

## The Truman Administration and Indochina: Case Studies in Decision Making

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THE PURPOSE of this article is twofold. One is to fill what may be called a “missing chapter” in American foreign policy towards Indochina. Past works on Indochina have dealt mainly with major events in the 1950’s and the 1960’s such as the Geneva conference of 1954 and particularly the second Vietnam War, thus in large measure neglecting the years between the Second World War and the Korean War. This article will reconstruct the political process leading to two important decisions regarding Indochina in those neglected years.

The other purpose of this article is to test the applicability of several theoretical models of decision making and to draw theoretical conclusions. Even a cursory reading of past works and relevant public documents reveals that decisions on Indochina in the 1940’s were “non-crisis” decisions and that there was a considerable conflict of opinion within the government, which, in turn, reflected a conflict of traditional values in America, namely, the idea of “Europe-first” in America’s global interests and anti-colonialism or support of nationalism. It was thus anticipated at the beginning of this research that the governmental

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(or bureaucratic) politics model<sup>1</sup> would be most applicable to the cases at hand. As the research advanced, however, it turned out that John Steinbrunner's "cognitive cybernetic" model<sup>2</sup> might also have some applicability.

In order to achieve these two purposes, this article takes up two decisions, namely, the decision to support Bao Dai and the decision to aid the French in Indochina.

# I

## THE DECISION TO SUPPORT THE BAO DAI SOLUTION

On June 21, 1949, the State Department issued a press statement welcoming the so-called Bao Dai solution:<sup>3</sup>

The formation of the new unified state of Vietnam and the recent announcement by Bao Dai that the future constitution will be decided by the Vietnamese people are welcome developments which should serve to hasten the reestablishment of peace in that country and the attainment of Vietnam's rightful place in the family of nations.

The United States Government hopes that the agreements of March 8 [1949] between President Auriol and Bao Dai, who is making sincere efforts to unite all truly nationalist elements within Vietnam, will form the basis for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

This press statement was the result of considerable pulling and hauling among field missions, the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (FE), and the Office of European Affairs (EUR).

### *Historical Background*

After the outbreak of hostilities in North Vietnam in December, 1946, it appeared that negotiations between Ho Chi Minh and the French were still possible, but that hope soon evaporated during the course of 1947.

<sup>1</sup> For "bureaucratic (governmental) politics" model, see Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, 1971); Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, 1974); and I. M. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform* (Princeton, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> John D. Steinbrunner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Department of State *Bulletin*, Vol. 21 (July 18, 1949), p. 75.

The gulf between the French and the Vietnamese was widened by the French decision in the summer of 1947 to endorse the formation of the former Emperor Bao Dai's anti-Communist national government. Three-way negotiations began between France, Bao Dai, and General Nguyen Van Xuan, the new President of the Cochin China Government. Bao Dai met with French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert on December 7, 1947, at Ha Long Bay, but the joint declaration and secret protocol signed there by Bao Dai were rejected by his advisors. In March 1948, France finally agreed to the formation of a "Provisional Central Government" under General Xuan. Bao Dai refused to take an official role in the French project but did endorse Xuan's effort to rally nationalist support. On June 5 Xuan met with High Commissioner Ballaert and Bao Dai at Ha Long Bay and signed the agreement establishing the Provisional Government of Vietnam.

As the year 1949 began, the situation became increasingly difficult for France. The Viet Minh continued to consolidate its position in the countryside and opposition to the war was mounting in France. It appeared essential to bring Bao Dai actively into the nationalist movement, but he demanded more substantial independence and unity than he had been given. Agreement was finally reached, however, and on March 8 Bao Dai and President Auriol of France exchanged letters at the Elysée Palace.

Since the Elysée Agreements were not to come into effect until after the reunification of Cochin China with the rest of Vietnam, France initiated the procedure required by the Constitution to change the status of a French territory. In March the National Assembly passed a law creating an elected territorial assembly in Cochin China, which, on April 23, adopted a motion in favor of the reintegration of Cochin China with Vietnam. The law modifying the status of Cochin China was approved by the National Assembly on May 21 and promulgated by President Auriol on June 4. The Elysée Agreements came into effect on June 7, and Bao Dai set about forming the new government of the State of Vietnam. But many of the most prominent Vietnamese nationalists refused to associate themselves with the new government. After Ngo Dinh Diem refused to become Premier, Bao Dai finally was forced to assume the post himself.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Allan W. Cameron, ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1: 1945-1956 (Ithaca, 1971), pp. 100-04.

*Different Views within the State Department*

Within the State Department, there was agreement on the undesirability of a coalition government with Ho Chi Minh. EUR generally took the views: 1) that the apparent deviations of the Vietminh line from the Soviet line were merely adaptations to the current situation; 2) that the influence of Communists in the present Vietnamese Government was sufficient to bring about the eventual establishment of a Communist state in Indochina; and 3) that the United States, therefore, should refrain from pressing the French to deal with this government and should even consider encouraging or actively assisting the French to bring about its downfall. At the initiative of the Division of West European Affairs (WE), the Department on July 14, 1948, authorized the Embassy in Paris to communicate to the French Government at its discretion that once the Baie d'Along agreement together with change in the status of Cochin China were approved, the Department would be disposed to consider approving publicly the French Government's action "as forward looking step toward settlement of troubled situation [in] Indochina and toward realization of aspirations [of] Vietnamese people."<sup>5</sup>

After the Czechoslovakian coup of February 1948, FE also came to believe that any coalition government with Ho Chi Minh would result in failure. In April 1948, its director W. W. Butterworth, a career officer who had served at the Embassy in China when George Marshall visited there in 1946, instructed Charleton Ogburn of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs (SEA) to examine the feasibility of applying to the situation in Indochina the good offices formula used in Indonesia, which FE and SEA had long been advocating. Ogburn's study concluded that "the good offices formula as applied in Indonesia would have no efficacy at present in Indochina and that, regardless of the point of departure, any third party would find itself intervening between the French and Ho Chi Minh against neither of whom the restraints and compulsions so far effective against both parties in Indonesia are available." It was impracticable to suggest to the French to include Ho Chi Minh in any coalition with which they would have to negotiate: "Past experience with Ho Chi Minh indicates that he quickly dominates any coalition he enters."

FE, however, was much less sensitive to the unstable domestic politics in France. The alternative to a coalition type of government, Ogburn

<sup>5</sup> *Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1948, vol. 6, pp. 33, 40.

concluded, was to support Bao Dai, but the French would have to make substantial concessions to Bao Dai, including the setting up of a timetable leading to ultimate independence. In spite of the internal weakness of the French Government and possible repercussions in North Africa, he added, strong representations should be made to the French to force a reorientation in their thinking.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, FE was not willing to commit the United States to the Bao Dai solution. FE feared that the Bao Dai Government "might become virtually a puppet government." On February 25, Charles Reed, the chief of SEA, had the Department send a cable to Paris:<sup>7</sup>

Dep[artmen]t believes . . . [that] it should not now be committed in any way to approve Fr[ench] action vis-à-vis Bao Dai and must reserve aforementioned public expression until Fr have provided Bao Dai with means to obtain support [of] appreciable portion [of] Vietnamese population. . . . Accordingly Emb[assy] should make clear to Fo[reig]n Off[ice] that for these reasons US [is] not prepared [to] give public indication [of] its approval until, in Dept's opinion, conditions noted above [have been] fulfilled.

The Embassy in Paris and Consul George A. Abbott at Saigon were strongly for supporting the Bao Dai solution. The Embassy's opinion was that "Indochina, with the Communist-dominated Vietminh already present, is the gateway to Communist expansion into Southeast Asia and it is therefore a logical initial area in which positive steps should be taken to check such expansion." The Bao Dai solution was a solution which "offers an opportunity for the emergence of a non-Communist nationalist government capable of realizing the patriotic aims of the Vietnam population and at the same time opposing aggressive designs of both the native and Chinese Communists."<sup>8</sup>

After the March 8 agreements, the question arose as to whether these agreements in fact offered a sufficient ground for the United States to give support to the Bao Dai solution. The Embassy in Paris recom-

<sup>6</sup> O'Sullivan to Hickerson and Butterworth, April 29, 1948, 751g.00/11-349. See also a paper by Kenneth P. Landon of SEA on "Southeast Asia Communist Penetration," June 24, 1948, PSA File, Indochina, 1949, USSR Relations, Box 10.

