

Chapter X

INDOCHINA AND THE BIG TWO

Even prior to the termination of the war in Europe in the summer of 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union stood out as the leading Great Powers. The United States emerged as the most powerful and richest nation, envied by the rest of the world due to its economic strength, technological and military power. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union surprised all world strategists with its military might. Despite its heavy losses incurred during the German invasion—1,700 towns and 70,000 villages reportedly destroyed, twenty million lives lost, including 600,000 who starved to death in Leningrad alone, and twenty-five million homeless families—after 1942 the Red Army convincingly destroyed German forces and steadily moved toward Berlin.

No matter whether they were destined to be archrivals or not, the United States and the Soviet Union soon disrupted their wartime alliance to enter what was often labeled the Cold War (1947-1991). From 1947 onward, each became the leader of a “democratic” and “peace-loving” camp, sponsoring smaller nations in “brushfire” wars with large casualties and tragic destruction. The war in Viet-Nam was often considered one of these small wars within the context of the global Cold War. However, there is only a partial truth in this assertion. The Cold War aspect of the Viet-Nam conflict was a later development. The Viet-Nam Thirty Years’ War (1945-1975) started as early as September 1945 when the British helped the French reconquer Indochina. Meanwhile, at least until the end of 1946, both the United States and the Soviet Union did not pay much attention to Indochina in general and Viet-Nam in particular. Surprisingly, they each endorsed the same policy of

non-commitment and, to various degrees, supported the French return. It was not until mid-1947 that the Big Two, with the birth of Andrei Zhdanov's "two camps" theory, began to select their minor partners.

I. THE AMERICANS:

A. INDOCHINA: ROAD TO PEARL HARBOR:

As early as the summer of 1940, President Roosevelt's administration (1933-1945) had become increasingly alarmed over Japan's expansion to Tonkin. However, this concern had little to do with Indochina itself. Roosevelt's main aim was to prevent Japan's so-called "Crimes Against Peace"¹—i.e., attempting to undermine Western Powers' domination of the Asian countries, especially the Philippines, the Netherlands Indies [Indonesia] and the British colonies of Burma and Malaya. This general principle, combined with Roosevelt's shock at France's military collapse in June 1940, resulted in the American policy of non-commitment toward Indochina. In 1940, therefore, the Roosevelt administration showed no interest in giving France any help in Indochina. French requests for the purchase of American airplanes and anti-aircraft artillery and for the staging of an American naval demonstration in the Gulf of Tonkin were turned down by the United States.² American policy was explicitly expressed by Under Secretary of

¹*IMTFE*, "Summation of the Prosecution" (16:38,990, 38,998 ff).

²Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, 2 vols. (New York: Praeger, 1967), vol. I, pp. 572-574 [henceforth, *A Dragon Embattled*].

State Summer Welles in his conversation with [Count] Rene de Saint Quentin, the French ambassador to Washington, on June 30, 1940:³

[T]he government of the United States did not believe that it could enter into conflict with Japan and that, should the latter attack Indochina, the United States would not oppose such an action.

The conclusion of the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan on September 27, 1940 and the concurrent American embargo on the export of scrap iron and steel to Japan, effective October 16, opened a period of increasing tensions between America and Japan. But it was not until the summer of 1941, after Japan had decided to move its troops into southern Indochina, posing a direct threat to the whole Southeast Asian region, that the Roosevelt administration reacted firmly. This led to Tokyo's allegations of a western "encirclement" of Japan.⁴

In the summer of 1941, to ease the tensions between the two nations, the Japanese ambassador to Washington, Admiral Nomura Kichisaburo, and Secretary of State Cordell Hull conducted talks in Washington. Occasionally, "a friend of Japan" named Roosevelt also engaged in the parley. Thanks to Japanese Premier Konoye Fumimaro's sincere desire to reach a peaceful settlement, both sides made some progress, narrowing down the differences between the parties to three issues: equal commercial opportunity in China, the right of self-defense—including Japan's obligations under the Tripartite pact—and

³Georges Catroux, "La crise franco-japonaise de juin 1940 (26 novembre 1944);" CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 366, d. 2906; Georges Catroux, *Deux actes du drame indochinois* (Paris: Plon, 1959), p. 55; Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, rev. edition (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 41. Cited henceforth, *Deux actes* and *Two Viet-Nams*, respectively.

⁴For further details, see *IMTFE*, Exhibit 2879 (11:25,755-6).

Japan's military presence in China.⁵ Soon, after the Japanese Imperial Conference of July 2, 1941 had endorsed the establishment of Japan's Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and an armed occupation of Indochina as a "consolation prize,"⁶ rumors of a planned Japanese thrust into the southern region reached America. On July 5, the *New York Times* printed a dispatch from Shanghai that Japan was going to invade Indochina and Thailand.⁷ The same day, two State Department officials visited Nomura to inquire into the accuracy of this dispatch. Nomura vaguely replied that his government was simply taking "appropriate preparatory measures" against "possible eventualities," specified as an encirclement of Japan and an American embargo of oil to Japan.⁸ It was not until July 23, two days after Vichy France's acceptance of a Joint Defense Treaty with Japan, that Nomura confirmed Japan's move. That afternoon, Acting Secretary Welles met the Japanese Ambassador and strongly protested the Japanese occupation, which, according to Welles,⁹

. . . means a further step in seizing control of the South Seas area, including trade routes of supreme importance to the United States controlling such products as rubber, tin, and other commodities.

⁵For the American version, see *IMTFE* (16:39,577-618). For the Japanese side of the story, see *Ibid.*, (11:25,647-751).

⁶For the English text of the July 2, 1941 Imperial Conference Decision, see *Ibid.*, Exhibit 588 (3:6,566-9). For Konoye's diaries, see *Ibid.*, Exhibits 2877 (11:25,726-8) and 2866 (11:25,672-3, 25,694-700, 25,743-9 and 25,766-772)

⁷*New York Times*, 5 July 1941.

⁸*IMTFE*, Exhibit 2879 (11:25,732-3).

⁹*The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decision Making on Vietnam*, the Senator Gravel edition, 5 vols. (Boston: Beacon, 1971), vol. I, p. 8; Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945," *American Historical Review*, No. 80 (Dec 1985), p. 1278. Cited henceforth, *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel) and "Roosevelt," respectively

Welles also informed Nomura that talks will be temporarily suspended.¹⁰ Next day, at a private meeting between Roosevelt and Nomura, the former menacingly hinted at the possibility of an oil embargo, but also proposed the neutrality of Indochina. In exchange for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from the French possession, Roosevelt pledged to grant Japan the “fullest and freest opportunity of assuring a source of food, supplies and other materials . . . which Japan claimed she was seeking.”¹¹ A State Department press release on the same date warned that the Japanese southward expansion would “bear directly upon the vital problem of our national security.”¹² Two days later, July 26, Roosevelt ordered a freeze of all Japanese assets in the United States and put the few remaining commercial transactions between the two countries under strict control. Then, on August 1, as Japanese troops were landing on South Indochina under the banner of the Franco-Japanese Joint Defense Treaty of July 29, 1941, the U.S. initiated a full-scale “economic war” with total embargo upon the export of oil to Japan.

In order to avoid a breakdown of talks, the Konoye government cabled to Nomura on August 5 its reply to Roosevelt’s proposal of July 24. Although promising to give thoughtful consideration to the Japanese reply, Hull expressed his personal sentiment that “as long as Japan holds to the policy of conquest by force, there is no room left for negotiations; and that so long as the government authorities of Japan call American actions

¹⁰Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Mcmillian, 1948) vol II, pp. 1013-1014. Also see *IMTFE*, (4:9,295).

¹¹Nomura’s report of 24 July 1941; *Ibid.*, Exhibit 2882 (11:25,750-2); Hull, *Memoirs*, p. 1104; Togo Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1956, 1977), p. 85; Fall, *Two Viet-Nams*, p. 45;

¹²US Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1931-1941, Japan* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943), vol. II, pp. 315-317 [henceforth, *FRUS, 1931-1941, Japan*].

the encirclement of Japan, [we] can expect nothing from Japan.”¹³ Hull’s attitude was so unfriendly that Nomura had to report to Tokyo.¹⁴

Judging from the impression I received today [August 6, 1941], it seems utterly impossible now by any explanation to bring the authorities of the American government to understand the true intention of Japan, and it was clearly perceived that the United States is clearly determined to face any situation that may be brought about.

Two days later, Hull formally replied that Japan “failed in responsiveness to the proposal advanced by the [American] President on July 24.”¹⁵

On August 7, to improve the situation, Premier Konoye instructed Nomura to sound out the possibility of a summit meeting between himself and Roosevelt.¹⁶ Roosevelt, however, had left Washington for a ten-day trip to meet British Premier Winston S. Churchill on board the *USS Augusta* near Newfoundland. Not until August 17 did the President grant Nomura a private meeting, during which Roosevelt asked for Konoye’s official proposal and a precise statement of Japan’s position.¹⁷ Meanwhile, in Tokyo, the new Foreign Minister, Toyoda Teijiro, who had just replaced Matsuoka Yosuke in July 1941, also approached American ambassador Joseph C. Grew to request a summit meeting, and Grew apparently supported Konoye’s initiative.¹⁸ On August 28, Nomura conveyed

¹³Nomura’s report of 6 August 1941; *Ibid.*, Exhibit 2886 (11:25,765-6).

¹⁴*Ibid*

¹⁵Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan: A Contemporary Record Drawn From the Diaries and Private and Official Papers of Joseph C. Grew* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), p. 421. Cited henceforth, *Ten Years in Japan*.

