stilwell as Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo and Commander of U.S. ground forces in China.

[20] Grew had served as U.S. Ambassador to Tokyo until the outbreak of WWII. Dunn, according to George C. Herring, "ranked below only Secretary of State Stettinius and Assistant Secretary Grew. In a letter to her husband written on 4 December 1944, Eleanor Roosevelt showed clearly that she considered Dunn an opponent of Roosevelt's foreign policies. See Eleanor Roosevelt to Franklin Roosevelt, 4 December 1944, Joseph Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 713-714. Also, see Herring, Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty, 103.

[21] A former U.S. Secretary of War, Major General Patrick J. Hurley was noted as an anti-colonialist and initially visited in China during the second half of 1944 in an attempt to serve as a buffer between Stilwell and Chiang Kai-shek. Previously Hurley had gone on special missions on behalf of the president to the Middle East and Iran. Hurley is treated with less than charity by British historian Christopher Thorne in "Indochina and American and Anglo-American Relations". In January 1945, Hurley replaced Gauss as U.S. Ambassador to China.

[22] Matthews was Director of the Office of European Affairs, Department of State. A career Europeanist, he had served as Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the U.S. Embassy to Vichy France and later as a political advisor on General Eisenhower's staff. He was also heavily involved in planning for postwar Germany. Stanton was an Asian specialist who had served at consulates in China. Moffat, another Asian specialist, was Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs in 1945. Moffat is quoted extensively in *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, on Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973).

members of OSS Detachment 404 to Saigon, the "Deer" Team,[23] the Patti Mission to Indochina,[24] and the U.S. Consulate in Hanoi. Many of the latter groups contained a special sort of individual in terms of history, particularly the history of involvement with Vietnam. These were direct participants and witnesses of action, policy in execution in the final days of World War II and in the subsequent months. Many of them had direct contact with the Vietnamese, the French, the British, the Chinese, and other key role players in Vietnam. Furthermore, many of them had special language or other skills that put them in positions of understanding and responsibility well above their rank.

Formal sources of information on these individuals and their experiences are in large part auto-biographical, by authors such as Archimedes L.A. Patti, Milton E. Miles, and Charles Fenn, but also include oral history gleaned from survivors of the Deer Team, Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey's mission to Saigon, and other sources such as the research and documentary histories written by Ronald H. Spector,[25] Charles Cruikshank, and R. Harris Smith. In many respects, these individuals provide the most critical information because they observed the actual working end of U.S. policy. This is so because the crux of the following discussion is pinned more on what the United

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[23] The Deer Mission will be discussed in more detail below. In brief, it was an OSS Team infiltrated into the Cao Bang region of northern Vietnam with the purpose of providing training and assistance to Ho Chi Minh and confederates in resisting the Japanese.

[24] See Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[25] Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: the Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York: the Free Press, 1985); and "Allied Intelligence and Indochina, 1943-1945," *Pacific Historical Review* LI; 1 (Feb. 1982), 741-751.

States did or did not do in reference to policy that what was said about policy. Did the United States facilitate or "allow" the reoccupation of Indochina by France? Did the United States attempt to prevent reoccupation? And, finally, regardless of intent or action, was the United States in the position to influence events toward a desired end – or were events determined by other players acting independently of U.S. objectives? There is a clear possibility that events on the ground might render all arguments on intent and evolution of policy moot in the case of in 1945 and 1946 if, for example, actions were taken by other parties in disregard of or in spite of U.S. policy.

In any study of U.S. policy, it is natural that the backbone of study will be documentation of official pronouncements of policy. In this case, that is in large part the U.S. Department of State communications contained in the volumes of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*). Another source is *U.S. Treaties and Other International Agreements*, which contains both the text and timing of related international agreements and well-documented context, as well. Other sources come from the Harry S. Truman Library archives, the George C. Marshall Library archives, and the Vietnam Archives of Texas Tech University. Additional sources include *Viet-Nam Crisis,* edited by Allan Cameron; *Vietnam: the Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, edited by Gareth Porter; and *The Truman Administration: A Documentary History*, edited by Barton Bernstein and Allen J. Matusow. Congressional record also holds relevant discussion and documentation, particularly *Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War* (US Senate); *Study of Pacific Bases* (US House of Representatives); and the *Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers.*

Personal papers and memoirs of state leaders such as the *Papers of Sir Anthony Eden*, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, the three volume *Churchill & Roosevelt: the Complete Correspondence*, the *Papers of George Catlett Marshall* and other participants such as Abbot Lowe Moffat, Archimedes L.A. Patti, Charles Fenn, Frank White, and George Wickes offer valuable information. Several of the latter individuals, including Patti, Fenn, and White experienced, reported, and were possibly influenced by direct contact with Hồ Chí Minh's Vietnam Independence League (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh, also known as the Việt Minh). Finally, although time has taken its toll on living witnesses, several personal interviews are also employed, one of Embankment Group member George Wickes and one of Deer Mission member Henry Prunier.

Secondary sourcing is available through studies, articles and book-length analyses of U.S. policy of that era. The most comprehensive of these that focus specifically on the time and issues of interest to this study are John Buttinger, David Marr, Stein Tønnesson, and John Sbrega.[26] At the same time, Edward Drachman's methodical study, *United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940 – 1945*, probably

[26] See Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1991), 19, where author Tønnesson refers to the "FRUS syndrome," suggesting, with some justification, a tendency to rely heavily on *FRUS* while neglecting other sources. Nevertheless, *FRUS* is most useful in providing insight into internal discussion of issues, whether or not the contents of individual messages can be regarded as accurate representations of fact they are certainly representations of what was actually said. Also see John Buttinger, *Vietnam: a Dragon Embattled*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967); David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: the Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); John Sbrega, *Anglo-American Relations and Colonialism in East Asia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983); and John Sbrega " 'First Catch Your Hare': Anglo-American Perspectives on Indochina during the Second World War," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 14; 1 (Mar. 1983): 63-78.

achieves the best focus on U.S. policy specifically in regard to Vietnam.[27] Several other studies concern related elements such as Anglo-American or Euro-American relations, Imperialism in Asia or Southeast Asia, and the impact of the Second World War on colonial empires in Asia. The most lively debate on issues such as changes in U.S. policy between Roosevelt and Truman administrations and the effect of containment on U.S. policy are to be found in contributions to *Foreign Affairs*, the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Diplomatic History*, the *American Historical Review*, and the *Journal of American History*. That debate generally focuses on the notion of a change in policy and, for the most part, assumes its effect.

While this thesis is not intended to be a historical study of Vietnam, a brief history of the connection between Vietnam and France is useful in terms of reference. Of course, the first French arrival came quite some time before Winston Churchill's question.[28] For the purposes of this paper, however, the first significant European visitors to Vietnam were Portuguese traders who arrived in about 1537 and established a trading port at Faifo, located about 15 miles south of the site of the current port city of Đà Nẵng in south central Vietnam. Faifo was later significant as the landing place of wandering merchants and for the Jesuits expelled from Japan in the mid-1600s.

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[27] Edward R, Drachman, *United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940-1945* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1970). Drachman conducts a step-by-step examination of policy as it developed not only over the Roosevelt-Truman transition, but in the early years before and just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

[28] The first contacts occurred, surprisingly, several hundred years after the birth of Christ. According to Vietnamese historian Phạm Văn Sơn, the first European visitors came from Rome. Also according to Son, a second group of visitors, the Nestorians (considered European by the Vietnamese), came to Vietnam in the 7th Century from or by way of Persia. See Phạm Văn Sơn, *Việt Sử Toàn Thư*, Vol. I & II. (Tokyo: Nam Nghe Xa, 1983).

Before the arrival of the Jesuits, however, a French Catholic priest had already arrived on the scene, a man who had arguably the greatest influence ever of any foreigner on Vietnamese history and culture. This priest was Alexander de Rhodes, an Avignon-born French priest who arrived in Viet Nam in 1627 at the age of 28 under the auspices of a Portuguese order. Quickly mastering the Vietnamese language and recognizing the difficulties of the written language, de Rhodes devised a romanized version of the written language based on phonetic representation of the sounds using the Latin alphabet with diacritical and tonal indicators. The Vatican eventually sent De Rhodes to the seat of Prince Trịnh Tráng[29] in Hà NộI, where he had great influence in gaining access for foreigners and in the spread of Catholicism in Vietnam. Through the 17th century there were also English and Dutch commercial representations in Hanoi, but these were half-hearted at best and were withdrawn before the advent of the 18th century as the difficulty in dealing with the Vietnamese appeared greater than the potential rewards.

As the result of a combination of French commercial pressure and the lasting influence of de Rhodes, French contact with the Vietnamese princes continued to increase. In the 18th century, no single individual played nearly as significant a role in the final blossoming of French-Vietnamese relations as that played by French priest-

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[29] Many historians, especially the French who delight in dividing Vietnam to show that it was a disorganized region of petty kingdoms, which really needed the organizational guidance of an enlightened Western culture, depict Trịnh Tráng as the emperor of the northern kingdom of Tonkin. I prefer, as do the Vietnamese, to consider him the prince of the northern portion of Vietnam, while the emperor, Lê Thần Tông, resided in the imperial city of Huế, and another prince (of the south), Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên, had his court in Sài Gòn.

diplomat Pigneau de Behaine, known as Bà đa Lộc to the Vietnamese. In the final years of the 18th century, de Behaine was single handedly responsible for organizing and orchestrating the training and assistance of the army of Nguyễn Anh, a pretender to the throne who in 1800 defeated the Tây Sơn rebels and other pretenders to the throne, uniting Vietnam under the house of Nguyễn, Vietnam's last dynasty. (The last Nguyen emperor, Bảo Đại, who died in France in 2000, was a principal figure, perhaps a pawn, in Vietnam's fight for escape from French domination.) As a result of Pigneau de Behaine's influential role and the continued increase of French presence, a special relationship began to grow between France and Vietnam, and Vietnam began to assume a growing importance to the French economy.

By the mid-1858, the French occupied the city of Đà Nẵng (in the central part of Vietnam near Faifo).[30] In the following year the French occupied Saigon and the provinces of Biên Hoà, Gia Định, and Định Tường, and in 1862 these territories were ceded to France. By 1867, the provinces of Châu Đốc, Hà Tiên, and Vĩnh Long were also added to the growing French concession, all of which eventually become part of the French colony of Cochinchina.

In June 1884, as France's hold on Vietnam tightened, a treaty between France and Emperor Tự Đức formalized a French protectorate over most of southern

[30] This was accomplished by main force, or, at the least, intimidation.

Vietnam,[31] and Vietnam became a part of the Union of French Indochina in 1887. France was not satisfied, however, until she could also extend her control over the northern most segment of the country, called Tonkin by the French. While France was unable to make an actual colony of Tonkin, by the end of the century, France dominated all of Vietnam and was busy "colonizing" and developing industries that became increasingly important to the French economy and the French Empire. In the building of the colony's infrastructure, the French were often brutal and callous in the treatment of laborers. Examples of this brutality can be found in the railway projects of French Governor General Paul Doumer at the turn of the century. On one rail line alone, the Yunnan-Fou line, of about 80,000 Indochinese and Chinese workers employed, over 25,000 died in completing the project.[32]

As the French domination strengthened, France tended to use overt military power to keep the Vietnamese court in subservience and worked to establish by precedent the right to enthrone kings or remove them. The latter happened twice in the early 20th century when kings proved troublesome to the French for one reason or another. At the turn of the century, continued opposition to the French had become a growing problem to colonial domination. Two successive emperors were exiled to the French colony on the Island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean. The first of these was Thành Thái, who was sent to Reunion in 1907. The French recognized his strong nationalist attitude and actually caught him attempting to escape to China. In order to

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[31] Bảo Đại, *Con Rồng Việt Nam* (Los Alamitos, California: Nguyễn Phước Tộc, 1990), 593-596.

[32] Buttinger, *A Dragon Embattled*, 30.

have some appearance of propriety, the French Governor General pressured members of the royal court to sign a document claiming that Thanh Thai was mentally unfit to rule and calling for him to abdicate.[33] Thanh Thai was allowed to return to Vietnam under a form of house arrest in the south in 1947. In some respects his fate was better than that of his successor.

Thanh Thai's nephew, the emperor Duy Tân was the second successive victim of deportation by the French. Despite his tender age of 16, he also was recognized to be a nationalist and, in fact, had connections with representatives of the Việt Nam Quảng Phục Party (VNQP), an anti-French nationalist group. In 1916 after an abortive uprising against the French in which Duy Tan played a role, almost twenty of the party's leaders were executed, while several hundred others were sentenced to hard labor. The young emperor was arrested and subsequently sent to Reunion, the island to which his uncle had been exiled. Duy Tan, however, never returned to Vietnam.[34]

Aside from their problems with controlling emperors and courtiers of the Imperial City, the French felt compelled from the onset of their military domination of Vietnam to deal with numerous anti-imperialist organizations. In addition to the VNQP, mentioned above, there were individual revolutionary leaders such as Phan Bội Châu, Nguyễn Thái Học, and Hoàng Phạm Trân, and organizations such as the Việt

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[33] Interestingly, the only mandarin in the court that refused to sign the document was Ngô Đình Khả, father of Ngô Đình Diêm.

[34] Hoàng Trọng Thược, *Hồ Sơ Vua Duy Tân* (San Francisco: Mõ Làng, 1993). Duy Tan died in an airplane crash in Africa en route from France to Reunion to visit his family on 26 December 1945. Duy Tan was serving as a Major in the French Army; his family continued to reside on Reunion.

Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (Vietnamese Nationalist Party), and Ho Chi Minh's Đông Dương Đảng (Indochina Communist Party). All became increasingly active and increasingly powerful toward the advent of World War II.

The Emperor Khải Định followed Duy Tan as the 12th emperor of the house of Nguyen, and at his death in 1922, Bảo Đại became the emperor of Vietnam. Bao Dai remained in France for the first years of his reign, completing his education, but returned to Vietnam in 1933 to assume his full duties, such as they were. Bao Dai, having been virtually raised and trained by a one-time French Governor-General (Jean Eugene Charles), was considered a "tame emperor" by the French. In the 1930s, however, a growing independence movement threatened the French, who reacted ruthlessly, killing or imprisoning resistance leaders and attempting to stamp out any notions of independence. They missed a small, wiry French communist named Nguyễn Ai Quốc, who would later come to be called Hồ Chi Minh.

Born Nguyễn Sinh Cùng in Nghệ An Province on 19 May 1890, Ho Chi Minh, also known as Nguyễn Tất Thanh, Nguyễn Ô Pháp, and Nguyễn Ai Quốc, was the son of a lesser mandarin and sometimes professor. At the age of 21, after some years of school and also employment as a teacher, Ho signed on as a crewmember of a French ship bound for Marseilles. He would not return to Vietnam for 30 years, and when he did so it was as a member of the Communist International. Ho was a founding member

of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), which came to life in Hong Kong in 1930, but he did not return to Vietnam until the onset of World War II.[35]

While Ho Chi Minh was absent, spending years in France, Russia, and China, Vietnam went through several stages of rebellion and harsh suppression by the French. In particular, the Yen Bay Rebellion of 1930 resulted in the execution of 83 revolutionaries and the imprisonment for life of 546 others. Later during the year almost 700 more were executed without trial, and by 1932, over 10,000 nationalists had been arrested and imprisoned.

In about 1940, Ho established a base in Cao Bang (a province bordering China). He also maintained contacts and a secondary base in Kunming, China. With the arrival of the Japanese in Indochina, Ho developed a pattern of travel between China and Vietnam, and accepted some assistance from the Chinese. In 1942, when crossing the border from Vietnam into China, Ho was arrested. He remained in jail for almost a year. His release by General Chang Fa-kwei in 1943 was followed within month by his first contact with U. S. military and intelligence officers.

Thus, in 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, France had dominated Vietnam and the Vietnamese for almost 90 years. While the French held that they had helped develop the country and its infrastructure, the Vietnamese had strong justification for opposition to the French presence there and had demonstrated this sentiment repeatedly despite harsh French countermeasures. A by-product of

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[35] Thus he missed the French purges of Vietnamese dissidents in the 1930s. For more detailed background, see Charles Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biographical Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973).

Japanese occupation during the war was the opportunity for a change in that situation. How U.S. policy on Indochina evolved during World War II and how it affected subsequent events, if at all, is the subject of this discussion.

# CHAPTER II

# POLICY OF RHETORIC

In August 1941, the Atlantic Charter seemed to put on paper the United States and British policy for conduct of the war and afterward. At the time it was written, Britain had been at war with Germany for almost two years, France had been occupied and split into two separate entities by the Germans for more than a year, and French Indochina was about one month away from total occupation by the Japanese Army. The United States, not officially at war, was in the midst of war preparations in the Atlantic and the Pacific, despite significant internal popular resistance, and had passed legislation aimed at providing support to the beleaguered British. The Charter, agreed upon during a conference aboard the USS *Augusta*, anchored in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, was probably aimed at strengthening a nascent Anglo-American alliance, but it was regarded by many as a blueprint for the post-war world. It could also be viewed and was as a pronouncement of policy, U.S. and British.[1]

In particular, the third principal listed in the Charter appeared to be reasonably clear in terms of colonies and subject peoples: "...they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived

[1] As will be discussed below, each side chose to interpret the Charter in a light favorable to its own interests.

of them..."[2] Not so strangely, that apparently clear statement was interpreted differently on either side of the Atlantic. To the Americans, it sounded the death knell of colonialism worldwide. On the other side of the Atlantic, the generally accepted interpretation was that Article Three of the Atlantic Charter was written with Europe in mind rather than other parts of the world - certainly not elements of the British Empire or even American dependencies such as the Philippines.[3] Nevertheless, there was a strongly defensive reaction in government leadership circles in Great Britain. A major argument on the issue concerned strategic locations as enumerated in late August 1941 by British Colonial Secretary Walter Edward Guiness, Lord Moyne: "...Some colonies are so small, or strategically so important, that complete self-government seems out of the question: and I cannot, for instance, imagine any conditions under which we would give Dominion status to Aden, Gibraltar, the Gambia or British Honduras."[4]

One member of Lord Moyne's colonial office staff went further, listing more colonies, including Mauritius, the Seychelles, Fiji, the Western Pacific islands, the Falklands, Hong Kong, and, perhaps, Borneo and Malaya as being either too small or too strategically important *ever* to become independent.[5] Churchill, ever the

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[2] Samuel I. Rosenman, ed, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Roosevelt, with a Special Introduction and Explanatory Notes by President Roosevelt,* vol. 10, *The Call to Battle Stations.* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941), 314.

[3] William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 129.

[4] Note from Moyne to Amery, 26 Aug. 1941, British Public Records Office, Colonial Office file 323/1858/9057, quote in Louis, *Imperialism,*126.

[5] Letter from Christopher Eastwood to J.M. Martin, Churchill's private secretary, 1 Sept. 1941, PRO, PREM 4/42/9, quoted in Louis, *Imperialism*, 128.

wordsmith, associated himself with the carefully worded comment by Leo Amery,[6] Secretary of State for India and Burma, to the effect that the ultimate goal of the Empire should be self-government.[7] This statement appeared to accept the Charter but somewhat disingenuously omitted specifics of time and place. Even this did not, however, calm the fears of the imperialists, and a lively debate sprang up within British government circles.

In his speech before Parliament on 9 September 1941 Churchill, himself, repeated the British view that the issue of self-government for dependent populations raised in the Atlantic Charter was "...quite a separate problem from the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in the regions and peoples which owe allegiance to the British Crown..."[8] Perhaps tiring of the argument almost a year later, Churchill gave a much less diplomatic statement of his views on the issue in a speech at the Lord Mayor's Day Luncheon: "I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." Great Britain, with its various degrees of interpretation of Article Three, never wavered from this general view: preservation of empire.