<sup>7</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, p. 8.

[Editor's note] In direct quotations from official telegrams, the restoration of omitted or abbreviated words is kept at the minimum. Omitted verbs and prepositions are restored, but omitted articles are left out. Abbreviations which appear several times are spelled out only once.

<sup>8</sup> Bonsal to Bruce, May 23, 1949, RG 84, Box 1547, the Federal Record Center, Suitland, Maryland.

mended that the Department should now give moral and some economic support "in difficult initial period following his [Bao Dai's] return." It admitted that such support was a calculated risk, but this risk should nevertheless be taken. James O'Sullivan of SEA replied on March 25 to the Embassy stating that the recent developments "such as [have been] reported lack popular enthusiasm and profound suspicions among Vietnamese in Saigon which followed announcement [of] March 8 agreements have not changed Dept's estimate [of] Bao Dai's chance of success."<sup>9</sup> Reed's telegram of February 25 had already provoked criticism from the Embassy and Consul Abbott. An exchange of letters between William O. Bonsal at the Embassy and Abbott shows that they agreed to take coordinated action to persuade the Department to take a position in support of Bao Dai.<sup>10</sup> There followed successive cables supporting Bao Dai from the field missions.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, there was a conflict of views within the State Department. WE, EUR, the Embassy in Paris, and the missions in Vietnam all favored strong support of France and avoiding putting pressure on her. FE and SEA, which had changed their attitude on a possibility of coalition with Ho Chi Minh, now favored putting strong pressure on France: they would support Bao Dai only if France gave a promise of the ultimate independence of Vietnam. The Division of Research for Far East (DRF), however, had not changed its view, still thinking the matter in terms of coalition with Ho Chi Minh and a general election to form a representative government in Vietnam. But DRF was not a policy division, and therefore had little influence in decision making.

### *PPS 51*

The above conflict of views over Indochina policy was a part of the controversy over the entire Southeast Asian policy. The impending fall of China to the Communists had increased the urgency for re-examination of the entire Far Eastern policy, and as early as November 1948, DRF, SEA and WE were discussing an "Asian paper" with the

<sup>9</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, p. 14; and the Department to Paris, March 25, 1949, 851G.01/3-1849.

<sup>10</sup> Bonsal to Abbott, March 30, 1949, RG 84, Box 1574.

<sup>11</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 14-15; Hanoi to the Department, March 27, 1949, 851G.01/3-2749; Paris to the Department, March 30, 1949, 851G.01/3-3049; Hanoi to the Department, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 17-18; memorandum of conversation, April 26, 1949, 851G.01/4-2649; and Saigon to the Department, 851G.01/4-2949.

Policy Planning Staff (PPS).<sup>12</sup> In preparing PPS 51, "United States Policy towards Southeast Asia," Director W. W. Butterworth of FE played a major role, and the sections on Indochina and Indonesia were in fact drafted by John Davies of PPS in collaboration with FE and SEA. After being submitted by PPS Director George F. Kennan to the Undersecretary's meeting on April 1 as UM D-26, the paper was discussed on April 4 and 6 and was recommended to the Secretary for a general guidance in the Department with regard to Southeast Asia. Butterworth was given the coordinating responsibility in implementing its recommendations, and was requested to submit to the Undersecretary a brief report on such implementation by May 15.<sup>13</sup> A gist of UM D-26, which was presented to the meeting of April 4, contained a strong indictment of European colonialism and strong support of Asian nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

A. If we put extreme pressure on the Dutch and French, we risk (1) hardening of their present attitudes, (2) political crises in France and the Netherlands, and (3) reducing the cohesion of the Atlantic community.

B. But we must not be blackmailed by the threat of disunity among our Western friends. . . .

C. Nor can we merely refrain from taking a position, as a smaller state might do, and evade a clear ideological issue: colonialism vs nationalism. To do so would be default to our adversaries and to deny our own heritage.

D. If we favor nationalism we risk interim chaos and Communist influence, but satisfaction of nationalism is the first essential for resistance to Stalinism. We must take the risk.

E. Conclusions: The sympathetic encouragement of Asiatic nationalism is the only course between polarization and Stalinization. We must discreetly but strongly press the Dutch and French to accommodate themselves to SEA nationalism and we must then follow through, in cooperation with others to be sure the moderate nationalist elements grow and win out.

On May 9, Reed, Chief of SEA, sent a memorandum to John Davies, setting forth in rough form his plan for a workable solution to the Indochina question. He made three "basic assumptions" in making the plan: 1) Bao Dai démarche had a high likelihood of failing due to inadequate concessions from France; 2) Ho Chi Minh was the key to

<sup>12</sup> Records of PPS, 1947-1953, Minutes of 316th Meeting, November 24, 1948 and 327th Meeting, December 14, 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Records of PPS, 1947-1953, Chronological File, Box 33; and Executive Secretary's File (hereafter cited as ExSec's File), Box 8, UM Summaries, US S-25.

<sup>14</sup> Executive Secretary's File, UM Documents, Box 5, UM D-26, April 4, 1949.

military and political power in Vietnam; and 3) overt Asian leadership in an Indochinese settlement would best serve the United States interests. Then he proposed the following steps for the solution of the problem. First, the United States would request India, the Philippines, Siam and the United Kingdom to take a joint action. Secondly, these five nations would approach France to empower Bao Dai to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh for a truce and the withdrawal of Vietnamese and French forces to garrison areas under international supervision. If the French threatened refusal, the five nations might counter it with a statement that they could not support Bao Dai under such circumstances. If the French nevertheless refused the offer, the Bao Dai experiment might fail and the French military position in Tonkin would continue to deteriorate. Then the five nations might repeat their offer and serve as negotiators in place of Bao Dai. Thirdly, Bao Dai (or the five nations) and the Vietnam Government would hold elections to a national Constituent Assembly in the three *keys* under international supervision. Fourthly, the Constituent Assembly would appoint a body to negotiate international supervision. Finally, upon conclusion of a settlement, the United States would offer aid for the rehabilitation of Vietnam with the provision that international supervision continue for a stipulated period and report at specified intervals to an appropriate UN body.<sup>15</sup>

Reed worked out with John Davies a more detailed plan based on the above draft and submitted it to Butterworth. In the memorandum to Butterworth, Reed explained the reasons for submitting the plan:<sup>16</sup>

I wish to suggest a line of action which must face up to many imponderables, and, accordingly, may have small chance of success, but which [has] the advantage of bringing the whole Vietnamese problem into open, of crystalizing not only our thoughts but also those of other non-Communist countries, and once for all of 'smoking out' Ho and determining whether he is primarily a nationalist or a Communist. The plan proceeds on the basis of a calculated risk but under existing conditions it would appear that we have everything to win and virtually nothing to lose.

This plan could hardly be considered a viable solution by EUR and DRF.

Butterworth reported on May 15 to Undersecretary James Webb that "the paper defining U.S. policy towards Southeast Asia has not secured

<sup>15</sup> Reed to Davies, May 9, 1949, PSA File, Box 9.

