negotiations on Korea. 81 The National Assembly had scheduled a new debate on Indochina for the week following the opening of the Geneva Conference, however. In his statement of policy on May 3, Laniel made no mention of the independence negotiations, understandably. 82

Bao Dai Takes a Hand

If the French thought they would have an easy time getting Bao Dai to fall into line with their plans for the conference itself when he arrived in Paris to consult with Laniel and Bidault on strategy, they were mistaken. No arrangement had been agreed on for seating the Vietnamese. Bao Dai told the French there was no question but that Vietnam would participate in the conference on the basis that it was a fully sovereign and independent state. The problem was Viet Minh participation. Bidault assured Dulles he meant to oppose this, but in the event the Soviet Union insisted on it, a formula would have to be found for acceptance of a "Viet Minh presence in some restricted capacity." 83 On April 23, Bao Dai wrote to President René Coty asking him to convene a meeting of the High Council of the French Union to discuss these vital issues; he

81 Ibid.


received an evasive reply.\textsuperscript{84}

April 24, the day set for the French delegation's departure for Geneva, was a particularly busy day in this busy period. At 11 a.m. Bao Dai met with Secretary Dulles, who had returned to Paris for another hurried visit to consult the French and British foreign ministers (April 21-24), and informed him of the delay in signing the treaties decided by the French Cabinet.

In consideration of the French Government's difficulties with the National Assembly over the French Union issue, Bao Dai said, he had accepted to delay signature of the treaties until the conclusion of negotiations on the ancillary conventions.\textsuperscript{85} That evening, Bidault communicated to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Quoc Dinh what was officially described as "a full statement regarding the position of the French Government in relation to Geneva." The Vietnamese, however, did not consider this a "working session" or in any way meeting their desire for coordinating strategy at the conference.\textsuperscript{86}

Bao Dai was dissatisfied with his conversations with Laniel and Bidault and the French delay in signing the treaties, as well

\textsuperscript{84} Memorandum of conversation by Heath, April 24, 1954; \textit{FRUS} 1952-1954, Pt. 1, p. 1385. See also Bao Dai, op. cit., p. 322.

\textsuperscript{85} Memorandum of conversation by Heath, April 24, 1954; \textit{FRUS} 1952-1954, Pt. 1, p. 1384.

as the French manner of "coordinating" strategy for Geneva. Coty's refusal to call a meeting of the High Council of the French Union in which, at least, the Vietnamese position might be presented, powerless as that body was under existing statutes to take a stand independent of that of the French Government, was apparently the last straw. Bao Dai saw this as a violation of the undoubted right of any member of the French Union to ask for a meeting of the High Council.\(^\text{87}\) He therefore took the unusual step of issuing a public statement in his own name on April 25.

After recalling the progress the negotiations had made since the statement of July 3, 1953, Bao Dai pointed out that in spite of the absence of serious disagreement over the matter of Vietnamese independence, the treaties giving effect to this independence had not yet been signed. France had declared on many occasions that it recognized the independence of Vietnam. Vietnam had shown unequivocally its desire to remain associated with France in the framework of a freely constituted union of sovereign states. Vietnam, Bao Dai said, was aware of having done nothing to delay a solution that seemed to be imperative before the opening of the Geneva Conference.

Then, in a paragraph which has given rise to confusion, Bao Dai said:

3. The Vietnamese Government has finally accepted not to conclude this phase of the negotiations by the signing of the two treaties of independence and association on which agreement has been reached. As a matter of fact, in certain respects Vietnam does not have all the concrete assurances that its unity and its independence as a freely associated partner are completely guaranteed under conditions which answer to the principles proclaimed.  

Then, evoking published reports of proposals to partition Vietnam at the Geneva Conference, Bao Dai said that while they offered at first sight certain advantages, diplomatically speaking, they would entail "inconveniences and extremely grave dangers for the future."  

