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. THE ROLE OF PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY SYSTEMS
. IN US FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

Pasi Tuunainen

The Role of Presidential Advisory Systems in US Foreign Policy-Making

The Case of the National Security Council and Vietnam,
1953–1961

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■ Acknowledgments

I first came across with the National Security Council (NSC) some fourteen years ago, in connection with the disclosure of the Iran-Contra Affair. I remember clearly how an NSC Staff member, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, testified live on television. I asked myself: what is this NSC and why is it shadowed by a veil of secrecy? The question was left unanswered for then, but my next encounter with the Council was in 1988, when I was collecting material for my first research paper on US policy toward Vietnam during the Eisenhower Presidency. After graduating, I revised my Master's thesis and presented it again for the degree of Licentiate in the fall of 1993. The examiners for that work, Professors Auvo Kostianen and Seppo Rytönen, encouraged me to embark on the path that would eventually lead to a doctorate. In doing so, however, they remarked that my approach would need to be changed. Then, in early 1994, while I was serving as an intelligence officer with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and on a visit to Beirut, I grew increasingly puzzled by the Eisenhower Doctrine and Eisenhower's decision to send the Marines onto Lebanese soil in 1958. How did the NSC fit into this? I asked myself. Thus, partly because of my UN peace-keeping experiences, as well as a number of other events, I decided to take up postgraduate studies. While considering possible dissertation topics, I remembered how important a "second Cabinet" the NSC had been for Eisenhower. I soon realized that the various US Presidents since the establishment of the NSC in 1947 had used it in very different ways, but that Eisenhower's approach had been exceptional, since his leadership style demanded quite a lot of the NSC machinery. Most significant in this academic process of discovery, though, was that on my initial material-gathering trip to various US archives, I noticed that the range of materials would undoubtedly permit me to make a study of Eisenhower's Council mechanism as an advisory structure in the Presidential decision-making process, with his Vietnam policy-making as a particular case study.

It would be odd to claim that I wrote this doctoral dissertation entirely by myself. Rather, many people have had an impact on its production, and in many different ways. I owe thanks to all of them. At the same time, I do, of course, accept full responsibility for all errors and deficiencies therein. When I started out on my history studies back in 1987, my first actual research adviser was Dr Osmo Kiiskinen, who introduced me to the study of the US and Vietnam. We have repeatedly touched upon the topic ever since, and, in particular, over the past five years, as we have been next-door neighbors at the University of Joensuu's History Department. But this study is, in a way, the outgrowth of research begun almost thirteen years ago. I thoroughly appreciate all of the efforts of my academic supervisors – or should I say advisers – and I cannot thank them enough for the counsel they have constantly provided. Professor

Marjatta Hietala worked efficiently during the early stages of this project, but she moved to the University of Tampere and her place was, in consequence, taken over by her successor, Professor Jukka Korpela. The extra advice given by Professor Harri Siiskonen has also been of great importance: among other things, he read through the final version of the manuscript and commented on it. Other colleagues at the History Department in Joensuu have helped and supported me in various ways. In methodological questions, for example, Professor Antero Heikkinen and Kari Miettinen have been constantly helpful, and the latter belongs to a group of young historians who have sometimes provided me with a serious boost to my spirits whenever my task seemed an uphill one. In addition, there have been some “outsiders”, such as Professors Allan M. Winkler and Lloyd C. Gardner, who have provided me with great encouragement. Moreover, Adjunct Professor William R. Copeland and Dr Jarmo Oikarinen both read several parts of the draft manuscript during the final stages of this project, which resulted in a number of small alterations and amendments. The essence of multiple advocacy was also clarified to me by Professor T. Michael Ruddy, and the Senior Researchers of the Karelian Institute were always there when I needed them.

Professor Keith W. Olson is a good friend of Finland. I am truly indebted to him for all of his help. He has assisted me in a number of ways during this time-consuming project. For instance, the hospitality of the Olsons made my archival visits to Archives II at College Park easy and pleasant, and Professor Olson has always been ready to write letters of recommendation on my behalf. Furthermore, he has been one of the pre-examiners of this thesis, as a result of which he, and also the other pre-examiner, Professor Jussi Hanhimäki, have offered invaluable comments and made suggestions for minor revisions of the text, for which I am particularly grateful.

I did not write this work in my mother tongue, and so I have sometimes needed linguistic assistance. Hence, I have bothered several members of staff at our Department of English with numerous questions. I should like especially mention Doctor-in-spe Roy Goldblatt, Dr Jopi Nyman, and, above all, Dr John A Stotesbury, who has worked magnificently at correcting the language and upgrading my style. Despite the obvious difficulties of his task, he has always been in the mood for some joking. Invaluable technical assistance has been provided by Matti Koskela, who arranged thousands of photocopies, and by Martti Pelvo, who compiled the bibliography. Maija Räisänen prepared the text for publication. Jari Koski designed the cover. To all of them I express my sincere and humble thanks.

In the course of this study, and making it possible, additional funding has proved to be indispensable. The University of Joensuu and its Faculty of Humanities, and the History Department in particular, have provided me with research grants and financial support for my domestic and foreign travels. I am also grateful to The Finnish Graduate School of History for sharing some of the travel costs with me. I also wish to thank the Finnish Historical Society and the Finnish Literature Society for accepting this work for publication in the series *Bibliotheca Historica*. The Managing Editor of the series, Rauno Endén, has been splendidly cooperative.

Life is not just about work. In substantive discussions over the years with my friends and relatives I have frequently been forced to re-think and explain my ideas, which has often resulted in further refinements. If I were to mention here just a few of the many names, I am positive that I would forget someone. For this reason, I should like to thank you all collectively.

One of the significant turning-points on my way to completing this work was the Twenty-Sixth Annual Conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, held in Toronto in late June, 2000. Numerous distinguished scholars gave me their encouragement there, for which I am appreciative. Even though Anna Kasten Nelson told me that studies to do with the NSC are often regarded as boring administrative history, she urged me to complete the thesis; David L. Anderson and John Prados also considered it a task worth undertaking. In addition, Professor Robert E. Herzstein provided me with sharp and perceptive commentary. Other valuable forums have been provided in Finland by several Tampere conferences on North American studies where I have taken part in some very constructive discussions.

In the course of preparing this study I have needed to make numerous visits to a variety of archives and libraries. I am pleased to acknowledge the professional assistance provided by the ever-helpful staff at the National Archives and Records Administration Archives II at College Park, Maryland, at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, and at the Princeton University Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library in Princeton, New Jersey. Dwight E. Strandberg, of the Eisenhower Library, did more than could have been expected: he smoothly facilitated my visit to Abilene and quickly replied to my follow-up questions with impressive precision. The Director of the Oral History Research Office of the Butler Library at Columbia University, Ronald J. Grele, provided expert assistance in New York. In addition, the staffs of the Library of Congress, the Finnish Parliamentary Library, the North American Studies Library of the Tampere University, the Library of Finnish National Defence College, Helsinki University Library and Joensuu University Library – especially the superb staff in the inter-library loan office – have all responded positively to my research needs. And I am especially grateful to President Eisenhower's son, John S. D. Eisenhower, who is a retired Brigadier General in the US Army Reserves and a prominent military historian. He kindly took the time to talk about his views and experience concerning the work of the NSC.

Throughout all these years, my whole family has been very supportive, and for this I express my deepest gratitude to them. In this, my father, Kari Tuunainen, has provided me with a model to aim for. Finally, I must thank those closest to me. I am immensely grateful to my wife Kaisa for the way in which she has worked together with me for our common cause. Even more, I particularly respect the way in which she has borne with me so tolerantly in the course of this laborious project. And last, but by no means least, I am extremely fortunate and happy that my relationship with our daughter Alma – despite her father's long absences – has developed into such a close and warm one.