<sup>16</sup> Reed to Butterworth, May 16, 1949, PSA File, Box 10.



final approval by the Secretary and, in consequence, there has been no implementation of those recommendations which are still the subject of discussion by the Department officers concerned with the formulation of policy and its implementation in that area."<sup>17</sup> With these diverging views in the State Department, a meeting was held on May 17 to discuss what steps the United States might take in Indochina. Those who attended the meeting were John Davies (PPS), Douglas MacArthur II (the new director of WE), Elim O'Shaughnessy (WE), G. McMurtrie Godley (WE), Reed (SEA) and Ogburn (SEA). According to the summary of the discussion by Ogburn, SEA noted that the March 8 agreements left France in nearly full control of Vietnam's foreign relations and in substantial control of Vietnam's armed forces and hence that there seemed little chance that the agreements would appeal to Vietnamese nationalists or that the Bao Dai experiment would succeed. On the other hand, WE explained that there was no chance whatsoever of the French making any concessions at the present time beyond those contained in the agreements, and that for the United States to press them to do so would only stiffen and antagonize them. "It was the consensus of the meeting," notes Ogburn, "that the United States should not put itself in a forward position in the Indochina problem since there appeared to be nothing we could do to alter the very discouraging prospects and that we should endeavor to 'collectivize' our approach to the situation." As might be expected, this consensus proved to be a compromise for the sake of compromise.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, PPS 51 remained blocked by EUR.

*The June Affair and the Decision to Support the Bao Dai Solution*

Disagreement between WE and SEA soon arose over a cable for Saigon drafted by Ogburn. WE's chief objection to the draft was a sentence which stated that the Department considered it a "paramount obligation of France" to give Bao Dai a promise of genuine independence. In a memorandum to Reed, Ogburn complained that "if WE is convinced that the French will not make these concessions, then it appears that we must base our strategy on the assumption that Indochina is lost and stop muddying up our thinking with such phraseology as that which has been suggested for this telegram." A compro-

<sup>17</sup> This was based on Reed to Butterworth, May 11, 1949, PSA File, Box 5, Southeast Asia, U.S. Policy, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 27-28.

mise draft was nevertheless completed. It now read that the Department believed that the extent to which the French concessions embodied in the March 8 agreements would satisfy nationalists could be determined only by the reaction of the nationalists themselves. The telegram, however, contained the following passages:<sup>19</sup>

. . . Dept believes that when independence movement in colony [is] too strong to be defeated, metropolitan power if it wishes [to] preserve influence in area has no real chance but [to] attempt [to] establish special relationships with former colony based [on] free acceptance [of] terms [of] latter. . . . However, Dept [is] persuaded [that] Fr [are] unlikely [to] make further concessions this time and that any US efforts [to] press them [to] do so would probably miscarry. . . . [S]hould it appear as Dept fears that Fr are offering too little too late, Dept will not be inclined [to] make up for Fr deficiencies by rushing into breach to support Bao Dai agreements at cost [of] its own remaining prestige in Asia. Dept considers US [at] this stage should avoid conspicuous position [of] any kind and try [to] reach common attitude with other interested governments, particularly [those of] UK, India and the Philippines.

The telegram was repeated to Paris.

The Embassy in Paris acted quickly on the telegram. Ambassador Caffery had been replaced by David K. E. Bruce, the former chief of the Economic Co-operation Administration mission to France and a close friend of Dean Acheson. The Embassy's telegram to the Department emphasized the unstable internal political situation in France, adding that "it was only with great difficulty that he (Queulle) was able to persuade political parties forming coalition . . . to approve action [of] their members in Cabinet in accepting March 8 agreements." It concluded that "March 8 agreements afforded as much room for satisfying Vietnam aspirations [for] self-rule and international status as Vietnamese themselves are now able to cope with." On June 2, the Embassy recommended that *de facto* recognition and upgrading of consul to minister or chargé d'affaires in Saigon should take place "in later summer if conditions then appear [to] warrant such action."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ogburn to Reed, May 17, 1949, PSA File, Box 10; and *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 28–29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35–38. Acheson wrote that "in Paris Ambassador David Bruce most hospitably took in the Achesons and Lucius Battle. . . . In the next three years, until David Bruce came back to Washington to be Under Secretary of State, we imposed unconsciously on the Bruces' kindness. It is no exaggeration to say that not since

The text of the March 8 agreements reached the Department, and now it had to prepare a memorandum to France on the agreements. It just so happened that Secretary Acheson and Counselor Charles Bohlen were in Paris to attend the 16th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (May 23-June 20), and Butterworth was Acting Secretary. Before their departure, however, Acheson, Bohlen and other Department officials had discussed the matter. Bohlen recalled later that he was "very strongly of the belief that we should endeavor to use our influence with the French in an appropriate manner to bring their attitude on Indochina more in line with our thinking on the subject." It seems that Bohlen's and FE's views were generally accepted at the meeting. On receipt of the text of the March 8 agreements, Butterworth instructed Ogburn to prepare two memoranda on Indochina: one summarizing the March 8 agreements on a pro-and-con basis, and the other outlining alternative policies for Indochina. Ogburn prepared the two memoranda on the basis of the discussion at the meeting with Acheson.

The first memorandum<sup>21</sup> was a long one, and included the views of both EUR and FE, but it included the following passages:

The United States Government is, however, convinced that if the requisite concessions by the French Government to the nationalist demands are not forthcoming, the task of the Government envisaged in the March 8 agreements must prove most difficult of accomplishment and the countries adjacent to Indochina will most likely be confronted by the prospect of the appearance of sizable Communist-controlled forces on their frontiers.

According to Ogburn, this memorandum was considered as "the cornerstone of our record." It was "designed not to put pressure upon the French but to leave them with no misapprehension as to our thinking and to be suitable for public release should we eventually have to explain why our hands were tied in Indochina."<sup>22</sup>

The second memorandum listed alternative courses of action: (1) watchful reserve; (2) supporting the Bao Dai Government on the basis of the March 8 agreements politically, economically and militarily; (3) coalition government with Ho Chi Minh; and (4) doing utmost to make the Bao Dai solution successful. It also mentioned a compromise course:

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Benjamin Franklin had any one closer to more understanding of the French situation than David Bruce." Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, (New York, 1969), p. 294.

<sup>21</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 39-45.

<sup>22</sup> Ogburn to Reed and O'Sullivan, June 28, 1949, PSA File, Box 9.

giving encouragement to the Bao Dai solution without committing the United States to support the March 8 agreements or the Vietnamese government envisaged in it, and at the same time preparing for the time when it might be expedient to reveal publicly why the United States was unable to do more to save Indochina.<sup>23</sup> It was quite clear that Ogburn favored the last alternative.

WE refused to clear the first memorandum, contending that "if we expressed doubt that the March 8 agreements would satisfy the demands of the Vietnamese nationalists, we should also state that we had no alternative but to make the best of it." Ogburn contended that "the question of our alternatives [was] covered fully in the second memorandum." The first memorandum was nevertheless sent to Paris, but the second one was held by WE and no action was taken on it.<sup>24</sup>

According to L.D. Battle of the Paris Embassy, "it required no coaxing on our part for the Department's memorandum to cause a very strong reaction in the mind of [Ambassador] David Bruce. He cried 'poppycock,' and suggested going to the Secretary." Bruce did not go directly to Acheson, but instead prepared a memorandum, which was delivered through Bohlen. Attached to Battle's note to Bohlen was a proposed telegram to the Department, which was quite strongly worded: "We are unanimous in thinking it would be a serious mistake to deliver Dept's memorandum [to the French]. The Secretary has read both the memorandum and my reply which follows and concurs with us that the delivery of such views as expressed by the Department would at this time be inappropriate." Bohlen recommended to Acheson that the memorandum prepared by the Embassy be sent to the Department, and then added that in the meeting in Washington he had agreed with putting strong pressure on the French, but that "I have never had in mind anything like the proposed memorandum which seems to me a combination of a 'holier than thou' lecture plus suggestions which in view of the March 8 agreements are completely hopeless of any French acceptance."<sup>25</sup>

On June 14, Battle wrote a personal letter to Hickerson of WE, explaining the episode.<sup>26</sup>

I am not theoretically in favor of the Field making such power magic at the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> RG 84, Box 1574.

<sup>26</sup> Battle to Hickerson, 851G.00/6-1449.