On the American side of the Atlantic, Article Three of the Atlantic Charter gradually developed into President Franklin D. Roosevelt's concept of *trusteeships* over

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[6] Leopold Avery had served in the governments of David Lloyd George and Neville Chamberlain in such positions as First Lord of the Admiralty, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies and Secretary of State for India and Burma. It was in the latter position, as shall be noted hereafter, that he was responsible for suggesting to Winston Churchill the formation of the Southeast Asia Command.

[7] Louis, *Imperialism*, 128.

[8] Speech by Winston Churchill before Parliament on 9 September 1941, quoted in Louis, Imperialism, 130.

a period of several years. The principle could be construed to fit all colonial possessions, but Roosevelt characteristically appeared to focus on French possessions. Garry Hess points out that Roosevelt projected his views on colonial issues and other matters to different degrees, varying from "idea or suggestion" to "concrete goal" and that, even in the case of Indochina, Roosevelt varied his pronouncements in degree because of his "reluctance to risk a rupture in the wartime coalition and to utilize fully his military and diplomatic power."[9]

According to then Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's ideas of trusteeship probably went as far back as the example of the Philippines and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934. Hull indicated, however, that the solidification of Roosevelt's focus on Vietnam in this respect probably sprang from Roosevelt's own observation of the "devious conduct of the Vichy Government in granting Japan the right to station troops there..." and from the Japanese use of Vietnam as a "springboard for the Japanese attack on the Philippines, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies." The first of these series of events commenced well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; the latter commenced soon after.[10] It should also be noted here, that Hull, himself, espoused these notions:

> Concerning the vast area of the Southwest Pacific, my associates and I had been doing considerable thinking and, along with the President, had arrived at certain conclusions during my last years in office. This area

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[9] Gary R. Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," *The Journal of American History*, 59; 2 (September 1972), 354.

[10] Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 1595.

> embraced such important territories as the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines, and could be taken to include Malaya and French Indo-China. We believed the time had come when all parent countries should begin to plan and prepare for the self-government of these peoples, to be given them when they were ready for it and worthy of it.[11]

Considering Roosevelt's penchant for running foreign policy out of his office and Hull's tendency to pick and choose amongst State Department elements and elsewhere in considerations of policy, it would be interesting to know to which individuals Hull referred as "my associates." It is possible that this included members of the State Department's Division of Special Research and the multi-disciplined Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy. The latter group was formed under the authority of the president at the suggestion of Hull and Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles near the end of December 1941. Original members included Hull, chairman; Welles, vice-chairman; Norman H. Davis, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and chairman of the American Red Cross; Myron C. Taylor, the President's personal representative to the Pope; Dean Acheson, Assistant Secretary of State; Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of Foreign Affairs; Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State; Isaiah Bowman, president of Johns Hopkins University; Benjamin V. Cohen, general counsel, National Power Policy Committee (and future counsel of the Department of State); Herbert Feis, State Department Adviser on International Economic Relations; Gene H. Hackworth, legal adviser; Harry C. Hawkins, Chief of the Division of Commercial Policy; Anne O'Hare McCormick, *New York Times*; and Leo Pasvolsky,

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[11] Ibid.

special assistant to the Secretary of State and Chief of the Division of Special Research.[12]

Nevertheless, there was a period early in World War II in which Roosevelt and U.S. policy pronouncements seemed to guarantee the return of French colonies. In December 1941, for example, at the time of the Atlantic Conference, Hull issued a statement "concerning the agreement entered into between the French [Vichy] and the Japanese Governments regarding French Indochina." Hull's statement "sympathized" with the desire of the French to maintain their territories intact, but added that U.S. policy would be "governed by the manifest effectiveness with which those [French] authorities endeavor to protect those territories from domination and control by those powers which are seeking to extend their rule by force and conquest, or by the threat thereof."[13] Several weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack, Roosevelt himself wrote in a message to Marshall Henri-Philippe Pétain, head of the Vichy French Government, "that as long as 'French sovereign control remained in reality purely French,' the American Government has no desire to see French sovereignty over French North Africa or any other French colonies 'pass to the control of any other nation.'"[14]

Three months later in March 1942, yet another State Department press release said that U.S. policy was based on the "integrity of France and of the French Empire

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[12] Ibid.,1631-1633.

[13] "United States Position With Respect to French Territory After the War," *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1944, III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), 769-773.

[14] Roosevelt to Petain, 27 Dec. 1941, *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. II, 205.

and of eventual restoration of the complete independence of all French territories."[15] Later the same year, immediately before the Allied landing in Morocco,[16] Robert D. Murphy, consul-general in Algiers acting as a personal representative of the President, drafted two letters to General Henry Honoré Giraud, French High Commissioner in North Africa, saying in part, "It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan and colonial, over which flew the flag of France in 1939."[17]

There were even more such statements following the Casablanca landings including two notes from President Roosevelt to Marshal Pétain and the French resident-general in Tunis. It should be noted, though, that aside from Murphy's remarks, all of the communications contained wording or qualifications which could be construed to lessen their scope or significance. Eventually the president himself disavowed Murphy's pledge. During a meeting in January 1943, Franklin Roosevelt told members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Murphy had exceeded his authority in giving "certain pledges to Giraud to restore France and the colonial possessions of France after the war." The president further commented that he "was not prepared to make any promises." "There are some colonial possessions," he said "which he was

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[15] "Discussions Regarding the Future Status of French Indochina and French Occupation in Its Liberation from Japanese Occupation," January 14, 1944, *FRUS, 1944*, Vol. III, 769-771.

[16] Operation Torch, the Allied Landings in North Africa began on 8 November 1942 in the general vicinity of Casablanca, Morocco.

[17] Personal Representative of President Roosevelt (Murphy) to General Henri Giraud, November 2, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. II, 416-417. Murphy was acting as Roosevelt's personal representative to French leaders in North Africa.

certain would not be returned to France, and he had grave doubts as to whether Indo-China should be. He thought that the Chiefs of Staff in their discussions in North Africa should make this plain to both Mr. Murphy and General Eisenhower."[18]

It should also be noted that some time earlier, May 1942, the Secretary of State, despite his earlier statement, had also said in public that the issue of full restoration of the French Empire had yet to be addressed.[19]

Roosevelt's remarks on both sides of the issue created a degree of uncertainty that lasted in some quarters even into 1943. In April 1943, Under Secretary of State (Acting Secretary of State at the time) Sumner Welles, whose membership in Roosevelt's inner circle implied even greater authority than his official post, advised the French Ambassador to Washington "The Government of the United States recognizes the sovereign jurisdiction of the people of France over the territory of France and over French possessions overseas. The Government of the United States fervently hopes that it may see the reestablishment of the independence of France and of the integrity of French territory."[20] By the early months of 1943, however, Roosevelt went back to the offensive on trusteeship. By this time, of course, the need to coddle the French had been overtaken by events, in one case the total Japanese occupation of Indochina and, in

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[18] See *FRUS, The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), p, 514.

[19] Acting secretary of State (Welles) to the French Ambassador at Washington, April 13, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, vol. II, 561.

[20] Ibid., 561.

the other, the successful completion of the Allied North Africa campaign. The subject of trusteeship came back into the open.[21]

Public statements by U.S. officials in the early years of the war notwithstanding, possibly the first enunciation of the notion of trusteeships for colonial possessions following the war had come in September 1941 in a memorandum from Roosevelt to Myron C. Taylor, Roosevelt's Personal Representative to Pope Pius XII. Roosevelt was instructing Taylor on comments to be presented to the Pope and said, in part, "There seems no reason why the principle of trusteeship in private affairs should not be extended to the international field. ...For a time at least there are many minor children among the peoples of the world who need trustees in their relations with other nations and peoples."[22]

During 1943, Roosevelt expounded on this idea in various forms to his own countrymen, the British, the Chinese, the Soviets and others. Initially, the British were concerned about focus on the British empire, but this changed with time as Roosevelt's focus seemed to narrow onto French Indochina. As the need for the French in North Africa was outweighed by French-caused irritations in other areas and as Roosevelt's

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[21] In fact, the subject of Trusteeships had probably come into the open well before Murphy's comment to Giraud, although Roosevelt's reaction to Murphy's letters certainly appeared to have caught Murphy off guard. According to Murphy, in Casablanca Roosevelt commented "...you overdid things a bit in one of the letters you wrote to Giraud before the landings, pledging the United States Government to guarantee the return to France of every part of her empire. Your letter may make trouble for me after the war." See Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 168. At any rate, Murphy's statement was repudiated and Murphy reprimanded. This was not the only time that a U.S. official was caught off guard by changes in "official" policy as will be seen later in the cases of China and Vietnam. In Murphy's case, considering his future assignments, it is questionable for whose benefit the reprimand was made.

dislike of Charles De Gaulle grew, the notion of *not* returning Indochina to France appears to have grown stronger. As early as the end of 1942 this was evidenced in a letter written by Owen Lattimore to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and edited by President Roosevelt. The note drafted for Lattimore's signature touches lightly on Trusteeship. "In certain colonies it will hardly be desirable to restore the previous regimes in full, even if that were possible. It may be possible in many instances to find a solution through a new legal application of the concept of trusteeship."[23]

Nowhere in the letter to Chiang Kai-shek was there a specific reference to French Indochina. That lack of specificity changed, however, by the spring of the following year. Roosevelt made what was, in all probability his most explicit statement to foreign officials, particularly the British, concerning French colonies in Southeast Asia to date in Washington on 27 March 1943. Roosevelt, in a meeting at the White House attended by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Hull, British Ambassador to Washington Lord Halifax,[24] U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James John G. Winant, and others, introduced the idea of trusteeships for Indo-China and Korea, "with China, the United States, and one or two other countries participating." Roosevelt,

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[22] Memorandum to Myron C. Taylor, 1 Sept. 1941, Papers of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary's File (Box 76), Hyde Park Library, as quoted by Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations: the Role of the United States 1940-1945* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1958), 53.

[23] Draft of Letter from Mr. Owen Lattimore to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, *FRUS, 1942,* China (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967-69), 185-187.

[24] Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, the Third Viscount Halifax was British Ambassador to Washington 1941 — 1946. He served previously as Viceroy of India, Conservative of the House of Lords, Chancellor of Oxford University, and foreign minister in the "appeasement" government of Neville Chamberlain. When Chamberlain resigned in disgrace in 1939, Churchill retained Halifax as Foreign Minister as a matter of wartime political cosmetics. Eventually, Churchill replaced Halifax with Anthony Eden and sent Halifax to Washington as ambassador.

according to Hull, argued that "Indo-China should be taken away from the French and put under an international trusteeship."[25]

Roosevelt discussed his views on post-war Indochina with Chiang Kai-shek at Cairo in October 1943 and with Marshall Joseph Stalin at Tehran in November 1943.[26] Then, on 16 December Roosevelt also bluntly expressed his thoughts to the representatives of Britain, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and Egypt, who had been summoned to the White House for the purpose. Roosevelt said, in part, that he was working to see that Indochina did not return to France after the war and that it should be placed under some sort of trusteeship in preparation for self-government. According to British observers, Roosevelt also implied that the United States and China would serve as the "policemen" in Asia.[27]

Roosevelt became increasingly direct on the subject over the next year. This process is best illustrated by an exchange of memos between Roosevelt and Hull. Hull initiated the exchange in early January 1944, as noted above, bringing up the U.S. position with regard to French territories. He reviewed for Roosevelt early quasi-policy statements such as those noted above as well as Roosevelt's speech to the French people

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[25] Hull Memoirs, 1595; and Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: the Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, vol. 1 (Stanfordville, New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, Inc., Publishers, 1979), 13.

[26] Roosevelt-Chiang Dinner Meeting, November 23, 1943, Chinese Summary Record, *FRUS, the Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), 325; Roosevelt-Stalin Meeting, November 28, 1943, Bohlen minutes, ibid., 485. Secretary of State Hull had previously broached the subject with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov during the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943. British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden was also present in at least one instance.

[27] Eden to Churchill, Dec. 20, 1943, PRO, FO 371 F118/66/61 as cited by Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina: 1942 — 45," *American Historical Review 80* (December 1975), 1285; and Charles Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 123.

broadcast on 8 November 1943 and also terms of the unpublished Agreement between Admiral Jean-Francois Darlan, Commander-in-Chief of the [Vichy French] Armistice Army, and General Mark Clark.[28] Then Hull briefly commented on British policy with respect to French territory to the effect that Britain made no claim to French territory.

In response to Hull, Roosevelt was very direct in singling out Indochina as the principal subject of the discussion and minced no words:

> I saw Halifax last week and told him quite frankly that it was perfectly true that I had, for over a year, expressed the opinion that Indo-China should not go back to France but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country–thirty million inhabitants for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign office on this. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. The case of Indo-China is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that.[29]

Roosevelt did not appear to modify this view during 1944, but as the year went by, he began to defer the issue rather than argue it head-on. This may have been a result of internal pressures as well a reaction to pressures from our allies. For example, in February 1944, War Department planners queried the Department of State concerning the issue of French participation in the Pacific and in the administration of liberated

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[28] *FRUS, 1944*, III, 772; *FRUS, 1942*, II, 453. The preamble of the Clark-Darlan agreement reads in part: "It has been agreed by all French elements concerned and United States military authorities that French forces will aid and support the forces of the United States and their allies to expel from the soil of Africa the common enemy, to liberate France and restore integrally the French Empire."

[29] Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State, January 24, 1944, *FRUS, 1944*, III, 773.

French Indo-China.[30] Roosevelt did not respond to this but must have begun to feel other pressures militating against his personal views.

One such pressure came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War Department and was motivated by two general considerations. The first of these was the concern that Trusteeship arrangements might interfere with island bases the military wished to retain in the Pacific after the war.[31] A second issue was the fear that discussion of Trusteeship would lead to territorial disputes and dissension among allies prior to the accomplishment of the overall goal of defeating the Japanese. Roosevelt had addressed this with Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox[32] in March 1943 when Knox proposed that the U.S. Navy reach an agreement with the British Navy concerning control of the mandated islands. Roosevelt told Knox in no uncertain terms that the Navy should "do nothing further in regard to understanding with the British about Japanese Mandated Islands in the Pacific...I think I had better handle the discussions myself without bringing the two Navies into it, though I may later ask for naval advice."[33]

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[30] Memorandum by the Under secretary of state (Stettinius) to President Roosevelt, February 17, 1944, *FRUS 1944*, 774.

[31] For a discussion of that general issue, see "Study of Pacific Bases, a Report by the Subcommittee on Pacific Bases of the Committee on Naval Affairs, House of Representatives, 79th Congress, 1st Session" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945). Also, for Roosevelt comment on the military's attitude see *FRUS, 1945*, I, 123.

[32] William Franklin Knox (1874-1944) served with the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry (The Rough Riders) in the Spanish-American War. He later became publisher of the Chicago Daily News. In 1940 President Roosevelt appointed Knox Secretary of the Navy. Knox died in office in 1944).

[33] Louis, *Imperialism, 262.*

This military interest became even more pronounced in early 1945.[34] Despite its concern, however, the military showed a clear understanding of the president's intended short-term policy in its correspondence with military commanders in India, Burma, and China: "This government has made no final decisions on the future of Indo-China, and it expects to be consulted in advance with regard to any arrangements applicable to the future of southeast [sic] Asia."[35]

There was also mounting pressure from British diplomatic and military circles. From as early as the beginning of 1944, Lord Halifax queried Hull concerning Roosevelt's statement at the Pacific War Council meeting to the effect that "Indo-China should be taken away from the French and administered by an international trusteeship."[36] Later, in August 1944, the British and French also began to urge French participation in the Pacific theater of war. This initially came in the form of a proposal including the attachment of a French military mission to the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) Headquarters, the formation of a light intervention force in India for operations in Indochina, and French participation in the planning of political warfare in the region.[37] This proposal was forwarded to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff on 4 August 1944. It was a measure aimed at getting the French foot in the Southeast Asia door.[38]

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[34] For comments by Secretary of War Stimson on the issue, see Thomas M. Campbell & George C. Herring, ed., *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., 1943 — 1946* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 217-219.

[35] This is an almost exact quote of Roosevelt's own memo on the issue. See page 16 below; *FRUS, Conference of Berlin (Potsdam)*, 916; and *FRUS 1944*, Vol. III,779.

[36] *FRUS, 1944*, Vol. III, 769 (and footnote 22).

[37] See Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, *FRUS, 1944*, Vol. III, 775 for details of the French proposal.

Within the State Department, there was also pressure caused by division of interests between those who were most concerned about post-war order in Europe and those who tended to focus on Asia and issues of imperialism and self-determination. Those most interested in the European perspective included Assistant Secretary of State James C. Dunn and H. Freeman Matthews, Chief of the Office of European Affairs. Dunn and Matthews focused on the preservation or rebuilding of Europe, of which France was a key element.[39] In opposition to this European lobby were Asian specialists Abbot Low Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, and Edwin F. Stanton, also of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs. Both were influenced by their recognition of growing nationalism among Asian peoples and felt that support of colonial regimes would be contrary to the long-term American interests.[40] Two significant points in this debate are (1) that there is no evidence of any degree of influence by either side on Roosevelt's thinking or his policy; and (2) neither side of the argument, Europeanist or Asianist, suggested that the indigenous people of Indochina were ready for self-government. Nor did President Roosevelt so suggest.

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[38] By the same token, it could be said that the British "foot in the door" was achieved with the creation of SEAC at the time of the Second Quebec Conference, August 1943. For an account of the formation of SEAC and the reasons behind it from the U.S. point of view, see Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943—1945* (New York: the Viking Press, 1973), 256-260.

[39] Dunn, was a pure "Europe First" advocate and conservative to the point of having supported Franco over the liberals and communists in the Spanish Revolution.

[40] Moffat's views on this issue are offered in retrospect in his testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1972. See *Causes, Origins, and Lessons*,161-205.

Strangely, earlier reporting from both the Department of State and the OSS had both suggested that the "Annamites" had proven themselves capable of self-government.[41]

Whatever the pressures, Roosevelt's reluctance to see Indochina returned to French control lasted to his death. In his last year he continued to defer responses on the issue. In early August 1944, when questioned on the issue raised by the British of the movement to India of a Free French Corps Léger d'Intervention (CLI), which had been established in Algiers, and the attachment of a French Military Mission to SEAC Headquarters in Ceylon, Roosevelt deferred response pending his meeting in Quebec with Churchill (17 August 1944). When the same issue was raised again by Secretary Hull and the OSS in separate instances in October, he yet again put off the issue. Roosevelt proclaimed, "It is my judgment on this date that we should do nothing in regard to resistance groups or in any other way in relation to Indochina. You might bring it up to me a little later when things are a little clearer."[42]

In early November 1944, a memorandum forwarded to Roosevelt by Under Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius[43] finally provoked a clear response. The

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[41] OSS Research and Analysis Study No. 3336 (Mar. 1942), National Archives cited by Thorne, *Indochina and Anglo-American Relations*, 81-82.

[42] Memorandum by the secretary of State to President Roosevelt, October 13, 1944, *FRUS, 1944*, III, 776-777; and Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State, October 16, 1944, ibid., 777.