¹⁶Cable of 7 Aug. 1941, Toyoda to Nomura; *Ibid.*, Exhibit 2887 (11:25,772-5). This message was given to Secretary Hull on August 8; *Ibid.*, Exhibits 2886 (11:25771) & 2887 (11:25472-5).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, Exhibits 2889 (11:25781-2), 2890 (11:25,782-4); 16:39,633.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Exhibits 2891 (11:25,790) & 2892 (11:25,791); Grew, *Ten Years in Japan*, pp. 416-421.

to Roosevelt what was to be known as the "Konoye Message." In this message, dated August 27, 1941, Konoye stated that Japan would withdraw from Indochina when the "China Incident" was to be resolved, and that the Japanese moving of troops into Indochina was not a preparatory step to attack the neighboring countries. It also dropped the term "encirclement" as required by the Americans.¹⁹

Konoye's initiative, however, was launched at an inopportune time. The Americans and Japanese had nearly reached extremes of mutual distrust. The Gallup Poll, whether accurate or not, revealed that in June 1941, 51 percent of Americans felt that Japan's expansion should be checked even at the risk of war, and three months later, on September 8, the figure was up to 70 percent.²⁰ The high-ranking American diplomats, particularly Hull, one of Roosevelt's closest associates at that time, were equally unreceptive to Konoye's peaceful approach. On the other side, anti-American sentiment in Japan steadily increased after Roosevelt's oil embargo. The pro-German and anti-American extremists took full advantage of this event to challenge Konoye's move and predicted that the summit meeting would fail. Worse, the leakage of the August 28 message to the press aroused uneasiness in Japan.

On September 3, six days after Nomura's submission of Konoye's official proposal for the summit meeting, Roosevelt agreed in principle for a summit meeting, but wanted to assure the success of the proposed talks by the resumption of "preparatory discussions" on essential questions.²¹ In fact, Roosevelt and his associates were not as sympathetic to

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Exhibits 1245-B (5:10,764), 2891 (11:25789) & 16:39627.

²⁰[check]

²¹*IMTFE*, Exhibits 1245-C (5:10,722-4) & 2894 (11:25,798-801). Also see *FRUS, 1931-1941*, vol II, pp. 591-592.

Konoye's "unprecedented move" as they professed. Meanwhile in Japan, time was running out for Konoye. The patience of the military extremists grew thinner. On September 6, an Imperial Conference in Tokyo made several important decisions. Nomura was allowed to continue his diplomacy but a time-limit was imposed—Japan was to go to war with the United States if a diplomatic resolution was not attained by mid-October. Meanwhile, orders to prepare for war were issued to responsible commanders.²²

The talks moved very slowly. On October 2, Hull handed Nomura a memorandum in which he simply repeated the "four cardinal points" contained in his June 21 proposal—a full circle of useless and fruitless diplomatic efforts.²³ Konoye's premiership consequently weakened. In early October, a series of cabinet meetings was held in Tokyo to discuss Japan's future course of action. Finally, on October 16, with American-Japanese talks deadlocked, Konoye was forced to resign. The next day, General Tojo Hideki was asked to form a new cabinet. Although extending the deadline for a peaceful resolution until November 25 (and, later, November 29) and sending another negotiator, Ambassador Kurusu Saburo, to join the Washington talks, Tojo intensified his preparations for war. On November 5, the Japanese Premier called for an Imperial Conference in which, among the other things, two final drafts of Japan's proposals were approved.²⁴ The same day, however, the Combined Fleet Top-Secret Operation Order No. 1 was also issued, outlining the attack on Pearl Harbor.²⁵ On November 6, The General Headquarters of the Southern

²²*JM* 24:4.(?)

²³*IMTFE*, (4:9,302-3)

²⁴*IMTFE*, (4:9,305); Exhibits 1107 (5:10,332), 1169 (5:10,333-40), & 3027 (11:27,028).

²⁵*IMTFE*, Exhibit 800 (5: 10,315), 809 (5:10,347-8).

Army was officially organized. Four days later when Nomura presented Secretary Hull with the first proposal (Plan A), the Combined Fleet Top-Secret Order No. 3 was sent out, ordering that preparations for the Pearl Harbor attack be completed by November 20 and that the X-Day, or beginning day of the “Yamamoto Plan,” be fixed for December 8 (Tokyo time).²⁶

Ten days later, on November 20, accompanied by Kurusu, Nomura presented to Hull the second proposal (plan B or *modus vivendi*) endorsed by the Imperial Conference of November 5. In this final proposal, Japan pledged an immediate withdrawal from southern Indochina, along with evacuation from the northern region upon the conclusion of a satisfactory peace with China. In return, the United States was to cease its support to China and to restore normal commercial relations between the United States and Japan.²⁷ This proposal was rejected by Hull on November 26, and the American counter-proposal was more demanding: Japan’s complete withdrawal from both Indochina and China in exchange for the restoration of trade.²⁸

On the morning of November 26, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku’s fleet, including six carriers, two battleships and dozens of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, set sail for Pearl Harbor. Then, after a series of secret meetings, on December 1, the Imperial Conference and Cabinet meeting decided to go to war against the United States and reconfirmed December 8 (Tokyo time), or December 7 (Pearl Harbor time) to be “X-Day”

²⁶*JM* 24:4; *IMTFE*, 16:39,642, & Exhibit 809 (5:10,347-50).

²⁷*IMTFE*, 4:9,307; Exhibit 1245-H (5:10,811-4)

²⁸For the full text of this "Hull Note," see *IMTFE*, 4:9,307; Exhibit 1245-L (5: 10,815-23); Shigenori, *Cause of Japan*, pp. 170-173; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, p. 13; *FRUS, Japan, 1931-1941*, II, pp. 768-770;

On December 6, Roosevelt sent a letter to Emperor Hirohito, hoping to avert the war.²⁹ It was too late. At 2:20 PM the next day, when Nomura met with Hull to deliver Japan's declaration of war, Japanese bombers had already attacked Pearl Harbor.

B. INDOCHINA AND THE AMERICAN WAR EFFORT:

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 (local time) and the German declaration of war against the United States the following day placed Viet-Nam's future in an entirely different context. Henceforth, America's Indochinese policy would be determined by the military requirements of a global conflict.

Allied strategy—as it had been decided on as early as March 1941 by the American and British Chiefs of Staff³⁰—centered upon fighting and defeating the *Axis* powers in and around Europe. In the Far East, despite bitter criticism from General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. forces in this region,³¹ the Allied effort was limited and defensive. Ground and naval forces were employed solely to protect strategic islands and archipelagoes in the Pacific and the main sea routes. Continued Chinese participation in the Pacific war was encouraged with exhortation, diplomatic concessions and the occasional supply of economic and material support. Meanwhile, in the former European colonies which had swiftly fallen under Japanese occupation after Pearl Harbor, anti-

²⁹*IMTFE*, Exhibit 1245-J (5:10,825-9). *FRUS, Japan, 1931-1941*, II, pp. 784-786; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, pp. 14-15;

³⁰Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in Kent R. Greenfield (ed), *Command Decision* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1960), pp. 11-47; Kent R. Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 5, 26-27.

³¹Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 194-195 [henceforth, *Politics of War*].

Japanese movements and nationalist aspirations were encouraged by the American policymakers. Roosevelt heralded his anti-colonialism in the so-called *Atlantic Charter*, the result of his secret meeting with British Premier Winston Churchill in August 1941.³²

This ambitious statement of Allied “war aims” rejected territorial aggrandizement and the use of force as an instrument of national policy, affirmed the principles of self-determination and freedom of the seas, advocated equal access “to the trade and to the raw materials of the world,” proclaimed the objectives of freedom from fear and want, and promised efforts to secure “improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security.” Churchill subsequently went to great lengths to emphasize that the self-determination clause was intended solely for Nazi-occupied Europe but Roosevelt promoted its implications for the former colonies. These “noble ideals” of self-determination and independence were reiterated in the United Nations Declaration four months later, signed on January 1, 1942 by representatives of the 26 nations at war with the Axis.

The American Office of War Information [OWI] and, especially its San Francisco radio station, openly urged the Indochinese peoples to take arms against both the Japanese and their Vichy French collaborators.³³

Ironically, however, through the first year of the war, the Americans retained diplomatic ties with Vichy and repeatedly assured the imperialist powers that their prewar colonial possessions would be restored after the defeat of the Axis. Washington announced

³²This document was originally a press release after the Roosevelt-Churchill meeting.

³³There were at least four Vietnamese working for the American OWI radio station in San Francisco at that time, including Andre-Marie Tao Kim Hai, a French citizen of Sino-Vietnamese origins, Nguyen Duc Thanh, Ly Duc Lam, Bui Van Thinh, and Nguyen Van Luy. Tao also worked for the French intelligence. See his reports to Jean de la Roche, in CAOM (Aix), INF, Carton 178, d. 1425.

on at least seven occasions between 1940 and 1942 that France would regain its sovereignty over all territories it had possessed before the war. As late as November 1942—after Roosevelt had privately told the Allied representatives at the Pacific War Council in Washington that France, in light of its colonial record, would not deserve to recover Indochina after the war—Robert Murphy, his representatives in North Africa, during the Allied landings, wrote to General Henri Giraud, the American protege:³⁴

[T]he restoration of France to full independence, in all the greatness and vastness which it possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United States.

It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be reestablished as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939.

Privately, the American authorities, from Roosevelt to second-ranking officials in the State Department, also repeatedly assured the French ambassador to Washington of America's respect for French colonial claims.³⁵

C. ROOSEVELT'S TRUSTEESHIP PLAN FOR INDOCHINA:

Roosevelt's attitude toward France and Indochina during the period between 1940 and 1942, it should be repeated, was ambiguous. The principal reason was that all

³⁴William L. Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York: Harper, 1966), p. 33 [*Italics mine*]. Extract from letter of November 2, 1942, Murphy to Giraud; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, p. 16; Also see Edward Drachman, *United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940-1945* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 34-40 [henceforth, *US Policy*].

³⁵The other American commitments to this issue included: official press release on the Franco-Japanese Treaty of July 29, 1941; Roosevelt's letter to Petain on December 7, 1941; in a conversation between Ray Atherton, Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs, and the French ambassador to Washington, Gaston Henri-Haye; statement on New Caledonia, an island controlled by the Free French (March 2, 1942); a note to the French ambassador of April 3, 1942; Roosevelt's statements and messages at the time of the North African invasion, the Clark-Darlan agreement of November 22, 1942.