Joensuu, May 2001

Pasi Tuunainen

■ Abbreviations and Acronyms

AEC	= Atomic Energy Commission
AFV	= American Friends of Vietnam
ANZUS	= Security Treaty signed by Australia, New Zealand and the United States
ARVN	= Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam
AWF	= Ann Whitman File
BOB	= Bureau of Budget
CAT	= Civil Air Transport
CBS	= Columbia Broadcasting System
CFEP	= Council for Foreign Economic Policy
CFR	= Council on Foreign Relations
CI	= Counterinsurgency
CIA	= Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	= Commander-in-Chief, US Pacific Command
CIP	= Commodity Import Program
CNO	= Chief of Naval Operations
COHP	= Columbia University Oral History Project
CR	= Congressional Record
CY	= Calendar Year
DDEL	= Dwight D. Eisenhower Library
DLF	= Development Loan Fund
DSB	= Department of State Bulletin
EDC	= European Defense Community
EXIM	= Export-Import Bank
FDR	= Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FEC	= French Expeditionary Corps
FRB	= Federal Reserve Board
FOA	= Foreign Operations Administration
FRUS	= Foreign Relations of the United States
FY	= Fiscal Year
GPO	= Government Printing Office
HFAC	= House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
IAC	= Intelligence Advisory Committee
IBRD	= International Bank for Reconstruction & Development
ICA	= International Cooperation Administration
ICASD	= Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal
ICSC	= International Commission for Supervision and Control
IEES	= International Educational Exchange Service

IFC	= International Finance Corporation
IMF	= International Monetary Fund
INR	= Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Department of State)
ISA	= International Security Affairs (Assistant Secretary of Defense for)
ISC-PL 480	= Agricultural Surplus Program
JCS	= Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFK	= John Fitzgerald Kennedy
JSPC	= Joint Strategic Plans Committee
JSSC	= Joint Strategic Survey Committee
LBJ	= Lyndon Baines Johnson
MAAG	= Military Assistance Advisory Group
MDAP	= Mutual Defense Assistance Program
MSA	= Mutual Security Agency
MSP	= Mutual Security Program
MSUG	= Michigan State University Group
NA	= National Archives and Records Administration (Archives II)
NAC	= National Advisory Council on International Monetary & Financial Problems
NAPA	= National Academy of Public Administration
NARA	= National Archives and Records Administration
NASA	= National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NATO	= North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIA	= National Institute of Administration
NIE	= National Intelligence Estimate
NIS	= National Intelligence Survey
NLF	= National Liberation Front
NSC	= National Security Council
OCB	= Operations Coordinating Board
ODM	= Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization
OISP	= Overseas Internal Security Program
OSANSA	= Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs
OSS	= Office of Strategic Services
PB	= Planning Board
PP	= Pentagon Papers
PPS	= Policy Planning Staff (Department of State)
PSB	= Psychological Strategy Board
PUL	= Princeton University Library (Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library of)
RG	= Record Group
SEATO	= Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
SFRC	= Senate Foreign Relations Committee
SMM	= Saigon Military Mission
SNIE	= Special National Intelligence Estimate
SNSCS	= Senior NSC Staff

STEM = Special Technical and Economic Mission
TERM = Temporary Emergency Recovery Mission
TRIM = Training Relations and Instruction Mission
UK = United Kingdom
UN = United Nations
UPA = University Publications of America
US = United States
USAF = United States Air Force
USIA = United States Information Agency
USIS = United States Information Service
USN = United States Navy
USOM = United States Operations Mission
USVNR = United States–Vietnam Relations
VOA = Voice of America
WHO = White House Office

■ Introduction

Foreign and National Security Policy-Making during the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidency, 1953–1961

The Foreign Policy Process

US foreign policy could be divided into international security matters, economic affairs, international organizations and law, its social and scientific dimensions, and its management. The military aspects of foreign policy and arms control and disarmament make up international security. Foreign economic policy and economic (development) assistance are included in economic affairs, and international organization refers mainly to the United Nations (UN), while the social and scientific sectors comprise educational, cultural and social affairs, scientific and technological relations, informational activities and volunteer organizations. The conduct of diplomacy and the allocation of resources make up management.¹

The American foreign policy decision-making process was, and still is, continuous. As the Chief Executive the President is the main choice- and decision-maker. Thus, a lot depends on his personal qualities. Koenig reminds us that a “President’s non-decisions” may well be of the same order of importance as the actual decisions. “Presidential decision-making”, Koenig argues, “is both an intellectual endeavor and an organizational enterprise”.²

Dwight David Eisenhower (1890–1969) was in many ways an exceptional President and he usually ranks rather high among all of the US Chief Executives. He had been born in Denison, Texas, but he grew up in Abilene, Kansas. After graduating from the West Point Military Academy in 1915 he embarked on a military career. Eisenhower became a General in 1941. He served as the Supreme Allied Commander in World War II. Academia was not totally strange to him either: he worked as the President of Columbia University in 1948–1950. Throughout those years, he took an interest in international affairs. In 1951 he became the first Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, under authority of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The call to political duty came in 1952. Eisenhower took office as the 34th President of the United States on January 20, 1953. Even though he was a Republican, his public image was somewhat non-political: Eisenhower was a war hero and a golf player with a smile.³

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1 United States Foreign Policy 1969–1970. A Report of the Secretary of State (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office [hereafter GPO] , 1971), pp. v–vii.
2 Koenig, Louis W., *The Chief Executive* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), chapter 13.
3 About Eisenhower see, for example, Divine, Robert A., *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Greenstein, Fred I., *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*:

Within the US Government, there are several people in a position to influence the decision-making and implementation of foreign policy. The President appoints his own advisers and elevates some of them to be his confidants. It is a well-known fact that President Eisenhower had a great respect for his widely experienced Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (APPENDIX I). Dulles was influential and loyal, but Eisenhower was, as Eisenhower revisionists⁴ have clearly shown, the ultimate decision-maker and not by any means simply a figurehead. In many cases, nevertheless, the President made foreign policy decisions after consulting with Dulles. In order to get advice, Eisenhower also turned to department heads and others at the meetings of the cabinet or the National Security Council (NSC). Furthermore, Eisenhower made extensive use of various ad hoc groups of Presidential aides from the various departments and the White House Staff, which assembled as committees at his direction. They were to study problems, present alternatives or make recommendations. Eisenhower's administrative style was based on the "maximized delegation of authority". Therefore, Betts notes, "he did not compromise the chain of command by asking lower-echelon officials for opinions of information".⁵

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- Eisenhower as Leader (New York: Basic, 1982); Ambrose, Stephen E., *Eisenhower: The President, Volume Two: 1952–1969* (London: Allen, 1984); and Pach, Chester J., Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).
- 4 For reviews of Eisenhower scholarship and accounts of the Eisenhower revisionism over the past three decades see, for example, Kempton, Murray, "The Underestimation of Dwight D. Eisenhower," *Esquire* (September 1967), pp. 108–109, 156; Rhodes, Richard, "Ike: An Artist in Iron," *Harper's Magazine* (July 1970), pp. 70–77; Bernstein, Barton J., "Foreign Policy in the Eisenhower Administration," *Foreign Service Journal*, Volume 50 (May 1973), pp. 17–20, 29–30, 38; DeSantis, Vincent P., "Eisenhower Revisionism," *Review of Politics*, Volume 38 (April 1976), pp. 190–207; Reichard, Gary W., "Eisenhower as a President: The Changing View," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Volume 77 (Summer 1978), pp. 265–281; McCoy, Donald R., "Trends in Viewing Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower," *Midwest Quarterly*, Volume 20 (Winter 1979), pp. 117–136; Immerman, Richard H., "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?," *Political Psychology*, Volume 1 (Autumn 1979), pp. 21–38; Quester, George H., "Was Eisenhower a Genius?," *International Security*, Volume 4 (Fall 1979), pp. 159–179; Greenstein, Fred I., "Eisenhower as an Activist President," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 94 (Winter 1979–1980), pp. 575–599; MacAuliffe, Mary S., "Eisenhower the President," *Journal of American History*, Volume 68 (December 1981), pp. 625–632; Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., "The Ike Age Revisited," *Reviews in American History*, Volume 11 (March 1983), pp. 1–11; Joes, Anthony James, "Eisenhower Revisionism: The Tide Comes In," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Volume 15 (Summer 1985), pp. 561–571; Neal, Steve, "Why We Were Right to Like Ike," *American Heritage*, Volume 37 (December 1985), pp. 49–65; McMahon, Robert J., "Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism: A Critique of the Revisionists," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 101 (Centennial Year 1985–1986), pp. 453–473; Burk, Robert F., "Eisenhower Revisionism Revisited: Reflections on Eisenhower Scholarship," *Historian*, Volume 50 (February 1988), pp. 196–209; Brinkley, Alan, "A President for Certain Seasons," *Wilson Quarterly*, Volume 14 (Spring 1990), pp. 110–119; Immerman, Richard H., "Confessions of an Eisenhower Revisionist: An Agonizing Reappraisal," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 14 (Summer 1990), pp. 319–342; Rabe, Stephen G., "Eisenhower Revisionism: The Scholarly Debate," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 17 (Winter 1993), pp. 97–115; and Bischof, Günter and Stephen E. Ambrose, eds, *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).
- 5 Barber, James David, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1977), p. 162; Anderson, Patrick, *The President's Men: White House Assistants of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson* (Garden City: Doubleday,