In the light of what both the Vietnamese, including Bao Dai himself, and French diplomats were telling the Americans at the

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89 Ibid. On April 22, The New York Times had frontpaged a dispatch from London reporting that British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was prepared to present a case for partition of Indochina at the Geneva Conference. According to a member of the British delegation, the British saw partition as the key to compromise in the negotiations, and had already sounded out Soviet diplomats about its acceptability. See James Cable, The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 82. The French considered public statements by the British about partition as "doing less than no good." (Secretary Dulles to State, telegram Secto 16, April 27, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954, Geneva, p. 590.) By the time Bao Dai issued his statement, the possibility of partition of Vietnam appears to have been envisaged within the French Cabinet. See the report of Defense Minister René Pleven's conversation with Heath in Paris Embassy to State, telegram 4003, April 21, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954, Pt. 1, p. 1358.
time, negotiations on the wording of the treaties were basically completed, and the Vietnamese were not responsible for the fact that they had not been signed. In using the word accepté, Bao Dai was merely stating that he had had to accept this situation, for not to have accepted it would have meant certain rebuff.90 It is unfortunate that in the very next sentence Bao Dai gave eloquent expression to the concerns the Vietnamese felt on the eve of the Geneva Conference about safeguarding the unity and independence of their country. These were being placed at risk not by the wording of the treaties, about which there was agreement, but by the failure of the Vietnamese to obtain concertation of strategy within the French Union as would have been normal had the treaties been in force (since they were to come into effect immediately upon signature). The French idiom en effet can properly be translated here by "as a matter of fact" without implying causality.91

Bao Dai nevertheless instructed his delegation to continue the negotiations on the ancillary economic, financial, cultural, judicial, and military conventions. On the day the Geneva Conference opened, negotiations on these matters were reported to

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90 "Had he [Bao Dai] insisted he would have met with a flat refusal." (Memorandum of conversation by Heath, April 24, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954, Pt. 1, p. 1384.)

91 The Robert states: "S'emploie pour introduire un argument, une explication."
be proceeding. 92

The next bone of contention between the Vietnamese and the French was a proposed statement to be issued jointly establishing that agreement on the treaties had been reached. Jacques Roux, director of the Asian Department of the French Foreign Ministry, told the Americans on April 27 that the French had proposed to the Vietnamese issuing a declaration that agreement had been reached in principle, initialing the accords and making them public. Work would then continue on the ancillary conventions. 93 But the Vietnamese were still pressing for word changes. 94

Dulles was sufficiently worried about the reservations Bao Dai had expressed as to the State of Vietnam's position at the Geneva Conference to ask Heath, who had come to Geneva from Saigon, to see the head of state on his behalf. Heath asked the French how they would view such a move. 95 Bidault, meanwhile, in his capacity as issuer of invitations to the conference on the Western side,


had seen his counterpart, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, and had been told by the latter that no solution could be arrived at without the participation of the Viet Minh. 96 Bidault thereupon told the Americans that he had asked the Foreign Office to contact the representatives of the Associated States to try to get an affirmative reply regarding Viet Minh participation. 97

The French, who were under great compulsion to get negotiations on Indochina started as early as possible, were by this time feeling rising frustration with Bao Dai and the threat of non-cooperation that had been contained in his statement on April 25. In that statement, he had said:

Vietnam could not tolerate the prospect of negotiations in which France, contrary to the principle of the French Union which she cites, were to negotiate with those who are in rebellion against the Vietnamese nation or with powers hostile to it, disregarding or even sacrificing her associates.

He had then added:

Neither the Chief of State nor the Government of Vietnam will consider itself bound by decisions which run counter to the independence and unity of their country at the same time that they violate a people's rights and offer to reward aggression, contrary to the principles of the United Nations Charter and to democratic ideals.

96 The Soviet Union and China had accorded diplomatic recognition to the clandestine Viet Minh government in 1950.

Of course, both the French and Bao Dai realized that as long as the treaties were not signed "perfecting" its independence, Vietnam was bound by its role of subordinate to France within the French Union. The Vietnamese were to maintain the stand enunciated by Bao Dai consistently throughout the duration of the Geneva Conference. They found themselves to be, in the circumstances, unwilling but powerless accomplices of the French in the latter's negotiation of the terms of armistice with the Viet Minh.