American efforts were absorbed, at first, in war preparations and, later, in the stabilization of the European theater. Moreover, although scornful of the Petain regime, the Americans did not consider General Charles de Gaulle's Fighting French organization in London an acceptable alternative. It was not until mid-July 1942—in preparation for the Allied invasion of the French colonies in North Africa and under British strong pressure—that the Americans started an unofficial working relation with the Gaullists. Even so, during the Allied landings, General Dwight D. Eisenhower made a deal with Admiral Francois Darlan, the former Vichy Premier who was in North Africa at that time, recognizing him as the head of the Free French government in North Africa. After Darlan's assassination on Christmas eve 1942, Eisenhower gave his formal recognition to General Henri Giraud, passing over the more popular de Gaulle. As for Indochina, partly because of Governor General Jean Decoux's allegiance to Vichy, which had broken diplomatic relations with the United States on November 8, 1942, and partly because of confusion of orders among the decision-making circles, no official American policy was endorsed. After having used Indochina as a test case of strength against the Japanese in the last year of peace, Roosevelt temporarily neglected its fate in the first year of war. **It was not until late 1942 and early 1943 that Roosevelt again looked toward Indochina, and blew up a tempest among the Allied officials and leaders with his well-publicized "trusteeship plan" for Indochina.**

Roosevelt's attitude toward Vichy France began to alter after the return to power of Pierre Laval in April 1942. Laval's ascension was viewed as a sign that Washington's hope for a Vichy policy independent of Hitler's was a failure. Roosevelt recalled the American ambassador to the Petain regime, Admiral William D. Leahy, and began to use Indochina as a weapon against Vichy. In May 1942, Roosevelt told the Allied

representatives at the Pacific War Council that France would not deserve to receive back Indochina after the war.³⁶ This statement was reiterated several times in 1942.

After the Allied invasion of North Africa, Roosevelt began to make known his postwar policy toward Indochina. At a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in January 1943, Roosevelt mentioned briefly that Robert Murphy, his personal representative attached to Eisenhower's General Headquarters in North Africa, had assured General Giraud that all French colonies would be returned to France after the war. Roosevelt however added that probably some French territories, especially Indochina, would not be returned.³⁷ About two months later, at a meeting on March 27, 1943, when Anthony Eden, British Foreign Minister, arrived in Washington for a conference on postwar problems, Roosevelt brought up for the first time his trusteeship plan for Indochina—an intermediate step toward independence during which this French colony would be ruled by an international committee.³⁸

During the years 1943 and 1944, Roosevelt appeared to hold to his position. He commissioned private studies of the population and resources in Indochina.³⁹(41) He also repeatedly sought support for his trusteeship plan from the Soviet Union and China: at the Foreign Minister's Conference in Moscow in October 1943, at the Cairo meeting between

³⁶Gary Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina;" *Journal of American History*, No. 59 (Sept 1972), p. 355 [?]. Cited henceforth, "Roosevelt and Indochina."

³⁷Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (Washington: 1968), p. 514.

³⁸Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 1234-1236, 1259-1296 [?], 1706; Drachman, *US Policy*, pp. 44-46; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, p. 32; Christophe Thorne, "Indochina and Anglo-American Relations, 1942-1945;" *Pacific Historical Review*, No. 45 (Feb 1976), pp. 73-96 [henceforth, "Indochina"].

³⁹Henry Field, "How F.D.R. Did His Homework?;" *Saturday Review* (July 8, 1961), pp. 8-10; *Idem.*, *The Track of Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963).

Chiang Kai-shek and Roosevelt in the following month, and at the “Big Three” summit meeting at Teheran in November/December 1943.⁴⁰

On November 28, 1943, in discussing the postwar world, Stalin expatiated at length on the French ruling classes and suggested that they were not entitled to share in any benefits of the peace, in view of their past record of collaboration with the Japanese. Roosevelt said that he did not share Churchill’s view that France would be very quickly reconstructed as a strong nation. Stalin agreed and went on to say that he did not propose to have the Allies shed blood to restore Indochina, for example, to the old colonial rule. He repeated that France should not get back Indochina and that the French must pay for their criminal collaboration with Germany. Roosevelt said he was 100 percent in agreement with Stalin and remarked that “after one hundred years of French rule in Indochina, the inhabitants were worse off than they had been before. He said that Chiang Kai-shek had told him that China had no designs on Indochina but the people in Indochina were not yet ready for independence, to which he had replied that when the United States acquired the Philippines, the inhabitants were not ready for independence which would be granted without qualification upon the end of the war against Japan. He added that he had discussed with Chiang Kai-shek the possibility of a system of trusteeship for Indochina which would have the task of preparing the people for independence within a definite period of time, perhaps 20 to 30 years.”⁴¹

⁴⁰Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 1305-1306; Edward Stettinius, Jr., *Roosevelt and the Russians* (New York: Doubleday, 1949), p. 258; Hess, “Roosevelt and Indochina,” pp. 358-359.

⁴¹*United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, pp. 24-25; La Feber, “Roosevelt,” pp. 1284-1285.

The support of Joseph Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek increased Roosevelt's confidence in the merits of his postwar plan. While en route returning to Washington in late 1943, the President was so confident that he made public his efforts to prevent restoration of French rule in Indochina. Also he implied that the United States and China would assume the role of world policemen in Asia.. In January 1944, when the British ambassador to Washington, Frederick Wood (Lord Halifax), was instructed by London to inquire as to the meaning of Roosevelt's statements regarding Indochina, the President replied that he had meant what he said. A few days later, replying to Secretary Hull's memorandum of January 24 on the same subject, Roosevelt recalled his talks with Ambassador Wood and added:⁴²

. . . France has the country [Indochina]—thirty million inhabitants—for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. As a matter of interest, I am wholeheartedly supported in this view by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and by Marshal Stalin. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign Office in this matter. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. . . . Each case must, of course, stand on its own feet, but the case of Indochina is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that.

Roosevelt's trusteeship did not go unchallenged. The strongest opposition to the plan naturally came from France. France fought jealously for its postwar recovering of Indochina. But the Free French Committee for National Liberation in Algiers was too weak to have any substantial voice and Roosevelt disliked de Gaulle, the Free French

⁴²"Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State," January 24, 1944; in *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers 1944: The British Commonwealth and Europe* (Washington: GPO, 1965), p. 773; Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 1597; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1947-1967*, Bk 7, p. 30.

chief.⁴³ Meanwhile, the Vichy government had cut off diplomatic relations with the United States immediately after the Allied invasion of North Africa. Fortunately for the French, it was Britain which took the leading role in opposition Roosevelt's postwar plan for Indochina, and never retreated on this matter.⁴⁴

The trusteeship plan was also opposed within Roosevelt's inner circle. Hull and his assistant, Sumner Welles, thought that Indochina should be returned to France after the war.⁴⁵ The American military leaders were concerned about the occupation of Pacific islands taken from Japan rather than Indochina and Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ In August 1944, shortly after the "liberation" of France, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's closest advisor, told British officials that the trusteeship plan referred only to the raising of living standards of Indochinese people.⁴⁷ Early in January 1945, Hopkins told Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Edward R. Stettinius, who had replaced Hull as Secretary of State in the fall of 1944, that "there was need for a complete review not only of the Indochina question but of our entire French approach."⁴⁸

⁴³As early as December 1943, Henri Hoppenot, the Free French representative in Washington, had requested French participation in Pacific operation, particularly in Indochina. In July 1944, in a visit to Washington, Charles de Gaulle received in "pensive silence" Roosevelt's suggestion of offering to France Filipino experts and advisors to help France establish a more progressive policy in Indochina; James Eyre, *The Roosevelt-MacArthur Conflict* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Craft Press, 1950), p. 156. Also see George Herring, "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," *Diplomatic History* (Spring 1977), vol. I, no. 2, pp. 98-99. Cited henceforth, "Truman Administration."

⁴⁴See Chapter XI *infra*.

⁴⁵Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 1595-1598; Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), pp. 297-303.

⁴⁶Herring, "Truman Administration", pp. 98-99.

⁴⁷La Feber, "Roosevelt," p. 1289.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 1291.

After the second Quebec conference in November 1944, in which Roosevelt had decided not to use American troops in Southeast Asia, except the Philippines, the trusteeship plan weakened almost daily. In December 1944, when London demanded that Gaullist French saboteurs be sent into Indochina, Roosevelt first refused, but finally agreed to look the other way.⁴⁹ A month later, at the Yalta Conference, held in the Crimea from February 4 to 11, 1945, Roosevelt's concept of post war trusteeship for Indochina was almost dismissed. Stalin privately agreed with Roosevelt's,⁵⁰ but when the issue of trusteeship under the auspices of the United Nations was presented by Secretary of State Stettinius at the meeting of February 9, Churchill promptly and vehemently objected. It was then decided that trusteeship was to be restricted to League of Nations mandate territory taken from the enemy, and areas voluntarily turned over to the United Nations by their former colonial powers. In other words, Indochina became a matter for purely French determination.⁵¹

Roosevelt did not surrender easily. On his return to Washington, he held a press conference aboard the cruiser *Quincy* on February 23, and told reporters for the first time the details of his trusteeship plan for Indochina, and he also expressed his disappointment about Churchill's opposition:⁵²

. . . I suggested . . . to Chiang [Kai-shek], that Indochina be set under a trusteeship—have a Frenchman, one or two Indochinese, and a Chinese and a Russian,

⁴⁹*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel), vol I., p. 11; La Feber, "Roosevelt," p. 1291.

⁵⁰Minutes of Roosevelt-Stalin Meeting, February 8, 1945; *FRUS, The Conferences at Malta and Yalta* (Washington: GPO, 1955), p. 770.

⁵¹Stettinius, *Roosevelt*, pp. 236-238; Hess, "Roosevelt and Indochina," p. 363.

⁵²Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Diplomacy, 1941-1968*, revised ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1968), p. 23.

because they are on the coast, and maybe a Filipino and an American, to educate them for self-government. . . .

Stalin liked the idea, China liked the idea. The British didn't like it. It might bust up their empire.