Department. Furthermore, I bear too many scars of intramural matches not to know the paralyzing effects on policy of envenomed relations between two parts of the Dept. On balance, however, we all felt that there simply was not time in the present instance for the customary long gestation period, accompanied by coaxing, wielding and compromises, which in such matters normally precedes the birth of a policy in a matter of joint jurisdiction.

Butterworth and SEA now had no alternative but to accept the proposal made by the Embassy. The Department's reply to Paris of June 16 stated that "Dept of course accepts Emb's judgement regarding delivery at this time of memo under ref and is agreeable to oral presentation of Dept's general views on problem as contained in . . . memo." Paris replied on June 20 that it would continue stressing "overwhelming importance of a most liberal interpretation of Mar 8 agreements." The oral presentation, however, was not made until June 29, eight days after a release of the public statement of June 21.<sup>27</sup>

In the meantime, the independence of the State of Vietnam had been recognized by the exchange of letters between the French High Commissioner and Bao Dai formalizing the March 8 agreements. Strong appeals for a public endorsement had come from the Embassy in Paris as well as the Consulate in Saigon. Abbott at Saigon warned that "too long delayed indication of our support [of] new Vietnam state will deprive us of opportunity to exert influence on developments during crucial period"<sup>28</sup>

The Department now moved to prepare a public statement. Consultation with the British was conducted in Washington, but, on June 15, without waiting for a reply from London, the Department sent a circular telegram to diplomatic officers abroad, requesting comment on the proposed statement. The telegram stated that the statement would be released perhaps on June 17 before the announcement of the establishment of the Bao Dai Government.<sup>29</sup>

The reply from London on June 15 was very cool. Ambassador Douglas cabled that the British Foreign Office had not contemplated making a statement welcoming the formation of Vietnam and doubted the advisability of so doing. He further reported that an "approach to India might in present circumstances do more harm than good, fearing

<sup>27</sup> *FRUS, 1949*, Vol. 7, pp. 56–57; and Paris to the Department, June 20, 1949, 851G.01/6–2049.

<sup>28</sup> *FRUS, 1949*, Vol. 7, pp. 45 and 47.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

Nehru blast on colonialism.” The Department had been led to believe by Abbott’s report that India would follow American lead, and further expected a favorable reception from the British in view of British Counselor Graves’ noncommittal but understanding attitude. The Department therefore instructed the Embassy to inquire about London’s attitude again, but London’s July 7 cable merely confirmed its earlier report. From New Delhi Ambassador Loy Henderson also confirmed London’s estimate of India’s reaction. Ambassador Stanton in Bangkok opposed the proposal as well.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the cool reaction of the British, the negative attitude of India, and the opposition of Stanton, the Department informed field missions that it was going to issue the statement on June 21 in a press conference. They were instructed to endeavor to obtain from the governments to which they were accredited some public statement of encouragement for the Bao Dai solution.<sup>31</sup>

It was quite clear that FE’s “policy” was undercut by WE. The following bitter memorandum from Ogburn to Reed and O’Sullivan dated June 28 is quite revealing:<sup>32</sup>

Our memorandum to the French setting forth our views on Indochina was rejected by our Paris Embassy, except for those parts expressing a favorable attitude to the Bao Dai experiment. . . . Embassy Paris, having the advantage of the Secretary’s presence in Paris, succeeded in forcing us to issue a statement welcoming the Bao Dai Government despite the fact that no other government had given any evidence of an intention to do so. . . .

What happened is that SEA’s policy has been junked, nothing effective is being done to promote a non-Communist solution in Indochina, and FE is being put in an extremely vulnerable position. . . .

I think we are heading into a very bad mess in the policy now following toward Indochina.

The decision following the June affair to support the Bao Dai solution was reflected in the final version of PPS 51 or NSC 51, which considerably weakened its opposition to French colonialism. The state of policy towards Indochina at the end of the June affair was well shown in the Policy Paper on Indochina of July 1949. According to the Policy Paper, the March 8 accord was not a model agreement between a

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–59; and London to the Department, 851G.01/6–1549 and 851G.01/6–1749.

<sup>31</sup> *FRUS, 1949*, Vol. 7, pp. 53–54.

<sup>32</sup> PSA File, Indochina, 1947–1949, Policy and Information Papers, Box 9.

metropolitan power and a colonial area, but it was considered as "a concrete welcome step forward in French colonial policy." In view of the relatively unstable political situation in France, it was stated, the March 8 accord "presumably represents for the moment the maximum concessions which the present French coalition government and the French public are willing to accept."<sup>33</sup>

## II

### THE DECISION TO AID THE FRENCH IN INDOCHINA

#### *The Reexamination of the Far Eastern Policy in 1949*

In May 1949, Dean Rusk, then Assistant Secretary of State for United Nations Affairs (UNA), was appointed Deputy Undersecretary for Policy. His responsibility was to coordinate policy matters within the State Department and also with the Defense Department. Geographical directors did not have to go through Rusk on all questions, but they could bring matters directly to Acheson or Undersecretary James E. Webb only with Rusk's knowledge.<sup>34</sup> After Defense Secretary Louis Johnson proposed NSC 48 on June 10, Rusk made it clear that he would get Philip C. Jessup, the editor in chief of the China White Paper, working on the whole Asian program. After the release of the China White Paper, Jessup was appointed by Acheson as a Special Consultant on the Far East together with Raymond Fosdick, former President of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Everett Case, President of Colgate University. On appointing them, Acheson instructed the consultants "to draw up a possible program of action relating to various specific areas not now under Communist control in Asia under which the United States could have the best chances of achieving its purpose." Acheson reminded them that he wanted to "make absolutely certain that we are neglecting no opportunity . . . to halt the spread of totalitarianism in Asia."<sup>35</sup> With the appointment of the consultants, the reexamination of Far Eastern policy went into full swing. Though the major concern of the reexamination was China and Formosa, it was bound to have some impact on Southeast Asia.

<sup>33</sup> PSA File, Box 9.

<sup>34</sup> ExSec's File, Box 9, Undersecretary's Meetings, February 7 and 16, 1949. Since February Rusk had been acting in this capacity. See Acheson, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>35</sup> Acheson to Jessup, July 18, 1949. 890.00/7-1849.

PPS 51 of April 6 fully recognized the importance of Southeast Asia. It was stated that if Southeast Asia was controlled by Moscow-directed Communism, an important source of rubber, tin and oil and a vital communication crossroads would be denied to the United States. Furthermore,

With China going Communist, SEA is a vital link in the crescent of containment reaching from Japan through Australia to India. These three non-Communist areas would be gravely threatened if the SEA link is removed. . . . If SEA is swept by Communism, we will suffer a political rout whose repercussions will be felt throughout the world.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the recognized importance of Southeast Asia, however, the means available to the United States to improve the situation was considered very limited. A report on "Economic Aspects of United States Policy with respect to South Asia and East Asia" of May 18, 1949, clearly concluded that an ERP-type program would be entirely inappropriate in South Asia and East Asia. On Indochina, Burma and Indonesia, it was concluded that disturbed political conditions "make it unlikely that external aid to these countries could have any significant economic effect at the present time." Butterworth generally agreed with the conclusion, while George F. Kennan commented that "this document highlights our policy of opposition to an ERP-type of recovery program for Asia."<sup>37</sup>

When the aid under the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) was considered, a limited amount was recommended for Indonesia, Thailand and Burma, but not for Indochina. What was needed in Indochina was large concessions by the French and the support of Bao Dai by other Asiatic countries. Only when these conditions were met, as SEA's report to Jessup of August 22, 1949 stated, should we "be prepared to take the calculated risk of recognizing the Bao Dai Govern-

<sup>36</sup> ExSec's File, UM Documents 1-55, Box 5.

<sup>37</sup> D-38, Report submitted by Thorp for consideration at the Undersecretary's meeting of May 18, 1949. ExSec's File, UM Documents 1-55. ExSec's File, Undersecretary's Meetings, May 25, 1945.