Bao Dai's stance, apparently, was finding a more sympathetic audience at the American delegation in Geneva than it had at the American Embassy in Paris. Bidault suggested that Heath should go to Cannes, whither Bao Dai had retired, to use his influence to solve the impasse over invitations to the conference.98

French frustration with Bao Dai must have been heightened when the Foreign Office received a note from him on April 27 restating his opposition to the partition of Vietnam and suggesting that, when Vietnamese independence had been perfected, his government approach the Viet Minh directly proposing establishment of a coalition government in which the Viet Minh would not hold the key positions. The American Embassy, which received word of Bao Dai's démarche through roundabout sources, commented that it had no prior hint of his communication, which may in any case have been inspired

by mischievous motives. Needless to say, this was not only a most unwelcome complication to the French, but also completely at variance with American policy, which was to keep the French fighting in Indochina.

The Vietnamese Win Their Point

Perhaps in an effort to keep the Vietnamese in line, the French finally assented on April 28 to release of a public statement in which France and Vietnam jointly affirmed their agreement to regulate their mutual relations on the basis of two fundamental treaties. The Franco-Vietnamese association within the French Union was described as "founded on equality." The Vietnamese had finally won their point. But the treaties themselves remained unsigned.

French dealings with Bao Dai and his legal advisers now moved into high gear. Jacquet was dispatched to Cannes on April 28, but failed to obtain Bao Dai's acceptance of an invitation to the Viet Minh, in spite of veiled French threats to move ahead without his


100 Text in Cameron, op. cit., p. 245.
government's assent. 101 Heath, however, found the head of state more forthcoming the following day; he was willing, in view of the necessity of his government's participation, not to interpose objections to the Viet Minh's being invited. According to Heath, Bao Dai's foreign minister, Nguyen Quoc Dinh, however, insisted on a procedure whereby Bidault, Eden, and Dulles would write to him asking what reply he would make to an invitation that would be extended both to him and to the Viet Minh. 102 The letter was written on April 29 and delivered to Bao Dai in Cannes on the next day. 103

101 Telegram Secto 47, idem. According to Bao Dai, Jacquet told him of Bidault's meeting with Molotov and added the embellishment: "Sire, the Americans and the Russians reached an agreement at Berlin; everything has already been arranged in advance." (Bao Dai, op. cit., p. 322.) Jacquet gave the Americans in Paris a different version. Further delay might result in the "inclusion of India, Indonesia and other undesirables." Bao Dai was impressed by this argument. Jacquet added that he was "delighted" at the April 28 joint statement "and took obvious pleasure reporting that in light present serious adversities facing both partners and in part because of theme relations between French and Vietnam Governments, at least as presented by officials both countries in France and Geneva, are unusually cordial (sic.)." (Paris Embassy to State, telegram 4137, April 29, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954 Geneva, pp. 613-614.)

102 Secto 47, idem. The demand for an invitation from the three foreign ministers had originally been made by Bao Dai in his meeting on April 21 with Laniel and Bidault. (See Bao Dai, op. cit., p. 322.) To add insult to injury, Heath was received into Bao Dai's presence ahead of Bidault's chef de cabinet, Pierre Falaize, who had flown on the same plane from Paris.