It was Japan's purge of Vichy French rule in Indochina on March 9, 1945 which struck the last blow at the trusteeship plan. While the British actively supported the French units fleeing Tonkin to Laos and, then, the Sino-Indochinese border—touted by French and British propaganda as “Free French resistance”—the American field commanders were not as helpful as the French expected.⁵³ This lukewarm attitude brought about strong protests from the French. In a conversation with the American ambassador to Paris, Jefferson Caffery, on March 13, 1945 the French Premier de Gaulle bitterly said:⁵⁴

What are you [Americans] driving at? Do you want us to become, for example, one of the federated states under the Russians' aegis? . . . When Germany falls, they will be on us. . . . We do not want to become Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit but we hope you do not push us into it.

Finally, Admiral Leahy, Roosevelt's Chief of Staff, succeeded in persuading Roosevelt to support French troops retreating from Indochina.⁵⁵ On April 3, Roosevelt allowed Stettinius to issue a statement regarding the result of the Yalta Conference, including the United Nations trusteeship provision.⁵⁶ Nine days later Roosevelt died. His trusteeship plan for Indochina was interred with him.

⁵³Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1983), pp. 31-35. Cited henceforth, *Advice and Support*.

⁵⁴*FRUS, 1945: British Commonwealth and Far East*, vol. VI, p. 300. This warning was repeated on May 5, 1945 by de Gaulle; *Ibid.*, 1945, vol. IV, pp. 686-687.

⁵⁵Hess, “Roosevelt and Indochina,” p. 64; La Feber, “Roosevelt,” p. 1293.

⁵⁶*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel), vol. I, pp. 14-15.

D. TRUMAN'S HANDS-OFF POLICY:

Stepping out of Roosevelt's shadow, Harry S. Truman (1945-1953), the new president, endorsed what may be termed a "hands-off" policy. At that time, victory over Germany was imminent, but economic crisis spread over "liberated" Europe. Consequently, Europe remained the center of American postwar planning. Even in the Pacific Theater, Southeast Asia was given the next to the lowest priority by the State Department.⁵⁷ As for Indochina, Truman's administration carried on Roosevelt's retreat from his wartime trusteeship plan. On May 8, at the United Nations conference in San Francisco, Secretary Stettinius told French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault that "the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of [the American] government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indochina."⁵⁸

Meanwhile, on June 2, the Truman administration endorsed the recognition of French sovereignty over Indochina.⁵⁹ On June 10, 1945, at his own request, Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley in China was given new guidance on Truman's policy toward Viet-Nam. In this message, Washington informed Hurley that Indochina would be placed under an international trusteeship only if France consented. President Truman, the message went on, intended however.⁶⁰

. . . at some appropriate time to ask that the French government to give some positive indication of its intention, in regard to the establishment of basic liberties and an increasing measure of self-government in Indochina, before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect.

⁵⁷Drachman, *US Policy*, pp. 114-116.

⁵⁸Tel. of 9 May 1945, Grew to Caffery, *FRUS, 1945*, vol. VI, p. 307; US Department of Defense, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Bk 8, p. 27.

⁵⁹"Politico-Military Problems in the Far East and Initial Post-Defeat Policy Relating to Japan;" *FRUS, 1945*, vol. VI, pp. 557-568.

⁶⁰*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel), vol. I, p. 15; Hammer, *Struggle*, p.44n12. Spector gives the date of June 7, 1945; Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 47.

Then, at the Potsdam Conference, the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that both Chinese and British troops would occupy Indochina after the defeat of Japan, a decision which implicitly permitted France return at least to Cochinchina. About a month later, Truman himself reportedly told de Gaulle in Washington that his government “offer[ed] no opposition to the return of the French Army and authority in Indochina.”⁶¹ On September 19, four days before the French takeover of Saigon, both the Chinese General Lu Han and his American Advisor, General Philip E. Gallagher, were ordered to help France restore its authority in Viet-Nam. Lu Han refused to do so, and not until October, when General Jacques Phillippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque, Commander of the French Expeditionary Forces in the Far East, began to reconquer South Viet Nam [Nam Bo], did Gallagher succeed in persuading Lu Han to soften his attitude toward the French. Meanwhile, the agents of the *Office of Strategic Services [OSS]* in Indochina were also ordered to come home in late September leaving their “friends of forest”—i.e., the Communist-led Viet Minh—to the mercy of the French.⁶²

On October 27, 1945, after Leclerc had advanced his occupying troops to the Mekong delta, Truman delivered a speech in which he dealt with the question of colonial countries. Truman’s speech was so vague and ambiguous that both the Viet Minh and the French could praise it.⁶³ Subsequent events were to show that **Truman’s “hands-off” policy was in favor of the French reconquest of Viet Nam.** In the last months of 1945,

⁶¹Charles de Gaulle, *The War Memoirs: Salvation, 1944-1946*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), p. 242; *Idem., Memoires de guerre, vol. III: Le Salut, 1944-1946* (Paris: Plon, 1959), pp. 550-553.

⁶²US Senate, *Hearings* (1972), pp. ? ;Drachman, *US Policy*, pp. 131-140, 157.

⁶³Drachman, *US Policy*, p. 118.

Truman made several decisions which indirectly strengthened the French position in Indochina. The transfer to France by Britain of 800 American lend-lease jeeps and trucks in Saigon in September 1945 was approved by Truman on the grounds that “removing the equipment would be impracticable.”⁶⁴ From October 1945 onward, tens of thousands of French troops entered Viet Nam with American weapons, in American uniforms, and on American-made ships. Meanwhile, at least eight messages from Ho Chi Minh to Washington during the fall of 1945 and the spring of 1946, asking for political recognition and American support, were ignored by American.⁶⁵ Finally, after open warfare had flared up in Viet-Nam in late December 1946, the United States allowed credit for France to purchase \$160 million worth of surplus war equipment. From that day on, the United States made it easier for France to carry out its colonial reconquest.

II. THE SOVIET UNION:

Historically, as mentioned earlier, the Soviet Union [USSR] was the Mecca for Vietnamese Communists. Under *Comintern* auspices, the Soviet Union had as early as the 1920's recruited and trained a number of Vietnamese agents residing in France and China. One of these was Nguyen Sinh Con (1892-1969)—with over 150 aliases, better known as Nguyen Ai Quac (1919-1933), and Ho Chi Minh (1943-1969). It was Con who organized in China the Vietnamese Communist Party [VCP] in 1930, that was later renamed the

⁶⁴*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel), vol. I, p. 18; *New York Times*, 25 Oct 1945.

⁶⁵*United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Bk I, C-63 and *passim*; *The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel), vol. I, p. 51.

Indochinese Communist Party [ICP], all of its leaders were trained and supported by Moscow. After residing a short period in Siam [Thailand] and a British prison in Hongkong, Con returned to the Soviet Union between 1934 and 1938, reportedly attending the Lenin Institute. In November 1938, as international tensions steadily increased in both Europe and the Far East, Moscow decided to send Con back to China, under the alias of Ho Quang, temporarily attached to the Chinese Communist Eighth Army in northern China. Whatever his true mission, Con sent a series of articles denouncing the Japanese brutalities in China to the ICP journals in Sai Gon and Ha Noi, and contacted the *ICP* cell in Kunming, Yunnan, in early February 1940.

In February 1941, after the Japanese thrust into Tonkin, Con returned to northern Viet Nam, establishing a secret base in Cao Bang province, adjacent to the Chinese border. Three months later, he convened the “Eighth” Plenum of the *ICP*, during which Dang Xuan Khu (better known later as Truong Chinh) became Secretary General, and the *League for Independence of Viet-Nam [Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh or Viet Minh]* was officially adopted as the ICP’s mass organization inside Indochina.

The historical background of Con and the ICP inevitably suggests that a close relation existed between Moscow and Hanoi. A lack of precise documentation makes such an assumption speculative. Indeed, the Soviet Union—officially, at least—displayed very little interest in Ho’s organization and activities through the war years and the immediate post-war period.

A. SOVIET WARTIME POLICIES:

Prior to Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Soviet Far Eastern policies were flexible. Tension between the USSR and Japan steadily increased after Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931. In 1935, at its Seventh Congress, the *Comintern* endorsed an anti-Fascist resolution, aimed mainly at challenging the rise of Nazi Germany and militarist Japan. In retaliation, Germany and Japan concluded the Anti-*Comintern* Pact of November 25, 1936. After Japan's invasion of China in July 1937, the USSR gave moral support to Chinese resistance forces and concentrated a substantial army along its Chinese border. Several clashes between Russian and Japanese troops took place between 1938 and 1939, the most serious taking place near Lake Khasan (Changkufeng) in July-August 1938 and Nomonhan (Khalbin-Gol) in the summer of 1939. With the Soviets primarily concerned with Nazi expansionism and Japan increasingly preoccupied with China and the United States, the two sides managed to settle these conflicts diplomatically. In 1940 and 1941, Soviet-Japanese relations eased somewhat as the two nations' increasing concern with other foreign policy issues gradually pushed the question of Manchurian-border security into the background. In April 1941, these new priorities were reflected in the conclusion of a Neutrality Pact between the USSR and Japan; its provisions were upheld until the summer of 1945. By putting their Far Eastern quarrel on ice, the Soviets kept their hands free to concentrate on their European frontier, while Tokyo was free to launch a "southern strategy" directed toward Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The pact was particularly useful to both parties during its first year. Japan repeatedly refused German requests to join their war against the USSR with an invasion of Siberia, while the Soviets stood clearly aside throughout the escalating crisis between Japan, the United States, and

the European colonial powers, whose final phase opened with Tokyo's military occupation of southern Indochina and ended with the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During the war, Stalin's Russia concentrated all its efforts on fighting the Germans, temporarily abjuring exportation of proletarian revolution to the Far East. Both the British and the Americans heartily welcomed Stalin's Russia joining the anti-German battle. On the same day of the German invasion, Britain declared its support for the Soviet Union. About a fortnight later, on July 12, the Soviet Union and Great Britain concluded a mutual assistance agreement. On August 25, a joint Soviet-British force entered Iran. Although the United States was not yet at war, the Roosevelt administration was apparently delighted to receive the Soviet Union into the ring of "peace-loving" countries. On July 24, after the conclusion of the Soviet-British Mutual Assistance agreement, Roosevelt released Russian credits and promised American aid. About five months later, on August 2, the United States and the USSR exchanged notes concerning economic assistance. In late October, Roosevelt approved a credit of one billion dollars for Russia. Finally, on January 1, 1942, the Soviet Union was among the 26 signatories of the United Nations Declaration, built on the somewhat doubtful base of wartime alliance between the stronghold of the world revolution of the proletariat and its ideological adversaries.