<sup>37</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 568-570. SEA stated, however, that on short term actions, "we should be prepared to acquiesce, tacitly without giving publicity to our change in policy, in France transferring military equipment to Indochina to aid in the immediate struggle against the forces of Ho Chi Minh. We should also, as another shortrange action, be prepared to aid France, and incidentally Bao Dai, in every way possible if the Chinese Communists began to push over the border into Indochina." 851G.00/2249.



ment and giving full military and economic aid.”<sup>38</sup> Since the re-examination of the Far Eastern policy in 1949 was largely made by FE, PPS, and the Jessup group, the above views were bound to be reflected in the final conclusions reached at the end of the year.

What was behind this line of thinking was the “lessons” of China. When approached by the British on a joint venture to save Southeast Asia from Communism, Butterworth cautioned that “any concerted move on the part of the United Kingdom and the United States to build a front against Communism could result in whetting of the appetites of the countries in the Far East.” When requested military aid by Thailand, he responded that “such assistance should be looked upon as supplying that marginal increment which may mean the difference between success and failure of the foreign government’s own efforts.” Butterworth emphasized “self-help” and opposed any large aid to Asia. His tenet was caution and realism based on his “lessons” of China.<sup>39</sup> “Marginal increment” above was to be developed into “missing component” in Acheson’s address of January 12, 1950.

A few words on the consultants. They had the usual jurisdictional dispute with FE, particularly when they proposed an “area approach” which would have required a reorganization of the State Department. They also tended to overemphasize “psychological warfare” against Communism, whose effectiveness FE discounted. The consultants, however, generally agreed with FE, particularly on the importance of nationalist movements in Southeast Asia. At the conference of the Far Eastern consultants with Acheson on October 26, 1949, Jessup stated that “we must build up governments which are solid and strong because they are riding the wave of nationalism and are themselves able to bring about improvements in the conditions of the population.” On Indochina there was at first a difference of opinion among the consultants, but in the end they agreed to the following policy prepared by SEA:<sup>40</sup>

That we continue to press the French to move as rapidly as possible on ratification of the elements which will define juridically France’s relationship with Vietnam;

<sup>39</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, Part 2, pp. 1118–19; Butterworth to E-Thorp, February 28, 1949, PSA File, Box 5; Butterworth to Reed, April 6, 1949, 890.001/4–649; and telegram to Bangkok, April 23, 1949, 890.00B/4–2049.

<sup>40</sup> Jessup to Butterworth, November 4, 1949, 890.00/11–1849; and Butterworth to Fosdick, November 17, 1949, 751G.00/1749; Memorandum for file by Wilds, November 16, 1947, 890.00/11–1849.

that we again emphasize our feeling that the March 8 Agreements are only one of the first of many steps which must occur in the evolution of Vietnam; that the recent Indonesian settlement with all its implications calls for a more rapid accommodation of the legitimate nationalistic aspirations of the Vietnamese than the French has so far considered.

Both Butterworth and Rusk had been Rhodes scholars, but Rusk was several years the junior. As a coordinator of the geographical offices, Rusk apparently felt that he had to prove himself. Two days before Jessup's appointment, he sent a memorandum to Acheson describing a general outline of Far Eastern policy.<sup>41</sup> There he argued that "a change of climate" was necessary and important "both because of our international relations with the non-Communist world and because of the need to satisfy domestic and Congressional opinion behind our policy in Asia." He therefore proposed to have immediate talks with Congressional leaders and regular consultation thereafter, and make approaches to Asian powers, France and the Netherlands for collaboration. He also proposed a program of action which included, for example, a declaration of non-recognition of Communist China and assistance for non-Communists in China. On Indochina, he proposed to put pressure on France for more political concessions, but also favored a Point IV Program for Indochina, at least for Tonkin, and political support for Bao Dai.

In a paper dated September 8, Rusk argued that even if the United States should support a community of independent states in Asia, it was essential that the spread of Soviet Communism throughout the area be first halted in order to preserve conditions in which the United States objectives could be obtained.<sup>42</sup> He repeated the view at the conference of October 26 with Acheson. "We must support against aggressive pressure from the outside even states which we regard unfavorably. . . . This we have done in Greece, Korea and Yugoslavia. Our first concern is not with the internal structure but with their safety from aggression." Rusk, however, did not push his ideas through, probably because of the consensus emerging among FE, the Jessup group and Acheson.<sup>43</sup> It is

<sup>41</sup> Rusk to Secretary, "United States Policy and Action in Asia," July 16, 1949, 890.00/7-1649.

<sup>42</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, Part 2, pp. 1196-97.

<sup>43</sup> "Meeting of the Secretary and Consultants on the Far East," October 26 and 27, 1949, 890.00/11-1749; and minutes of Special Undersecretary's meeting on the Asia Paper, UM D-26, ExSec's File, Box 9, December 1, 1949.

also possible that Rusk was deliberately presenting a view directly contrary to that of FE just to keep balance in the policy deliberation.

Acheson's idea on Indochina and Southeast Asia in general was vague. He had had no first-hand experience of the region, though as Undersecretary under Secretary Byrnes from 1946 to 1947, he had dealt with the problem of China. In the course of discussion with the consultants and reading documents related to China, he seemed to have come to share the view held by Butterworth and the consultants. In the October meeting with the consultants, Acheson noted that "what we are looking for in the Far East are regimes with local bases animated by the desire to maintain themselves against pressure from outside. Regimes which tend to identify themselves with the emotional surges of the population are more likely to succeed."

When a NSC paper on NSC 48 was presented in October 1949, a clear line of Far Eastern policy was emerging within the State Department. The emerging policy was essentially cautious and negative: it did not envisage any "bold" new departure. The Jessup Mission began its much delayed trip to the Far East in late December, but its purposes were: 1) to review Asian policies with ambassadors; 2) to express support for Asian governments; and 3) to explain American intentions with respect to the Point IV Program. Since there were many in Asia who expected the program to involve large grants of capital, it was thought necessary to deflate such undue expectation.

#### *NSC 48/1 and NSC 48/2*

The National Military Establishment (NME), however, seems to have had a quite different view from that of the State Department. As early as January 1949, the NME Plans Group had requested a reexamination of Southeast Asian policy with a view to assisting economic development and increasing international security of the area. The Plans Group's memorandum stated that Southeast Asian countries were looking primarily to the United States for economic, political and military cooperation. There had been numerous requests for such aid, and this offered "unusual opportunity to maintain and strengthen the current anti-Soviet tendencies of South Asia with relatively modest outlays of United States resources." It continued that:<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See the attachment to an office memorandum from U/CFA to SEA, January 29, 1949, 890.20/1-2749.

In these circumstances, it is imperative that our interests in South Asia be urgently reappraised along the following lines. Our national interests require economic development in South Asia. To this end we should ascertain as specifically as possible the economic needs of the South Asian countries. [There is a] need of the maintenance of internal security within the countries of South Asia. [To t]his end we should reexamine our capabilities of providing military material to South Asia.

Defense Secretary Louis Johnson, who succeeded James Forrestal in March 1949, had been a founder of the American Legion, and from 1937 to 1940, served as Assistant Secretary of War. He was an ambitious man and a rumor had it that he nourished an ambition for the Democratic nomination for President in 1952. Moreover, he did not get along with the State Department: he tried to "choke off all Defense Department contacts with the State Department except through his office"; and he severely criticized Acheson for the publication of the White Paper on China.<sup>45</sup>

Secretary Johnson was probably dissatisfied with the reexamination of Far Eastern policy within the State Department, particularly PPS 51: on June 10 he proposed to the National Security Council reexamination of the policy. He expressed his concern over the advance of Communism "in large areas of the world and particularly the successes of Communism in China" which would affect the future security of the United States. He said he was dissatisfied with the "day-to-day, country by country approach" of "the several departments" in examining the critical situation, and requested the Council to develop "a broad program in our best long-range interests." "Our actions in Asia should be part of a carefully considered and comprehensive plan to further that objective [to contain Communism] in order to reduce its threat to our security." The "day-to-day, country by country" approach, which had been adopted by FE and SEA, can be called, according to John Gaddis, a "regional" approach, while an approach that emphasizes "a broad program in our best long-range interests" may be termed a "global" approach. In this sense, NSC 48 was a challenge by the "globalists" against the "regionalists."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics and Defense Budget* (New York, 1962), pp. 292–293.