The very essence of Eisenhower's foreign policy decision-making was, in fact, his reliance upon his subordinates, who were, in the words of Koenig, "to define situations and present alternative approaches to them". This left the President with the task of "ratification". Eisenhower's system could be regarded as consultative management. Rosenberg argues that the foreign policy of Eisenhower was "guided by a set of moral principles". In order to achieve the objectives of US foreign policy Eisenhower utilized a variety of means short of open military action; for instance, diplomatic maneuvers, economic methods, the UN, regional organizations and covert operations. President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, writes that each President wants to leave a mark on foreign policy. According to him, Eisenhower attempted "to replace containment with proclamations of liberation".⁶

Despite the fact that the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the US armed forces, only Congress can declare war. In conducting foreign policy, the President has to act according to current legislation. He has to ask Congress for additional authority. The Senate has, for example, a say in the approval of treaties and confirmation of ambassadors. Congress also appropriates funds for foreign affairs and passes bills and resolutions in the field of foreign relations. Top foreign policy officials, who are often Presidential appointees, are called upon from time to time to testify before the committees of Congress.⁷ Even though partisan differences over national security and foreign policy were

- 1968), p. 133; Betts, Richard K., *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 34; See also Sloan, John W., "The Management and Decision-Making Style of President Eisenhower," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Volume 20 (Spring 1990), pp. 295–313.
- 6 Koenig writes that Eisenhower's decision-making was based "on 'presentations' and 'briefings', on charts and one-page summaries". Koenig, *The Chief Executive*, 1964, pp. 331–341, 352; Wanamaker, Temple, *American Foreign Policy Today* (New York: Bantam, 1966), pp. 17–21; Oikarinen, Jarmo, *The Middle East in the American Quest for World Order: Ideas of Power, Economics, and Social Development in United States Foreign Policy, 1953–1961* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1999), p. 18; Immerman, Richard H., *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), p. 46; Rubin, Barry, *Secrets of State: The State Department and the Struggle over U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 76–77, 94; Arthur S. Flemming quoted in "Perspective on Eisenhower's Values," in *Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III: The Eisenhower Presidency. Eleven Intimate Perspectives of Dwight David Eisenhower*. Ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham: University Press of America [hereafter UPA], 1984), p. 249; Rockman, Bert A., "The American Presidency in Comparative Perspective," in *The Presidency and the Political System*. Ed. Michael Nelson. 2nd ed. (Washington: CQ, 1988), p. 72; Rosenberg, J. Philipp, "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Foreign Policymaking Process", in *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Soldier, President, Statesman*. Ed. Joann P. Krieg (Westport: Greenwood, 1987), p. 127; Vinyard, Dale, *The Presidency* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), p. 135; Thompson, Kenneth W., "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Eisenhower's Leadership," in *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s*. Ed. Richard A. Melanson and David Mayers (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 23; Melanson, Richard A., "The Foundations of Eisenhower's Foreign Policy: Continuity, Community and Consensus," in *ibid.*, p. 61; Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, 1983), p. 81.
- 7 Wanamaker, *American Foreign Policy Today*, 1966, pp. 17–21. See also Dycus, Stephen, Arthur L. Berney, William C. Banks and Peter Raven-Hansen, *National Security Law* (Boston: Little, 1990), pp. 51–86, 87–137.

evident between 1945–1960, the Congressional opposition had been unable to shape policy. Likewise, it failed, Reichard writes, to present clearly articulated alternatives to Administration programs, because “policies were in such flux”. The policy-makers appealed to the “norm of bipartisanship” as a means of curtailing the congressional opposition.⁸ In Congress, the Truman’s Democrat Administration had been accused by some right-wing members of the Republican Party of the “loss” of China in 1949. In addition, the shock wave of McCarthyism during the early 1950s made the policy-makers cautious and anti-Communist in their foreign policy. According to Fisher, Eisenhower believed that a commitment by the US would have much greater impact on allies and enemies alike because it would represent the collective judgment of the President and Congress.⁹

In the conduct of US foreign policy and diplomacy, the Department of State is the main channel. The head of the Department is the Secretary of State who, in addition to advising the President on foreign affairs, supervises the activities of his department and those of the Foreign Service. Furthermore, the Secretary of State works in close cooperation with other departments and agencies, who have interests in foreign policy. Those are the White House, the Department of Defense (the Pentagon), the United States Information Agency (USIA), International Cooperation Administration (ICA); It had been Mutual Security Agency (MSA) until August 1953 and from then on until June 1955 Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), the Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Budget (BOB), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the Export-Import Bank (EXIM) and the Federal Reserve Board (FRB). State Department’s Office of Southeast Asian and Philippine Affairs was one of the six offices of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. It was headed by the Assistant Secretary of State. Routine matters were often taken care of, in accordance with Eisenhower’s management style, by officials below the level of Assistant Secretary, but important issues were submitted as far up as to the Secretary of State or the President¹⁰. If a

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- 8 Reichard, Gary W., “The Domestic Politics of National Security,” in *The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945–1960*. Ed. Norman A. Graebner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 267–268. For elaboration on the consensus during the Eisenhower years see Nelson, Anna Kasten, “John Foster Dulles and the Bipartisan Congress,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 102 (Spring 1987), pp. 43–64.
 - 9 Blum, Robert M., *Drawing the Line: The Origin of the American Containment Policy in East Asia* (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 92–95; Kahin, George McT., *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Dial, 1986), pp. 35, 64–65; Steel, Ronald, “Vietnam and United States National Security,” in *Vietnam Reconsidered: Lessons From A War*. Ed. Harrison E. Salisbury (New York: Harper, 1984), pp. 20–21. For discussion of the impact of McCarthyism and the Red Scare upon Eisenhower Administration see, for example, Broadwater, Jeff, *Eisenhower & the Anti-Communist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 137–208; and Fisher, Louis, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pp. 110–111.
 - 10 Eisenhower briefed the President-elect John F. Kennedy in January 1961 by saying: “There are no easy matters that will come to you as President. If they are easy, they will be settled at a lower level.” Eisenhower, quoted in Sorensen, Theodore C., *Decision-making in the White House* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 13.

country like Vietnam received American military assistance, there often was a military mission, usually a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) there. In the case of economic aid, there was usually a FOA/ICA mission. CIA and USIA (in the field, the United States Information Service, USIS) also had their own field representatives.¹¹

Eisenhower's military background had a great impact on his foreign policy decision-making style. The idea of his methodical approach was to make extensive use of the NSC. This meant that, as Yost has put it, the system for the conduct of foreign affairs was "centered not in the State Department but in the National Security Council". According to Eisenhower's former Staff Secretary Andrew J. Goodpaster, the NSC mechanism was "primarily concerned with policy and long-range plans, which he [the President] used as the basic tools to guide his administration". The policy questions were brought up for discussion in the Council, and the Presidential advisory machinery then produced policy options. Eisenhower's main interest was in foreign and national security policy, which is, Divine asserts, illustrated by regular Council meetings. Therefore, Eisenhower's "procedures for analyzing and debating domestic policy were not as elaborate as those of his NSC", Greenstein continues. The interdepartmental and interagency national security policy-making process as a whole, however, had also informal levels. The formal NSC process was augmented by small-group meetings in the Oval Office between the President and his key advisers or, as Burke and Greenstein conclude, even "one-to-one meetings", especially "daily consultations" with Secretary of State Dulles.¹²