In the following years, Stalin displayed his political as well as military cooperation with his non-Communist allies. The Soviet press concentrated on denouncing Fascism and refrained from commenting on sensitive issues such as colonialism. And, on May 22, 1943, Stalin went so far as to dissolve the *Comintern*.

Regarding Asia in general, the USSR, at least officially, maintained a non-committal attitude. During the period from 1942 to the fall of 1944, the USSR gave

repeated assurances to Japan that it would observe and act in accordance with the Neutrality Pact of April 1941. Although the Russian entry into the war against Japan had been discussed among the Allies as early as the fall of 1944, the “Steel Man” seemed reluctant to do so. In September 1944, three months after the Allied landings in Normandy, Moscow was still assuring Tokyo that Soviet-Japanese relations would remain normal. It was not until February 1945 that Stalin, under American and British pressure, agreed at Yalta to declare war on Japan after the termination of war in Europe. This agreement, however, allowed a three-month delay for Soviet entry and was, moreover, top secret. Russian diplomats subsequently assured the Japanese that the Yalta Conference had included no discussion on the Far Eastern questions.(68) As late as April 1945, after announcing that the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact would not be renewed, the Russian government still pledged that the Pact would nevertheless be observed for another year.(69) Such false assurances, ironically, led Japan to try to secure Russian mediation for an end of the war. Instead, Japan received a Pearl-Harbor-like ultimatum on August 8, 1945, just as the Red Army invaded Manchuria.

As the European war ended, the USSR was more concerned with its internal affairs and Eastern Europe problems than it was with Asia. While emerging as a superpower, the USSR faced mountainous adversities. Hitler’s invasion had been costly indeed. Russia needed time for economic reconstruction and political stabilization. From a strategic viewpoint, fear of a revived Germany motivated Stalin to build a buffer zone along Russia’s Eastern European border and to cultivate alliances with Western European nations, such as de Gaulle’s France. For better or worse, Stalin and his lieutenants shared the view of their American and British counterparts concerning global zones of influence. Consequently,

while the Red Army was advancing on Berlin, Stalin launched a major diplomatic campaign in Europe. His most conspicuous act was to invite de Gaulle to Moscow for a state visit and the conclusion of the Soviet-French Friendship Treaty in December 1944. This move paved the way for the home return of Maurice Thorez, the Secretary General of the *French Communist Party*, who had taken refuge in Russia since the prohibition of Communism in September 1939, and the subsequent expansion of various “leftist” parties and organizations in France—which were powerful enough to force Premier de Gaulle to resign in January 1946.

Given this context of global strategies—i.e., self-preservation and Europe-firstism—Stalin’s approach to the Far Eastern questions was ambiguous. The key targets of Soviet wartime Far Eastern policies were Japan and China. Prior to the sack of Berlin in May 1945, and probably as late as July 1945, Stalin’s main aims were to restore Russia’s “former rights” in Eastern Asia before the Russia-Japanese war of 1904-1905, and to obtain as much as possible in war reparations from Japan. Regarding China, Moscow officially supported Chiang Kai-shek by endorsing a coalition government between the Kuomintang and Communists. As for the rest of Asia, Stalin was non-committal. Such prewar terminologies as “world proletarian revolution” had disappeared from the Soviet press. Although giving heavy coverage to the World Trade Union Conferences in Europe, the fortnightly *The War and the Working Class*—a Soviet official magazine in English, to be renamed *New Times* on June 1, 1945—mentioned India only a few times. Both Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh League were never mentioned.

Prior to Japan’s surrender, there was only a very general article in this journal by a certain E. Zhukov dealing with the colonial issues. After analyzing current literature

“among the British, Dutch and American circles,” Zhukov pointed out that “the spirit of the haughty, racial colonizer approach toward the peoples of backward and dependent countries” still persisted, and that “this spirit permeated a number of utterances on the colonial question.” As a result, despite some possible “revision” of the colonial status, the colonial powers were to preserve their positions in the colonies and perpetuate the status quo. In his view, the colonial powers “will offer strenuous resistance to any positive steps that may be taken toward abolishing, or even alleviating, colonial oppression.” Nevertheless, Zhukov failed to specify any concrete measures to be taken by the USSR against colonial hegemony. Instead, he vaguely stated:⁶⁶(70)

The removal of [the systems of colonial enslavement of hundreds of millions of people] is an essential condition for the inclusion of vast countries and the peoples inhabiting them, in the general channel of humanity’s economic, political and cultural development.

Whether this was simply lip-service on the Soviet part in response to the Indian nationalist movement or a first step aimed at renewing Russian engagement in the Far East, Zhukov’s article was harshly responsive to the current changes in the colonial world.

As for Indochina, Stalin reportedly supported Roosevelt’s postwar “trusteeship” plan at both the “Big Three” conferences at Teheran and Yalta. However, no records exist indicating that “UJ” [Stalin] pressed the British on this point.⁶⁷(71) Meanwhile, the Soviet press—or, more precisely, *The War and the Working Class*—was completely mute on the

⁶⁶70. E. Zhukov, “The Trusteeship Question;” *The War and the Working Class*

⁶⁷71. “UJ” or “Uncle Joe” was Stalin’s nickname used by Churchill in his secret correspondence with Roosevelt during the war. See Francis L. Lowenheim, Harold D. Langley and Manfred Jonas (eds), *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975), p. [556]. Cited henceforth, *Secret Wartime Correspondence*.

Indochinese issue. There was neither reference to the Viet Minh Front nor even to the Japanese purge of the French in Indochina in March 1945. The famine which took over one million Viet lives was also not mentioned.

This silence deserves special attention. First, considering the *Comintern*'s support for Nguyen Sinh Con and the "returnees from Russia" in the past, such silence shed some light on the true relations between the USSR and the *Indochinese Communist Party* [ICP]. Although in later years Ho Chi Minh was touted as "the architect of the eternal friendship between Viet-Nam and the Great Soviet Union,"⁶⁸ it seems that in these years he stood somewhere on the far fringe of the Soviet intelligence community, via the *Comintern*. Consequently, after the dissolution of the *Comintern* in May 1943, Linov Con (Ho) was free to proceed on his own mission within the broad context of anti-Fascism, and probably with some support from the *Chinese Communist Party* [CCP]. His seizure of power in August 1945 and his professed pro-American stance, therefore, were cautiously watched by the Soviet authorities but there was no official Soviet stand regarding his regime. At any rate, his junior status in the Soviet intelligence network was confirmed after the August Revolution of 1945 when his name and the national name of Viet Nam were repeatedly misspelled in *New Times*.⁶⁹

Above all, this silence gave support for the assumption that Stalin's Russia was not interested in the colonial question during the war. Even in late 1944 and early 1945, Soviet global strategies prevented the Soviet authorities from engaging in such a minor, but

⁶⁸See, for instance, *Nhan Dan [People]* (Hanoi), 30 June 1983.

⁶⁹A. Guber, "What's Happening in Indonesia and Indochina;" *New Times* (Moscow), No. 11 (1 November 1945). Also see various entries regarding "*Ho She-ming's Viet Nham*" in *New Times* in January 1947 (International Life).

complicated, issue as the colonial question. In the case of Indochina, Stalin elaborately avoided antagonizing an ego-centric de Gaulle, whose friendship he needed at that time.

In brief, there was a surprising similarity in the wartime policies of the “Big Two” toward Indochina. Both the United States and the Soviet Union at first endorsed the postwar trusteeship plan for Indochina, but were then retreated, thus tacitly designating it a French internal affair.

B. POSTWAR SOVIET POLICIES:

On August 8, 1945, Stalin’s Red Army invaded Manchuria and declared war on Japan. Stalin, however, appeared to honor his word at the Yalta Conference concerning the postwar situation in Asia. Regarding China, he strongly supported the formation of a coalition government between Chiang and Mao’s CCP. The USSR and Chiang’s China reached a friendship agreement on August 14, 1945—the very day on which Japan surrendered. Thereafter, the Soviet authorities concentrated on dismantling Japanese industrial plants and other assets in Manchuria rather than on helping Mao’s proletarian cause. Although the USSR provided Mao’s forces with weapons and protection in Manchuria—the generosity of which drew high praise from Mao and his lieutenants at that time—Stalin’s official stance was to maintain diplomatic relations with Chiang and to endorse a coalition government.

Regarding Viet Nam, there was no significant change in Soviet policy—or more precisely, its non-policy. According to an American source, a Soviet agent named Stephane Solosieff was present in Hanoi in August-September 1945. He presented himself to Major Patti, the senior American *OSS* officer, as “some sort of Soviet liaison to the

Japanese political offices in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon with the task of looking after the interests of Soviet citizens in Indochina who numbered . . . five or six hundred.”⁷⁰ Solosieff’s mission, however, was apparently no more than a marginal intelligence operation.

In Moscow, Ho Chi Minh’s coming to power received very little attention. The name “Indo-China” was mentioned for the first time in the *New Times* on October 15, 1945, in an article dealing mainly with Japanese imperialism.⁷¹ In the next issue, a certain A. Guber wrote an article dealing with the situation in Indochina—the first of his two articles regarding Ho’s republic during the 1945-1947 period. Although he gave a relatively detailed account the political and military developments in Indochina (together with those in Indonesia), Guber’s tone was moderate. He stated vaguely:⁷²

The threat to restore colonial rule in its previous forms, which are unacceptable to the peoples of Indonesia and Indochina is meeting with growing assistance. The sympathies or progressive forces all over the world are entirely with the masses who are striving for freedoms and who have a right to be free.