<sup>46</sup> The Defense Department, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967* (hereafter cited as *The Pentagon Papers*), Book 8, pp. 217–18. The term "regionalists" and "globalists" were suggested by Professor John Gaddis at the American studies Specialists' Conference in Kyoto, July, 1978.

While the State Department was deliberating on the Far Eastern policy, the NSC Staff was working on NSC 48. Its draft was written in complete cold war terms. For example, it was assumed that the Soviet Union had complete and effective control over all Asian Communist movement; that the United States had all effective power to further its objectives; and that the Asian nations had to be immediately either pro-Soviet or pro-United States. It proposed establishing a defense pact in Asia, setting up a trusteeship in Formosa, embarking on an economic embargo of Communist China, and extending overt and covert support of non-Communists in China short of committing United States military forces. It also proposed that the United States "should endeavor to create in Asia an atmosphere hospitable to economic recovery and development." They were all completely antithetical to the emerging State Department policy.

FE set to work to revise the draft unenthusiastically and produced a document called UM 69a. Butterworth remarked at the Undersecretary's meeting on December 1 that "FE in revising the paper, kept as much as possible of the original version while changing all the conclusions and tying them on as far as possible to earlier NSC papers." Rusk, who was acting as chairman in the absence of Undersecretary Webb, explained that "he had agreed with NSC consultants that approval of this general paper on Asia would not, without a specific statement to that effect on each point, amend earlier papers considered in the NSC." It was also agreed in the meeting that the use of the \$75 million fund under Section 303 of MDAP, would be included in the paper, but that "much of this was to go for police equipment rather than strictly military material." Coordination with the Defense Department was carried out by Rusk, and the final draft was presented to the National Security Council as NSC 48/1 on December 23, 1949.

A comparison of UM 69a and NSC 48/1 reveals that the former was largely accepted by the Defense Department except the section on Formosa, to which was added JCS's decision that "a modest, well directed and closely supervised program of military advice and assistance to the anti-Communist government in Formosa would be in the security interest of the United States. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> An outline of the NSC paper and Butterworth's point by point criticism of the paper are in an memorandum from Butterworth to Rusk, November 28, 1949, ExSec's File, Box 6, UM D-69/1; minutes of Special Undersecretary's Meeting on the Asia Paper, UM D-69, December 1, 1949 in ExSec's File, Box 9; and UM D69a, December 5, 1949 in ExSec's File, Box 6.

NSC 48/2 of December 30, 1949, however, added further revisions in line with the views of the National Military Establishment. Since the National Security Council does not keep records of its deliberations, there is no way of knowing directly what went on in the Council, but it can be reasonably speculated that these additions in NSC 48/2 might have been the price that had to be paid by the State Department in order to have the Defense Department accept the revision of the section on Formosa.

A personal feud between Acheson and Johnson had grown into a conflict over the Formosa issue. In August and September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had reaffirmed their views that, though Formosa was strategically important, "overt" American military action to deny Formosa to the Communists would not be justified. Defense Secretary Johnson, however, had the JCS reverse its recommendations on December 23, which was then included in NSC 48/1. FE was quite critical of all of this. On December 28, Butterworth commented to Acheson that "this proposal [the new JCS decision] flies in the face of the Joint Intelligence estimate quoted in the body of NSC 48/1 and in effect runs counter to the entire analysis and discussion contained in this paper."<sup>48</sup> The next day, Acheson and Butterworth had a heated debate over Formosa with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>49</sup> Then, it can be assumed that Acheson succeeded in eliminating the JCS decision from the NSC paper perhaps with the help of President Truman, but at a price.

In NSC 48/2, the following provision was added to the Conclusions 1 b: "Development of sufficient military power in selected non-Communist nations of Asia to maintain internal security and to prevent further encroachment by Communism." Another addition was 3 b of the Conclusions, which stressed the importance of military assistance and bilateral or multilateral arrangements to combat Communist subversion. A revision which proved later to be important was made concerning assistance under Section 303 of the MDA Act. In 29 H of UM 69a (and perhaps in NSC 48/1 as well), it was provided that "the fund available under Section 303 (in the sum of \$75 million) . . . should be utilized immediately to strengthen the Indonesian constabulary. Similarly the use of funds should be combined with respect to other countries in Southeast Asia." In NSC 48/2, however, it was given an

<sup>48</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 461ff; and Butterworth to Acheson, December 28, 1949, 894A.00/12-2849.

<sup>49</sup> *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. 7, pp. 463-67.

independent entry: it was provided in 3 m of the Conclusions that the sum of \$75 million should be programmed as a matter of urgency. In the context of Sections 2 b and 3 above, this provision could easily be expanded beyond Indonesia. These revisions were a clear victory of the "globalists" over the "regionalists" or a victory of the NME over FE, SEA and possibly Acheson. Therefore, the origins of NSC 64, which will be discussed later, can be found in NSC 48/2.

To be sure, NSC 48/2 had very little to say on Indochina. As in UM 69a and NSC 48/1, it merely reiterated what NSC 51 had stated. As we have seen in the previous section of this article, the section on Indochina in NSC 51 was the result of a considerable conflict between FE on the one hand and EUR and the field missions on the other. NSC 48/2 left untouched the provision in NSC 51 probably because no other compromise was possible. The above mentioned revisions made in NSC 48/2, however, provided the "globalists" with grounds for revising the compromise policy of NSC 51 in favor of their views. In this sense, NSC 48/2 can be considered a turning point in American policy toward Indochina.

Butterworth and others in the State Department, however, would have had reasons to be satisfied with NSC 48/2 as well. They had won the battle over Formosa. Furthermore, at the insistence of the State Department, NSC 48/2 provided that "Nothing in this paper shall be construed as amending approved NSC papers unless a specific statement to that effect had been made on each point" (Conclusions 31). The State Department could assume that no change had in fact been made in policy toward the Far East. From the very outset, the Department of State showed very little enthusiasm for NSC 48, for they had already reexamined the policy and were reaching a realistic conclusion. NSC 48 was Defense Secretary Johnson's venture. In spite of the revisions in NSC 48/2, the Department of State adhered to NSC 48/1, which was largely their paper. Acheson's January 12 speech was based on NSC 48/1.

### *The Decision to Aid the French in Indochina*

On December 30, 1949, France signed over ten separate implementing agreements relating to the transfer of internal administration in Vietnam to the State of Vietnam in accordance with the March 8 agreements. As the year 1950 opened, the question of recognizing the Bao Dai Government became an urgent matter for decision.

FE now proposed that, together with the implementing agree-

ments, France should make a “spontaneous public statement of liberal intentions for future evolution of Vietnam” (a so-called “evolutionary statement”). Such a statement would help Bao Dai to gain recognition from otherwise suspicious Asian nations, and would also help him to attract Vietnamese nationalists to his side. FE thought that the United States “should not go beyond what the British . . . are prepared to do, and in connection with the timing, our move should follow theirs.” This meant *de facto* recognition, which would leave the United States and Britain some room for maneuvering in getting political concessions from France.<sup>50</sup> Acheson was in complete agreement with this policy.