[43] A successful corporate businessman, Stettinius had initially become acquainted with Franklin Roosevelt through his social welfare work. Used by Roosevelt to oversee Lend-Lease aid to the allies early in the Second World War, Stettinius was appointed to replace Sumner Welles as Undersecretary of State in 1943. When Cordell Hull resigned from the government for health reasons in November 1944, Roosevelt chose Stettinius to replace Hull as Secretary of State. President Harry S. Truman, in turn, replaced Stettinius with James Byrnes following the signing of the United Nations Charter in June 1945. Stettinius then became the chief of the first U.S. delegation to the United Nations.

memorandum, entitled, "Recent Developments in Relation to Indochina," outlined British and French actions aimed at re-establishing the French in Indochina.[44] Roosevelt reacted by making three succinct points:

> ...I wish you to make it clear that:
> We must not give American approval to any French military mission, as it appears we have done in the first sentence of the first paragraph [reference made to the Stettinius memorandum].
> Referring to the third paragraph, it must be made clear to all our people in the Far East that they can make no decisions on political questions with the French mission or anyone else.
> We have made no final decisions on the future of Indo-China. This should be made clear.[45]

This memorandum was no sooner sent, than a new communication arrived from U.S. Ambassador to France Jefferson Caffrey describing a French military detachment of one thousand men to be attached to SEAC, the parachuting into Indochina of Baron de Langlade,[46] and the general desire of the French to participate in any actions involving Indochina, whether from Indian bases or from staging areas in the Philippines. Then, later in November, there was yet another communication, this time another aide-memoire from Ambassador Halifax.[47] In general, the British note contained a series of proposals for inclusion of the French in military and intelligence operations to be staged out of SEAC into Indochina, described the gentleman's agreement between Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of

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[44] Recent Developments in Relation to Indochina, November 2, 1944, *FRUS, 1944*, III, 779.

[45] Ibid., 780.

[46] French Major François de Langlade. See below.

[47] *FRUS, 1944*, III, 780.

SEAC, and Chiang Kai-Shek concerning operational control of Indochina, pointed out strategic importance of Indochina, and requested concurrence with the outlined measures. The memo further described the advantage of use of French resources for the benefit of Special Operations Executive (SOE)[48] and the OSS to establish irregular forces in Indochina.

Yet another source of pressure on Roosevelt during 1944 was the deteriorating situation in China, a key part of Roosevelt's plans for the post-war world. With General Stilwell's forces under Japanese attack in the southern part of China, Roosevelt requested that Chiang Kai-shek shift troops south. Chiang, however, refused repeatedly. He failed even to acknowledge Roosevelt's final plea in early April 1944, and the president at that point apparently gave up attempts to urge Chiang into action and may have also begun to see the impracticality of relying on a Chiang-led China playing a role as a major power in Asia following the war.[49]

On the first day of 1945, Roosevelt once again temporarily dismissed the Indochina trusteeship issue with yet another terse note to his new Secretary of State: "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for post-war.

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[48] More or less the sister service of the OSS, the SOE was officially authorized by the British War Cabinet on 22 July 1940 at the request of Winston Churchill. Answering to the Minister of Economic Warfare, the SOE was first operated out of London but eventually had units under the authority of regional military commanders. The SOE unit attached to India and Burma and, later, SEAC, was known as Force 136. By the end of the war Force 136 had a personnel strength of 2,432, and had established its headquarters at Kandy, Ceylon.

[49] See La Feber, *Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina*, 1287. La Feber's presentation argues four elements of resistance to Roosevelt's plans for Indochina in 1944: (1) British pressure; (2) French determination; (3) State Department opposition; and (4) the failure of Chiang Kai-shek to grow to the required stature.

...You can tell Halifax that I made this very clear to Mr. Churchill. From both the military and civil point of view, action at this time is premature."[50]

Then came the Yalta Conference in February 1945. In what appeared to be a major change in policy, Roosevelt and the U.S. delegation accepted wording on the issue of trusteeship that appeared to limit trusteeships almost entirely to existing mandates and captured enemy territories. The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union agreed that the five nations which will have permanent seats on the Security Council should consult each other prior to the United Nations conference on the question of territorial trusteeship.

> The acceptance of this recommendation is subject to its being made clear that territorial trusteeship will only apply to
>
> (a) existing mandates of the League of Nations;
>
> (b) territories detached from the enemy as a result of the present war;
>
> (c) any other territory which might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship; and
>
> (d) no discussion of actual territories is contemplated at the forthcoming United Nations conference or in the preliminary consultations, and it will be a matter for subsequent agreement which territories within the above categories will be placed under trusteeship.[51]

On the surface, this seemed to be the end of the trusteeship issue in the case of Indochina. France would never consent to the establishment of a trusteeship there. Then, at the beginning of April 1945, Roosevelt also directed new Secretary of State Stettinius to publicly announce the terms of the Yalta agreement on trusteeship.

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[50] Memorandum by President Roosevelt for the Secretary of State, January 1, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. III, 293.

[51] Protocol of Proceedings, February 11, 1945, FRUS, 1945, the Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 975-976.

According to many participants and students of the issue, this public pronouncement was, in fact, a public repudiation of the notion of trusteeship for Indochina.[52]

For one reason or another, however, Roosevelt continued to maintain at least an ambiguous position in reference to Indochina, although he modified this somewhat in conversation with Charles Taussig.[53] He said that his thoughts on the issue had not changed, that both French Indo-China and New Caledonia should be taken from France and put under a trusteeship, but, then, he paused briefly and said, "Well, if we can get the proper pledge from France to assume for herself the obligations of a trustee, then I would agree to France retaining these colonies with the proviso that independence was the ultimate goal."[54]

Further questioned by Taussig, Roosevelt said that neither "self-government" nor "dominion status" were acceptable, "it must be independence." Depending on interpretation, this could sound like surrender. In fact, many diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic interpreted it that way. This was particularly true for those such as Halifax who were aware of Roosevelt's tacit acceptance of Britain sending French saboteurs into Indochina in January 1944.[55] State Department officers at the time and analysts, since, have also shared that opinion.[56]

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[52] See *Causes, Origins, and Lessons*, 174 for comment by Robert Low Moffat; also, see *Department of State Bulletins*, 8 April 1945,601 for the text of the statement by Stettinius

[53] Taussig, a Foreign Service officer, was Chairman, U.S. Section, Anglo-American Caribbean Commission.

[54] *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. 1, 124.

[55] Halifax to Eden, 9 Jan 45, PRO, FO file 371 F4930/9/61 as cited by La Feber, *Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina*, 1291.

Another interpretation, however, may be derived from Roosevelt the man. Roosevelt's normal mode of action, his predilection for sending personal emissaries, his personal briefings of officers sent on foreign duty, and his skill in dissembling and the particular words used in his conversation with Taussig leave open the possibility that that the president still reserved the notion of depriving France of her Indochina colony in the future. In his study of the history of the Vietnamese Revolution of 1945, Stein Tønnesson advances such a theory. Tønnesson cites as evidence flurries of U.S. operational and intelligence messages concerning a possible amphibious assault on Indochina, the specific wording of the declaration at Yalta itself, and the actions of the British and French at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. He suggests that Roosevelt may have found a loophole in the Yalta declaration, to wit, that Indochina by virtue of the coup of 9 March 1945 fell into the category of "enemy territory" and could, thus, become "territory detached from the enemy as a result of the present war."[57] If that interpretation could be justified, France would have no say in the trusteeship decision there. This would require, first, that Indochina be considered Japanese territory and, second, that Indochina be captured from the Japanese. Much of this argument springs from concerns expressed by the Europeans about U.S. intentions and evidence of European suspicion of U.S. actions. As the only real authority on what was in President Roosevelt's mind died on 12 April 1945, the question will probably never be fully resolved.

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[56] For examples, see La Feber, *Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina*, 1291; and Thorne, *Indochina*, 80.

The evolution of U.S. policy and, particularly, the Roosevelt vision, did not, of course occur in a vacuum. Through the years from the Atlantic Charter and the first Quebec Conference until Roosevelt's death, the British and the Free French continued their efforts aimed at surviving with empires intact. The creation of the Southeast Asia Command was probably their biggest breakthrough after the fall of Singapore. Created by agreement reached at the Quebec Conference in August 1943, ostensibly to remove pressure from General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area, SEAC in effect put a high profile British officer in control of Allied resources in the perfect jumping off point for regaining lost empire, while also being at a point of great interest to the United States on account of U.S. policy concerning the role of China in the new post-war world. Thus, there were always good prospects of U.S. materiel support despite shortages caused by the European conflict.

The effect of this on the fate of Indochina was significant. The British were very much in favor of returning Indochina to France. A paper drafted by the British Foreign Ministry as guidance for British "diplomats," military and civilian, late in 1944 illustrates their reasoning clearly:

> Our main reason for favoring the restoration of Indo-China to France is that we see danger to our own Far Eastern colonies in President Roosevelt's idea that restoration depends upon the United Nations (or rather the United States) satisfying themselves that the French record in Indo-China justifies the restoration of French authority."[58]

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[57] Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution*, 162-170.

[58] Untitled Work Paper circulated at British Foreign office, F 1269/11/G61, 28 February [1945], Peter Dunn Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Box 1, folder 3.

As far as Roosevelt's possible tactics are concerned, there is also some indication that both the British and the French still expected the U.S. to oppose re-establishment of the Indochina colony despite Yalta. One piece of evidence to this effect can be found in British and French efforts to prevent a meaningful U.S. intelligence presence in Indochina. Before Yalta OSS Director Donovan reported this effort in a message to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Donovan brought to Hull's attention a report from the Office of War Information (OWI) representative in New Delhi to the effect that the British wished to restrict direct OWI contacts with the native populations of Thailand and Indochina. At the same time, the OWI representative in Colombo had reported that the British SOE wished to severely restrict OSS operations in the SEAC theater. "There can be little doubt," Donovan continued, "that the British and the Dutch have arrived at an agreement with regard to the future of Southeast Asia, and now it would appear that the French are being brought into the picture." [59] This attempt at "squeezing" U.S. intelligence assets out of Indochina continued after the end of hostilities in August 1945. For example, it was only with difficulty that an OSS team (code name "Embankment") was able to fly to Saigon to look after U.S. interests there in early September.[60]

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[59] Recent Developments in Relation to Indochina, November 2, 1944, *FRUS, 1944*, III, 778-779.

[60]See Dunn, *The First Vietnam War*, 153-154, 214-216 for the flavor of British attitudes towards the U.S. intelligence presence. The author concludes that the OSS team was exceeding its brief by conducting activities beyond those authorized by the "Supreme Commander." There is some question concerning the authority of the Supreme Commander to limit the role of U.S. representation on the scene, confined as he himself was in terms of mission in Indochina. Also, see R. Harris Smith, *OSS: the Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 338, for an account of British opposition to the OSS presence and for discussion of the Embankment team's missions.

In mid-March 1945, Churchill, who had carefully nurtured his relationship with Roosevelt from 1939 onward and had resisted direct confrontation with Roosevelt on the issue of Indochina, finally allowed himself to be prodded into action and sent Roosevelt a message concerning conflict between British and U.S. military commanders over control of the Indochina area. This was of importance to the British and the French, who were seeking to bring control of Indochina under the SEAC. Churchill suggested this issue be resolved through the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[61] Churchill was more than likely aware of a recent report from Admiral Sir James Somerville, Head of the British Admiralty Mission in Washington to the effect that he had come away from a meeting with Admiral Ernst J. King, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, convinced of the U.S. military's support for Mountbatten's views related to Indochina. "It seems quite clear to me the U.S. Chiefs of Staff are by no means in favour of the President's policy of keeping the French out of Indochina."[62] Churchill's approach to Roosevelt may thus have been a crafty effort to engage Roosevelt's own chiefs of staff in support of the British point of view.[63]

Churchill did not, in the March communication, directly suggest the realignment of territorial control to include Indochina under SEAC. Roosevelt responded that, pending actual military advances by Mountbatten's SEAC forces in Indochina, "all

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[61] For full text of Churchill's message see C – 913. Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, III. Alliance Declining, February 1944-April 1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 572-573. Also, see Tønnesson, 260-261, citing Prime Minister to President Roosevelt, No. 913, 17.3.45, PRO, PREM 3/178/3 and CAB 120/708.

[62] Somerville to Mountbatten, March 27, 1945, file 9/2, Somerville Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge University as quoted in Thorne, *Indochina*, 94.

[63] Then again, as per Churchill's note to General Ismay in Chapter I, it may not.

Anglo-American-Chinese military operations in Indo-China [sic], regardless of their nature, [should] be coordinated by General Wedemeyer as Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo, who is Supreme Commander of the China Theater..."[64]

This was clearly not the answer Churchill sought, but he did not return to that subject until April 11, when he sent Roosevelt a draft of his orders to Mountbatten authorizing the vice-admiral to take actions he considered necessary in Indochina with the proviso that he keep General Wedemeyer informed. Churchill also urged inclusion of the French in Allied operations in Indochina as well as support to French forces already in Indochina:

> Now that the Japanese have taken over Indo-China and that substantial resistance is being offered by French patriots, it is essential not only that we should support the French by all means in our power, but also that we should associate them with our operations into their country. It would look very bad in history if we failed to support isolated French forces in their resistance to the Japanese to the best of our ability or, if we excluded the French from participation in our councils as regards Indo-China.[65]

On 14 April 1945, new President Harry S. Truman sent the answer to Churchill's 11 April message.[66] With Roosevelt's death, long repressed arguments concerning U.S. policy and the notion of trusteeship, among others, surfaced at the Departments of State and War.

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[64] See "Roosevelt to Former Naval Person," R – 724, Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 582-583.

[65] Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 626-627.

[66] Nor was Truman's answer exactly what Churchill sought. Truman responded with the American understanding of the agreement between Wedemeyer and Mountbatten.

Some manifestation of policy change in terms of policy pronouncement was evident in the first months of the new administration, but the change was gradual in most places. First came a message from Secretary of State Stettinius to French Ambassador Henry Bonnet. In this communication, Stettinius again postponed discussion of a Franco-American agreement on the administration of civil affairs in Indochina. This was the second such French approach to the Americans, the first having come in February 1944.[67] The French proposal sought an agreement analogous to the Franco-Allied agreement signed in August 1944 for North Africa. Among other things, conclusion of such an agreement would signify U.S. recognition of French status in Indochina. In putting off a decision, Stettinius noted that a French presence in Indochina would require a diversion of resources directed against Japan, a diversion which could not be undertaken in "the immediate future." [68]

This rather negative communication, however, was followed by one of the opposite nature from Acting Secretary of State Grew.[69] The French had asked for clarification on U.S. policy citing concern over American newspaper articles implying that a special status had been reserved for Indochina as opposed to other colonial portions of the "French Empire." Grew assured both that "the record is entirely innocent of any official statement from this government questioning, even by

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[67] *FRUS, 1944*, Vol. III, 774-775.

[68] The Secretary of State to the French Ambassador (Bonnet), April 20, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 306-307.

[69] By 1945 Grew was one of the most experienced senior members of the U.S. Foreign Service and, in fact, was responsible for organization of the Foreign Service in its current form. His first chief of mission posting was in 1920. Grew left the post of Under Secretary of State to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1932-1942. In 1942 he returned to the position of Under Secretary.

implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China." He added, however, the certain American public opinion "condemned French governmental policies and practices in Indo-China."[70]

Aside from these external pronouncements of policy, the Department of State also suggested the following guidelines to both Truman and the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee on the issue of French participation in the Pacific theater of war:

> a) While avoiding so far as practicable unnecessary or long-term commitments with regard to the amount or character of any assistance which the United States may give to French resistance forces in Indochina, this government should continue to afford such assistance as does not interfere with the requirements of other planned operations. Owing to the need for concentrating all our resources in the Pacific on operations already planned, large-scale military operations aimed directly at the liberation of Indochina cannot, however, be contemplated at this time. American troops would not be used in Indochina except in American military operations against the Japanese.
>
> b) French offers of military and naval assistance in the Pacific should be considered on their military merits as bearing on the objective of defeating Japan as in the case of British and Dutch proposals. There would be no objection to furnishing of assistance to any French military or naval forces so approved, regardless of the theatre [sic] from which the assistance may be sent, provided such assistance does not involve a diversion of resources which the Combined or Joint Chiefs of Staff consider are needed elsewhere.[71]

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[70]The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffrey), *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 307.

[71] See Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, Washington, May 16, 1945, signed by Joseph C. Grew, 307-308, and Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Matthews) to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 310-311.

In terms of presidential pronouncement of policy, President Harry Truman's remarks made directly to Georges Bidault, Foreign Minister of the Provisional Government of France, appeared fairly clear. In a personal meeting in the White House on 19 May 1945, Truman thanked Bidault for General de Gaulle's offer of military assistance in the Pacific War, but stated his personal policy to leave to the "Commander-in-Chief in the field matters relating to the conduct of the war." Truman concluded that the use of French forces would probably depend on the availability of transportation, which, he said, was much more heavily committed in the Pacific than it had been in the Atlantic. This apparently ended discussion of the subject at the time.[72]

The French seemed to interpret Truman's remark as a rejection, because they quickly reformulated the offer to assure the United States that it was intended to cover all of the Far East and not limited to Indochina. In fact, on the day following his meeting with Harry Truman, Bidault advised Acting Secretary Grew that France had readied two divisions for immediate transportation to the Far East. Grew repeated Truman's reference to the issue being a military problem, and, following that conversation sent word to State-War-Navy via Director of the Office of European Affairs Matthews with the above noted guidance on handling the issue.[73]

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[72] In his memo for Truman three days before, Joseph Grew noted for the president's information "from the military point of view the use of French forces in that theatre has relatively little if any value." Grew further suggested that the president avoid making more than the most non-committal response. Memorandum by the Acting secretary of State to President Truman, May 16, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 307-308.

[73] See footnote [71] above.

Truman's remarks notwithstanding, probably the most obvious retreat from President Roosevelt's anti-French Indochina line came from Secretary of State Stettinius in the course of the United Nations meetings in San Francisco several weeks before Truman met Bidault. At that time, it became clear that the United States needed the support of the French. It had also become equally obvious that pressure from the Departments of War and the Navy and their congressional supporters would not permit a stronger line on the issue of trusteeship.[74] Confronted on 3 May by an obviously furious Georges Bidault, who "poured out his country's resentment against the United States" in relation to publicly expressed anti-French Indochina sentiment, Stettinius rushed to assure both Bidault and Ambassador Henry Bonnet that he was "personally desirous of France being restored to her former stature." Assistant Secretary of State Dunn then hurriedly asserted that although the American press was very critical of the conduct of France in the colonies, "no official policy statement of this Government...has ever questioned even by implication French sovereignty over Indo-China."[75]

Despite these statements, or perhaps not accepting them at face value, responsible U.S. officers in the field, particularly General Wedemeyer[76] and U.S.

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[74] See *Stettinius Diaries*, 303-305 and 319-321 for the Secretary of State's observations on the effect of the military point of view.

[75] Quoted from Memorandum of conversation, Stettinius, Dunn, Bidault, and Henri Bonnet, May 3, 1945, Stettinius Papers, Box 313 in Herring, French Sovereignty, 104.

[76] A favorite of Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, Wedemeyer had been sent from his planning position at the Pentagon to serve as Chief of Staff for Vice-Admiral Mountbatten at SEAC. Several months after General Joseph Stilwell was relieved of command of the U.S. China-Burma-India theater and his concurrent duties as Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in China, Wedemeyer was appointed commander of U.S. forces in China and, concurrently, became Chiang's chief of staff.

Ambassador to China Hurley requested clarification of U.S. policy, both having last received policy guidance directly from Franklin Roosevelt in March.[77] On 28 May, Wedemeyer warned Washington that SEAC was engaged in military operations aimed at restoration of the French in Indochina. On the following day, Hurley chimed in with a warning that the British were "using American land-lease [sic] supplies to reestablish French imperialism." He said, in part,

> The move of the imperialistic powers to use American resources to enable them to move with force into Indo-China is not for the purpose of participating in the main battle against Japan. Such a move would have two political objectives: (1) the reestablishment of imperialism in Indo-China and (2) The placing of British forces in a position where they could occupy Hong Kong and prevent the return of Hong Kong to China.[78]

Hurley expressed perplexity concerning the stands taken by the American delegation at San Francisco.[79] Joseph Grew was Acting Secretary while Edward Stettinius was absent as a delegate to the United Nations convention in San Francisco. Grew responded to Hurley on 2 June:

> The Secretary conversed with Bonnet and Bidault at San Francisco on May 8. On the subject of Indochina Bonnet observed that although the French Government interpreted Mr. Welles' statement of 1942 concerning the restoration of French sovereignty over the French Empire as including Indochina, the American press continued to imply that a special status will be reserved for this colonial area. The Secretary made

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[77] See footnote [16] in Chapter I.