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- 11 In the case of foreign aid, there were also other government policy-formulating and operational organizations. Those were the National Advisory Council on International Monetary & Financial Problems (NAC), the Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal (ICASD), the Council for Foreign Economic Policy (CFEP), the Development Loan Fund (DLF), the International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the International Educational Exchange Service (IEES), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Agricultural Surplus Program (ISCP-PL 480). Non-governmental Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) was also important. Wanamaker, *American Foreign Policy Today*, 1966, pp. 21–29; Letter to the President of the United States from the President's Committee to Study the US Military Assistance Program and the Committee's Third Interim Report, July 13, 1959, *Economic Assistance Programs and Administration* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1959), p. 49; Elder, Robert Ellsworth, *The Policy Machine: The Department of State and American Foreign Policy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1960), pp. 19–22.
 - 12 Briggs, Philip J., *Making American Foreign Policy: President-Congress Relations from the Second World War to the Post-Cold War Era*. 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman, 1994), p. 71; Yost, Charles W., "The Instruments of American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 50 (October 1971), p. 63; Goodpaster, Andrew J., "Foreword," in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. xvii; Dougherty, James E. and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *American Foreign Policy: FDR to Reagan* (New York: Harper, 1986), p. 278; Crabb, Cecil V., Jr. and Kevin V. Mulcahy, *Presidents and Foreign Policy Making: From FDR to Reagan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 191; Davis, Lynn E., "Containment and the National Security Policymaking Process," in *Containment: Concept and Policy*. Ed. Terry L. Deibel and John Lewis Gaddis. Volume 1 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1986), p. 125; Divine, Eisenhower and the Cold War, 1981, p. 24; Greenstein, Fred I., *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (New York: Free, 2000), p. 55; Burke, John P. and Fred I. Greenstein with the collaboration of Larry Berman and Richard Immerman, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (New York: Sage Foundation, 1991), p. 14.

Advising the President – The National Security Council Machinery

“I consider the NSC one of the most important policy making institutions of our entire governmental structure.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower to NSC’s Executive Secretary James S. Lay, Jr. in September 1957¹³

“I said that the National Security Council had become the most important weekly meeting of the government.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower to President-elect John F. Kennedy in December 1960¹⁴

The NSC was established by National Security Act of 1947. The Council was intended “to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and other departments and agencies of the government to cooperate more effectively”. The CIA, which was created simultaneously, was placed under the Council structure as it was charged with advising the NSC and making recommendations to it. The NSC and the CIA have epitomized what Yergin has labeled the “national security state”. Reichard adds that it is generally asserted that the two organs developed “without challenge because they were immune to partisan criticisms and, hence, to legislative control”.¹⁵

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- 13 Eisenhower’s letter to the Executive Secretary of the NSC James S. Lay, Jr., September 18, 1957, White House Office (hereafter WHO), Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (hereafter OSANSA), NSC series, Administrative subseries, Box 7, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL), Abilene, Kansas.
 - 14 Account of the meeting between Eisenhower and President-elect Kennedy, December 6, 1960, Ann Whitman File (hereafter AWF), Ann Whitman Diary series, Box 11, DDEL; Diary entry, December 6, 1960, The Eisenhower Diaries. Ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 379; also quoted in Nelson, Anna Kasten, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill’: President Eisenhower and the National Security Council,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 7 (Fall 1983), p. 323 and in Smith, Bromley K., “Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.” (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 1988), p. 2. Eisenhower’s personal secretary Ann C. Whitman has written that the NSC “was the most time-consuming part of the President’s week”. Whitman quoted in Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 322. For Whitman’s role see Donovan, Robert J., *Confidential Secretary: Ann Whitman’s 20 Years with Eisenhower and Rockefeller* (New York: Dutton, 1988), pp. 39 ff.
 - 15 National Security Act of 1947, Title I, Section 101(a), *The Decisions of the Highest Order: Perspectives on the National Security Council*. Ed. Karl R. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1988), pp. 37–39; Blechman, Barry M., *The Politics of National Security: Congress and U.S. Defense Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 139–140; Prouty, L. Fletcher, *The Secret Team: The CIA and Its Allies in Control of the United States and the World* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1973), pp. 128–129; Reedy, George E., *The Twilight of the Presidency: From Johnson to Reagan*. Rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1987), pp. 182–183; Yergin, Daniel, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton, 1977), passim; Reichard, “The Domestic Politics of National Security,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, pp. 243, 261; Schlesinger, Jr. notes that the NSC, the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) started to play “larger and larger roles in the formation of foreign policy”. Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1989), p. 368.

In his Presidential Campaign in 1952, Eisenhower had criticized Truman's NSC as having been a "shadow agency" and, therefore, he saw the need "to organize for the battles of the Cold War" by developing the Council further.¹⁶ After his inauguration in early 1953, Eisenhower soon set out to revitalize the NSC system. The new President placed value on thorough planning and staff work. Eisenhower asked a Boston Banker and Brigadier General Robert Cutler (APPENDIX II) to study the NSC mechanism and to make recommendations to improve it.¹⁷

According to Lay, Jr. and Johnson, the NSC was to "form a coherent body of thinking". Cutler was appointed as Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, whose basic concepts behind the operations of the new Council emphasized Presidential advisory character. The machinery consisted "of individuals advising the President in their own right" and not only representing the departmental or agency views. The organization favored regular and frequent meetings with full agenda and "vigorous discussion and strong leadership at all levels". The NSC was a machinery within machinery in which the principals relied mainly on their own staffs, but the system could also utilize the permanent NSC Staff and consultants. Cutler stressed that the NSC mechanism was intended for the integration and coordination of policy and that its recommendations were advisory only. The new NSC system separated policy formation and operations. By institutionalizing the Council, Eisenhower established clear lines of responsibility. The former Secretary of Defense and NSC principal, Thomas S. Gates, Jr., has said that Eisenhower's Council was an effective and a "powerful vehicle" and "the vital instrument that brought together foreign policy". Cutler's successor Dillon Anderson (see APPENDIX II) phrases it as having been "a corporate board" and "an expansion of the advisory wing that the President needs in the field of foreign affairs".¹⁸

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- 16 Leffler, Melvyn P., "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48," *American Historical Review*, Volume 89 (April 1984), pp. 346-381; Leffler, Melvyn P., *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), passim; Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill,'" 1983, pp. 307-310; Anderson, *The President's Men*, 1968, pp. 172-174; Endicott, John E., "The National Security Council," in *National Security Policy: The Decision-making Process*. Ed. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. and Uri Ra'anana (Hamden: Shoe String, 1984), p. 187. Dillon Anderson calls Truman's NSC "a sounding board or meeting place where Mr. Truman would tell part of the Cabinet what he'd done". Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, DDEL. More on the comparisons to the Truman NSC see Gordon, Bernard K., "'The Top of Policy Hill,'" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Volume XVI (September 1960), pp. 289-291. For a good overview of the Truman's NSC see Nelson, Anna Kasten, "President Truman and the Evolution of the National Security Council," *Journal of American History*, Volume 72 (September 1985), pp. 360-378. For NSC documentation between 1947 and 1952 see *National Security Council Documents*. Ed. Anna Kasten Nelson. 15 Volumes (New York: Garland, 1988).
- 17 Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill,'" 1983, pp. 307-310; Anderson, Patrick, *The President's Men*, 1968, pp. 172-174; Endicott, "The National Security Council," in *National Security Policy*. Ed. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. and Ra'anana, 1984, p. 187; Olvey, Lee D., Golden, James R. and Kelly, Robert C., *The Economics of National Security* (Wayne: Avery, 1984), p. 93.
- 18 US Senate, "An Organizational History of the National Security Council by James S. Lay, Jr. and Robert H. Johnson." A Study Submitted to the Committee on Government Operations by its Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, 86th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960, p. 29 (A copy of Lay, Jr's and Johnson's study is in Records Relating to

The modus operandi of Cutler's NSC system is revealed in the extracts of a poem that was written for a luncheon in his honor when he was leaving the White House for the first time in March 1955:

“For State is State and Defense the same and all that either will share is blame,
They'll get together when the chips are down, but in long-range planning each likes his own.