On April 30, Prime Minister Buu-Loc left Saigon for Paris. His departure coincided with popular demonstrations in Hanoi and elsewhere against territorial partition. On May 1, with Bao Dai still not having given his assent to Viet Minh participation, Bidault sent a new note to Cannes in exchange for the one of the 29th, which was "retrieved."\(^{104}\)

Bao Dai's Conditional Acceptance and the Start of the Conference

The next day, there was a meeting between Bidault and Dinh, who had arrived in Geneva from Cannes. The substance of this meeting was outlined by French Ambassador to Switzerland Jean Chauvel to Dulles at a dinner given by the latter at the Restaurant du Nord. By this account, Dinh pressed very strongly for a formal letter from Bidault indicating that the French would not agree to any settlement in Vietnam involving a partition of that country. The French told Dinh that they had already given formal verbal assurances that France would not agree to a territorial division of Vietnam, and that if now a new, written assurance had to be carried back to Bao Dai time would be consumed and the discussions on Indochina could not begin. After some discussion, and a telephone call from Dinh to Bao Dai, it was agreed that the formal note requested by Dinh would not be a necessary precondition for the French to inform the Soviets that the Viet Minh could

participate in the conference. Chauvel indicated that some form of letter regarding French non-acceptance of a division of Vietnam would subsequently be given to Dinh. Chauvel said that on the basis of the agreement with Dinh he had seen Gromyko at 6 p.m. and informed him that the French and the Vietnamese Government agreed to the participation of the Viet Minh.\textsuperscript{105}

On this basis, the Soviets invited the Viet Minh and the French invited the State of Vietnam at 10 a.m. on May 3. In a letter to Bao Dai on May 6, Bidault wrote:

The French Government does not propose, at the present time, to seek a definitive political settlement. Our task consists, as foreseen in the Berlin communiqué, in establishing peace in Indochina.

Our goal is therefore to obtain a ceasefire, in the framework of an armistice which furnishes necessary guarantees to the three states of Indochina, to France and to the allied powers whose general interests are in solidarity with ours in Southeast Asia. This armistice must not prejudice a definitive settlement the examination of which can be approached later on, when the required conditions of peace and liberty for the holding of general elections can be reunited.

From this moment, I am nevertheless in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing could be further contrary to the intentions of the French Government than to prepare the establishment at the expense of the unity of Vietnam of two states each having an international vocation.\textsuperscript{106}


\textsuperscript{106} Bao Dai, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 323. (Translation by the present author.)
Bidault had, in fact, taken other steps to multiply his "assurances." On May 3 he had authorized Dejean to publicize the French Government's refusal "to contemplate any partition of Vietnam." On May 4, the Saigon newspaper *Le Journal d'Extrême-Orient* published a declaration of Dejean: there was "no intention" of partitioning Vietnam.

The fall of Dien Bien Phu on May 7 was the occasion for President Eisenhower, in a personal message to Bao Dai, to pay tribute to "the gallant men of the Vietnamese forces who, together with their comrades of the French Union," defended against insuperable odds. The first plenary session on Indochina at Geneva opened at 4 p.m. on May 8. Each delegation sat at its own small table. The French delegation (Jacquet, Bidault, Chauvel) had on its left the delegation of the State of Vietnam.

**The Issue Joined**

While the negotiations in Geneva got under way, the issue of Vietnamese independence received fresh prominence in bilateral communications between Washington and Paris. On May 11, Dulles

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instructed Dillon to inform the French of the six conditions the United States would require to be met in the event President Eisenhower were to ask Congress for authority to use American armed forces in Indochina. One of these conditions was "That France guarantees to Associated States complete independence, including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time."\(^{110}\)

In addition, Dulles said, these conditions would have to be accepted by the French Cabinet and endorsed by the French National Assembly, a point to which he attached importance because of the uncertain tenure of any French Government. These conditions made it virtually impossible for any French Government to have requested, much less obtained, American intervention in Indochina, the Government's critics notwithstanding.\(^{111}\) But Dulles was already looking ahead to the diplomacy of postwar Indochina and wished to secure as broad a backing as possible for the defense of what would be left in non-Communist hands after the armistice.

\(^{110}\) Secretary Dulles to Paris Embassy, telegram 4023, May 11, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954, Pt. 2, pp. 1534-1535. Dulles drafted this telegram himself and it was approved by Eisenhower.