[78] Control and Command in the war Against Japan, No. 603, Memorandum by the Assistant to the president's Naval Aide (Elsey), undated, *FRUS, Potsdam*, 915-921.

[79] Herring, *French Sovereignty*, 106; Thorne, *Indochina*, 75. For the full text of Hurley's several messages on the subject, see *FRUS, Potsdam*, 917-920. Neither George Herring nor Christopher Thorne treat Hurley with much sympathy. Herring describes Hurley as a "flamboyant nationalist and an unrelenting Anglophobe." Thorne, reverting to English schoolboy rhetoric, calls him "that buffoon among ambassadors."

> it clear to Bidault that the record was entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indochina but that certain elements of American public opinion condemned French policies and practices in Indochina.[80]

In his statement, Grew avoided saying directly that the United States recognized French sovereignty in Indochina. There is also a comment in the official record to the effect that neither did Truman release any message on Indochina, nor did the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff take any action on "inter-theater disputes in Asia." The same commentary noted Churchill's silence on the issue during the same period, but also stated that President Truman had advised Hurley that the issue would probably be discussed at Potsdam.[81] Then arrangements for Indochina at Potsdam further confused the situation.

At the Potsdam Conference in July, with U.S. military leaders anxious to press directly on to Japan and to relieve U.S. Pacific commanders of the burden of responsibility in areas contiguous to the SEAC Theater, the allies decided to split responsibility for Indochina, with the southern half to become the responsibility of SEAC, while the northern half would remain a part of the China Theater. Judging from his comment in a cable to the Department of State from Chungking on 13 August, this division of Indochina was apparently not immediately clear to Ambassador Hurley who was reporting on a query from the French concerning surrender arrangements in

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[80] The Acting Secretary of state to the Ambassador in China (Hurley), June 2, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 312. This is apparently another reference to the conversation between Grew, Hull and Bidault in San Francisco on 8 May. See footnote [69].

[81] *FRUS, Potsdam*, 920-921.

Indochina. A cable from new Secretary of State James Byrnes[82] sent to the U.S. Ambassador in France, indicates that this misunderstanding was immediately rectified.[83]

Although Joseph Grew had avoided fully spelling out U.S. recognition of French sovereignty in Indochina, by October a statement by then Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson was much clearer. This message was sent to the chargé in China on 5 October 1945 during Hurley's absence:

> US has no thought of opposing reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by U.S. Govt has questioned even by implication French sovereignty over Indochina. However, it is not the policy of this Govt to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force and the willingness of the U.S. to see French control reestablished assumes that French claim to have the support of the population of Indochina is borne out by future events.[84]

The final condition attached to Acheson's statement seen in hindsight probably had little real significance, but it was apparently viewed with greater importance at the time judging by the comment of John Carter Vincent, Director of State's Office of Far Eastern Affairs, less than a month earlier. In response to a British complaint concerning

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[82] Member of the U.S. House of Representatives for South Carolina (1911-1925) and Senator (1931-1941), Byrnes was appointed Associate Justice of the Supreme Court by Franklin Roosevelt in 1941. He resigned a seat on the Supreme Court in 1942 to join Roosevelt's wartime administration, first, as Director of Economic Stabilization, later, as Director of War Mobilization. Often called "The Assistant President" by pundits, Byrnes played a somewhat superficial role at the conferences in Malta and Yalta in 1944. He was appointed Secretary of State by new President Harry Truman in June 1945.

[83] See The Ambassador in China (Hurley) to the Secretary of State, Chungking, August 13, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, VII, 498; and The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffrey), Washington, August 14, ibid.,499-500. The latter entry contains a footnote referring to a similar message sent to Ambassador Hurley on the same day.

[84] Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Vincent), September 24, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 313.

anti-British demonstrations in Saigon, Vincent dryly noted a statement by the commander of SEAC land forces to the effect that the British were in Indochina to maintain order until the arrival of the *French*. Vincent, who did not favor British assistance to France in returning to Vietnam, was suggesting that the British, themselves, were the cause of the discontent.[85]

There stood U.S. policy on Indochina and, thus, Vietnam through the end of 1945. On 11 October 1945, French newspapers reported a Franco-British agreement on Indochina. Details of the agreement noted in *Le Monde* were reported in a telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Paris:

> In the agreement French Civil Administration is recognized as sole authority in that part of Indochina south of the 16th parallel. Only exceptions result from presence of British troops in this part of Indochina and these exceptions do not affect principles of agreement. Le Monde adds agreement is designed to determine relations between French Civil Administration and British military authorities and provides British Commander will not intervene in civil affairs except through French authority....Agreement provides British troops will only be there temporarily for purpose of enforcing terms of Japanese surrender and to assure repatriation of Allied prisoners and civilian internees.[86]

By the end of the first quarter of 1946, for all practical purposes the French had achieved their goal of reintroducing a degree of authority in both the north (Tonkin) and the south (Cochinchina). In the final months of 1945, there was a high degree of U.S. scrutiny vis-à-vis French conduct in the northern and southern sectors of Vietnam, particularly the former after October 1945. Attention was also paid to Franco-British agreements and Franco-Chinese agreements that led to the reestablishment of French

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[85] Ibid.
[86] The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 314.

authority in Indochina. This scrutiny notwithstanding, there is no clear indication in the record that the U.S. Government either advocated or opposed, aided or blocked French moves there.

# CHAPTER III

# POLICY OF ACTION

As noted in the introduction, the assumption is made here that both France and England maintained their interests in Asian colonies even in the darkest hours of conflict in Europe in the early 1940s. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, however, British and French capabilities in Asia were drastically reduced. After Pearl Harbor the Free French, who had declared war on the Japanese on 12 December 1941, had few if any assets other than the Vichy balancing act in Indochina under Vice-Admiral Jean Decoux. British resources were beaten back to India and Burma by the Japanese, who took Malaya and Singapore by mid-February 1942, while also seizing the Dutch colony on Java the following month. Left to the allied cause in Asia were beleaguered China under Chiang Kai-shek, British Imperial forces in India and Burma, and what was left of U.S. assets in the Philippines until they fell in early May. The French, British, and the Americans, however, were focused for the most part on the war in Europe and North Africa.

In a message to Churchill on 6 March 1942, Roosevelt proposed to divide the world into three large areas of responsibility, with the United States assuming strategic responsibility for the Pacific and China and the British side assuming responsibility for that portion of the world from the Mediterranean Sea to Singapore.[1] Churchill, because

[1] The third portion, not directly significant here, would include the "waters of the North and South Atlantic" and would include plans for a new front on the European continent. It would be a joint responsibility for the United States and Britain.

of circumstances, was obliged to go along with this.[2] Among other manifestations of the new U.S. responsibility was the replacement of the British citizen head of the Chinese Imperial Customs Service with an American.[3]

Roosevelt's suggestion was actually preceded by three significant U.S. actions. First, on 6 May 1941 President Roosevelt declared China eligible for Lend-Lease; second, the president authorized activation of a plan by which American fighter aircraft flown and serviced by American volunteers would begin operation in China as a part of the armed forces of China; third, Major General Joseph Stilwell was promoted and assigned as Commander of U.S. Forces in China and, concurrently, Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.[4] For some time after Stilwell's assignment, the issue of employment of Chinese troops against the Japanese in China was contentious; eventually his efforts were focused on Burma, Northern India, and contiguous areas of China.[5]

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[2] R-115, Washington, Mar. 9, 1942 / TOR Mar. 10, "To the Former Naval Person," Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 398 – 399.

[3] Memorandum by Chief of Far Eastern Affairs Division (Ballantine), *FRUS, 1943, China* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957); La Feber, *Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina*, 282. There was a degree of symbolism in the replacing of a British adviser with an American, but the Customs post was also probably the single most crucial position held by a foreign civilian in China and was highly significant to trade relations. It marked a changing of the guard.

[4] *The China White Paper, August 1949* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967), 39, 28-30. U.S. military aid had begun to flow to China immediately with the granting of Lend-Lease status and before the United States became a belligerent. The volunteer air force, Chennault's "Flying Tigers" was first brought in to the Chinese service. The group was eventually disbanded (1942), and its personnel were incorporated into the United States Tenth Air Force. Later the same unit and personnel were activated as the Fourteenth United States Air Force, still under the command of Claire Chennault.

[5] Consideration of Proposed Entry of Chinese Troops into Indochina to Combat Japanese Forces in that Colony, 8 January-6 February 1942, *FRUS, 1942, China*, 749-760.

One early U.S. response to setbacks in Asia–even before the fall of Corregidor–was the formation of intelligence apparati to prepare for major operations in China and Southeast Asia. Wartime U.S. intelligence operations targeting Indochina actually commenced in China in May 1942. At the direction of Admiral King, Navy Captain Milton E. Miles[6] went to China to establish bases and to, in King's words, "prepare the China coast in any way you can for U. S. Navy landings in three or four years." "In the meantime," directed King, "do whatever you can to help the Navy and to heckle the Japanese."[7]

Miles arrived in Chungking in the same week as the fall of Corregidor, and immediately went into partnership with General Tai Li, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's intelligence chief.[8] This cooperation eventually evolved into a joint intelligence team known as the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO). That organization also included the first OSS presence in China following an order in

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[6] Captain Miles, U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1922, was a two-time veteran of "The China Station" prior to World War II. Miles was assigned to go to Chungking in April 1942 to establish naval weather stations and to examine possibilities of operations against the Japanese. By the end of the war, Miles had established his own intelligence network and built a "Rice Paddy Navy" which conducted guerilla operations against Japanese forces and sought to rescue American fliers downed in Japanese controlled territory in China. See Milton E. Miles, *A Different Kind of War: the little-known story of the combined guerilla forces created in China by the U.S. Navy and the Chinese during World War II* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967).

[7] Ibid., 18.

[8] This arrangement had been arrived at through discussions between Miles, Assistant Chinese Military Attaché Hsiao Sin-ju, and Admiral King. Hsiao was apparently in frequent contact with the Office of Naval Intelligence in the course of his duties and had become a frequent contact of Miles. Miles, himself, spoke several dialects of Chinese. According to Department of State records, Tai Li's official title was Deputy Director, Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, Chinese National Commission of Military Affairs. See Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Richard L. Sharp of the Division of Seoutheast asian Affairs, January 30, 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, VIII, 18, footnote 11.

September 1942 appointing Miles to be Special Operations Officer or coordinator for the OSS in China.

In early 1943, Miles sought to widen his area of operation through the use of a French naval officer. Tasked to collect coastal data relevant to naval landings in China, Miles realized that such landings could take place as far south as Indochina.[9] At the orders of OSS chief Donovan, Miles visited General Henri Giraud in North Africa and established contact with French Naval Commander Robert Meynier, a follower of General Henri Giraud and the husband of a Vietnamese woman. Brought to China, Meynier managed to organize a network of informants inside French government agencies through Indochina. He did this despite the opposition of the pro-de Gaulle representative in Chungking.[10] His network provided reporting on the enemy order of battle, potential bombing targets, and political developments inside the Indochinese colonies.[11]

Also during 1943, Miles and SACO worked to recruit and train a group of specialists to infiltrate Indochina to make contact with ethnic minorities in the highlands. Their mission was to organize and conduct guerilla operations against the Japanese, collect intelligence, and support the rescue of downed pilots. Navy Reserve Lieutenant George Devereux, a political warfare expert assigned to Miles, completed plans for this operation early in 1943. A group of twenty specialists was hired and

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[9] Ronald H. Spector, "Allied Intelligence and Indochina, 1943-1945," *Pacific Historical Review* 51; 1 (Feb. 1982), 25-26.

[10] Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 34; and Miles, *Different Kind of War*, 182-186.

[11] Spector, "Allied Intelligence and Indochina," 25-26.

trained for this mission, but the operation became the victim of friction between Miles and the OSS and between SACO and the French Mission in Chungking and was never executed. Those trained included both French and Annamese, a combination which would subsequently be forbidden by both the French and the American leadership for different reasons.[12]

The OSS, however, had interests that went beyond the SACO mission, and the Chinese element of SACO made independent action difficult. One example of this was the attempt by the OSS to infiltrate Thailand from China in 1943. Tai Li effectively scuttled this operation by placing restrictions on the movement of the Thais working for the OSS, probably because he already had assets in Thailand and did not wish to assist an operation not under his control. Tai Li preferred to keep Americans tied down in a way to prevent them from interfering with his smuggling interests and also with Chinese interests in Indochina and Thailand.

As a result of Tai Li's operational interference, OSS chief Donovan sought a viable alternative to the Tai Li–Miles combine. The Quebec Conference in August 1943 provided that opportunity through the establishment of SEAC. Donovan took advantage of the new joint command to establish an OSS presence in Ceylon, which would provide him with a base for OSS operations in the entire region. Then, in December, Donovan relieved Miles of his OSS duties, appointed a regional OSS

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[12] Spector, "Allied Intelligence and Indochina," 26-27. This use of French personnel by U.S. intelligence predated instructions concerning employment of French and indigenous personnel by President Roosevelt in October 1944 (pages 10-11, above). The French Special Action units working for the SOE out of Calcutta (SEAC) were also forbidden to use Annamese because of possible unfavorable reaction from French colonials in Indochina.

director, and established an independent OSS unit in Chungking under Colonel John Coughlin. To enable Coughlin to operate in a somewhat hostile environment (hostile because of Tai Li), Donovan also reached an arrangement with Major General Claire Chennault, by then Commanding General of the Fourteenth USAAF.[13] The OSS would provide the USAAF with ground-air intelligence and an underground or behind-the-lines rescue system for downed pilots, and Chennault would both shield the OSS from Tai Li and also provide organizational cover for the OSS unit. The child of this union was called the 5329th Air Ground Resources Technical Staff (Provisional). This unit, officially formed in April 1944, functioned well until early 1945. Donovan also arranged with Washington to make this OSS unit directly responsible to the theater commander. Lieutenant General Wedemeyer, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the OSS, and made the OSS responsible for all clandestine programs in the theater. After several months in operation, the OSS unit in Chungking gained a status of near autonomy in the region.

Two other U.S. intelligence entities became crucial to developments in Indochina. First, the Air Ground Aid Section–China (AGAS), an organization under the War Department was charged with locating and rescuing downed pilots and prisoners of war in enemy territory. The second significant group was called the G-B-T Group. It was an intelligence team led by Laurence L. Gordon, Harry Bernard, and Frank Tan, three former employees of Union Oil of California-Texico (CALTEX) in Indochina. This group was initially organized privately to look after CALTEX property

[13] United States Army Air Force.

and personnel in Indochina, but quickly came under the wing of the SOE, which provided notional cover, funding, and logistical support. Eventually, G-B-T became associated with the USAAF, the AGAS, and the OSS. All three of the latter provided more funding than the SOE had available and gradually gained control of the group. Although made up of amateurs, G-B-T Group provided unique intelligence out of Indochina through mid-April 1945.

Having been forced by circumstances, limited assets, and resource limitations as well as commitment in Europe, to accept Franklin Roosevelt's division of world strategic military responsibility, Churchill and Britain quickly began efforts to gain an increased level of British participation in decision-making in the Pacific. This appeared necessary both in terms of British colonial possessions and in terms of the British position in China. In fact, this process began in Churchill's cable accepting the Roosevelt scheme. In that cable, Churchill pointed out that the British were in the process of pulling together a new fleet in the Indian Ocean, including British ships and the remnants of the Dutch Navy. Churchill also sought continued U.S. air support in the India-Burma area, but he asked for inclusion of Commonwealth and British officers in the related commands and also suggested a degree of "elasticity" in the borders dividing U.S. and British operational areas.[14]

By far Britain's most ambitious step toward regaining ground in East Asia was the creation of Mountbatten's SEAC. This was, in part, an answer to a divergence of

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[14] Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. I, 411-414.

American and British strategies in that region. American interests were focused to the north and northeast toward Japan via China, while the British were focused on attacking via Rangoon and points south.[15] There existed, therefore, a jointly perceived need to reorient British operations in Southeast Asia to complement the accelerating U.S. operations. According to Christopher Thorne, Churchill had come out strongly within his own government circles in favor of some move that would focus and energize British efforts in the Pacific. He used the successes of Brigadier Ord Wingate in Burma to challenge other less vigorous military elements in India and Burma. Some months earlier Secretary of State for India and Burma Leo Amery had suggested the formation of a command or theater of war in Southeast Asia, and Churchill approached the Americans on the issue.[16]

Churchill made his initial proposal to Franklin Roosevelt in a communication on 13 June 1943, and the two exchanged messages on the subject through the rest of June and July. Matters for discussion ranged from territorial boundaries to command structure. Churchill said that he was inclined toward an organization resembling the command of General Douglas MacArthur, with a British Commander-in-Chief, a U.S. Deputy, and joint staffs on the model used in by the Allies in North Africa. Churchill offered as one major reason the duplication of effort and lack of coordination in the area.[17] In one message Churchill suggested a joint command for all of East Asia, but

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[15] Thorne, *Allies,* 227; and Marr, *Vietnam 1945,* 299.

[16] Thorne, *Allies,* 298.

[17] The significance of the "MacArthur" model was that SEAC would be subordinate to the British Chiefs of Staff rather than the Combined Chiefs of Staff as MacArthur was subordinate to the U.S.

Roosevelt said that Chiang Kai-shek was the Commander-in-Chief in China and would never accept subordination to another command. While Churchill favored a command that would report to the British Chiefs of Staff, Roosevelt said the command should answer to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Churchill suggested General Sholto Douglass for the command, and Roosevelt countered by suggesting Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham.[18] There was also debate over the duties of General Stilwell and command of the 10th Air Force.[19] The complications were resolved, and Vice-Admiral Mountbatten was assigned as Supreme Commander, while Stilwell had concurrent duties as Deputy Supreme Commander and Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek in China. SEAC was formally authorized during the Quebec Conference in August 1943.

After the establishment of SEAC, Vice-Admiral Mountbatten acted quickly to gain entrance into Indochina from his theater. In October 1943, the same month in which he assumed command of SEAC, Mountbatten traveled to Chungking and met with Chiang Kai-shek to discuss the possibility of conducting "pre-operation" activities in Indochina. While Chiang would not approve inclusion of Indochina in the SEAC Theater for political reasons, he understood that eventually SEAC operations might

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Joint Chief of Staff rather than the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Roosevelt would not go along with this notion, and Churchill was in no position to fight the issue. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, C–311, 248-249 and C–320, 263-265.

[18] Ibid., C–342, 301-302, C–345, 305-306, and R–310, 317-381. The Americans, especially General George Marshall, did not like Sholto Douglas and believed that he was not qualified for a complicated command with the degree of political and military complexity as that proposed in SEAC. Churchill eventually elevated Admiral Cunningham, a veteran of the naval Campaigns in the Mediterranean, to the post of First Sea Lord (a post equivalent to Chief of Naval Operations in the U.S. Navy), and proposed Mountbatten for SEAC.

overlap into that area and said that they could be coordinated when that happened. Mountbatten chose to interpret this as meaning "I should have the right to send in any agents or carry out any subversive activities that are required for a campaign in Siam or Indochina."[20] This gentleman's agreement was the subject of infighting between Mountbatten and General Wedemeyer when the latter left SEAC to assume duties as Commanding General of American Forces in the China Theater and Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek.