Meanwhile, in December 1945—after the French reconquest of Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo had been carried out with strong support from British troops, using rearmed Japanese prisoners-of-war⁷³—the *New Times* published another article by E.

⁷⁰Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, p. 178.

⁷¹Gregori Evgenyev, “Japanese Imperialism and the People of Asia,” *New Times* (Moscow), No. 10 (15 Oct 1945), pp. 16-21.

⁷²A. Guber, “What’s Happening in Indonesia and Indochina;” *New Times* (Moscow), No. 11 (1 November 1945), p. 13.

⁷³*JM* 25, pp. 35-36.

Zhukov, entitled “The Trusteeship Question.” Within the context of the Soviet “peace-loving” principle, the author called for the immediate implementation of the “trusteeship” provision of the United Nations for the “inhabitants of colonial and dependent countries.”⁷⁴ This line of thought, it should be noted, had also been brought up by the Soviet representative in Hanoi several months earlier.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, in the following year—in spite of the fact that Ho Chi Minh’s government and the French were engaged in a series of crucial negotiations in both Viet-Nam and France—the *New Times* was nearly mute about Indochina. There was a sole article by A. Guber, his “geographical sketch” of “French Indo-China.” Written about the political development in “Viet-Nam” when Ho was in Paris on an official visit to observe the Fontainebleau conference, Guber gave his support to the principle of “French Union” proposed in the French Draft Constitution. After noting severe criticism by French “progressive forces” of the newly created autonomous government in Cochinchina in June 1946, Guber concluded:⁷⁶

The people of Indochina feel that the fate of their country and its independence are inseparably bound up with the consolidation of the democratic forces in France, among whom they seek support for their legitimate demands.

⁷⁴E. Zhukov, “The Trusteeship Question,” *New Times* (Moscow), No. 14 (15 December 1945), pp. 3-6.

⁷⁵Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, p. 179.

⁷⁶A. Guber, “French Indochina: Geographical Sketch,” *New Times* (Moscow), No. 14 (15 July 1946).

Five months later, another Soviet writer reiterated Guber's idea. In an article published in December 1946, Vasil'eva—the former mentor of Linov Nguyen Sinh Con in the Eastern Bureau prior to 1943—wrote:⁷⁷

The further development of Vietnam depends to a significant degree on its ties with democratic France, whose progressive forces have always spoken forth in support of colonial liberation.

It is unknown whether these presumably officially-approved assertions were based on the Soviet official line or inspired by French progressive writings at that time. In either case, two aspects of the Soviet official position are clear: The Indochina issue was purely a French matter, and the concept of a French Union consisting of France and its former colonies, based on the principle of equal rights, was acceptable to Moscow at that time. Thus, Stalin's Russia in late 1946 withdrew further from its former stance in favor of a trusteeship plan.

After the outbreak of a full-scale war in Viet Nam on December 19, 1946, the *New Times* gradually changed its editorial tone. However, in its brief references to “*Ho She-ming*” and “*Viet nham*” in the first months of 1947, it was still moderate and did not go beyond Soviet “moral support” for the Viet Minh cause. In fact, a careful comparison between the *New Times* and *L'Humanite* gives the impression that the Soviet organ simply summarized the editorial tone of the French Communist journal—both expressed two major themes of “French Union” and the legitimacy of Ho's Republic.

⁷⁷Cited in Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), p. 270 [henceforth, *Soviet Strategies*].

Representatives of the Soviet Union in Indochina also echoed the same official stance of “hands-off.” The head of the Russian Military Mission in Indochina, arriving in Saigon in October 1946, more than once declared that his government transcended the Franco-Vietnamese conflict.⁷⁸

It was not until the eventful summer of 1947—after Truman’s speech of March 12, 1947, the outbreak of the Chinese civil war, the ousting of the Communists from Paul Ramadier’s government in May, and the rise of tensions in Europe—that the USSR began to reassess its global strategies, beginning with the creation of the *Cominform* and A. Zhdanov’s “two camps” theory. Even so, the issue of Indochina stood somewhere near the bottom of the Soviet list of priorities.

C. THE INTELLIGENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL TRAILS:

Kremlin’s official line, however, did not reflect the true relations between Stalin’s Russia and Ho’s DRVN. For decades, the Soviet Union had established a solid network of intelligence service and revolutionary cells in Asia, especially in China. According to French counter-espionage reports, the *plaque tournante* of Soviet intelligence activities in Indochina in particular, and Asia in general, was Shanghai. In December 1945, the Shanghai section of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] received an instruction in the Russian language, via Vladimir Konstantinoff, to help and encourage the Vietnamese soldiers in French uniform in Shanghai entering the anti-French struggle and to organize them into revolutionary cells. This directive also indicated that further orders will be issued

⁷⁸DECS, Indochine, “Influences moscovistes et trotskystes sur le Viet Minh (15 Fevrier 1947), p. 514;” CAOM (Aix), INF, Carton 138-139, d. 1245.

by the Khabarovsk-based *Dalburo*, the Far Eastern affiliate of the newly reorganized *South Eastern Union [SAV]*, which was in charge of the whole South East Asian region, under the Soviet Politburo's direct control.

In July 1946, the Soviet Union moved its *SAV* to Shanghai. Under direct orders from the *Dalburo*, the *SAV* intensified its activities, renewing contacts with the ex-*Comintern* organizations and, especially, sending an intelligence team to Indochina through various channels. At least two agents were reportedly contacted two commercial shops in Hanoi and Hai Phong belonged to a certain Peter Koo in Shanghai. A second team was formed in the fall of 1946. It is unknown, however, whether these two intelligence teams had any relations with the Soviet Military Mission in Saigon, under the command of Colonel Vladimir Dubrovin, or Stephan Soloviev, who were responsible for the interests of the Soviet citizens in Indochina.⁷⁹

Interestingly, in September 1946—as the Franco-Vietnamese negotiations were ensuing in France—the *Dalburo* sent to the Shanghai-based *SAV* a directive denouncing the reconciliatory stance espoused by both Ho and Bao Dai. These instructions specified that⁸⁰

All Communist cells and organizations should immediately begin to act against the sold out politics of the Vietnamese leaders. . . . Concrete accusations must be made . . . against the nationalist leaders who should be dismissed or replaced by Communist representatives or Viet Minh.

. . . . Ho Chi Minh, Bao Dai . . . and the others should be considered as traitors to the Annamese peasants and workers.

⁷⁹Archimede Patti, *Why Viet-Nam?*, pp. 178-181; Anatoli A. Sokolov, “Doan quan su So-viet trong nhung nam 1946-1947” [The Soviet Military Team in 1946-1947]” (manuscript in Vietnamese).

⁸⁰Note of 15 Feb 1947; CAOM (Aix), INF, Carton 138-139, d. 1245.

Moscow's hands-off policy was also partially resulted from Ho's dissolution of the ICP in November 1945. Ho, it should be repeated, had been in Stalin's dog house for his alleged nationalist tendency in the 1930's. The dissolution of the ICP, thus, may reinforce Moscow's suspicion of Ho's heresy, if not reactionary stance or betrayal, to the proletariat revolution. It was not until February 1950 that Ho could meet Stalin, which was the first meeting between the two men, and personally explained to the Master of Kremlin his true motives.⁸¹ Apparently, Stalin was not very impressed. Although granting Ho's regime diplomatic recognition and approving Ho's request for 37-mm anti-aircraft guns, trucks and medicines, but the Steel Man assigned Indochina to Mao's sphere of influence. Even so, Ho and his lieutenants promptly reorganized the ICP, under the new banner of the Vietnamese Workers' Party [*Dang Lao Dong Viet-Nam*], and initiated a new Stalin cult in Viet Nam. While the Soviet Union was praised as "the Sun of Mankind," Stalin was conferred the familial title of "Ong" (Grand Papa), i.e., equivalent to Ho's father.⁸²

III. RELECTIONS ON "BIG TWO" POSTWAR POLICIES TOWARD VIET-NAM:

⁸¹A Vietnamese source, based on an AFP news, indicates that Ho reportedly went to Beijing in February 1950 and then Moscow in March 1950; *Tieng Doi [Echo]* (Saigon), 17 March 1950. A Chinese source states that Mao Zhedong arrived in Moscow in January 1950; Chen Jian, "China and the First Indochina War, 1950-1954;" *China Quarterly* (March 1950), pp. 89-90. Soviet and Vietnamese sources wrongly state that Ho visited China in late 1949 and then both Ho and Mao flew to Moscow together in late 1949; *An Ninh* (Hanoi), Spring of At Ty (2001), pp. 1, 3.

⁸²To Huu, the party poet, for instance, wrote: "Love for father, love for mother, love for husband, [or] love for oneself is only one-tenth of love for Grand Papa [Stalin];" or, "Stalin is the first word that a child starts his/her language acquisition."

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, amidst the declining tensions of the Cold War and the rise of anti-Vietnam-war sentiment in the United States, the regrettable retreat from Roosevelt's trusteeship plan for Indochina was a familiar theme running through many historical works. Garry G. Hess, for example, ended his article on "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina" in *The Journal of American History* as follows:⁸³

Looking back over the twenty-five years of bloodshed in Indochina since the end of World War II, a scholar can conclude that the trusteeship plan deserved more thoughtful consideration by the Allies and more vigorous advocacy by Roosevelt than it received.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his book, *The Bitter Heritage*, also concluded:⁸⁴

Roosevelt's proposal [trusteeship] plan had certain eccentricity of detail; but it was founded in realism and wisdom, and if its essence had been carried about, the world might have been spared much bloodshed and agony. Alas, the idea died with him. . . .

The trusteeship plan, however, should not be overemphasized. Until Roosevelt's death, it remained more of an idea, or in the words of the British ambassador to Washington, more a "first draft" than a systematic and concrete plan.⁸⁵ Apparently, as we have seen, the plan had been altered, if not undermined, at the Yalta Conference. Whether Roosevelt, had he lived, would have been successful in convincing France that independence for Indochina should be the prerequisite for French return to the territory is a matter of speculation. Moreover, the question of whether Truman discarded Roosevelt's

⁸³Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt," pp. 367-368.