\(^{111}\) Mendès-France, in a National Assembly debate on June 9, was to accuse Bidault of playing "infernal poker" in asking for American intervention and risking general war. (Journal Officiel, June 10, 1954, p. 2851.) The Chinese took press speculation about plans for American intervention in Indochina seriously, and this seems to have influenced Chou En-lai's behavior at Geneva. (See especially the account of Chou's meeting with Bidault on June 1 in François Joyaux, La Chine et le Règlement du Premier Conflit d'Indochine: Genève 1954 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1979), p. 200.)
of a fresh debate on the Government's Indochina policy which began in the National Assembly on May 11.\footnote{Paris Embassy to State, telegram 4332, May 12, 1954; \textit{FRUS 1952-1954}, \textit{Pt. 2}, p. 1536, fn. 4.} In the event, Laniel's government survived a vote of confidence on May 13 by the margin of 289 to 287. Dillon, who was by now warning the Department that the National Assembly was in such a mood as to, in the event of a failure of the Geneva negotiations, force any French government to sue for peace with the Viet Minh at almost any price,\footnote{Paris Embassy to State, telegram 4258, May 7; \textit{FRUS 1952-1954}, \textit{Pt. 2}, pp. 1502-1503.} said he was not favorably disposed to giving any publicity to an American demand that the Associated States be allowed to withdraw from the French Union.\footnote{Paris Embassy to State, telegram 4343, May 13, 1954; \textit{FRUS 1952-1954}, \textit{Pt. 2}, p. 1546.} To this, Dulles replied crisply that since any public statement on the issue had been deferred to avoid embarrassing the French Government politically, the matter was academic and would Dillon kindly inform Laniel that the United States believed it was essential to remove any taint of colonialism and the only way to do this was through provision of the right of withdrawal.\footnote{Dulles to Paris Embassy, telegram 4064, May 13, 1954; \textit{FRUS 1952-1954}, \textit{Pt. 2}, p. 1554.}

After further discussion with the French, who, as he had predicted, flatly refused to consider any public statement granting
the Vietnamese the right to withdraw from the French Union, Dillon on May 24 proposed an alternative. Instead of pressing the French to make a public statement that would be badly taken in the National Assembly and even in the country at large, U.S. pressure should more profitably be brought to bear to force the signature of the treaties of independence and association. Dillon said "If signature of these documents were made a firm prerequisite for U.S. assistance I feel confident that French Government for their part would agree to prompt signature and assume Bao Dai would as well." Dillon added that at the time of signature Bao Dai should be prevailed upon to make "a very clear statement regarding the full independence of Vietnam and the fact that Vietnam is joining [the] French Union entirely of her own accord."

From Geneva, after a meeting that same day with Buu-Loc, Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith cabled "I believe it is of the utmost importance to have prompt signature of the two basic treaties." Until these were signed, he added, "We are in a false position here." Buu-Loc told Smith that the French were refusing to sign the treaties "on the pretense that signature must await conclusion of the subordinate financial and cultural agreements," but in reality "because the French did not want to commit


themselves irrevocably until they saw how the Geneva Conference would turn out. Buu-Loc said he was urging Bao Dai to leave further dealings with the French on the matter of the treaties to Foreign Minister Dinh and Minister Dac Khe, and was returning promptly to Saigon.

In accordance with this advice from Paris and Geneva, Dulles cabled his instructions to Dillon on May 26:

It seems to me [that] what is primarily needed now is something which will have immediate and convincing impact on world opinion and above all on Vietnamese themselves. We cannot wait for abolition of all deep-rooted abuses and extra-territorial privileges in times like these. We can, however, attempt [to] have it made unmistakably clear that the Treaty of Independence between France and Vietnam represents [a] full and unqualified commitment on [the] part of France which will be carried out in practice.