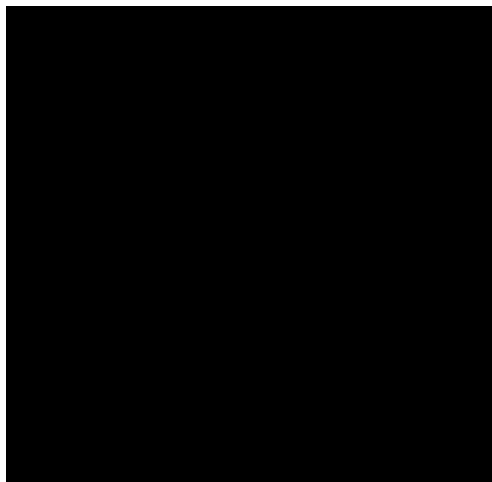
While the Treasury hatches different schemes, and FOA sends out country teams,
Who'll always respond to desperate pleas, by giving the moon -- and a hunk of green cheese.

The Cutler answer was to assemble every department, tous ensemble,
It's the biggest show since the Golden Horde, it sometimes plans, and it's never bored.

The talk's fascinating -- by decree, in the best Harvard prose they all disagree,
But hours and arguments without dilution, every so often produce a solution.

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State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 95, NSC – Administration 1960, Record Group “hereafter RG> 59, NA); Cutler, Robert, “Defense Organization at the Policy Level,” *General Electric Defense Quarterly*, Volume II (January-March 1959), pp. 8–13; Cutler, Robert, *No Time For Rest* (Boston: Little, 1966), p. 300; Gordon Gray Oral History Transcript, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Library (hereafter PUL) and in Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, National Academy of Public Administration (hereafter NAPA); Gray, Gordon, “The N.S.C.: ‘A President Who Uses It Is a Wise President,’” in *The White House: Organizations and Operations*. Ed. R. Gordon Hoxie (Montauk: Center for the Study of the Presidency, 1971), p. 118; Whitnah, Donald R., ed., *Government Agencies* (Westport: Greenwood, 1983), p. 374; Page, Benjamin I. and Mark P. Petracca, *The American Presidency* (New York: McGraw, 1983), p. 183; Destler, I.M., *Presidents, Bureaucrats and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 18–19; Bock, Joseph G., *The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant: Friendship and Friction at the Water's Edge* (Westport: Greenwood, 1987), pp. 33–35; Destler, I.M., “National Security Advice to U.S. Presidents: Some Lessons from Thirty Years,” *World Politics*, Volume 29 (January 1977), p. 156 (Destler's article is reprinted in *A World Politics Reader. Power, Strategy, and Security*. Ed. Klaus Knorr [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], pp. 240–273 and in *U.S. National Security: A Framework for Analysis*. Ed. Daniel J. Kaufman, Jeffrey M. McKittrick and Thomas J. Leney [Lexington: Lexington, 1985], pp. 177–199); Thomas S. Gates, Jr. Oral History Transcript, DDEL; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcripts, DDEL and PUL. For contemporary participants' accounts of the Council and its activities see Anderson, Dillon, “The President and the National Security,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Volume 197 (January 1956), pp. 42–46; Cutler, Robert, “The Development of the National Security Council,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 34 (April 1956), pp. 441–458; Cutler, Robert, “Intelligence as Foundation for Policy,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Volume 2 (Fall 1959), pp. 59–71; Gray, Gordon, “Role of the National Security Council in the Formulation of National Policy”. A paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 10–12, 1959 in US Senate, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations, *Organizing for National Security: Selected Materials*, 86th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), pp. 62–71; Gray, Gordon, “Organizing for Total Defense,” *General Electric Defense Quarterly*, Volume III (July-September 1960), pp. 4–10; and Wyeth, George A., Jr., “The National Security Council: Concept of Operation; Organization; Actual Operations,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume VIII (1954), pp. 185–195.

Robert Cutler was the first Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Cutler managed the NSC system as a neutral supervisory officer. The Special Assistant briefed Eisenhower during the afternoon prior to the Council meetings scheduled for the following morning, basically determined the agenda for NSC meetings, presented items for consideration at them, and solicited the views of the Council members. Cutler's knowledge derived from the fact that he lead the work of the NSC Planning Board: he presided over its meetings and controlled the preparation of the policy paper drafts. The Special Assistant also appointed the necessary ad hoc committees, groups and consultants. Cutler left the White House in the spring of 1955, but returned at the beginning of 1957. His second tour of duty ended in mid-1958. (Newsweek)



Then the Special Assistant, jaw outthrust explains to the Council that it must,
Splits reconcile and doubts dispel, the Planning Board likes it – – what the hell!

As for his part in the OCB, a superefficient gadfly he,
Has Japan been strengthened? Is Finland secure? Have you got the facts right, really sure?

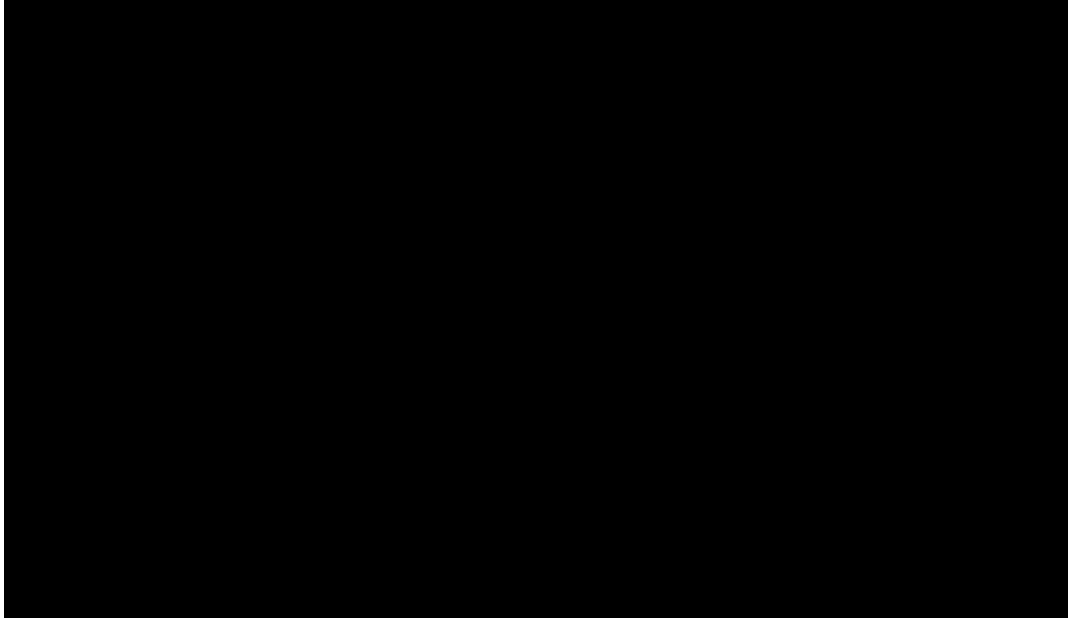
On the telephone he wields a sting, that has an effect like anything,
‘Will you do it or shall I take it up with the boss?’ Is a line that would throw any man for a loss.”¹⁹

Cutler characterized the whole system as a “policy hill”. The Planning Board (PB) of the NSC was at the bottom of the hill. It prepared papers which were submitted for Council consideration. They were policy recommendations in which conflicting views were marked as “splits”. At the top of the hill policies were discussed and debated by the President and his NSC advisers. The President demanded that in the NSC work, as Burke and Greenstein suggest, the participants give advice to the President “without the inhibition of allegiance to their agencies’ interests”. After Presidential approval the policies went “down” to departments and agencies for execution. A new staff agency of the NSC machinery, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), was responsible for following up and coordinating the implementation of approved policies (see figure 1). The Special Assistant directed and managed the formalized NSC system thus making the system function.²⁰

19 A Poem about Cutler, March 25, 1955. A copy found in Allen W. Dulles Papers, Box 66, PUL.

20 For the “policy hill” metaphor see Cutler, “The Development of the National Security Council,” 1956, p. 448; Cutler’s letter to the Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, January 7, 1957 with a memorandum “Basis On Which the NSC Mechanism Can Effectively Serve

Figure 1. The National Security Council under Eisenhower, 1953–1961 (as of 1959)



Source: US Senate, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations. *Organizing for National Security: Selected Materials* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), p. 8; also printed in *The Decisions of the Highest Order*. Ed. Inderfurth and Johnson, 1988, p. 44.