The Free French, who had declared war on Japan a day after Pearl Harbor, were also moving to protect their East Asian equity. In 1941, long before he had gained control of the Free French movement and while Indochina was still firmly under control of the Vichy–Japanese combine, Charles de Gaulle had dispatched Jean Escarra to Chungking to establish a Free French liaison with the government of Chiang Kai-shek. Eventually, Escarra and others, including French military officers who escaped from Indochina, established what was called the "French Military Mission in China."[21] Later, in mid-1943, de Gaulle dispatched Colonel Zinovi Pechkov,[22] to Chungking to head the military mission with the intention of fostering guerilla activity in Indochina,

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[19] Originally placed in India to support Burma road operations and to provide a strategic reserve for the 14th Air Force in China. Roosevelt was unwilling to give up control of this unit. Ibid., R–298, 294.

[20] Mountbatten to Chiefs of Staff, Nov. 9, 1943, Exec. File 10, item 66, Army OPD files, cited in Thorne, *Indochina*, 78.

[21] Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 33; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 305.

[22] Born in 1895, Pechkov was the adopted son of Maxim Gorki. Gaining a claim to French citizenship (never made official) through service in the French foreign legion, Pechkov associated himself with de Gaulle following the fall of France. Pechkov spent some time in the United States in the early

and François de Langlade to control political warfare for Indochina under the auspices of the newly formed Direction Generale des Services Speciaux (DGSS).[23] Part of de Gaulle's motivation in these assignments was to forestall similar action by General Giraud; the other part was the concern of the French, both Free French and Vichy, about Chinese ambitions to take control of Indochina.[24]

After Charles De Gaulle finally consolidated power as the head of the Free French late in 1943, he appointed General Roger Blaizot to head the Corps Expéditionnaire Française d'Extrême-Orient (CEFEO).[25] This organization was located in Algeria and was intended to serve in SEAC under Mountbatten. De Gaulle had already begun efforts to persuade the British to accept the French. In conjunction with orders for formation of this unit, the French submitted a request that the Allies

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1940s and became acquainted with William Donovan there. In 1943, de Gaulle appointed Pechkov general for the duration of the war and made him his representative to Chungking.

[23] Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 33; and Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 305. De Langlade was a French planter in Malaya. He had been used by British intelligence services operating out of Singapore against the French Indochina target in 1941. More is said about de Langlade below. The DGSS as a service was tasked with unconventional warfare.

[24] These reports had some substance. See "Consideration of Proposed Entry of Chinese Troops into Indochina to Combat Japanese Forces in that Colony," January 8, 1942, *FRUS, China*,749 – 750; "The Assistant Secretary of War (McCloy) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Acheson)," *FRUS, China*, 750-752; "Memorandum by the Adviser on Political Relations (Hornbeck)", February 4, 1942, *FRUS, China*, 756-760; The Secretary of State to the secretary of War (Stimson)," Washington, February 6, 1942, *FRUS, China*, 760; "Consideration of the Proposed Entry of Chinese Troops into Indochina to Combat Japanese Forces in That Colony," The Washington Delegation of the French Committee of National Liberation to the Department of State [translation], Washington. October 20, 1943, FRUS, China,882-883.

[25] French Far East Expeditionary Corps. This unit, formed in Algeria, was to be moved to South Asia–first India, then Ceylon, in preparation for participation in the "liberation" of French Indochina. Archimedes A. L. Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 36-37. Patti's rendition of de Langlade's title was "Chief, DGSS-Far East. Also, see David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 308. In his definitive work on the Vietnam conflict, Joseph Buttinger alludes to the formation of a military organization called Forces Expéditionnaire Française d'Extrême-Orient (FEFEO), under General Roger Blaizot. According to Buttinger, this unit was to be assigned to SEAC.

provide equipment for this unit and also advised General Marshall in Washington that they intended to request representation on the Pacific War Council.[26]

What was eventually formed under Blaizot was the above-mentioned CLI. This group, according to Stein Tønnesson, was initially 500 – 700 men strong, but grew to about 1,200 men.[27] De Gaulle began to press the British to accept this CLI and a French military mission under Blaizot at SEAC near the end of 1943.[28] The CLI did not reach Ceylon until late in 1944 after Winston Churchill had authorized Blaizot and his military mission to join SEAC.

Also, painfully aware of statements made by Franklin Roosevelt concerning Indochina in November and December 1943, the French Committee of National Liberation issued a declaration on 8 December 1943 repudiating "all the acts and cessions to which she had to consent at the cost of her rights and interests."[29] The declaration went on to say that France would fight until Indochina was liberated and returned to the French Union. It also promised liberal political and economic reform,

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[26] Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 18. The same source also notes reports from a U.S. State Department officer serving at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces Europe (SHAEF) to the effect that in the south of France the French were forming an army corps consisting of two divisions. These forces were intended for deployment in Indochina.

[27] Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution,* page 49. Tønnesson cites W. H. Wainright, *De Gaulle and Indochina*, 209, 264. From the same source, Tønnesson also notes that Blaizot was a former colonial officer with experience in Indochina. In October 1943, Blaizot was assigned by General Henri Giraud to head the Mission Militaire Française en Extrême Orient in Algeria.

[28] Thorne, *Allies*, 349, citing British Foreign Office document FO 371, F6582/6582/61; F1784/779/61; F6441/4023/61.

[29] Alan W. Cameron, Ed., *Vietnam Crisis: a Documentary History*, Vol. I: 1940-1956,11-12, which cites France, Direction de la Documentation, *Notes Documentaires et Etudes*, No. 548 (February 15, 1947), 3.

fiscal and tariff autonomy for Indochina, but concluded, "Thus France intends to carry on, in free and intimate association with the Indochinese peoples, the mission for which she has the responsibility in the Pacific."[30]

Initially, after the establishment of SEAC, British efforts directly targeting Indochina were limited and almost totally confined to SOE operations. For this activity, the SOE relied heavily on French nationals such as François de Langlade, who had experience in Indochina and had long established contact with the SOE. In mid-1943 (before his appointment by de Gaulle), de Langlade arrived at Force 136 headquarters in Calcutta, where the British made him head of the Force 136 Indochina Section (the British military refused to recognized de Langlade as an official representative of France). Before arriving in Calcutta, de Langlade had been based in China (between the fall of Singapore and his assignment by de Gaulle) and was for a time funded by Chinese intelligence chief Tai Li.[31] In October 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Jean de Crèvecoeur joined de Langlade in Calcutta with a small group of French officers who were to receive guerilla training and, then, shared for operations between the SOE in India and the Pechkov mission in China.[32] The British at SOE continued to use Frenchmen such as de Langlade to establish their own network within Indochina following the establishment of SEAC.[33]

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[30] Ibid., 12.

[31] Patti, *Why Vietnam*, 37; and Smith, *OSS*, 325; Specter, "Allied Intelligence," 30; and Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 320-324.

[32] Cruickshank, *SOE*, 122 – 123.

[33] Smith, OSS, 324-325.

De Langlade jumped into Indochina shortly after D-Day to meet with French military officers who were to create a resistance organization. He returned to Indochina again several months later to continue negotiations and pass instructions from De Gaulle. De Gaulle's aim was to have General Eugène Mordant, organize a Service d'Action (SA) unit. The British, of course, were happy to use the French assets for their purposes. A shortcoming of this operation that would show itself in the following year was the refusal of the French to employ local natives as cadres of the SA. This was interesting in that a primary SA mission was to involve the entire native population in guerilla operations against the Japanese.[34]

The British military initially opposed French offers, requests, and entreaties for placement of French military on the staff at SEAC and the location of a French military unit within the territory of SEAC's area of operation.[35] Beginning in 1944, however, the British – possibly motivated by the desire to focus their own forces further south in former British colonies – had a change of heart. As noted in Chapter Two, on 4 August 1944, the British Chiefs of Staff proposed to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that the French be allowed to participate in the Pacific War by the inclusion of a French military element on the staff at SEAC, the posting of the CLI to SEAC, and French participation in political warfare in their own specific "areas of interest," to wit, Indochina.[36] The

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[34] Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 320.

[35] Ibid., 302. It could be said, however, that the SA units themselves constituted military units, but they were hidden within the sheep's clothing provided by the SOE.

[36] "Questions Arising out of the United States Reactions to Proposals for French Participation in the War in the Far East," Annex I, C.O.S. [British Chiefs of Staff] (W.) 228, 4th August, 1944, [British] Public Records Office, WO 203, 5610, X/L07021, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, Folder 3.

Joint Chiefs had no objection in principle other than to note that French activities should be limited to the SEAC area of responsibility (which, also in the interpretation of the U.S. Chiefs, excluded Indochina). When Roosevelt rejected this proposal, the British Foreign Ministry, and Churchill, himself, opted to back away from the issue. Eventually, however, pressure from British military, including Vice-Admiral Mountbatten, led first to an initial informal visit by General Blaizot to Mountbatten at SEAC. In October 1944, Winston Churchill unilaterally authorized a permanent French presence at SEAC without advising Roosevelt.[37] On his part, as noted above, Roosevelt denied–once aware of the French presence–that this was an authorized official presence within the joint command at SEAC. He had been presented with a *fait accompli.* Churchill's action and the arrival of the French in Kandy, Ceylon at SEAC Headquarters was soon "discovered" and reported by Max Bishop, U.S. Consul in Ceylon, who routinely kept an eye on activities in Kandy.[38]

The exact significance of Churchill's action is questionable, however. The British had been infiltrating French officers into Indochina for almost five months as a part of clandestine operations of the SOE by the time Blaizot arrived in Kandy. According to reporting from Force 136, this had begun in May 1944:

> A series of operations was mounted in order to [one word missing] the French Resistance movement in INDO-CHINA and to organize the officers and men before possible Japanese surprise attacks on the French Forces. There were six successful drops in North TONKIN. Eight men

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[37] LaFeber, *Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina*, 1291.

[38] Thorne, *Indochina*, 88. Kandy was the site of SEAC's headquarters in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

> were introduced with 5 W/T sets [transmitter/receivers]. Major De LANGLADE arrived in Tonkin carrying a personal letter of introduction to the leaders of the Resistance Movement from General De GAULLE, to whom he was later to report the results of his mission in ALGIERS.[39]

The SOE activity noted in this report was to add flames to the dispute between Mountbatten and China Theater Commander Wedemeyer in the following year. Mountbatten felt that under the gentleman's agreement reached with Chiang Kai-shek in October 1943, he had the right to conduct such operations with the only requirement being that he *advise* the China theater. Wedemeyer felt, on the contrary, that he had the right to vet those operations and the power to veto them if necessary. This was particularly so since many of the operations would utilize U.S. resources. The dispute became so acrimonious that it finally was referred to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[40]

As noted in Chapter II, in discussion of Roosevelt's deferral of decision or comment on Indochina policy, a memorandum prepared for Roosevelt by Stettinius in November 1944 summarized fairly well British activity out of SEAC vis-à-vis Indochina. It described SEAC's unhappiness that Indochina remained in the theater controlled by Wedemeyer rather than passing over to SEAC by default with the breaking up of CBI upon Joseph Stilwell's departure. It also reported a growing French

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[39] Untitled Force 136 activity report dated 4 October 1945, Public Records Office, WO 172, 1786, X/L06684, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, Folder 2. This review of activity covered a period from May 1944 through August 1945.

[40] A series of communications between Wedemeyer and Mountbatten and between Mountbatten and his Chiefs of Staff illustrate the severity of the dispute and give a feeling for the basis of the argument. See Top Secret Cypher Telegrams CFBX 37689; CITE 105; CFBX 37747; CITE 106; CFBX 38024; SEACOS 408; FMW 95 [The CITE numbers were originated from Mountbatten for Wedemeyer, while the CFBX numbers were from Wedemeyer to Mountbatten. SEACOS number was from Mountbatten to the British Joint Service Mission in Washington; the FMW was from Field Marshall at the Joint Service Mission to the British Chiefs of Staff] Public Record Office, Prem 3/178/3, 06874, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, Folder 2

presence at SEAC, noted the fact that SOE undercover operations in Indochina were being restricted from using indigenous personnel, and described an apparent effort by the French and the British to foreclose the Americans from a voice in policy matters in Indochina.

US military and intelligence activities during 1943 and most of 1944, had not really focused on Indochina. Events in the area included the departure of Stilwell, who Roosevelt recalled in October 1944 at the request of Chiang Kai-shek. Stilwell's CBI command was broken into two segments: Burma-India and China. After some delay, Wedemeyer was transferred from SEAC and made Commanding General of U.S. Forces, China. U.S. Military efforts in the theater remained focused on support of China, and intelligence efforts in the region were mainly limited to some OSS activity in Burma in support of SEAC, the China Theater, and Naval Intelligence and OSS activity in China. The OSS operations out of SEAC included targets in Thailand and Burma and, peripherally, Indochina. The intelligence efforts in China were in support of U.S. Naval interests and in support of the operations of Chennault's Fourteenth USAAF. B-M-T and AGAS, however, did conduct activity in Indochina.

Thus was the stage set for momentous events in the year to come. The British and French were poised for action at SEAC, but the French as yet had only Intelligence assets there. French military forces remained in Algeria and elsewhere. The French intelligence apparatus at SEAC was very much a "piggyback" operation in conjunction with the SOE, while French intelligence operations out of China were for the most part rendered impotent by the ever-present General Tai Li until late 1944 when

the United States recognized De Gaulle's Provisional Government. The Americans had intelligence assets looking toward Indochina from the north and south, but had few military assets other than those in China, which were occupied with matters along the Burma Road. U.S. air assets were limited to the Fourteenth Air Force, preoccupied with Chinese defense, and the 10th Air Force in India, pre-occupied with support to SEAC and serving as a back-up to the Fourteenth Air Force. Miles' group was primarily occupied with events in coastal China.

One other development in 1944 that was to have lasting influence on U.S. intelligence officers operating out of China was the surfacing of Ho Chi Minh. Ho, Võ Nguyên Giáp, and their comrades from the Indochinese Communist Party (Đông Dương Cộng Sản Đảng or ICP) had been busy rebuilding their organization since 1940. In 1941, at the Eighth Party Plenum of the ICP, the decision was made to abandon the traditional Marxist class struggle in favor of drawing other nationalist groups into a broad alliance against the French. To this end, Ho formed the Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh (Vietnamese Independence League) or Việt Minh. Over a period of several years this organization had developed a considerable infrastructure in Tonkin, a somewhat less cohesive structure in Annam, and much less organized following in the far south, Cochinchina.

In August 1942, when traveling to China to meet with supporters and financiers, Ho was arrested and jailed by Chinese authorities. He was imprisoned until September 1943, when General Chang Fa-kwei, the Commander of the Chinese Fourth War Zone, ordered his release. Chang had decided that Ho would be useful in building a

nationalist Indochinese organization, probably for use as a trump card in negotiations with the French following the war. Although he had his own communist party, Ho cooperated with Chang and organized the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Việt Nam Cách Mệnh Đồng Minh Hội). Ho headed the Revolutionary League briefly before yielding his position to a nationalist who had no visible connections to the communists and was, therefore, more to the liking of General Chang and his masters in Chungking. The Revolutionary League's loss was the OSS's gain, because Ho, unable to find support in other quarters, decided to turn to the Americans.

Ho had already had some contact with U.S. authorities in China, perhaps as early as late 1943 or early 1944. He had done some bit-work, probably translations related to wartime propaganda for the Office of War Information. By mid-1944, the OSS and AGAS were attempting to recruit Ho to help establish an intelligence organization in Indochina. According to Archimedes L. A. Patti, who was to become the OSS Indochina chief in the field in 1945, Ho's agenda was to gain U.S. recognition for his Independence League.[41] To this end, Ho, assisted by OSS and OWI contacts drafted a letter to U.S. Ambassador Gauss. He eventually met William R. Langdon, U.S. Consul General at Kunming, who reported the contact to the Department of State. Nothing came of the contact at the time, but Ho had established contacts that he would use later.

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[41] According to Patti, Ho and his organization had actually come to State Department attention in 1943 and had been the subject of a cable from Secretary of State Hull in July 1943. See Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 46-57.

Ho's first efforts to reach the Americans involved a downed American flier, Lieutenant Commander Carlton Swift, Jr., who was rescued in Tonkin by the Viet Minh. Ho arranged for Swift to be transferred to U.S. forces in China and planned to use that service as an entrée to gain an audience with Major General Claire Chennault. Ho eventually succeeded in April 1945, but by that time events had transpired which gave Ho a much better channel of contact with the Americans.

By the third week of January 1945, Hitler had lost his gamble at the Battle of the Bulge, and the Germans were in full retreat on the Eastern Front. Hitler had less than four months to live and the Third Reich less than five. The Allies, sure of themselves in Europe, were beginning to focus on the defeat of Japan. In March 1945, after several months of increasingly indiscrete French efforts at preparing an anti-Japanese resistance Indochina, and faced by repeated and staggering military defeats across the Pacific and the prospect worse things to come, the Japanese finally ran out of patience with the French in Indochina. In a sudden move on 9 March, after giving French Governor-General Decoux an impossible 2-hour ultimatum, the Japanese arrested him and the vast majority of French officers and soldiers throughout the colonies. Despite the fact that the French were well aware of the impending Japanese action at least in general terms (the French Embassy in Chungking had discussed the issue with the American Ambassador and General Wedemeyer in late January),[42] the French were caught off guard, their communications cut, and disarmed almost without a fight. Of about 75,000

[42] Department of State Telegram No. 116, 26 January 1945 (sent via Naval radio) cited by Patti, *Why Vietnam*, 65

men of all ranks in the French Indochinese Military Command, including about 17,000 French soldiers, about 5,000 managed to escape, including about 1,500 Frenchmen.

General de Gaulle immediately demanded allied aid for his escaping troops, but the British had no uncommitted resources available, and the Americans, under orders from the president not to assist the French in Indochina, hesitated before giving aid. Initially Claire Chennault, acting theater commander while Wedemeyer was in the United States reporting to the Joint Chiefs, provided some assistance, but on 20 March the War Department put a stop to that aid.[43] Eventually, Chennault was allowed to provide tactical air support and to provide some humanitarian assistance and assist in evacuation of women and children.

The overall effect of the Japanese takeover, aside from political issues, was the chop the head off any incipient resistance from the French quarter and to suddenly cut off the production of intelligence by the SOE and French networks as well as most of G-B-T. Another effect was to give Ho Chi Minh the entry with the Americans he had sought. At the same time that Chennault was prevented from launching an overt military response to events, the OSS had gained permission to conduct operations in Indochina (which they had been conducting under the umbrella of AGAS all along anyway) and also had the go ahead to aid any resistance groups which would oppose the Japanese.[44] Almost immediately, source hungry OSS officers began to look for Ho Chi Minh.[45]

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[43] Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter,* Robert Holtz, Ed. (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1949), 342, as cited by Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 65.

[44] Ibid., 65.

Ho's first direct OSS contact was a meeting with Lieutenant Charles Fenn on 17 March 1945. Fenn, an OSS officer, was assigned to AGAS to maintain contact with the G-B-T Group. Gordon, the senior G-B-T partner, disliked the OSS and would not work with them directly, so the OSS sent Fenn to AGAS to keep track of Gordon. Fenn recruited Ho in the name of the AGAS. Preparations were made to send Ho back into Indochina to establish contact with those who had the potential to resist the Japanese and provide needed information. By mid-April, Ho had been provided with communications and dispatched along with two OSS operatives into Indochina. From there over the coming months, he reported on Japanese troop movements, local political and security conditions, and generally filled the void left by the loss of G-B-T sources.