Acheson testified on January 10 in the executive session of the Committee on Foreign Relations that before the United States recognized the Bao Dai Government, “the French must go as far as they are able to go themselves to treat this area [Indochina] as though it were . . . a sovereign area within the French unit.” He also stated that it would be highly desirable to have some Asiatic governments such as India recognize the Bao Dai Government prior to or simultaneously with United States recognition. Acheson concluded that “we have not committed ourselves and do not wish to, because if we do it has a tendency to slow down the French.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus, this was the policy of the United States in the early part of January. The Department sent a telegram to Paris on January 13, informing the Embassy of the step the United States was prepared to take at an appropriate time after the ratification of the implementing agreements. It included an announcement by the Secretary of the *de facto* recognition of the Bao Dai Government and granting an appropriate rank and title to the Consul General in Saigon, but it added that the Department hoped the French would issue an evolutionary statement. In a personal telegram dated January 30, Butterworth informed Jessup that the Department was planning to recommend to the President the granting of recognition to the Bao Dai Government following the ratification of the agreements by the French Assembly. He added that “timing and question of whether *de facto* or *de jure* at this stage will be coordinated with UK and other countries, especially in hope that at least one Asian country will recognize previously or simultaneously.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 1950, Vol. 6, pp. 691–92.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Reviews of the World Situation, 1949–1950* (Washington, 1974), pp. 159–60.

<sup>52</sup> *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. 6, pp. 694–95, 698–700.



There were, however, strong recommendations against this line of policy. Ambassador Loy Henderson in India advised that the time had come for the United States to pursue her own policies regardless of the Indian attitude. He reasoned that "our approach towards international situation for considerable period is certain to be quite different from that of Indians and for us to make no move without protracted attempts at coordination would result in vacillation and would give impression of lack of conviction." Chargé Edmund Gullion in Saigon, who succeeded George Abbott, strongly recommended granting *de jure* recognition. "*De facto* recognition," he said, "would damage Bao Dai's standing and prejudice his chances of success." Jessup, now in Saigon to meet Bao Dai, recommended *de jure* recognition.<sup>53</sup>

The Soviet Union's recognition of Ho Chi Minh, which came one day after the French National Assembly ratified the implementing agreements, considerably strengthened the position of those who supported *de jure* recognition. In a reply to a cable from London informing that the British were contemplating *de facto* recognition, the Department stated that it "has come to view that the French have for the moment gone as far as they can in according independence"; and that "a straightforward recognition without the qualification of *de facto*, or for that matter *de jure*, would best serve our and UK interests and this viewpoint should be pressed upon the commonwealth governments."<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet recognition of Ho Chi Minh produced further urgent counsel from Ambassadors Bruce and Jessup. On January 31, Bruce warned from Paris that "we may soon be faced with situation similar to that formerly prevailing in Greece and even in Spain," and advised that after the ratification of the implementing agreements, "if any measure of military and/or economic aid to Bao Dai is contemplated, it would seem advisable that it be announced at once and extended as soon as possible." Jessup in Saigon advised that "recognition and clear indication from US that aggression against IC will not be permitted" should be made. He further recommended that the evolutionary statement by the French would be difficult because of the internal political situation. The evolutionary statement would even have certain disadvantages: "It would bring forth new wave of demands from Vietnamese when what was needed was to get down to work and put present

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 692–93, 702–03.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 703–04.

agreements into effect.<sup>55</sup>

On February 1, Acheson released a statement on the Soviet recognition of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>56</sup>

The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's Communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgement of this movement should remove any illusion as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true color as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

On February 2, the State Department recommended the recognition of the Bao Dai Government, and the next day it was approved at the Cabinet meeting.

The decision to recognize Bao Dai did not mean the complete defeat of FE, nor did it mean that Acheson accepted the globalists' view. In fact, it seems that the decision on recognition was made on condition that further pressure would be placed on the French to issue the evolutionary statement. On February 2, the acting chief of EUR emphasized to French Ambassador Bonnet the importance of the evolutionary statement, adding that "it was our [United States'] hope that one of the South Asian nations might precede us." On the same day, the Department sent a telegram to Paris, in which it stated its belief that, on the occasion of the final French ratification of the March 8 agreements, Bao Dai should make a strong statement and that the French authorities in Paris should deliver an evolutionary statement. The recognition of Bao Dai was not made public until February 7, and pressures on the French continued after the announcement.<sup>57</sup>

In the meantime, the NME was considering the funding of \$75 million, and the JCS on January 20 recommended that a program of overt assistance and operations in the general area of China be initiated as early as possible, and that the program of assistance be conducted concurrently in countries such as Indochina, Indonesia and Thailand, with emphasis in the order listed. This JCS report was made at the request of Defense Secretary Johnson, which in turn was specifically made in accordance with NSC 48/2. On January 26, the JCS recommended several long-range objectives for future military defense assistance programs, one of which called for "the development of sufficient

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 704-07.

<sup>56</sup> Department of State *Bulletin*, Vol. 22 (February 13, 1950), p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. 6, p. 719 footnote.

military power in selected nations in the Far East [which meant that part east of India, including Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia and Indochina, etc.] and the Western Pacific Ocean area, to prevent further encroachment by Communism in those areas.”<sup>58</sup>

Within the State Department, ‘the globalists’ were also gaining the upper hand. The “Problem Paper Prepared by Working Group in the Department [of State]” dated February 1 specifically denied the views of Butterworth and SEA. It recommended that aid should be given to the French in Indochina short of dispatching ground troops. This aid would “meet deficiencies toward which the United States can make a unique contribution,” that is, American aid would constitute the missing component mentioned in Acheson’s January 12 speech. Lacy of SEA had joined the Working Group together with representatives of WE and MDAP. Reed had retired, and Lacy had become the new chief of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, (PSA, former SEA). He had always shared the view of EUR (in fact, he was later decorated by the Dutch Queen for his contribution in the Indonesian case). Thus Secretary Johnson could report on February 1 that there was general agreement between the representatives of the Defense and State Departments concerning the assumption on which planning of the funding of \$75 million should proceed.<sup>59</sup>

Acheson, however, was very cautious and cool when Ambassador Bonnet on February 16 requested military aid under Section 303. He thought that “our bargaining position with the French disappear the moment we agree to give them aid for Indochina. . . . American aid program should be set up in such a way as to give the three States [of Indochina] maximum incentive for independence.”<sup>60</sup> The situation, however, was becoming increasingly difficult for Acheson. On February 16 the CIA estimated that, though “Communist pressure probably will follow the customary pattern of infiltration and subversion rather than open military action, the Chinese, nevertheless, will provide the Ho regime with military assistance that, in the absence of substantial U.S. military or financial assistance, could bring about the downfall of Bao Dai and French withdrawal within two years.”<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, France was putting even stronger pressure on the United States than

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5–7; and *The Pentagon Papers*, Book 8, p. 274.

<sup>59</sup> *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. 6, pp. 711–716, 5–7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 733, 739–743.

<sup>61</sup> CIA, *Review of the World Situation*, Truman Library, PSF File, Box 205.

before. Ambassador Bruce on February 22 reported French Foreign Office's view that unless the United States agreed to give "a long term program of assistance" to France, "it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from IC." Even though this "warning" was denied by Schuman, there was always a possibility of French withdrawal.<sup>62</sup>

Butterworth still held to his position. On January 19, a day after Communist China's recognition of Ho Chi Minh, Butterworth proposed to dispatch an economic mission to Southeast Asia. The Department's instruction to the mission on February 7, just before Butterworth's departure for the Bangkok Conference of the chiefs of field missions in Asia, was in line with what had been given to Jessup in December 1949. It stated among others that the mission should seek to "give special attention to placing it [Point IV Program] in its proper perspective in order to avoid later disillusionment."<sup>63</sup> On February 22 when the mission was about to leave the United States, Butterworth conveyed his views from Bangkok to his deputy in FE.<sup>64</sup>

We should realize that ECA and military aid from US, just as recognition by US, do not constitute 'missing components'. . . . 'Missing component' is further action by French which would place Vietnam in category of independent states.