The PB, “the planning arm”, inherited on March 17, 1953 essentially the same functions of policy formulation as the former Senior NSC Staff (SNSCS) had had. The PB met regularly on Tuesday and Friday afternoons for three to four hours, sometimes even three times a week. Permanent or standing members of the Council, as well as the JCS and the CIA, had their representatives at the level of assistant secretary on the PB. The time was devoted, as Henderson notes, for “debating, refining, and drafting policy papers for consideration” by Eisenhower and the NSC. Ransom concluded that the drafts, staff papers, of the PB “lean heavily upon” intelligence estimates as they “usually serve as the foundation for” the PB’s policy recommendations. However, the CIA representatives sat in

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the President” (dated January 7, 1957) as an enclosure, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Administrative subseries, Box 6, DDEL; Falk, Stanley L., “The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 79 (September 1964), p. 420; Henderson, Phillip G., *Managing the Presidency: The Eisenhower Legacy – From Kennedy to Reagan* (Boulder: Westview, 1988), p. 75; Henderson, Phillip G., “Advice and Decision: The Eisenhower National Security Council Reappraised,” in the *Presidency and National Security Policy*. Ed. R. Gordon Hoxie et al., Center for the Study of the Presidency, Proceedings, Volume V, Number 1, 1984, pp. 172–175; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 62; Smith, Dale O., “What is O.C.B.?” *Foreign Service Journal*, Volume 32 (November 1955), pp. 26–27, 48–51, 56; Melbourne, Roy M., “Co-ordination for Action,” *Foreign Service Journal*, Volume 35 (March 1958), pp. 25, 28–29.

NSC's organs as advisers, who were "not expected", Ransom wrote, "to take positions on issues of foreign-military policy". On average, three or four draft policy papers were under consideration at a single NSC meeting. The splits were marked in the drafts. According to a former BOB PB member, Ralph W. E. Reid, "any member of the board was entitled to suggest an alternative, a turn of phrase, an alternative recommendation, and alternative conclusion". The PB set the agenda for deliberations in the Council. Immerman has pointed out that "the drafts structured and informed the NSC debates". Robert R. Bowie of the State Department later commented on the NSC planning process by saying that "it was a device, a method, by which, in the first place you frequently could get the bureaucracy thinking about things to some degree before they came right smack up against it". In addition, "the process within department" involved the Secretary and his aides in briefings and discussions "which might not otherwise been discussed". The system meant that the President "got exposed to more general ideas, more planning-type thinking" than would normally have been the case.²¹

The Council met normally on Thursday mornings in the Cabinet Room²² of the White House. Eisenhower attended and presided over some 90 percent²³ of

- 21 Falk, "The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy," 1964, p. 420 (Falk's article is reprinted with some omissions in *Problems of American Foreign Policy*. Ed. Martin B. Hickman (Beverly Hills: Glencoe 1968), pp. 142–165; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 75; Ransom, Harry Howe, *Central Intelligence and National Security* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 202–203; Bowie, Robert R., *The President and the Executive Branch in The Making of America's Soviet Policy*. Ed. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 75; Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999, p. 48. About the production and development of NSC papers see Roche, John P. and Leonard W. Levy, *The Presidency* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), pp. 171–175. An average time of progress of an NSC paper through the PB was 30 days. A draft policy statement went through PB Assistants' and PB meetings. Agencies contributed to the Financial Appendix in between, and the NSC Staff assisted when necessary. Lay, Jr's memorandum for the NSC on the preparation and use of Financial Appendices, November 10, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 95, Box 106, NSC – Administration 1960, RG 59, NA. On the PB see also Department of State Bulletin (hereafter DSB), April 13, 1953, p. 530; Ralph W. E. Reid Oral History Transcript, Columbia University Oral History Project (hereafter COHP). The former NSC staffer and Executive Officer of the OCB, Bromley K. Smith, points out that Secretary Dulles's confidant, Planning Director Robert R. Bowie of the State Department, and Harvard-trained William Y. Elliott, the representative of the Director of the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization (ODM), Arthur S. Flemming, often intensively debated issues on the PB. Bromley K. Smith Oral History Transcript, COHP; Robert Bowie's interview quoted in Hall, David K., "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1982, p. 316. Hall notes that scholars usually neglect to point out that the NSC planning, orchestrated by Cutler, had a positive aspect. It had a "stabilizing influence it could exert on the President's own behavior". The essential component of the process was "continuous review and reconsideration of policy issues". *Ibid.*, p. 348.
- 22 Sometimes Council meetings were held outside Washington D.C., at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado, at Camp David, Maryland, at a Navy Base in Newport, Rhode Island, at Fort Gordon near Augusta, Georgia or at other emergency relocation sites. Gordon Gray's letter to Eisenhower, January 13, 1961, AWF, Administration series, Box 16, folder: Gray, Gordon NSC (and Harr, Karl)(2), DDEL.
- 23 Eisenhower presided between the very first Council meeting of January 29, 1953 and the final one of January 12, 1961: altogether at 329 of 366 meetings. See Gordon Gray's letter to Eisenhower, January 13, 1961, AWF, Administration series, Box 16, Gray, Gordon NSC (and Harr, Karl)(2), DDEL; Greenstein erroneously refers to a figure of 339 even though he is citing the above-mentioned letter from Gray which specifically points to 329. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 124. Nelson speaks about a total of 346 meetings. She

the NSC meetings, which lasted up to three hours. In the absence of the President, Vice-President Richard M. Nixon (APPENDIX III), or in rare cases the Secretary of State, chaired the meeting. Other statutory members of the Council between 1953–1961 were Secretaries of State Dulles and Christian A. Herter (APPENDIX I), Secretaries of Defense Charles E. Wilson, Neil H. McElroy and Thomas S. Gates, Jr. (APPENDIX IV), and the Director of the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization (ODM) Arthur S. Flemming (APPENDIX V) and the Director of the MSA and later FOA Harold E. Stassen (APPENDIX VI). There were some 20–30 “participant members” usually participating at the meetings on standing request, or occasionally or less frequently on an ad hoc basis. The most important of these were the Secretaries of the Treasury George M. Humphrey and Robert B. Anderson by invitation (APPENDIX VII), as well as BOB representatives who were to inform the Council principals about what the US could afford. The active participants were the Chairmen of the JCS General Omar N. Bradley, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, General Nathan F. Twining and General Lyman L. Lemnitzer (APPENDIX VIII), and the Director of the CIA, Allen W. Dulles (APPENDIX IX), the brother of John Foster. They all, or their alternates, attended the NSC meetings as advisers. In addition, there were observers and NSC Staff members present. Attendance at the Council meetings was, in any case, restricted to those who had some responsibility for the subject matter under consideration and were in a position to give advice in order to “permit intimate, frank and fruitful discussion” on “precisely worded, carefully studied, and well presented papers”. Eisenhower explained his views on attendance: “You must get courageous men, men of strong views, and let them debate and argue with each other.” All the Council principals had their own seats, which had been predetermined.²⁴

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may have counted the special meetings. Gray confirms that there had been 366 regular and special meetings altogether. Nelson, Anna Kasten, “The Importance of Foreign Policy Process: Eisenhower and the National Security Council,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 114; Henderson, “Organizing the Presidency for Effective Leadership: Lessons from the Eisenhower Years,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Volume XVII (Winter 1987), p. 56; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 81, p. 92, footnote 49. Henderson has his presiding figures right. He has based them on Eisenhower’s letter to Gray, Press Release, January 13, 1961, AWF, Presidential Transition series, Box 3, Final Reports (2), DDEL; Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, COHP.