Through the following months, the British and French remained busy preparing to do what was needed to regain their Southeast Asian colonies, and at the beginning of April, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff finally agreed to the movement of the French CLI from Algeria to Ceylon. With that, de Gaulle announced the appointment of General Jacques Philippe Leclerc to head a French Army Corps of two divisions and be military commander for Indochina. He also selected Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu as High Commissioner for Indochina, Jean Cedile as Commissioner for Cochinchina, and Pierre Messmer as Commissioner for Tonkin. Then in July at the same time that SEAC was given responsibility for Indochina south of the 16th Parallel at Potsdam, it was also agreed that SEAC would accept the French offer of two army divisions for use in Indochina.

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This hurried pace of events was also beneficial to Ho's aims.[46] Given new missions to interdict Japanese lines of communications after the March coup by the Japanese, the OSS also attempted to employ the French military but did so only with difficulty in the face of internal French command fights, strikes by French soldiers, and interference from several French intelligence entities. For that reason, the OSS decided to turn to the Viet Minh. In doing so, the OSS also reached the decision to provide Ho Chi Minh with training and equipment to carry out resistance activity in the hinterlands. An OSS unit (the 'Deer Team") was parachuted into Cao Bang and commenced training of Ho's troops in July.[47] The team remained with Ho's command group until mid-August and then traveled to Hanoi with Ho and his entourage. Records of the effectiveness of the deer mission can be found in reporting from that mission included in testimony before Congress in OSS communications made available to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1972.[48]

The sudden end of hostilities caught almost everyone in the region off guard. Ho was forced to rush for Hanoi to conduct the "August Revolution." The French and

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[45] Charles Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh,* 76.

[46] Before his death, President Roosevelt had already indicated to General Marshall while at Yalta that General Wedemeyer (and thus the OSS in China) could conduct intelligence and subversive activity in Indochina. "News of this was passed to China in a hand carried note from General John E. Hull, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations through the services of Colonel George A. Lincoln, who carried the note from Yalta to Chungking. Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 64, 544 fn 7, 8. By the beginning of April the OSS had already drafted a paper suggesting that French sovereignty in Indochina should be recognized as a part of an overall policy aimed at showing solidarity against the Russians. There is no evidence, however, that Roosevelt saw or was at all influenced by the document. William O. Donovan provided a copy of the paper to President Truman in May 1945. See Office of Strategic Services, Memorandum for the President, 5 May 1945, Harry S. Truman Library, Rose A. Conway Files.

[47] Other such teams were also inserted into other locations, but none had contacts relevant to this discussion.

British, not having planned to do so during 1945, were suddenly forced into hasty preparations to re-enter Indochina. The Chinese were not ready to move south, either. With the arrangement reached at Potsdam, the British would be responsible for accepting the surrender of the Japanese in the southern portion of Indochina, and the Chinese would do the same in the North. This was not just a ceremonial responsibility. It involved the release and transportation of prisoners of war and civilian internees and the transportation of Japanese troops back to Japan.

Ho, however, was quickest on his feet. Trailing the "Deer Team" behind him, he moved quickly to Tan Trao, where he called a conference of the Indochina Communist Party on 13 August. Following the 3-day ICP gathering, Ho called a meeting of the People's National Congress, where he was elected president of the provisional government. Two days after completion of that meeting, Ho launched an insurrection, taking control of Hanoi's seat of government.

With a degree of authority added by the realignment of SEAC and the China Theater and a perceived void in colonial authority in Indochina, the French rushed to catch up with events. Using SEAC air assets, they dropped Commissioners Messmer and Cedile into Tonkin and Cochinchina on 22 August. Both were captured and held, Cedile by the Japanese in Saigon, Messmer by the Viet Minh in Tam Dao. Cedile was able to assume his duties upon arrival of the British. Messmer was eventually rescued by Chinese troops and reached Hanoi in late October.[49] A day after the commissioners

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[48] *Causes, Origins, and Lessons*, 243-280.

[49] Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 480. Among others, Marr cites Paul Mus, "L'Indochine en 1945," *Politique Étrangère,* 11, (1946): 329-374, 433-464.

were dropped and captured, the Vietnamese in Cochinchina formed their own provisional revolutionary executive committee in Saigon.

Although it was not a part of the Potsdam Protocol, one of the most significant decisions made at the conference as far as Asia was concerned was that of dividing responsibility for Indochina at the 16th Parallel, with the China Theater responsible for the northern portion and SEAC having responsibility for the southern portion. This was not everything the British wanted but sufficed to give them and, thus, the French, free entry into Vietnam with military forces under the authority of the alliance. Under the arrangement, Truman was to obtain the approval of Chiang Kai-shek to give up control of the southern part of Indochina. Once Truman was able to persuade Chiang Kai-shek to accept this arrangement, the French began to move in earnest.[50]

In the meantime, American prisoners of war and civilians in Indochina became the responsibility of the OSS. To gather information and protect American citizens and property, the OSS organized "Mercy Teams" to enter Indochina as the Japanese surrender was accepted. These teams had the task of locating and protecting American prisoners of war pending formal ending of hostilities and to the transfer of prisoners home. One team, code named "EMBANKMENT," was assigned to Saigon. A second team was assigned to Hanoi, while continuing to collect intelligence and assisting with arrangements for the Japanese surrender. The latter group, under the command of Major Archimedes L. A. Patti, landed in Hanoi on 26 August.

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[50] *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. II, 1321.

On 2 September 1945, the same day that the Japanese signed surrender terms, the first elements of EMBANKMENT landed in Saigon. The remainder of the team, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey arrived on 4 September, and was followed closely by British and French troops two days later.[51]

In the North, the lead elements of General Lu Han's Chinese troops arrived in Hanoi on 9 September, and one of Lu Han's first acts was to eject the team of Major Jean Sainteny from the Governor General's Palace, where the Viet Minh had been holding them in protective custody. On 12 and 13 September additional British and French troops flew into Saigon, and Major General Douglas D. Gracey arrived with his staff to assume command and to prepare to accept the surrender of the Japanese.[52]

There was an undeniable contrast between the situations in Hanoi and Saigon. In Hanoi, under Ho's Provisional Government there was a fair degree of order, public services functioned, and security was maintained. Ho's government gained a greater degree of legitimacy with the common people by the abdication of Emperor Bảo Đại, who volunteered to serve as an advisor to the new government.[53] In Saigon, on the other hand, the original provisional government lasted several days, never really exercised control, and was reorganized on 9 September with little improvement in result. Disorder in Saigon was rampant, and the situation was further exacerbated when the Vietnamese called a general strike. Eventually, despite efforts of Commissioner

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[51] Smith, *OSS*, 337; and Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 271.

[52] Dunn, *First Vietnam War*, 152; and Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 455.

[53] Bảo Đại. *Con Rồng Việt Nam: Hồi ký chánh trị 1913–1987* (Los Alamitos, California: Nguyen Phuoc Toc, 1990). 345.

designate Cedile to negotiate with the Vietnamese, General Gracey felt compelled to impose press censorship and martial law.[54]

Despite some return to order in Saigon, hostilities between the Vietnamese and the Europeans increased. Matters were complicated almost beyond remedy when Cedile arranged for the release and arming of French prisoners of war. Despite assurances of Cedile to Gracey that he would control the French, he was unable to do so. Then, on 24 September, unnamed Vietnamese elements attacked the suburban French quarter of Saigon, Cité Herault, murdering or maiming more than 150 men, women, and children. Gracey's reaction was to order the Japanese military to restore order or face trial for war crimes. Even so, the security situation did not improve measurably.[55] On 26 September, Lieutenant Colonel Dewey, commanding officer of the U.S. Mercy Team "EMBANKMENT' was killed at a roadblock near Tan Son Nhut Airport. Two days later, Mountbatten called both General Gracey and Commissioner Cedile to Singapore, where he directed them to reopen talks with the Vietnamese.

Throughout September the French military presence increased in the south. On 3 October, two days after the Gracey's return, the French 5 Colonial Infantry Regiment debarked from a French warship at Bạch Đạng Port in Saigon. On 5 October General Philippe Leclerc arrived in Saigon to assume his command. On 6 October, the talks

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[54] When Gracey reported this to his superiors, he was told that he had exceeded his authority, but he was not directed to reverse his orders. Top Secret, To Major General D. D. Gracey, 29 August 1945, PRO,WO 203, 4932, X/L 06309, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, folder 4 and From Saigon to S.A.C.S.E.A., 211500 Sept [1500 GMT, 21 Sept.], PRO, WO, 171/1784, X/J, 8280.

[55] Dunn, *First Vietnam War*, 203.

between Cedile and President of the Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic Phạm Văn Bạch broke down. Within days, a Vietnamese attack on Tân Sơn Nhứt Airport marked the beginning of open warfare. However, although French forces were still not overbearing, there were sufficient Allied troops in Saigon to begin to exercise a strong degree of control, and Vietnamese armed opposition began withdrawing into the hinterlands by 16 October.

Also on 9 September, the French and the British concluded an agreement in London, giving the French full authority to administer Indochina south of the sixteenth parallel.[56] The French would reach a similar agreement with the Chinese (mainly concerning relinquishment of extraterritoriality and Chinese withdrawal from Indochina) in February of the following year.[57]

While hostilities developed almost immediately in the south, the northern part of Vietnam still had a degree of order. Having declared independence, established contact with the commander of Chinese troops arriving to accept the Japanese surrender, and having dissolved the Indochinese Communist Party to clear his own slate, Ho Chi Minh announced that the Viet Minh and other nationalist factions had agreed to unite. In a general election conducted on 6 January 1946, Ho was elected the first president. In March, about a month after the signing of the agreement for withdrawal of Chinese troops by the French and Chinese, French representatives also signed an agreement

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[56] The Ambassador in France (Caffrey) to the secretary of State, October 12, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 314.

[57] The Counselor of Embassy China (Smyth) to the secretary of State, March 1, 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, Vol. VIII, 30-31.

recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free state within the Indochina Federation of the French Union. The Vietnamese agreed to the entry of French troops to replace the Chinese to restore order temporarily.

By the end of the year, despite agreements signed by both sides, armed clashes broke out at Lạng Sơn and Hải Phòng. The French demanded that the Vietnamese turn over all security duties to the French military and punctuated their demand by shelling Haiphong. The French were in the country, and first stage of the Vietnam War had begun.

# CHAPTER IV

# CAUSE AND EFFECT

The purpose here is to determine how the French returned to Indochina and what effect American policy had for or against. Having examined both the history of declarations policy against a French return to Indochina and actions taken in the field related to that policy, the final step is to examine the reasons for the policy and the effect of the policy. By the outset of World War II, there were several dominant strains of thought that affected formulation of policy. Three that appear most influential in reference to events were the Open Door, imperialism, and isolationism.

For the United States, the notion of opening closed markets probably originated with the New England whalers and Commodore Matthew Perry in the mid-1800s. America was far behind the major European powers in staking out world markets and world resources and was playing catch-up. By the end of the nineteenth century, the American campaign to gain access to resources and markets in the Far East had already been named. In 1897, in fact, President William McKinley called it the "Open Door."[1] In the following year, Secretary of State John Milton Hay began writing the Open Door

[1] The original use of "Open Door" as a description of a foreign policy is difficult to trace. McKinley is quoted using the phrase 16 September, 1898, about a year before Secretary Hay wrote the first Open Door Note, when addressing peace commissioners at the White House. In part, he said that U. S. tenure of the Philippines was a part of a policy in which "Asking only the open door for ourselves, we are ready to accord the open door to others." See Thomas McCormick, "Insular Imperialism and the Open Door: the China Market and the Spanish-American War," *United States Diplomatic History*, Vol. 1, Gerald Clarfield, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 271; and William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 49.

Notes. His letter to the United States Ambassador in London on 6 September 1899 spelled this out:

> This Government is animated by a sincere desire that the interests of citizens may not be prejudiced through exclusive treatment by any of the controlling powers within their so-called spheres of interest in China, and hopes also to retain there an open market for the commerce of the world, remove dangerous sources of international irritation, and hasten thereby the united or concerted action of the powers of Pekin [sic] in favor of the administrative reforms so urgently needed for strengthening the Imperial [Chinese] Government and maintaining the integrity of China in which the whole western world is alike concerned.[2]

In short, this meant a China free to provide the United States with its own *entrepôt* to the Asian market without prejudice to other interested parties and an end to special spheres of interest.

Contrasted with the Open Door, was the resurgence of isolationist sentiment that grew following World War I at a time when Woodrow Wilson was attempting to bring the United States into the League of Nations. Preached by George Washington and generally advocated by Thomas Jefferson in the early days of the Republic, 1930s *isolationism* was something of a semantic paradox in that the most influential brand of isolationism in American politics did not call for closing the door on the outside world, but rather demanded for the United States "complete independence of action in foreign relations" and demanded avoidance of institutions that might serve to protect the interests of western imperialism. The greatest threat to that complete independence, in

[2] Secretary Hay to the Ambassador in Great Britain, Stephen J. Valone, ed., *Two Centuries of U.S. Foreign Policy: the Documentary Record* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 39.

the view of Senator William E. Borah, was the League of Nations.[3] In contrast with the Open Door, which was aimed towards Asia, for the most part isolationism was aimed at Europe, particularly the Europe of the 1930s, where the incomplete and imperfect resolution of World War I was such that Europe seemed ripe for war again. The isolationists were interested in the world outside, but did not want to be drawn into a war by ties to any European state or organization. The general influence of this particular brand of isolationism in the last years before the beginning of World War II was invoked in particular toward the growing possibility of new conflict in Europe.

There can be little question that Franklin Roosevelt was the origin of the policy against a French Indochina. Nor can it be doubted that he was, in the tradition of the Open Door, interested in a way into the Far East. He was also very much aware of the competition from the old Imperialists and the newly developed states such as the Soviet Union and Japan. He also brought with him, from his days in the administration of Woodrow Wilson a healthy dose of Wilsonian liberal internationalism. Together these two tendencies might explain his interest in the welfare of the "1,100,000,000 brown people" of Asia.[4] The fact that Indochina and its neighbors were "sources of products essential to both our wartime and peacetime economy," excellent potential markets for America, and strategically located on the southwestern approaches to the Pacific Ocean drew his interest, but his main focus was on China, which had 450,000 of that 1.1

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[3] N. Gordon Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to World Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 253-254.

[4] Memorandum of Conversation, by the Adviser on Caribbean Affairs (Taussig), March 15, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, vol. I, 124.

billion "brown people."[5] When World War II upset European control of the Southeast Asian colonies, he was prepared to test his theory.

When he came to office in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt brought with him many characteristics developed during his early experiences in the Wilson administration, particularly a tendency towards, in historian N. Gordon Levin's words, "an American globalism, hostile to both traditional imperialism and to revolutionary socialism."[6] Roosevelt also brought with him an unequaled sense of political balance with which he navigated between extremes and opposing sets of values toward his own objectives, and he understood how to control his own government.

What made Roosevelt's pronouncement of policy so potent internationally was the perception of his control over his own government. Even seasoned statesmen such as Cordell Hull were not impervious to his manipulation. Roosevelt also had an ability to balance foreign affairs against domestic issues. Within his own cabinet, he demanded compliance and was able to play one individual against another to achieve his purposes. Roosevelt was able to boast experience in government and in the politics and management of military affairs. He had served as a state senator, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and as Governor of New York. He learned as he went and he became acquainted with and sometimes associated with individuals who would play key roles during his presidential administration.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics*, 269.

As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt became acquainted with Senator Cordell Hull, his future Secretary of State, and naval officers such as William D. Leahy, William F. Halsey, Husband E. Kimmel, and Harold R. Stark.[7] He made two Republicans members of his war cabinet, former Rough Rider Frank Knox and former Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson. Knox and Stimson would become Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of War, respectively.[8]

In 1939, as war approached, Roosevelt reached down into the junior ranks to bring up Brigadier General George C. Marshall to serve, first, as assistant Chief of Staff of the Army, then, as Chief of Staff. At the same time, he elevated Harold R. Stark to the post of Chief of Naval Operations. He gave both of these service chiefs direct access to his office, bypassing all but the Secretaries of War and Navy. Stimson and Knox he used in conjunction with their respective services and as general advisors on policy. Once the war had begun, according to Waldo Heinrichs, Roosevelt formed an informal war cabinet including Admiral Stark, General Marshal, Secretaries Knox, Stimson, and Hull, and trusted New Deal lieutenant Harry Hopkins.[9] All of this served to provide Roosevelt with a powerful management base and a great degree of freedom

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[7]Conrad Black, *Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 65, 67.

[8] For insight into Roosevelt's relations with his military chiefs see Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[9]Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988), 18 – 20. Harry Hopkins was one of President Roosevelt's closest advisors. He served Roosevelt during the first hundred days of his administration as chief officer of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Later Hopkins served as director of the Civil Works Administration, 1933-1934, and the Federal Surplus Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration from 1935-1938. In 1938, Roosevelt appointed Hopkins Secretary of Commerce.

from the institutions of government in planning policy. He was in control of the key players.

Although he and only he could say exactly what his ultimate objectives were, Roosevelt seemed in the case of Asia to have a continued interest in the Open Door, developing and holding some guaranteed access to Asia. In the interim, defeating Hitler and Tojo would do as powerful interim goals that were universally accepted.

His military strategists presented him with "Plan Dog," conceived by Admiral Stark in October 1940 with three basic elements: (1) a general alliance with Great Britain; (2) priority on the European war; and (3) maintaining a strong defensive posture in the Pacific.[10] He accepted this approach initially and tended to concentrate his interests on Europe in the last months before Pearl Harbor, allowing Secretary of State Hull to conduct affairs related to Japan. He showed a great interest in naval activities in the Atlantic, but, once general decisions were reached on strategy, he left details to his service chiefs for the most part. Nevertheless, it would be justified to say, as did Heinrichs, that "all the threads of policy led ultimately to the White House."[11]

Roosevelt could not, however, control the events that influenced his policy. When he made his first major pronouncement of policy on the subject of trusteeships in the Atlantic Charter, Britain was fighting for its life on the Atlantic, France had been split into occupied France and Vichy France, and French authorities in Indochina had

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Hopkins also acted as Roosevelt's unofficial representative in U.S.-British and U.S.-Soviet relations. Hopkins also participated in wartime conferences such as the Teheran Conference in 1943.

[10] Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 29.

[11] Heinrichs, *Threshold of War*, 20.

already given way to Japanese demands for transit rights and a Japanese military presence. The Germans had launched Operation Barbarosa against the Russians from the Balkans, thus drawing the Russians into the war on the Allied side. The United States had yet to join the war as a combatant, but five months had already passed since Roosevelt's victory in passage of Lend Lease. On the final day of the Atlantic Conference, isolationists in Congress proved how tenuous Roosevelt's grip was there by coming within one vote of preventing the extension of the draft in the U. S. House of Representatives.[12] Roosevelt's part in the declaration, therefore, might be considered a gamble, and the wording was probably influenced by his need for support at home.

The initial recidivist tendency in policy statements noted in Chapter Two during the period not long after the drafting of the Atlantic Charter is also most likely explained by exigencies of the moment. First, in late 1940 and early 1941, when the United States had little to offer in the way of military support for the French in Vietnam against the Japanese, there was a desire to stiffen French resistance.[13] Although the United States had yet to enter the war, there was a clear concern about the cutting of the Burma Road and other lifelines into China (Vietnam had also been a route) and–in the other direction–about the potential threat to British and Dutch possessions to the south for which U.S. support might be required or requested in the not too distant future.

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[12] See James M. Burns, Roosevelt: the Soldier of Freedom (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 120.

[13] See John J. Sbrega, " 'First catch your hare': Anglo-American Perspectives on Indochina during the Second World War," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 14(1) (March 1983), 65. Sbrega cites comments by British diplomat Nevile Butler on the need to stiffen French resistance in Indochina.