He then added:

Following represents certain minimum measures that we believe [the] French should take now, and which we feel will not place [the] government in [a] more difficult position than it is already: a. France and Vietnam should sign draft treaties promptly. b. At moment of signature, President of Republic, in his capacity as


119 Dulles to Paris Embassy, telegram 4272, May 26, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954, Pt. 2, pp. 1618-1620. According to one source, Dulles held "a very high-level secret dinner meeting at his home to discuss the [Indochina] situation and to plan U.S. strategy" on the evening of Sunday, May 16. Among those attending were Vice President Nixon and Dean Rusk, former Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East and then president of the Rockefeller Foundation. (Library of Congress, Cong. Research Service, op. cit., p. 233.)
President of the French Union, should make statement to effect that Union is composed of equal and sovereign states.

The next day, Dillon reported that he had communicated the contents of this message to Alexandre Parodi, Secretary General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, the Embassy reported that "negotiations on economic, financial, and military conventions are currently bogged down."

The Treaties Initialed

What is definitely known is that Reynaud summoned Buu-Loc and on June 4, at 5 p.m., in a simple ceremony at the Hotel Matignon, Laniel and Buu-Loc initialed the famous treaties. American pressure certainly played a role. But there was also another factor involved: Bao Dai was getting ready once again to change his prime minister, and by doing so he was intervening in the negotiation process with the French.

The time had come to choose a Vietnamese politician who could deal with the Americans. It was becoming obvious that the United

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States, rather than France, would be the major partner in Vietnam's postwar relations. This is why Bao Dai, acting once again in his self-imposed capacity as "arbiter" among Vietnam's political tendencies, had summoned Ngo Dinh Diem to Paris on May 14 from the abbey of St. Andrew in Bruges where he had been living as a tertiary member of the Benedictine Order. Bao Dai impressed on Diem the need he had of someone of his experience with the Americans and obtained Diem's agreement to re-enter the political arena after an absence from Vietnam of several years. Diem agreed.

Diem was, indeed, cut from a different cloth than the politicians Bao Dai had been accustomed to dealing with in Saigon. Not only did he have an independent base of support among his American friends in the Congress, the Catholic Church, and the academic community, but he was free of the links with French influence and money that weakened many of those who had held office under Bao Dai, and even Bao Dai himself. What impressed the Vietnamese who knew him then about Diem was above all his "sense of mission."

Diem has sometimes been described as "anti-French." Bidault

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in his memoirs comments bitterly that in Diem the Americans found "a new head of government who was reputed to have sympathy for them and none for France." 126 Too much should not be made of Diem's anti-French feelings, but the Laniel government judged, possibly quite correctly, that this new man in Saigon might well take it upon himself to break all ties between Vietnam and the French Union, dealing a fatal blow to the latter. Although they had not been informed officially by Bao Dai of what was in the wind, they had put two and two together. 127 In deciding at last to deal with the more pliable Buu-Loc, the French were taking precautions.

The question remains of why the treaties of independence and association were initialed by Laniel and Buu-Loc, and not signed by Coty and Bao Dai, and why there was no statement from Coty as had been stipulated as "minimum measures" by Dulles in his instructions to Dillon. There is, I believe, a quite satisfactory explanation to be had in examining the sequence of events as we now know them. 128 The key lies in what was happening in Geneva.


128 Many writers place the blame for the non-signature of the treaties on the Vietnamese. But there exists no logical explanation why it should have been the Vietnamese, rather than the French, who refused their signature to the treaties which had been
To the French public and much of the world it looked in the first days of June as if the negotiations on Indochina, if they had not broken down, were producing little in the way of substance. Even the fact of the start of restricted sessions on May 17 had been completely eclipsed in the press by speculations as to American intentions with respect to military intervention in Indochina. The negotiations had in reality advanced quite far in secret, due mainly to the efforts of Chou and Eden. Chou, in particular, had exercised himself to push the French to talk directly to the Viet Minh, while at the same time toning down the more extreme demands of the latter.