Accordingly, Griffin mission should receive very precise and careful instructions prior to departure and it would be my recommendation that no ECA or military aid be committed to French Indochina unless France gives requisite public undertakings re further steps leading to status similar to Indonesia.

There occurred a hot debate in the Bangkok Conference. Chargé Gullion argued that the United States should give military and economic aid to Indochina immediately, and that in case of Chinese or Soviet invasion of Vietnam, all means including use of armed forces should be provided to Indochina.<sup>65</sup> Seven out of twenty-two attending the con-

<sup>62</sup> *FRUS, 1950*, Vol. 6, pp. 743–44.

<sup>63</sup> For the Griffin Mission, see Samuel P. Hayes, ed., *The Beginnings of American Aid to Southeast Asia*, (Boston, 1971).

<sup>64</sup> *FRUS, 1950*, Vol. 6, p. 739.

<sup>65</sup> What Gullion stated at the Conference is not recorded, but *FRUS* notes that "The views presented by Chargé Gullion at the Bangkok Conference were presumably similar to those contained in the analysis of the Indochina situation transmitted in telegram 334 from Saigon, May 6, p. 802." Here we used the May 6 telegram.

ference supported the use of U.S. armed forces. On the other hand, Butterworth argued in terms of using UN agencies for economic projects in Vietnam.<sup>66</sup>

Even while Butterworth was arguing against Gullion and winning the argument, Washington was decisively moving towards granting military and economic aid to France in Indochina. On February 16, FE's "Country Report" to MDAP director recommended giving military aid to Vietnam in FY 1951.<sup>67</sup> While Butterworth was touring Europe (he did not return to Washington until March), the Department on February 27 sent him a report entitled "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina" (NSC 64). This report stated in its conclusion that:<sup>68</sup>

1) It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

2) The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave danger.

3) Accordingly, the Department of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina.

The report indicated that there would be no evolutionary statement by the French, and characteristically stated that "as this [Communist] danger becomes more evident, it is expected to overcome the reluctance that they [Asian nations] have had to recognize and support the three states [of Indochina]." It was not therefore necessary to get approval of Asian powers prior to United States commitment to the Bao Dai Government.

By whom and how the report was drafted in the State Department is not known, but it is clear that there was a consensus within the Department including FE. A FE memorandum to Secretary Acheson dated March 7 summarizes actions taken by the United States and points out important decisions yet to be made. Actions already taken were "the recognition of the three Indochinese states, the efforts to

<sup>66</sup> *FRUS, 1950*, Vol. 6, p. 28; p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 735-38.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 744-47.

secure Asian recognition of them, the dispatch of the Griffin mission to Saigon, the dispatch of elements of the Seventh Fleet to Saigon, and the processing of requests for economic and military assistance from the French Government and from the Government of Bao Dai." Decisions to be made were: "The extent and character of our military commitment in Indochina" (NSC 64) and a joint U.S., U.K. and French strategy against Communism. FE favored the last mentioned project, and requested Acheson whether it might make appropriate approaches to the British Government.<sup>69</sup> On March 9, the Department transmitted to the President a request that \$15 million be earmarked from Section 303 funds for military equipment to be supplied in Indochina,<sup>70</sup> and the request was approved by the President on March 10.

The Griffin Mission was to be strictly an economic mission partly to avoid giving offense to the neutralist nations it was to visit, partly to provide the Mission with a focus for discussions, and partly because there was already in prospect a military aid mission to the same area to be sent later. Undersecretary Webb's instruction to the Mission dated March 1 also reflected this basic idea. At the time of its departure from San Francisco in late February, however, it was suddenly joined by an Army colonel and a Navy captain, properly accredited as members of the Mission. They were to participate in discussing possible military projects in Indochina.

The Mission's chief, R. Allan Griffin, was a Republican, a friend of Senator William Knowland of California, and a former deputy chief of the China Mission of the ECA in 1948–1949. With Griffin, the military representatives, and Chargé Gullion in Saigon to advise the Mission, what it would recommend was a foregone conclusion. As might have been expected, the Mission modified its guideline. According to the new guideline, assistance projects were to be examined in terms of the security of the area, or the direct or indirect military values they might have, the emphasis being placed on "quick impact" projects.<sup>71</sup>

When Butterworth returned to Washington in March, he found himself isolated within the Department. In June 1949 Butterworth had had considerable difficulty in obtaining Senatorial confirmation, and now he was again under attack. On March 26, Senator Owen Brewster

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 749.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–44.

<sup>71</sup> Hayes, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11. For Webb's instruction, see *The Pentagon Papers*, Book 8, pp. 286–287.

requested his removal from FE for undercutting the Chiang regime.<sup>72</sup> Butterworth was removed from his office on March 28. In the meantime, the Griffin Mission's conclusions were forwarded to the State Department on March 18. On May 1, 1950, Truman approved a \$10 million military aid for Indochina. It was, at best, anti-climactic.

### CONCLUSIONS

Since the above reconstruction of the two cases would serve the first purpose of this paper, that is, to fill a "missing chapter" in American foreign policy towards Indochina, we will limit our conclusions to the second objective, a theoretical analysis of decision making.

The two cases we have reconstructed show that the foreign policy making process is not what the "rational actor" model assumes, but rather it shows many characteristics of the "governmental" or "bureaucratic politics" model.<sup>73</sup> What stands out in the two cases, for example, is the importance of personal relationship among decision makers: in the first case, the personal friendship between Acheson and Ambassador Bruce, and the personal feud between Acheson and Defense Secretary Louis Johnson in the second case. The close personal relationship between Acheson and Bruce was one of the determining factors in the decision to support the Bao Dai solution. Johnson's dissatisfaction with the policy reexamination in the State Department might have been based on his genuine desire to increase national security, but his feud with Acheson surely was a factor. Johnson thus proposed another policy reexamination (NSC 48), which resulted in a compromised paper, NSC 48/2. And it was this paper that can be considered as the origin of American aid to the French in Indochina.

One of the most controversial propositions in the "governmental politics" model of decision making has been the one that "where you stand depends on where you sit." This proposition is neatly explained by I. M. Destler as follows:<sup>74</sup>

While officials' view and actions are not predetermined by the position they hold, they are greatly influenced by them. For each official has a separate job to do, whether it be President or Air Force Chief of Staff or Turkey desk officer in State. Each receives different mix of information. Each is subject to

<sup>72</sup> *New York Times*, March 26, 1950.

<sup>73</sup> Allison, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Destler, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

a different mix of pressures. Each must maintain the loyalty of a different group of subordinates, the respect of a different group of press, the confidence of a different boss. Thus each views a problem from his own particular 'perspective.'

With the rare exception of Lacy of SEA, each decision maker acted as might reasonably be expected from the position he held. As I have shown in other articles, a similar observation can be made on decision making in the preceding years.<sup>75</sup> It is remarkable that each consistently held to his position despite changes in situation, showing that there was very little "learning."

This brings us to John Steinbrunner's three typical thinking patterns under uncertainty: "grooved thinking," "uncommitted thinking," and "theoretical thinking."<sup>76</sup> "Theoretical thinking" may well explain the behavior of bureaucrats, particularly FE (Butterworth and Ogburn) and field missions (Bonsal of the Paris Embassy and Saigon's George Abbott and Edmund Gullion). Likewise, Acheson's behavior, particularly in the reexamination of Far Eastern policy in 1949, may be explained by "uncommitted thinking." In fact, it can be said that Acheson had two policies, one for Europe and another for Asia, and that those policies were not rationally integrated.

<sup>75</sup> S. Miyasato, "The Roosevelt Administration and Indochina—An Analysis from 'Bureaucratic Perspectives'" *Ryudai Law Review*, No. 23 (Oct. 1978), pp. 73–128; also see Part I of "The Truman Administration and Indochina," which analysed decision making in 1945, *ibid.*, No. 24 (Dec., 1978), pp. 49–62. This part is omitted in this article because of the limitation of space.

<sup>76</sup> Steinbrunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–35.