With its fleet centered in and around Pearl Harbor, the United States was not in a position to provide more than verbal pressure against the Japanese and to urge the French to resist. Only days after the French capitulation to Germany in 1940, the Japanese had begun to exert pressure on the French in Indochina to close the supply route to the Chinese army via Haiphong and to accept a Japanese "inspection team."[14]

Later, in 1942 the United States sought to encourage the French administration in Indochina to minimize their cooperation with the Japanese. Roosevelt also needed to coddle the French in order to gain cooperation for North African operations at the same time. Even as participants in Operation Torch approached their jumping off points on 8 November, it became necessary to seek the cooperation of Petainist Admiral Darlan. In seeking Marshal Petain's approval, the Americans faced possible opposition. Petain's response to the American appeal was "We are attacked; we shall defend ourselves."[15] Even after the successful landings, there remained a clear need to gain the support of the French to gain either active support or passive acceptance.

By the time that Roosevelt began his more pointed remarks directly related to Indochina, all of the Far Eastern colonies had fallen, and South Asia was the last British bastion in the East. Roosevelt's statements in March 1943 were possibly bolder in view of the recent securing of Guadalcanal by U.S. troops in February.[16] Also, by that time,

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[14] For well-documented accounts of Japanese pressure on Vichy in Vietnam, see David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 13-30; and Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: a Dragon Embattled,* Vol. I (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 35-41.

[15] Burns, *Roosevelt: the Soldier of Freedom,* 293.

[16] The attack on Guadalcanal had commenced in August 1942. Completion of the operation marked the first capture of Japanese possessions in the Pacific.

General Joseph Stilwell was en route to Chungking to take command of U.S. forces in China, Burma, and India, where stagnation was rampant amongst the ranks of British forces. This gave the U.S. added leverage in determining the fate of that side of Asia. Roosevelt's remarks heightened British concerns about the future of the British Empire in the Far East and forced it to give more attention to the issue of supporting the French in holding on to Indochina.

Domestic issues also concerned Roosevelt at the time. Although it is impossible to prove a connection between issues with any degree of certainty, it can be said that the domestic labor and manpower problems, which had come to a boil in 1943, must have distracted him from foreign policy. One of these was a conflict between the manpower hungry War Department and the War Manpower Commission. More women were employed, but war industries continued to have critical shortages. Even more alarming to Roosevelt concerning his own political foundations were threats of coal miners' and railroad workers' strikes in the spring and fall. Roosevelt ordered that age-deferment provisions for the draft be suspended so that striking mine workers between ages thirty-eight and forty-five could be drafted. Roosevelt also threatened to nationalize mines and railroads. Both railroad workers and mine workers finally agreed to stay at work or return to work as the result of Roosevelt's personal negotiation efforts. The chief influence on foreign policy here was probably the drain on Roosevelt's time, because he was forced to become extensively and personally involved in these issues.[17]

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[17] Burns, *Soldier of Freedom*, 334-338.

Roosevelt's strengthened rhetoric at the end of 1943 probably reflected the improved U.S. situation in the Pacific and other gains for the Allied cause in the West, as well. The U. S. island-hopping campaign was under way in the Solomon and Gilbert Island groups. Bouganville was attacked on 1 November, while Tarawa and Makin Island landings were carried out later in the same month. The Russians had begun to enjoy increasing success in pushing the Germans back. Kiev was liberated, and the German defenses on the Dnieper River had begun to crumble. Also, Roosevelt had enjoyed face-to-face contact with both Chiang Kai-shek and Joseph Stalin, and may have begun to entertain thoughts about their potential contributions to the war in the Pacific in comparison with that of the British, who were still mired down in India and Burma.

What was the effect of these increasingly pointed statements about Indochina? Generally, they were negative. Roosevelt's statements caused additional concern in British military and diplomatic circles. In January 1944, the British Post-Hostilities Planning Commission circulated a memorandum through the British War Cabinet recommending that the British Government "tackle the U.S. Government" on the issue of French Indochina.[18] Later in the year, Churchill, himself, remained reluctant to raise the issue with Roosevelt while other issues remained unsolved, but the British and French were increasingly active in the field. This was particularly so in Mountbatten's

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[18] Extract of Conversation between Sir Arthur Cadogan and M. Esler Dening on 4th April 1944, PRO [Public Records Office]/FO [Foreign Office]/371/41723/7998, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, folder 3.

SEAC. While this action could not be blamed entirely on Roosevelt's policy, the policy acted as a spur.

Foot dragging by the United States in regard to recognition of de Gaulle's provisional government and the subsequent refusal by Roosevelt to give authorization for French representation at SEAC had the effect of delaying the arrival of French forces in South Asia, but it appeared to give even greater urgency to British intentions vis-à-vis the inclusion of the French at SEAC and beyond.[19] Nor did U.S. policy deter the British from including the French in intelligence operations targeting Indochina from SEAC. As noted in Chapter III, French officers with dual masters, de Gaulle and the SOE, had been participating in SOE activities before the creation of SEAC, and their participation intensified in May 1944 regardless of U.S. views on the issue.

Toward the end of 1944, Roosevelt was comparatively silent on the subject of Indochina. He had not, as is evident from the statements he actually did make, changed his thoughts about the desirability of having the French in Indochina, but his priorities had probably changed for a number of reasons. He was involved in getting himself re-elected, and that issue was not a foregone conclusion, particularly because of the shifting political alliances in the stress of war and because of some degree of discomfort with the unprecedented prospect of a four-term president. Aside from politics, the war also progressed at an accelerating pace.

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[19] By the end of 1943, the French had approached the U.S. and the British to express their interest in participating in the Pacific War. Both the U.S. and the British demurred initially. See Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 302.

In June the Allies had finally launched Operation Overlord. Also in June Tokyo had come within the range of U.S. bombers, and the Japanese fleet suffered a severe defeat in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Island hopping was accelerating. By August, U.S. forces had taken the Kwajalein Atoll, Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, Saipan, and Guam; and by October, the United States had also begun a series of landings in the Philippines. America was able to focus its efforts directly on the Japanese Islands, and other jumping off points suddenly diminished in importance in American military planners' eyes.

At the same time, it had also become apparent through the misadventures of Joseph Stilwell that China under Chiang Kai-shek was probably not going to provide Roosevelt with his key to the Orient. By that time, also, Roosevelt had become aware of Churchill's authorization of a French presence on the staff of SEAC. Presented with this *fait accompli*, Roosevelt chose to leave the issue alone with the exception of noting, when pressed on the issue, that the French presence in Kandy was not officially sanctioned.

Also, at the urging of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Roosevelt intensified his pressure on Joseph Stalin to bring his country into the war against Japan during the Yalta Conference in February.[20] Furthermore, he was deeply involved in a growing contest with the Russians over Poland and Eastern Europe. This all may have detracted

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[20] Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, 512-513. There had been interest in this all along, but by Yalta, Joint Chiefs of Staff interest in Soviet participation in the Pacific had grown to the point that it began to overshadow issues such as that of occupied Poland, which had been a major point of contention in previous months. Aside from the developing strategic situation in the Pacific, this may have been made more urgent by general acceptance of the fact that China would never be able to play the significant role expected in earlier planning.

from his efforts concerning trusteeship, but he continued to defer the issue when challenged and, in retrospect, appears to have been using the same sort of delay and attack again tactics that he employed so well on other occasions.[21]

After once again deferring the issue on the first day of 1945,[22] Roosevelt did, however, mention his interest in trusteeship for Indochina to Joseph Stalin at Yalta in February and raised it in off the record comment to the press after the conference.[23] Less than a month later, he again maintained his viewpoint to General Albert Wedemeyer during a conversation on 7 March that he would seek to end colonialism in the Far East following the war and that Wedemeyer was "not to give any assistance whatsoever to the French in Indo-China."[24] Even Roosevelt's oft cited conversation with Charles Taussig on 15 March, often used as evidence of a change in Roosevelt's thought on the issue, can be read as a use of words to leave Roosevelt an opening to pursue his original objective.[25]

The point, however, is moot, because Roosevelt did not survive to demonstrate his ultimate intentions to the world. Both Ambassador Hurley and General Wedemeyer

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[21] For a revealing example of this sort of maneuver on Roosevelt's part, see his use of James F. Byrnes as a "straw man" in maneuvering for the nomination of Harry S. Truman as his vice president in the election of 1944, see Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 18 – 20.

[22] Memorandum from the President to the Secretary of State, January 1, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. III, 293.

[23] Ibid., 512. Roosevelt also noted his tactic of denying transportation for the CLI.

[24] Drachman, *United States Policy Toward Vietnam*, 84,

[25] As noted in Chapter Two above; *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. I, 124.

had noted Roosevelt's physical deterioration with shock on 7 March. When Wedemeyer commented on this to Secretary of War Stimson some time later, he was "admonished quietly but firmly not to mention the President's physical condition to anyone."[26] And when he died, the country's baton of leadership fell from the hands of the gifted political long distance runner into the hands of a man, honest and equally dedicated, but totally out of touch with the complex system of relationships which had been created and directed by his predecessor. When he died, Franklin Roosevelt took with him his thoughts on trusteeship and dissolution of the French Empire.

Of particular note when beginning to examine the issue of continuity of policy is the fact that there is no evidence that Franklin Roosevelt ever ordered or requested the drafting of any sort of implementation plan for establishing a trusteeship over Indochina. At the Tripartite Conference of Foreign Ministers in Moscow in October 1943, at the time in which Roosevelt was making some of his most pointed comments about Indochina, British Foreign Minister Eden had announced that his government would not discuss the declaration on dependent territories proposed by the United States. In preparation for the Conferences at Dumbarton Oaks where a basic framework for the United Nations was negotiated, the Department of State drafted a proposal on a system for hostile territories to fall under the authority of the United Nations, but Secretaries Stimson and Knox objected to a plan which might allow captured Japanese territories to be under United Nations control. They were still

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[26] General Wedemeyer's recollection of a conversation with Secretary Stimson in March 1945. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports*, 343. Wedemeyer noted after the fact that Stimson's admonishment reminded him of the situation during the illness of President Woodrow Wilson.

worried about maintaining sufficient island bases in the Pacific to make a future Japanese resurgence impossible. Roosevelt, at the time, felt that the necessary islands could be excluded, and Hull felt that access could be secured via the United Nations, but the Joint Chiefs felt that on military grounds there should be no discussion related to postwar territorial settlements. As usual during a time of war, the Joint Chiefs won their point and the subject was not discussed, even in a general manner at Dumbarton Oaks, and there was still no detailed policy on Indochina.[27]

Truman might as well have been Rip Van Winkle when he took office in April 1945. He had been almost completely shut out of government since leaving the Senate to run for vice-president the year before and was working with a team of individuals with whom he had only passing acquaintance rather than the life-long familiarity enjoyed by Roosevelt. He had never held executive office and had not been afforded the opportunity to learn under Roosevelt. Truman did benefit from his years in the U.S. Senate, his experience with military appropriations, and the associations he had made in Washington, but he was dealing with individuals who had run the most complicated government in U.S. history in the most catastrophic conflict the world had known. He immediately faced weighty decisions in domestic and foreign issues related to the economy, war strategy, foreign relations, and world order. His administration was fighting a war, working on the creation of a new international community, and planning for the return to normalcy following the end of hostilities. In all of these areas he did

[27] Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations Charter 1940–1945* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1958), 346-348.

almost miraculously well. He was forced, however, to rely heavily on those who had already been in harness for information and advice.

Only a month before he took office, the Japanese had ousted the Vichy government in Indochina, and most of the French civil and military leadership there had been imprisoned. As a result, the Free French were bombarding U.S. military authorities and U.S. diplomats with appeals for support for those several thousand French soldiers who had escaped to the hinterlands and continued to resist. Shortly thereafter, the Joint Chiefs of Staff apparently approved the movement of the French CLI to Ceylon, but there is no evidence that Truman played any direct role in that authorization.

One key problem for Truman in terms of foreign affairs was that, as well as losing the principal author of foreign policy, the country had also lost the services of its longest serving secretary of state. Cordell Hull had retired from office for health reasons in November 1944. Having been more or less delegated as the master of things Asian at the beginning of the war while Roosevelt concentrated on Europe, he had shifted to postwar issues, particularly the building of the United Nations, near the end of his tenure. Hull had been connected with Roosevelt in one way or another since the 1920s. Almost as debilitating, Truman, although inheriting experienced officers and cabinet members, was virtually a stranger amongst them. Where Roosevelt had known most of them for 15–20 years, Truman knew little of them.

Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Jr. replaced Cordell Hull in November 1944. Under-rated by many historians, Stettinius was actually a very able

manager, but he was more an executor than an originator, and he tended to try to remain as neutral as possible in issues of policy. He had been occupied in large part with the drafting of the United Nations charter and related diplomacy for the past three years. He lasted as secretary only until the completion of the United Nations Conference in May, when Truman replaced him with former Chief of the Office of War Mobilization James F Byrnes.[28]

Because of his newness to the job and the lack of continuity at the head of the State Department, Truman had to try to the best of his ability to bring himself up to date on issues and was vulnerable to the information provided by the department. Twenty-seven years after the fact, in testimony before Congress, Abbot Low Moffat, former Chief of the State Department's Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, described how Truman received guidance on policy that seemed to turn the United States foreign policy away from an advocacy of trusteeship and eventual independence for Indochina in favor of supporting the fortunes of France.[29] As noted above, the concern of the Europeanists at the Department of State was with balance in Europe following the war. The reasoning was that a weakened France might make Europe vulnerable to the Soviet Union. The Asianists at the department were, on the other hand, primarily interested in stability in Asia based on self-determination and an end to colonialism. They emphasized the potential importance of Indochina's resources and market for the United States and were very conscious of the growing nationalism within Indochina.

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[28] Truman was well acquainted with Byrnes from the years they had served together in the Senate.

[29] Herring, "The Truman Administration and French Sovereignty," 102-104.

Faced with the need to provide a guidance paper to the new president, the two sides finally agreed to a compromise, which fell short of Moffat's desire to demand specific prerequisites for French return to Indochina, but did require French assurances of significant reforms and did not promise unconditional support for the return.

This compromise paper, however, was rendered pointless by developments at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in which a crisis in French–U.S. relations at a critical time of U.N. negotiations resulted in Stettinius' promises for the restoration of French sovereignty to French Foreign Minister Bidault. This, in effect, placed the United States firmly on the path originally advocated by Dunn and friends.[30]

The first briefing paper that Truman received was actually an analysis done by the OSS in early April for the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. OSS Chief William J. Donovan sent the report to Truman with a cover letter on 5 May that explained the general theme of the paper. "The thesis is that it should be our aim to convince Russia of our readiness to understand and consider her problems and yet to demonstrate our determination to safeguard our own interests." Donovan's explanation went on to mention, among other things, the importance of encouraging "West-European states in developing prosperous, popular democratic regimes which could, in cooperation with Britain and the United states, tend to balance the Russian position." Contained within

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[30] That Stettinius was stampeded into making the promises was in part likely due to his inexperience both with the French and with the wiles of Dunn, who was serving as his second at the U.N. Conference.

the report was an argument very similar to that of James Dunn to the effect that Indochina might be a price to pay for prosperity in France.[31]

As noted above, when Grew finally provided Truman with guidelines on policy for use in meeting with Georges Bidault on 16 May, Truman adhered to those guidelines. As noted in Chapter Two, Truman expressed his appreciation for General de Gaulle's offer of troops and his request to participate in the Pacific, but said that the subject was a matter that must be left to the relevant military commanders. [32]

At the end of the month, Truman received communications from Ambassador Hurley in Chungking, recounting Roosevelt's most recent policy guidance vis-à-vis Indochina and calling Truman's attention to French and British misuse of U.S. Lend-Lease resources to "move with force into Indochina."[33] While Truman merely advised Hurley that the issue would probably be raised at Potsdam, he may well have been distracted by crises involving the Franco-Italian border and more problems with the French military reasserting itself in Syria and Lebanon. Truman responded decisively by cutting off military aid to the French, but then bowed to advice from his diplomats, ordered resumption of aid to the French, and invited de Gaulle for a visit to avoid "martyring" him and actually strengthening his position with the French people.[34]

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[31] Office of Strategic Services, Memorandum for the President, 5 May 1945, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Rose A. Conway Files.

[32] Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Matthews) to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, May 23, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. VI, 309-311.

[33] *FRUS, Potsdam*, 919-920.

[34] Herring, "The Truman Administration and French Sovereignty," 107-108.

In fact, the participants at Potsdam did not address the subject of Hurley's complaint directly, but a related issue was settled that partially obviated Hurley's concerns. Truman once again paid heed to his advisors, this time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who recommended realigning the boundaries of SEAC to include the southern portion of Indochina along with other portions of the Southwest Pacific area no longer considered germane to the U.S. advance on Japan. In a memorandum submitted in preparation for discussions at Potsdam, the Joint Chiefs explained their reasoning as a desire to avoid employment of U.S. manpower and resources for the missions of containment and mopping up in peripheral areas. They wished to concentrate resources on the "main effort."[35] This requested realignment was clear evidence of the lessening significance of Southeast Asia, in general, and Indochina, in particular, to the U.S. perception of the overall mission of defeating Japan. Also, however, this realignment was an important step in putting the British in position to reintroduce French authority in the southern portion of Indochina. Considering the OSS briefing and the policy guidance he had received from the State Department, it seems unlikely that Truman totally missed this latter significance, but likely that he, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had bigger fish to fry.

From the surrender of Japan through the completion of the French reoccupation of Vietnam, there is little or no record of personal attention on the part of Harry Truman to any facet of this issue beyond his attention to France. Truman's perception of policy toward France and French Indochina may have been influenced by his attitude toward de

[35] "Control and Command in the War Against Japan," No. 1267, C. C. S. 890/1, *FRUS,*

Gaulle. Truman was doubtless aware of the fact that de Gaulle had gone to Russia in late 1944 to negotiate a Treaty of Friendship with the Russians. This in itself, considering the growing concern with Russian behavior in East Europe, was cause for thought. Coupled with de Gaulle's very public anti-American attitude, there may have been some cause for Truman's concern. How high it ranked on the scales of importance for the new president is problematic. In a period of several months since he suddenly took office, Germany had surrendered, the United Nations Charter had been completed, Berlin had been partitioned, and a new and terrible weapon had been successfully tested in New Mexico. Within days that weapon would be dropped on Japan.

On 22 August and again on 24 August, Charles de Gaulle visited the White House. As he did so, Ho Chi Minh and associates were cleaning up after their August Revolution in Hanoi and points south. There is no record that de Gaulle and Truman even discussed that event was discussed between the two presidents. De Gaulle apparently could not lower himself to beg for the shipping that his military commanders had requested to transport French troops to Indochina, and he may not have felt it opportune considering the cool atmosphere. Although de Gaulle probably expected Truman to be somewhat friendlier than President Roosevelt, he certainly didn't receive a warm welcome. Truman was unhappy with de Gaulle over a number of issues including issues related to internationalization of the Rhur, France's demands for control of the left bank of the Rhine, France's refusal to cooperate with the United States in connection

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*Potsdam*, 1313-1314.

with sites for military bases, and de Gaulle's general attitude of resentment toward the Americans for rescuing Europe.[36]

U.S. Indochina policy, such as it was, remained fairly consistent–with its normal dichotomy between rhetoric and execution. On 20 October, John Carter Vincent, Director of the State Department's Office of Far Eastern Affairs spoke before the Foreign Policy forum in New York. His speech was, in part, relevant to Indochina:

> In Southeast Asia a situation has developed to the liking of none of us, least of all to the British, the French, the Dutch, and, I gather, to the Annamese and Indonesians. With regard to the situation in French Indochina, this Government does not question French sovereignty in that area. Our attitude toward the situation in the Dutch East Indies is similar to that in regard to French Indochina. In both these areas, however, we earnestly hope that an early agreement can be reached between representatives of the governments concerned and the Annamese and Indonesians. It is not our intention to assist or participate in forceful measures for the imposition of control by the territorial sovereigns, but we would be prepared to lend our assistance, if requested to do so, in efforts to reach peaceful agreements in these areas.
> In a statement issued by Secretary Hull on March 21, 1944, entitled "Bases of the Foreign Policy of the United States," there occurs the following paragraph in regard to "dependent peoples": "There rests upon the independent nations a responsibility in relation to dependent peoples who aspire to liberty. It should be the duty of nations having political ties with such peoples...to help the aspiring peoples to develop materially and educationally, to prepare themselves for the duties and responsibilities of self-government, and to attain liberty." This continues to be American policy.[37]

Several days before that speech was made, U. S. Ambassador to France Jefferson Caffery sent a cable to Washington describing a conversation on the same day with Philippe Baudet, who had concluded the conversation by thanking Caffery for the ships

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[36] Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 379.