The Die Is Cast

At the seventh restricted session on May 27, Chou proposed that the two belligerent parties "begin negotiations on appropriate readjustments of the area of their occupied zones." On the face of it, this was not a dramatically new proposal. The French, in the first point of their initial proposal of May 8, had spoken of negotiated. Bao Dai had made it clear that Buu-Loc's principal mission as Prime Minister was to see the negotiations with the French successfully concluded, and had arrived in France in April believing this was only a matter of two or three weeks. Most writers, however, elude the question. Randle, with exemplary fairness, gives both the case for the Vietnamese refusing and the case for the French refusing. (Robert F. Randle, Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 244-245.)

"grouping of the regular units of both parties in delimited zones to be determined by the conference." And Chou was merely repeating in this respect the formulation of a readjustment of territory occupied by the two belligerents used by the Viet Minh in point 8a of their initial proposal on May 10. In explanatory remarks, Chou professed to see merit in a more detailed examination of Bidault's suggestion at the fifth restricted session on May 24 for creating "demilitarized zones" between the opposing forces in Vietnam, where the problem faced by the conference was not simply one of withdrawal of foreign troops as it was in Cambodia and Laos.

As Joyaux observes about the substance of what Chou was proposing the French and Viet Minh begin negotiations about, "Regrouping and creation of a demilitarized zone: did this not already amount to subscribing to the idea of a division of Indochina, or at least of Vietnam, into two separate zones?"

On May 29, Chou once more moved things ahead by supporting a proposal by Eden for fixing the date of a meeting of military

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133 Joyaux, op. cit., p. 189.
representatives. Chou's one sentence brushed aside a long harangue by the Viet Minh delegate, Pham Van Dong, about regrouping being essential but that it should not interfere with the unity of Vietnam. On May 31, both the French and the Viet Minh named their representatives to the meetings of the military commands. The first meeting was held on June 1.

Thus, by the beginning of June, the secret negotiations were under way which were to result in the final agreement between the French and the Viet Minh. The outcome was one that achieved an armistice and an end to French casualties, and allowed the French Government to avoid having to take the unpopular step of sending draftees to Indochina. To set the negotiations on the track to achieving these ends, the Laniel government was compelled by the very nature of the negotiations to violate the assurances it had repeatedly given the State of Vietnam regarding prior consultation. Furthermore, France's agreement to the establishment of the provisional military demarcation line and the demilitarized zone effectively partitioning Vietnam was to violate the condition on which Bao Dai had agreed to have his delegation participate in the conference together with that of the Viet Minh.

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In these circumstances, there was clearly no possibility whatsoever that the heads of state of the French Republic and the State of Vietnam would sign the treaties redefining their relationship as one of equals within the French Union. The French were about to undertake fresh legal responsibilities which would clearly be severely damaging to the interests of the State of Vietnam, and in fact were protested by the delegation of that state at the conference itself. The Vietnamese nationalists had missed the chance, if it ever existed, of receiving their independence by the stroke of the pen, and would have the more arduous task of showing that they could govern their country without the French.

A suggestion by a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff that an attempt be made to persuade the governments of the Associated States to withdraw from the Geneva Conference on the grounds that the negotiations were moving in a direction which threatened their independence was not followed up.\textsuperscript{136} The signature of Brigadier General Henri Delteil for the commander in chief of the French Union forces in Indochina to the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam was to bind the State of Vietnam to implement an agreement\textsuperscript{137} that had been negotiated


\textsuperscript{137} The text of the agreement is in \textit{FRUS 1952-1954 Geneva}, pp. 1505-1520. Article 27 is the relevant article making the agreement binding on successor governments. Unfortunately, the name of General Delteil is misspelled at various places in this volume.
without its consent, which it subsequently did to the best of its means and ability.\textsuperscript{138}

In Paris, yet another debate in the National Assembly on the Government's Indochina policy began on June 9 with both Laniel and Bidault in attendance. Mendès-France set the tone with a rousing speech ridiculing Bidault for allegedly refusing to talk to the Chinese at Geneva, much less the Viet Minh. "During the six weeks that the Conference has already lasted, there wasn't a single serious talk between the two delegates most directly interested in the conflict," he said with respect to the Viet Minh.\textsuperscript{139} This was, in the apt words of Alexander Werth, the coup de grâce.