⁸⁴Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage*, p. 23.

⁸⁵Ambassador Wood's feeling about Roosevelt verbal statements was that "the President was one of the people who used conversations as others of us use a first draft on the paper. . . . If it does not go well, you can modify it or drop it as you will." Lord Halifax, *Fullness of Day* (London: Collins, 1957), p. 263.

plan still open to differences of opinion. Evidence provides a strong backing for both sides in these arguments.⁸⁶

The motivation behind Roosevelt's plan is also debatable. Traditional historians see his plan as being motivated chiefly by America's "anti-colonialism."⁸⁷ Revisionists assert that this plan was essentially centered upon American self-interest.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Bernard Fall bitterly spells out Roosevelt's dislike of France and America's desire to exploit raw materials in the colonial world as the chief factors behind the plan.⁸⁹ Gabriel Kolko, labeled by many historians as a neo-Marxian historian, thinks that Roosevelt's trusteeship plan "was motivated by a desire to penalize French collaboration with German and Japan, or de Gaulle's annoying independence, rather than a belief in intrinsic value of freedom for the Vietnamese."⁹⁰ Although there is some truth in all these arguments, one has to take into account Roosevelt's personal dislike of de Gaule, (his "headache"), the

⁸⁶See, for instance, Gar Alpevoritz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Postdam; The Use of Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965) and Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War*. Alpevoritz, together with Drachman and Hess, emphasize a decisive break, while Kolko and La Feber stress a continuity.

⁸⁷William Range, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's World Order* (Athens, GA: Univ of Georgia Press, 1952), pp. 102-19; Drachman, *Vietnam*, chapt. II. Also see Elliot Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloane and Peace, 1945).

⁸⁸LaFeber, for example, argues that FDR "envisioned using his trusteeship approach to undermine the British as well as the French Empire;" *Idem.*, "Indochina," p. 1277. Roosevelt's plan, according to La Feber, "is a case study of how idealism, in this instance anti-colonialism, can blend perfectly with American self-interest;" *Ibid.*, p. 1294. For a brief survey of the revisionists, see David Donald, "Radical Historians on the Move;" *New York Times*, 17 July 1970.

⁸⁹Fall, *Two Viet-Nams*, pp. 49-54. Fall quotes George Taboulet's "interesting theory" that Roosevelt's particular hatred for the French in Indochina stemmed from his maternal grandfather, Warren Delano [Delaneau], who had lost a great deal of money in 1867 in prematurely selling two parcels of real estate at the entrance of the Chinese Arroyo into the Saigon river;" *Ibid.*, p. 453,n18. Taboulet, it should be added, was the former Director of Public Instruction in Cochinchina and then Director per interim of Indochinese Public Instruction in 1944. His personal papers are preserved at the Service Historique de la Marine, at Chateaux de Vincennes, an outskirt of Paris.

⁹⁰Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 91.

man who was “unreliable, uncooperative, and disloyal” to both the American and British governments and who, by challenging the authority of General Henri Giraud, the American protege, injured the British-American war effort.⁹¹ Moreover, like the Atlantic Charter, the highly idealistic trusteeship plan for Indochina might be seen, in part, as war propaganda. Whether the Indochinese would have been happier had Roosevelt lived for several additional years is open to question.

In formulating his plan for the postwar world, Roosevelt had to take into account of any instability that might follow the collapse of European imperialist powers and the resurgence toward nationhood of former colonial and semi-colonial peoples. His attention to the colonial world, especially in Asia, was clearly expressed in a conversation on March 15, 1945 with Charles W. Taussig, an advisor on Caribbean affairs. According to Taussig, Roosevelt thought that the United States would have to assist the “brown people” in the Far East to attain their independence from the Whites, because “1,100,000,000 potential enemies are dangerous.”⁹² On the question of former colonies Roosevelt tended to apply a reformist plan whereby the United States would encourage imperialist powers to proceed with a gradual decolonization, during a period from twenty to thirty years, a compromise solution which seemed at that time workable and appropriately liberal. Indochina was initially to be treated differently: France was to be kept out of the colony, which was ruled by an international trusteeship committee until the natives could govern themselves.

⁹¹Cable from Roosevelt to Churchill, via Eisenhower; and, Letter No. 228, 17 June 1943, Roosevelt to Churchill, cited in Lowenheim, Langley and Jonas (eds), *Secret Wartime Correspondence*, pp. [338], n1, & [344].

⁹²*FRUS, 1945*, vol. I, p. 124.

To cope with instability in the postwar world, Roosevelt also hoped to create a new international system of security. As he saw it, the world would be divided into spheres of influence “policed” by four great powers, i.e., the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and China. This global “law and order” was outlined in an “off-the-record” conversation with William D. Hassett on April 5, 1943. Replying to Hassett’s question on the maintaining of peace in the postwar world, Roosevelt said:⁹³

The policy of policing the world [is] not insurmountable. . . . The United States and China would police Asia. Africa will be policed by Great Britain and Brazil . . . with other interested nations cooperating. The United States will see to the protection of the Americas, leaving the peace of Europe to Great Britain and Russia.

In “policing the world,” Roosevelt presumably assumed that the Big Powers would continue harmonious relations and would work in close cooperation with one another when the war was over.

As the war dragged on, Roosevelt’s postwar plan was gradually altered. France’s strategic role in Europe and the necessity of dealing with de Gaulle, strong pressures from Great Britain, internal opposition from American officials, and Chiang’s weakness in China forced Roosevelt to reappraise his plan. The Yalta Conference decisions represented significant modification of his global order. China’s role in the future of Asia was notably reduced—Chiang even failed to regain Hong-kong from Great Britain. The Soviet Union was granted the right to regain its Manchurian sphere of influence and occupy the southern half of Sakhalin Islands from Japan. France was added to rank of the big powers who were

⁹³William D. Hassett, *Off the Record with FDR* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p. 166.

to dominate the United Nations. The United States agreed to the return of Indochina to France provided that France pledge to follow a plan of decolonization “with the proviso that independence was the ultimate goal.”⁹⁴

Entering the White House suddenly in April 1945, Harry S Truman faced mountainous difficulties. “I felt like the moon, the stars and the planets had fallen on me,” the new president told reporters.⁹⁵ In the field of foreign affairs the wartime alliance between Washington and Moscow was worsening almost daily. Despite Washington’s strong protests, Moscow was determined to create a buffer zone along the Soviet western flank. In the remainder of the devastated continent of Europe, victory over Germany could bring neither stability nor food. Leftist factions gained momentum elsewhere in Europe. The threat, in the words of W. Averell Harriman, of a “barbarian invasion of Europe” was seriously feared by Washington.⁹⁶ As for the colonial countries, national movements posed dangerous threats to the imperialist powers. The most prominent menace was to come from Asia, where patriotism and nationalism were very strong. The Second World War had strengthened the will of Asian nationalists for independence. Japan’s crushing victories over the colonial powers promised the end of a shameful era under European domination and exploitation. The war also gave indigenous peoples in various parts of occupied Asia the opportunity to form armed resistance organizations supported in many cases by the Allies in order to weaken Japan’s occupation forces. Most of these national

⁹⁴*FRUS, 1945*, vol. I, p. 124.

⁹⁵La Feber, *American, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1975*, 3rd ed. (New York:John Wiley and Sons, 1976), p. 17. Cited henceforth, *Cold War*

⁹⁶Harriman became one of Truman’s close advisors at that time. See George Herring, *Aid to Russia, 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 194-196; La Feber, *Cold War*, pp. 17-18.

movements consisted, in part, of Communist leaders who had been either trained by Moscow or inspired by Marxist-Leninism.

Truman and his lieutenants, however, paid very little attention to the colonial world. Faced with these complicated situations, they listed Europe as the highest priority in foreign affairs. It was there, in Europe, that the Soviet Union, despite its terrible losses in casualties and destruction, was reemerging as a potential enemy of the United States and other capitalist countries. For decades Communism and the propaganda of “proletarian revolution” had outraged and frightened the American policymakers. The wartime alliance was now deteriorating in the face of Stalin’s intervention in “Liberated Europe.” “We must stand up to the Russians,” Truman told his Secretary of State Stettinius on his first day in the White House.⁹⁷ At that time, however, the atomic project had not yet produced a workable bomb and the participation of the Red Army in the Pacific Theater seemed as necessary as the Second Front in Western Europe in previous years. It was not until Japan’s surrender that Truman began to formulate his postwar plans to check Stalin’s imperialism.

As for Asia, Truman and his lieutenants apparently followed Roosevelt’s policy. Washington focused its attention primarily on the Far East, notably China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. South and Southeast Asia were officially “returned” to the respective colonial powers and consequently became subject to their respective police actions. The American “hands-off” policy in Southeast Asia resulted in restoration of the prewar *status quo*.

This policy, according to Dean Acheson, was aimed at the establishment of stable and friendly governments, and at that time, it appeared that only colonial powers could

⁹⁷La Feber, *Cold War*, p. 19.

assure the stability and friendliness that the United States expected. Some in Washington, however, were also aware of the strength of national movements in the colonies and, consequently, attempted to encourage European powers to reform their system of colonialism.⁹⁸ The Ambassador to China, Patrick Hurley, appeared to disagree with Acheson's argument. He wrote in his letter of resignation to Truman on November 26, 1945:⁹⁹

The astonishing feature of our foreign policy is the wide discrepancy between our announced policies and our conduct of international relations. For instance, we began the war with the principles of the Atlantic Charter and democracy as our goal. . . . We finished the war in the Far East furnishing lend-leased supplies and using all our reputation to undermine democracy and bolster imperialism.

Traditional historians usually cite the threat of Communism in Europe as a major factor in the shaping of Truman's pro-colonialist attitudes. They believe he was influenced by European-oriented diplomats such as James C. Dunn and Joseph C. Crew in the State Department who wanted to bolster France's power as a counterweight to Soviet westward expansion in Europe. American anti-colonialism, by this reasoning, disappeared amidst the struggle against Communism.¹⁰⁰

A few dissident diplomats, such as Raymond Kennedy, bitterly denounced the "provincialism, . . . ignorance and isolation of the American public and American

⁹⁸Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 341.