[37] Cameron, *Vietnam Crisis*, 64-65.

that the United States was making available for the Pacific. He was obviously referring to ships used to transport French troops to Indochina. Several months later, on 15 January, a message finally made its way from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of War to the effect that providing *any* type of land or sea transport to take troops to or from either Indochina or the Dutch East Indies was contrary to U.S. policy. Only days later, however, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson advised H. Freeman Matthews that the president did not mind the transfer of eight hundred jeeps and trucks then in Saigon to the French as it would be too expensive for the British to take them home.

Despite the President's preoccupation, the U.S. State Department and the OSS continued to keep a neutral eye on Indochina. That was initially done in Hanoi by the Mercy Team led by Major Archimedes L.A. Patti, the OSS Secret Intelligence Officer for Indochina. The Patti group arrived in Hanoi on 22 August. Other U.S. military representatives also arrived in the following days to deal with matters related to American prisoners of war. In the South EMBANKMENT, led by Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey, arrived in Saigon on 2 and 4 September. Both of these groups left the country after stays of roughly thirty days, but they were replaced in the early months of 1946 with consular officials, Charles Reed, Consul in Saigon, John L. O'Sullivan, Vice-Consul in Hanoi. The correspondence from both Reed and O'Sullivan show a progression of events beginning in the early part of 1946.[38] The reporting centers first on negotiations for Chinese withdrawal from the North and also on French attitudes and

[38] *FRUS, 1946*, Vol. VIII, 24-45.

actions in Indochina. They chronicle Franco-Chinese agreements concerning the Chinese withdrawal, and then move to the tightening of French controls, French armed conflict with the Chinese in Haiphong, and the 6 March 1945 agreement between the French and the Vietnamese by which Vietnam was to become a free state within the Indochinese federation. Among other articles of that same agreement, is the declaration that the "Annamese" Republic of Vietnam declared its readiness to receive the French Army. The French had arrived.[39]

Once the Japanese surrender had been accepted by the British and the Chinese in their respective areas of responsibility, the United States adhered to a policy of neutrality. Shifting into what George Herring calls a "hands-off" mode, the U.S. stood by and avoided taking sides in Indochina. While the British sometimes employed U.S. flag carriers in moving French colonial troops from France to Indochina, the Americans for the most part attempted to avoid all connection with either the returning French or the Vietnamese nationalists. This became more difficult when hostilities broke out in October 1945, but the "hands-off policy" remained in place.[40]

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[39] Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs (Moffat) to the director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Vincent), August 9, 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, Vol. VIII, 52-53.

[40] Herring, "The Truman Administration and French Sovereignty," 113-116. For authoritative descriptions of the beginnings of the Franco-Vietnamese War, see Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, and Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled.*

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSIONS

As noted in earlier chapters, French efforts to re-establish themselves in Indochina began before the Free French had settled on a plan or a leader. Without question, there was a will to return. Less certain were the means and ability to do so. Motivations were simply the economic and political value of Indochina to France. For France the value of Indochina, in terms of domestic wealth and international prestige, was incalculable. The French saw their extended empire as the only path towards the re-establishment of their perceived world position.

By the end of 1943, the French had already taken a series of initial political and military steps. First, the French had put in place an intelligence network, sometimes more or less independent such as the military mission in Chungking, but for the most part riding on the back of the British intelligence apparatus operating out of India. Second, the French made an initial public declaration of intent to return to Indochina. Third, the French began to build a military apparatus to regain control in Indochina. This last action would not be sufficient to drive the Japanese out of Indochina but might be sufficient to maintain control once the Japanese were either driven out or had left of their own volition.

By using resources already in place in Chungking and Kandy, the French, more or less united under de Gaulle, were able to begin establishing contact with French elements in the Japanese-occupied colony. As a result, even before the French had an

official presence at SEAC, there was contact and a degree of control of assets already on the ground in Indochina. Because of their high value to the British intelligence operations there, the French were certain of British assistance in this effort. This assistance was often provided in the form of transportation or equipment, which had been provided to the British by the American Lend-Lease program. Once the British Supreme Commander Vice-Admiral Lord Mountbatten was in place at SEAC at the end of 1943, these efforts intensified.

Throughout this process, the French realized the importance of having some say in planning and policy in the Pacific, and they sought to establish a right to this through offers of troops and naval support. In the absence of American acceptance, the French continued to use the British as their window into regional affairs.[1] For the French, then, the pieces were in place – less a major military presence – by some time in 1944.

The French-British partnership in Southeast Asia was equally beneficial to British aims. Even before the loss of Singapore and Malaya in 1942, the British had worked to establish an intelligence network throughout the region. Because Indochina had, in fact, been a stepping-stone for the Japanese en route to British and Dutch possessions further south, the British were content to use all of the French talent they could to build a network there. Their motivation was similar to the French in terms of power and fortune. Both countries had long established spheres of interest in Asia, and

[1] The French offers of help were never accepted during the Roosevelt presidency and were only accepted in the Truman presidency once the U.S. Chiefs of Staff had determined that Indochina was not key to reaching and defeating Japan.

both had interests in maintaining some degree of control there, at least partially closing the Open Door.

Through their role in keeping their proverbial finger in the dike against Nazi Germany, offering time for the sleeping giant across the Atlantic to awake and also, not incidentally, providing sufficient resistance to German aggression to tempt Hitler into making his fatal mistake in arousing another sleeping giant to the east, the British had earned an equal partner's role in the alliance with the United States. This was true despite obvious cross-purposes in the Pacific. British defensive feelings in regard to its Asian possessions were exacerbated by the wrangling over wording in the Atlantic Charter, which could have been viewed as America's line in the sand against colonial imperialism.[2] It had become clear to the British that Roosevelt had eyes on all colonial possessions in the East and not just those of the vanquished French.

Aside from a close relationship with the United States, strengthened by the unique relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt, and also by Plan Dog, the British had the advantage of a remaining base in Asia. In the early years of the Japanese war, the British were careful to husband resources in India and Burma and were content to bargain away a degree of their position in China in order to have U.S. forces and resources blunting the Japanese threat to that base. This policy enabled Britain to have entry to its East Asian possessions and to support its colonial neighbors, as well.

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[2] As noted in Chapter II, elements in the British foreign and colonial services had viewed the Atlantic Charter with dismay. Forced as they were, however, to rely on U.S. support in their struggle for survival in the Atlantic, leaders were content for the time being to interpret the charter advantageously for themselves while quietly working to shore up the defenses of empire using tools provide by Lend-Lease. Louis' *Imperialism at Bay* is the seminal study of this process, while a much smaller work, Cruickshank's *SOE*, provides another view from the field.

The British realized, however, that their hold on Asia would become increasingly tenuous should the United States be allowed or forced to bear the entire load of fighting the war in the Pacific. A paper written by the Foreign Office in 1944 concerning proposals for French participation in the Pacific War and the inclusion of Indochina within the boundaries of SEAC summarized the position well:

> It is possible that the American attitude is part of a general plan to squeeze S.E.A.C. out of Indo-China and Siam, to enlarge the scope of General Stilwell's activities, and generally to assign us to a purely minor role in the war with Japan. We know that this would be in line with the thought in certain American naval and military circles. We hope, however, that President Roosevelt will see things differently.
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> Politically it is essential for the recovery of our good name and for the sake of our future influence on events in the Far East and the Pacific that we should play a major role in the war against Japan and that our contribution should be not merely effective but spectacular. Mr. Curtin[3] recently put this point to the Prime Minister in a telegram in which he said: "I am deeply concerned at the position that will arise in our Far Eastern Empire if any considerable American opinion were to hold that America fought a war on principle in the Far East and won it relatively unaided, while the other Allies, including ourselves, did very little towards recovering our lost property. I put this matter to you frankly as one of deep and far-reaching consequence to our future role and prestige in the Pacific sphere.

The paper recommended strongly that the inclusion of Indochina within SEAC be considered a political matter as well as a military problem and to urge that, if this does not come to pass, "it should only be at the price of an increase in our role in other directions which will ensure our effective and spectacular participation not only in the approach march but in the final assault on Japan itself." [4]

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[3] John Joseph Curtin became Australia's wartime Prime Minister in 1941. A leader of the Australian Labor Party, Curtain died in office in 1945.

[4] While dating is not precise, the body of the document indicates that it must have been written sometime after 4 August 1944 but sometime before 20 October 1944, when Joseph Stilwell was recalled.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the establishment of SEAC was Britain's first major step toward assuring a return to British colonial possessions in Southeast Asia following the war. Once in control of that theater, the British began maneuvering to draw Indochina into SEAC's boundaries. While doing so, however, Supreme Commander Mountbatten invoked the gentleman's agreement reached with Chiang Kai-shek in October 1943 to commence operations in Indochina in conjunction with the French. While this could not be done with major French military units, which were stranded in Algeria for want of transportation and approval by Roosevelt, French Service d'Action officers and DGSS officers co-opted by the SOE allowed both the French and the British to fulfill their own respective missions, military and political. Before the Japanese takeover in March 1945, the single most important of these missions was the establishment of official liaison between de Gaulle and French civil and military leaders in Indochina through the services of François de Langlade, who visited Indochina in 1944 to hold meetings with Admiral Jean Decoux, French Governor-General of Indochina, General Eugène Mordant, Commander of the French Indochina Army, and Lieutenant General Gabriel Sabattier, commanding French Indochina Army elements in Tonkin.[5] With that move, the French were in position

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Although the document was obviously drafted at the Foreign office, the copy cited above was originally located in War Office files (WO). See Military Headquarters Papers, Far East (WO 203)/5610/X/L 07021, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Peter Dunn Collection, Box 1, folder 3.

[5] Mordant was de Gaulle's first choice as leader of the covert French resistance organization in Indochina. Mordant was arrested by the Japanese in March 1945, and Sabattier replaced him as head of the French resistance in Indochina. See Marr, *Vietnam 1945* and Patti, *Why Vietnam?* For accounts of the dealings between de Gaulle and French leaders in Indochina prior to March 1945.

within Indochina to participate in the reclaiming of the French colony when the opportunity offered.

Unfortunately for French plans, on 9 March the Japanese took control of government in Indochina and imprisoned or killed French military leaders and soldiers except for about 5,000 of all ranks who escaped into the hinterlands under Generals Sabattier and Major General Marcel Alessandri. The Japanese also rolled up the French and British intelligence networks. This was a major setback to reoccupation plans, and both the French and the British were forced to rebuild their networks from the ground up. Nevertheless, they were both in position to move from their base in Ceylon, and orders were finally given for the movement of the CLI, by then renamed the Fifth Colonial Infantry Regiment (5th R.I.C.), to SEAC in April.[6]

The question then arises, what influence did U.S. policy have on these developments and this seemingly inexorable movement of Britain and France into their pre-war colonial posessions? Almost every time Roosevelt delivered anti-French Indochina rhetoric, both Britain and France redoubled their determination to do exactly what Roosevelt was opposing. Roosevelt's pronouncements proved of little use and were actually counter-productive.

In retrospect, there were several strains of policy at the White House, the totally anti-French outlook that Roosevelt developed out of disgust with French performance early in the war, and modified versions of that when Roosevelt was calmer or did not

[6] Cruikshank, *SOE*, 125.

feel challenged. The principal fault in Roosevelt's so-called policy was that it had no substance, i.e., no effort had been made to think out structure or mechanism.

The two opposing viewpoints at the Department of State were different in basic outlook, but some of the differences were semantic rather than substance. One viewpoint put priority on a strong postwar Europe able to resist Soviet expansion and considered France an important element of that. For that group, it was important that France not be weakened in fortune or morale by the loss of its most valuable colony. The opposite viewpoint also sought stability, but in Asia. They perceived the greatest threat to come from potential conflict caused by the aspiration of native peoples for freedom. They also emphasized the importance of that region to the U.S. economy. Neither side proposed total elimination of French equity in the colony, and neither side thought the indigenous people actually ready for self-government.

In terms of viability, Roosevelt's idea of trusteeships was doomed to failure if attempted. Short of armed intervention on the part of the Americans, there were few options for blocking French reoccupation of Indochina. Exclusion of Britain and France from that theater of war would have been difficult in light of British holdings in India and would also have meant that U.S. manpower would have to bear the brunt of the entire Pacific effort. The United States could have occupied the areas unilaterally, but this also would have caused a strain on manpower and would have been an unacceptable distraction of focus from what the Joint Chiefs of Staff had called the

"main effort."[7] Nor was it practical or even possible to deny to the allies the necessary resources for carrying out occupation, because such materiel had already been provided to them for other missions through Lend-Lease and also because of the high degree of integration of resources that had already been accomplished through the war in Europe. Finally, at no time, despite anti-colonial and pro-democracy sentiment in both administrations, had it ever been suggested that the indigenous peoples of Indochina should be granted complete independence, and the notion of doing so as an alternative to French occupation was never an option except to a few idealists on the ground touched by their contacts with the Indochinese and moved by their desire for independence. These voices would not be heard for several decades.

Thus, neither Roosevelt nor Truman had the power to prevent the inevitable return of France to Indochina. Nor did they have the strength of conviction to make the effort. For America, the general political view on East Asia remained linked to notions of an open door. In the end, that notion and the drive to end the war won out. Within another year or so, other issues, particularly the communist threat and containment of Russian expansionism would dominate, but at the end of the war America was satisfied and successful.

While one man may possibly succeed in dictating policy for a country, even as large and complex as the United States, no man, no matter how astute or powerful, can

[7] As noted in Chapter IV above, the Joint Chiefs' concern with the "main effort" was expressed in Memorandum No. 1267 at Potsdam.

really sustain such a policy alone. The majority of the United States could agree on a general theme such as the Open Door and the need to defeat Japan. This was U.S. policy, and it succeeded. Although the strategy of using China as a key to the Open Door failed, British, French, and Dutch preoccupation with their old colonies, and Russian preoccupation with the Asian land mass, left America alone with a much better key to the door: Japan. And America made the most of it, rebuilding Japan in a form compatible with U.S. democratic and mercantile ideals.

Freedom for the oppressed populations of the colonies would have to wait. Perhaps it could be said, nonetheless, that Roosevelt's notions contributed to a building momentum in that direction. In fact, the United States did reverse itself somewhat in helping the Indonesians gain freedom. Unfortunately for Vietnam, the situation immediately to the north and America's preoccupation with the rise of communism probably made it impossible for rational judgments to be made on Vietnamese independence. With the rise of the anti-communist hysteria, Vietnam became a meeting place between giants, and the concerns of the Vietnamese themselves were made insignificant.

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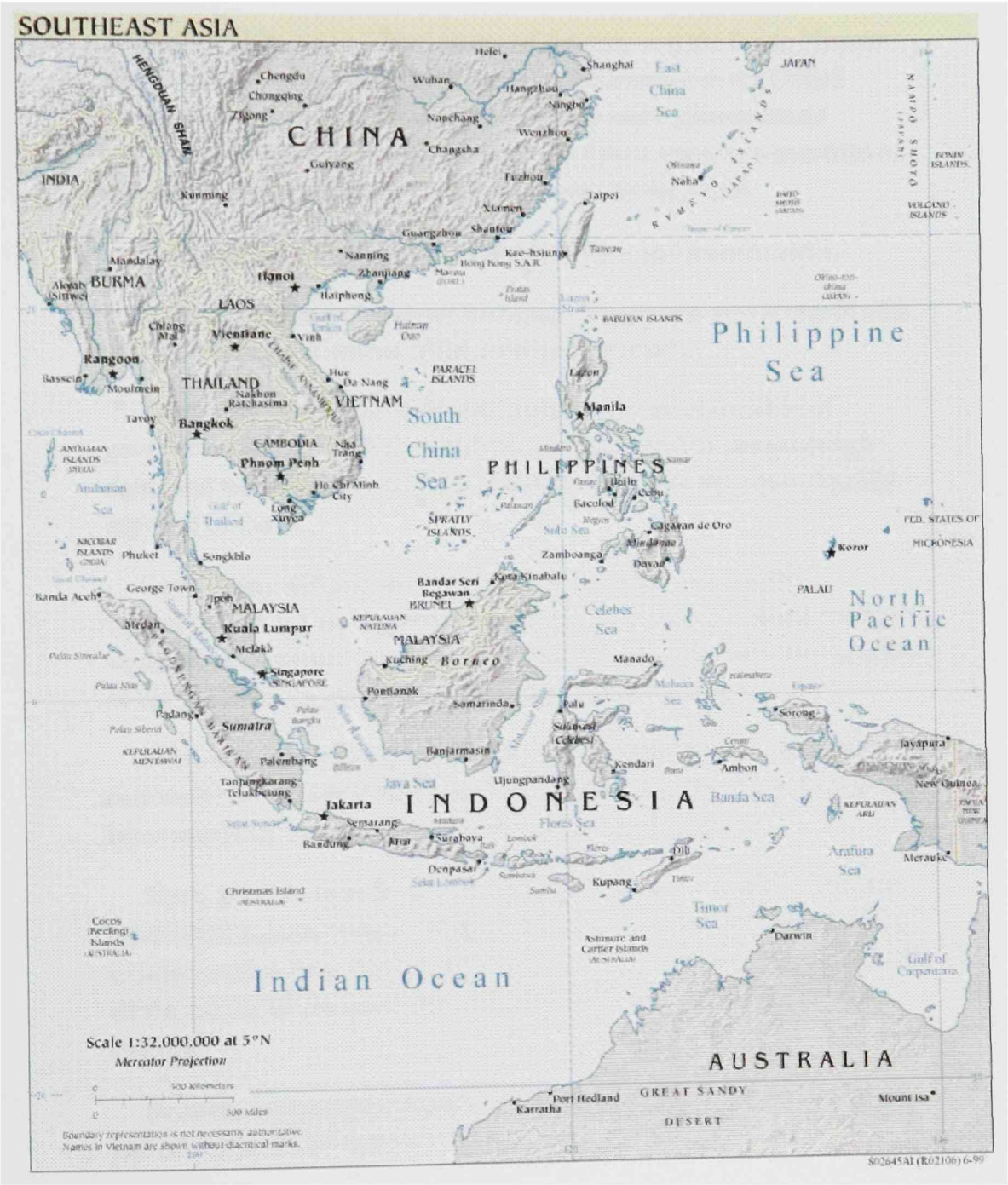
# APPENDIX A

## MAP OF SOUTHEAST ASIA[1]




[1] Perry-Castañada Library Map Collection, University of Texas, http: //www.lib.utexas.edu / maps / middle_east_and_asia/se_asia_ref802645_1999.

## APPENDIX B

## THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

The President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government [sic] restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;

Fourth, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity;

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security;

Sixth, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

Seventh, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance;

Eighth, they believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of

force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Winston S. Churchill[2]

[2] Rosenman, *Public Papers and Addresses of F. D. R.*, 314.

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