The next day, the Assembly, by a vote of 322 to 263, refused to give priority to an ordre du jour requested by the Government. Laniel thereupon said he would seek a vote of confidence on June 12 with respect to three resolutions critical of his government. The Assembly voted, 306 to 293, not to reject consideration of the three resolutions. In spite of the fact that this was 8 votes short of the majority required for a vote of no confidence, Laniel submitted his resignation.

\textsuperscript{138} On July 13, after a talk with Pham Van Dong, Diem's Foreign Minister Tran Van Do told the Americans he foresaw the "probability of [a] settlement which would be difficult but unavoidable." (FRUS 1952-1954 Geneva, p. 1347.)

The irony was that no one could see any results from the Government's conduct of the negotiations at Geneva, and the Government itself, like any government engaged in secret diplomacy, was not in a position to give the lie to its critics. Mendès-France exploited fears that Laniel's secret intention was to widen the war by asking for American intervention, whereas the Government's position actually was to consider making such a request only in the event of a failure at Geneva. But he appears genuinely not to have been aware that Bidault had held two secret meetings with Chou on June 1 and 7, with all this implied for the chance of success at Geneva. Nor was he aware of the secret talks that had begun between military representatives of the two commands.

It was only after he had been officially designated as Coty's choice as Prime Minister and had been briefed about the secret meetings of military representatives in Geneva that Mendès-France became convinced that the major elements of a settlement based on partition had already been tabled. It was on this basis that, in order to prevent the conference from becoming bogged down, he made the dramatic offer to resign by the deadline of July 20 if he did

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140 Mendès-France told Joyaux in an interview on July 3, 1975, that he first learned of these two meetings, and of a third on June 17, when he met Chou in Berne on June 23. (Joyaux, op. cit., p. 199, fn 84.)

141 From Geneva, Chauvel was in touch with Mendès-France and sent an emissary to brief him. (Smith to State, telegram Dulte 195, June 18, 1954; FRUS 1952-1954 Geneva, p. 1178.)
not achieve a settlement which ensured his investiture by the National Assembly. General Delteil was instructed to continue his secret talks with the Viet Minh military representatives.

Concluding Observations

What are the lessons, if any, that one can draw from this long and tortuous story? I would suggest two lessons.

1. Big powers (and France definitely qualified as a big power in 1954) get the kind of government in their client states that they deserve. If they want to have client states that are colonies, then they must accept the problems that go with colonialism. There was no reason why the State of Vietnam, after the Ha Long Bay accord, should have remained in a subordinate status except for French insistence for constitutional reasons that it must in spite of the wishes of the majority of genuine Vietnamese nationalists.

2. Once big powers intervene in the affairs of small states at war, it is they who determine the conditions under which hostilities are brought to a conclusion. The meaning given to

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\[142\] The text of Mendès-France's speech before the National Assembly is in Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale, Session of June 17, 1954, pp. 2992-2994.

\[143\] Randle, op. cit., pp. 283-284.
"independence" is all relative in such circumstances. (Note that indigenous people usually have an infallible sense of what constitutes independence.) This state of affairs has detrimental consequences for the small state, certainly. But it also may have detrimental effects on the big power as well. Would it not have been far less painful for French public opinion to let the Viet Minh be rebels against Bao Dai's government, as the ex-emperor saw them, in fact, than to be rebels against an outmoded French empire in Indochina? There is a danger that the independence of the client state in such a situation of war becomes so unpopular politically in the beleaguered big power that such independence is no longer seen as an asset but as a liability. Pretensions of sovereign power have their limits, however. After 1954, it was no more feasible for France to carry out the obligations it had assumed at Geneva than it was prior to 1954 to go on fighting in Indochina on behalf of a state that had assumed a position of equality within the French Union.

Perhaps the French proverb sums it up:

"Tel est pris qui croyait prendre."