⁹⁹"The Ambassador to China (Hurley) to President Truman," Enclosure No. 50, in Department of State, *United States Relations with China* (Washington: GPO, 1949), pp. 581-584.

¹⁰⁰Laurence E. Salisbury, "Personal and Far Eastern Policy;" *Far Eastern Survey*, XIV (Dec 19, 1945), pp. 361-364.

statesmen” for the “Jim Crow attitude” toward the world.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, historians like Harold M. Vinacke assert that the United States was ready to “acquiesce” in the imperialist powers’ return to power as long as they followed a non-restrictive trade policy and guaranteed Washington a satisfactory supply of rubber, tin and other commodities.¹⁰² Kolko alleges that as long as the United States had access to raw materials and markets, Washington was “indifferent to colonialism.”¹⁰³ John W. Dower, in his “The Superdomino in Postwar Asia,” and other critical historians like Thomas McCormick, emphasize the American preoccupation with the emergence of Japan as the “Asia’s ‘workshop’,” and the regional integration of the United States, Japan and non-Communist Asia.¹⁰⁴ Still others allude to the American conception of “national security,” which varied from time to time.¹⁰⁵

The complacency with which the United States accepted colonialism probably reflected racial biases, which were not unfamiliar in the United States and in the Western hemisphere in the 1940’s. It was not a coincidence that the white Allies repeatedly used the term “free peoples” in their pronouncements about self-determination. Arguments that the colonial peoples were not ready for freedom contained a racial bias that nationalist

¹⁰¹*New York Times*, 5 May 1946.

¹⁰²Harold M. Vinacke, *The United States and the Far East, 1945-1951* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰³Kolko, *Politics of War*, p. 607; and *Idem.*, *Roots*, pp. 49-87.

¹⁰⁴John W. Dower, “The Superdomino in Postwar Asia: Japan In and Out of the Pentagon Papers;” in *The Pentagon Papers*, the Senator Gravel edition, 5 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), vol. V, p. 101; and *Empire and Aftermath* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979). I am also indebted to Professor Thomas McCormick for his scholarly kindness in providing me with a copy of his forthcoming work dealing with the American-Vietnamese relations.

¹⁰⁵See John L. Gaddis, “The Emerging Post-revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War;” *Diplomatic History*, vol. VII, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 171-190.

leaders in the colonies could never accept. The “hands-off” policy also clearly expressed the so-called *la loi du plus fort*, that justice is in the strongest hand. Like justice at the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes trials, justice for colonial peoples depended entirely on military power. In this light of justice, the prospect of a Communist totalitarian advance—because of the Munich lesson—was to be checked by restoration of imperialist domination. In this context of international codes, the reemergence of the colonies as independent nations was considered a source of instability and hostility and, consequently, should be prevented or policed by “pacification” campaigns to restore order.

The threat of Communism in Asia had the most direct impact upon Truman’s attitude toward self-determination in Southeast Asia. The establishment of a Communist regime in a foreign country was assumed to mean that the door to its market would be closed up to the flow of American trade. The economic factors were not lost amidst the concern over Communist ideology, military strategies and political upheavals. In the final months of the war, the forthcoming threat of Communism in Asia was discussed in Washington by high-ranking officials. For instance, a study prepared by the Office of Strategic Services in April 1945 that reached Truman’s desk on May 5 suggested that the United States should act to create a West European-American “bloc” not only to check the expansion of “Russian influence and control” in Europe, but to prevent Moscow’s influence “in the stimulation of colonial revolt.” The report also emphasized that the trusteeship plan for Indochina “may provoke unrest and result in colonial disintegration, and may at the same time alienate us from the European states whose help we need to balance Soviet Power.”¹⁰⁶ In September, George F. Kennan also warned from Moscow

¹⁰⁶OSS, “Problems and Objectives of United States Policy” (April 2, 1945); cited in Herring, “Truman Administration,” p. 101.

that the departure of European powers from their colonies would “completely open [these countries] to Communist penetration.”¹⁰⁷

However, Washington at first appears not to have taken the Communist threat in Asia very seriously. There may be some explanation for this attitude. First, Truman probably believed that the future of Asia would depend upon the outcome of the anti-Communist campaign in Europe. Europe, in Truman’s view, was still the heart and the mind of the world, save for the American continent. Secondly, within the American sphere of influence, i.e., the Far East, Mao Zedong did not appear to be a dangerous threat. Even at the end of 1946, when the prospect of a civil war came to seem likely, Chiang’s army outnumbered the Communist forces by more than two to one and enjoyed a far greater superiority in firepower. In South and Southeast Asia, save for Indochina, Communist elements were merely faint shadows of a proletarian revolution. Finally, Washington might have suspected that Communists in Asia were essentially patriots who had merely espoused Marxian ideology and Leninist revolutionary theory because they saw in them instruments to unify their peoples in order to drive the invaders out of their countries.¹⁰⁸ The task of pacifying these countries, the logic went on, did not appear to be insurmountable. Washington’s proposed decolonization plans might even avert uprisings by the indigenes. But the United States wanted the European powers to carry out decolonization without direct American intervention. Material assistance and advice might

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸See, for instance, Memorandum of 30 January 1946, by Richard L. Sharp; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 57.

be expected from Washington, but the problem was essentially theirs. The “hands-off” policy would nevertheless help the United States to maintain a posture of anti-colonialism.

Truman, no doubt, foresaw the inflammatory situation in Vietnam after France’s return. Added to the memory of his predecessor—who had gone too far toward undermining French sovereignty over Indochina—Truman asked and obtained de Gaulle’s pledge that “more or less ‘colonial’ countries would be granted their independence,” but the means would “inevitably be varied and gradual.”¹⁰⁹ These words satisfied Truman, and he—within the framework of the “hands-off” policy, of course—cast full support to the French reconquest of Indochina. In October 1945, after the French coup of September 23 in Saigon, the State Department repeated Dunn’s exact words to Georges Bidault at San Francisco in the previous May that the United States “had never questioned, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indochina.”¹¹⁰ Washington then approved the transfer of war equipment by Great Britain to France and ordered the *OSS* agents to leave Vietnam (the *OSS* was disbanded by November 20, 1945 by Truman’s Executive Order). About a year later, on January 8, 1947, twenty days after the beginning of open warfare in Viet Nam, the United States agreed to loan France \$160 million worth of war materials. Meanwhile, Washington turned a deaf ear to Ho’s pleas for recognition and support.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Memorandum of conversation by Dunn, August 29, 1945; *FRUS, 1945*, vol. I, pp. 121-124. According to de Gaulle, Truman assured him that the United States only wanted to see “the under-developed peoples . . . receive the means of raising their standard of living;” *Complete War Memoirs*, p. 907. It was his own idea that “the new era would mark their accession to independence though the means would inevitably be varied and gradual;” *Ibid.*, p. 910.

¹¹⁰See note 60 *supra*.

¹¹¹*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk I, C-69-104

On the Soviet side, it is undeniable that Marxist-Leninism—characterized by its fundamental antagonism to capitalism and its dogged belief in the inevitability of a world proletarian revolution—formed the general framework of Stalin’s foreign policy. However, realist that he was, Stalin followed a course of action often labeled “national communism.” Within this context of realism, Stalin hoped to prolong the wartime alliance for the sake of Soviet postwar reconstruction. From the Kremlin, he preferred to look toward Western Europe. He set his mind on building a buffer zone along the Soviet European border, embracing the Eastern European countries. The master of the Kremlin also hoped to cultivate friendship among the postwar governments in Western Europe, where Communist parties and radical organizations had gained momentum during the war. Therefore, in spite of the later chant of “eternal solidarity” between the USSR and the “Achilles of imperialism,” Stalin in fact paid very little attention to the colonial world. Even China was placed on a secondary level, at least until the outbreak of the civil war between Mao and Chiang and the concurrent formation of the *Cominform*.

As for Southeast Asia, the USSR appeared to pay even less attention to Ho’s “*Viet Nam*” than to Sukarno’s Indonesia. Following its wartime policy, the Soviet Union, temporarily at least, delegated the issue of Indochina to the French “progressive forces,” represented by Maurice Thorez’s *French Communist Party* [FCP] and Louis Saillant’s Trade Union [C.G.T.]. After the outbreak of a full-scale war in Viet Nam in late 1946, for instance, the *New Times* angrily blamed “influential French reactionary circles” and cited an accusation advanced by an Egyptian newspaper, *Al Misri*, that the British imperialists were attempting “to drive France and Holland out of their colonies in the Far East.” However, it refrained from attacking Leon Blum or the succeeding coalition government

of Paul Ramadier, so long as Thorez and other Communist leaders were still holding their ministerial posts.¹¹² Not until April 1947, when the Cold War was developing and France began to move toward the right, did the *New Times* blame the Ramadier government for French military action in Indochina and other political acts—including the establishment of a non-Communist government in exile under Bao Dai—to undermine Ho Chi Minh’s republic.¹¹³ The same month, April 1947, Zhukov highly praised the Vietnamese, together with the Indonesians, for “carrying the banner of freedom and independence into the heart of Asia.”¹¹⁴ Even so, Soviet foreign policies were still firmly focused on Europe. The *Cominform*, created in 1948, was essentially an all-European organ. China and Viet Nam received only “moral support” from Moscow.

Simply put, during the period between August 1945 to early 1947, both the United States and the Soviet Union followed similar, essentially “hands-off” policies toward Viet Nam. Both the Super Powers, for their own reasons, acquiesced in the French return to Indochina. However, for the reason of face, both paid lip-service to the cause of “decolonization.” This left the matter of Indochina in the hands of the remaining powers, namely the British and the Chinese, who were entrusted by the Allies to disarm the Japanese in Indochina, and ultimately to the French.

¹¹²“Events in Viet Nham;” *New Times* (Moscow), No. 3 (16 Jan 1947), pp. 15-16.

¹¹³“The Situation in Indochina;” *Ibid.*, No. 15 (11 April 1947), pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁴McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, p. 274.