24 Other standing request participants who also sat at the table were Director of the BOB, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Attorney General, Chairman of the AEC, Directors of the USIA and the ICA, Executive and Deputy Executive Secretaries of the NSC. Some Special Assistants – such as Special Assistants for Operations Coordination and Disarmament and the ICA Director – could sit in any vacant chair at the table when participating in discussions of an item on the agenda. There were also occasional visitors who were not seated at the table, such as Assistants to the President and the White House Staff Secretary. Sometimes the three service – Army, Navy and Air Force – secretaries were invited, together with the rest of the JCS, i.e. the Chiefs of Staff of the three services and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. “The Membership of the National Security Council”, Address by Robert Cutler at Compton Memorial Dinner, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, January 4, 1956, AWF, Administration series, Box 11, (Cutler, 1956–1967)(1), DDEL; Falk, “The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy,” 1964, p. 419; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 124; Henderson, “Organizing the Presidency for Effective Leadership,” 1987, p. 56; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*,

The Council meetings featured an intelligence briefing by Allen W. Dulles. It supplemented official intelligence estimates which were incorporated into NSC papers and covered notable and acute current events or dealt with the intelligence background of policy decisions. During the Eisenhower years the CIA played an important role within the NSC system. Furthermore, as Leary writes, it “emerged as an integral element in high-level...policymaking”.²⁵ There were meetings featuring reports on foreign travel by the Secretary of State, the Vice-President or others, and purely informational meetings on specific acute topics. In addition, reports by the Chairman of the JCS or Ambassadors were occasionally heard at the meetings. Briefings were followed by discussion, which was, according to Eisenhower’s last Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Gordon Gray (see APPENDIX II), “lively”. At most meetings, as Nelson writes, the “agenda revolved around the numbered reports or previous NSC Actions. The members were well prepared for debates as they had been distributed documents identifying the main points relating to any particular policy, financial implications, the departmental views and the differences in them”. The President’s son, John S. D. Eisenhower, has stated that for his father the Council meetings had been “a debating society”. The meetings were, as Patrick Anderson points out, “semi-judicial in nature”.²⁶

Henderson suggests that “the President would usually reach tentative decisions at some point during the NSC meeting”. This happened if “there was a consensus among” the Council members, Dillon Anderson adds. Usually, the formal Record of Action in which the Special Assistants “tried to reduce to writing in the light

- 1988, pp. 80–85, APPENDIX 1, pp. 187–188; Nelson, “The Importance of Foreign Policy Process,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 114; “An Organizational History of the National Security Council by Lay, Jr. and Johnson”, 1960, pp. 29–31. Those attending the Council meetings were not allowed to bring supporting personnel unless the President approved their attendance or they were needed for visual or specialized presentation. Cutler’s letter to Radford, March 30, 1955, Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Radford), Box 29, 334 NSC, RG 218, NA; Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats and Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 18–19; Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999, p. 47. The seating arrangements at the NSC meetings in the Cabinet Room were dictated by protocol. For more details see, for example, *Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC*, Lot 66 D 95, Box 105, NSC – Administration 1955–1959, RG 59, NA.
- 25 Dulles, Allen W., “The State of Our Intelligence,” *Army*, Volume 10 (March 1960), p. 37; Leary, William M., ed., *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents* (University of Alabama, 1984), p. 54. Bissell, Jr. recalls that Allen Dulles “took a lot of trouble with his preparation” of his weekly briefings. The conclusions of NIEs were included in his words. Richard M. Bissell, Jr. *Oral History Transcript*, PUL. Kirkpatrick, Jr. asserts that it was because of Eisenhower’s military background that he preferred oral intelligence briefings. Kirkpatrick, Lyman B., Jr., “The Intelligence Community,” in *National Security Affairs: Theoretical Perspectives and Contemporary Issues*. Ed. B. Thomas Trout and James E. Harf (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1982) 1982, p. 266. For contemporary accounts of the role of intelligence in decision-making see Hilsman, Roger, *Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions* (Glencoe: Free, 1956) and Ransom, *Central Intelligence and National Security*, 1958.
- 26 Nelson, “The Importance of Foreign Policy Process,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 115; Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999, p. 48; Anderson, *The President’s Men*, 1968, p. 175; Gray, “Organizing for Total Defense,” 1960, p. 8; John S. D. Eisenhower quoted in Kinnard, Douglas, *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management: A Study in Defense Politics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977, p. 134.

of exchanges between the President and the NSC members”, as Dillon Anderson has said, was sent to the Council members for comments. After circulation the policy was adopted and approved by Eisenhower. The approval never took place at the Council meetings. The approved policy papers became the official policy of the US Government. According to the former ODM Director Arthur S. Flemming, the President used to say at the NSC meetings, if time permitted: “well, I’m not going to shoot from the hip on this one (final decision)”, and continued, “I’m going to sleep on it”. Eisenhower later explained that an organization is unable to make decisions for its head, but a “good organization helps the President to do the sensible things”.²⁷

Unlike other American Presidents since Truman, Eisenhower was completely committed to his NSC system. According to Burke and Greenstein, Eisenhower contributed to the policy process in particular by “being final decision maker on plans and operations”. Eisenhower exercised power with much more vigor and skill than was expected in the 1950s. He knew that the Presidential choice and decision required properly processed information, analysis and advice. The President did not accept consensus recommendations from his NSC advisers

The National Security Council met in the Cabinet Room of the White House. Here, Eisenhower’s Cabinet during his first Administration. Clockwise: UN Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Interior Secretary Douglas McKay, Treasury Secretary George M. Humphrey, Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr., Commerce Secretary Sinclair Weeks, Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Oveta Culp Hobby, Assistant to the President (White House Chief of Staff) Sherman Adams, Director of the Budget Joseph M. Dodge, Defense Mobilizer Arthur S. Flemming, Labor Secretary Martin P. Durkin,

27 The Record of Action was written and submitted to Eisenhower within two days of the NSC meeting. Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 85; Eisenhower, Dwight D., “The Role of the President in the Conduct of Security Affairs,” in *Issues of National Security in the 1970’s*. Ed. Amos A. Jordan, Jr. (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 212–216; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, DDEL, pp. 35, 37; Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999, p. 48; Hoxie, R. Gordon, *Command Decision and the Presidency: A Study in National Security Policy and Organization* (New York: Reader’s Digest, 1977), p. 254; Pinkley, Virgil with James F. Scheer, *Eisenhower Declassified* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1979) p. 277; Clotfelter, James, *The Military in American Politics* (New York: Harper, 1973), p. 185; Hartmann, Frederick H. and Robert L. Wendzel, *Defending America’s Security* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey’s), 1988, p. 99; Arthur S. Flemming Oral History Transcript (# 504), DDEL; See also Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcripts, COHP and PUL.

Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower, Defense Secretary Wilson, Agriculture Secretary Ezra Taft Benson, and Harold E. Stassen. Nixon, Flemming, Dulles, Eisenhower, Wilson and Stassen were statutory members of the Council, whereas Humphrey regularly sat in by invitation. Brownell, Jr. was a standing request participant and Adams occasionally participated in the NSC meetings as an observer. The seats were predetermined by protocol. At Council meetings Stassen, for example, moved one chair closer to the President. (National Archives)

and utilized the NSC meetings for testing his ideas. As Greenstein has pointed out, Eisenhower preferred “reasoned discourse” and thus he expected that the NSC discussion would offer an even wider range of options than had come up in the PB deliberations. Eisenhower actively participated in the substantive deliberations, because he, as Goodpaster has noted, aimed at achieving clear decisions. President Eisenhower did not give the feeling that a decision had already been made, but instead, he urged for honest give-and-take, strong argumentation, and even heated debates. He did not mind being challenged by his NSC advisers as he did not like “yes-men”. The President did not like interpersonal strife and the battle of wills. Therefore, Hall argues, the formal choices Eisenhower rendered at the Council were less significant than the disagreements and the intelligence, serving as analytical inputs into decisions and being provided through the NSC system. Eisenhower did not usually take the leading role, but he would not hesitate to interrupt the discussion. He then showed an impressive ability to probe for facts and broaden the scope of consideration of specific issues by bringing alternative viewpoints as well as “trade-offs” into the Council discussions. He was quite impatient with background information; he wanted to cut through the goose chase and receive clear recommendations. Many participants confirm that he, in fact, asked pungent questions. There were no signs of uneasiness in his behavior, but he admitted quite often that he did not know what to do. Thus, he could not always predict the consequences of his decisions. Even though Eisenhower brought emotions into the Council work, when making the final decision, as Nixon later wrote, “he was the coldest, most unemotional and analytical man in the world”. He preferred to simplify issues and use easy-to-understand expressions. Eisenhower had an ability to perceive the general attitude prevailing among the Council members. At the beginning of the Council meetings, the President did not lay out his own thinking, but at the close of the meetings Eisenhower usually summed up the wide range of views presented in the course of the discussion or pierced through the arguments and then clearly stated what he thought were the essential points. But Eisenhower’s role at the Council work was hindered by his health. He apparently would have participated in almost every meeting had he not suffered from health problems.²⁸

28 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 53–63, 100–103, 256–267; Milkis, Sidney M. and Nelson, Michael, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776–1998*. 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 1999), p. 289; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, passim, especially pp. 70, 124–138; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 85; Cutler, *No Time For Rest, 1966*, chapter XVIII; Goodpaster quoted in *National Security Decisions: The Participants Speak*. Ed. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. and Jacquelyn K. Davis (Lexington: Lexington, 1990), pp. 3–4; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 310; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 290–292, 333, 340, 346–347; John McCone and John S. Patterson Oral History Transcripts, DDEL; Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcripts, COHP and PUL; Prados, John, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council, from Truman to Bush* (New York: Morrow, 1991), p. 58; Nixon, *Richard M., Six Crises* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), pp. 158–159; Arthur S. Flemming Oral History Transcript (#504), DDEL; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, PUL; Robert R. Bowie Oral History Transcript, COHP.

Former Special Assistant Gordon Gray recalls that the members had a chance “to make their input” and hear the rationale for the Presidential decisions. Yet, as the brother of the President Milton S. Eisenhower explains, there was a feeling among the participants that “they really helped” the Chief Executive. The participants, Dillon Anderson argues, knew “what the policy was and how it was arrived at”. Furthermore, as Immerman continues, every principal “was intimately familiar with the substance and rational and had the chance to argue his case”. They might have sometimes “secretly disagreed”, but had to “live with” the decisions, he adds. The former Attorney General and Council participant, Herbert Brownell, Jr., rebuts the criticism by confirming that Eisenhower “was never bound by the group’s consensus” and adds “if any in fact developed”. The Executive Secretary of the NSC Staats remembers “that he [Eisenhower] did use those [NSC] meetings very much for decision-making purposes”. However, he adds, “that isn’t to say that he tried to settle everything in group meetings”. Brownell, Jr. offers an additional view: he confesses that at the Council meetings he “learned his [Eisenhower’s] methods of contingency planning”. Eisenhower wanted the participants “to be prepared for the emergencies”. If contingency planning did not help, Brownell, Jr. adds, the President thought their value lay in the fact that the members learned to work with each other in other emergencies. According to the recollections of Eisenhower’s personal secretary Ann C. Whitman, the President decided to “sit through” the meetings in order to encourage and support his NSC advisers even though he had himself usually been carefully briefed beforehand. Hall contends that a central feature of Cutler’s NSC machinery “was the continuous review and reconsideration of policy issues”.²⁹

A significant new staff agency in the NSC mechanism was the OCB, which was established in September 1953 “out of the ashes” of the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB). Before the OCB was created, the NSC policy directives were implemented by entrusting them to one department or agency, in most cases the State Department. The Board was responsible for overseeing the execution of national security policies approved by the President. The OCB took up the coordination and integration of the activities of those departments and agencies which were responsible for the execution of the new policy. Even though the Board was constituted at the Under Secretary level, it lacked, however, real authority. The OCB met regularly once a week. In carrying out its duties, the OCB produced interagency Operations Plans, which consisted of all

29 Gordon Gray Oral History Transcript, PUL and in Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, NAPA; Gray, “The N.S.C.,” 1971, p. 118; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, PUL; Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999, p. 48. Nelson also emphasizes “the educational and informational nature” of the Council meetings. Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. Brownell, Herbert with John P. Burke, *Advising Ike: The Memoirs of Attorney General Herbert Brownell* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1993), p. 292; Elmer B. Staats in Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, NAPA; Herbert Brownell, Jr. quoted in *The Eisenhower Legacy: Discussions of Presidential Leadership*. Ed. Shirley Ann Warshaw (Silver Spring: Bartleby, 1992), p. 106; Whitman quoted in Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 133; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 349.

major planned and programmed activities concerning certain policies, and Progress Reports for follow-up purposes at various intervals, normally semi-annually. Both documents were prepared by the Working Groups (also on Indochina, Vietnam and Southeast Asia etc.). They were, however, “quickly briefed” to the Council. The OCB, like the PB, had also Assistants. Interdepartmental coordination was not easy. In the beginning, for example, the Board structure had problems of being fully informed regarding developments relating to OCB assignments. This was solved by intensifying contacts between the OCB Staff and agency representatives as well as by the distribution of action documents from the departments to the OCB. Furthermore, the presence of a Board representative on the PB was deemed practicable from mid-1956 on. Richard Johnson has noted that as the OCB was “translating general NSC statements into tangible objectives, the OCB inevitably made as well as interpreted policy”. According to Henderson, “the OCB relied on collegiality and consensus-building to shape implementation processes”.³⁰

State Department people like the OCB Chairman, Under Secretary Herbert Hoover, Jr. did not like the Board as it “stepped on the toes” of the State Department officials. Hoover, Jr’s successor and the later Secretary of State Herter once said in an interview that the OCB was like a “nursemaid looking over” the shoulder of the State. A former OCB employee Robert Thayer remembers that it was “a very frustrating kind of work” because some departments were “very reluctant” to execute approved policies as it would “upset the apple cart” within the department. The former Executive Officer of the Board, Bromley K. Smith corrects the view which is often alleged in scholarship that the OCB in

.
30 Formal weekly meetings of the OCB began with an informal luncheon at which the members were free to express their ideas and opinions. In February 1957, the separation of policy formulation and coordinated execution ended as the OCB officially became part of the structure of the NSC. Henderson, *Advice and Decision*, 1984, pp. 172–175; Patterson, Bradley H., Jr., “Eisenhower’s Innovations in White House: Staff Structure and Operations,” in *Reexamining the Eisenhower Presidency*. Ed. Shirley Ann Warshaw (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), pp. 37–38; Rostow, W. W. *The Diffusion of Power 1957–1972: Men, Events, and Decisions that Shaped America’s Role in the World – From Sputnik to Peking* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 165; Smith, “What is O.C.B.?” 1955, pp. 26–27; Cutler, “The Development of the National Security Council,” 1956, p. 448; Wise, David and Ross, Thomas B., *The Invisible Government* (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 262–263; Walter A. RADIUS’s memorandum to the Chairmen of OCB Working Groups, January 26, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Staff Studies and Reports and OCB Working Papers 1951–1955, Box 1, OCB Procedural Memos, RG 59, NA; Elmer B. Staats’s memorandum for Dillon Anderson, June 25, 1956, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 14, DDEL; “Functions and Organization of the Operations Coordinating Board,” August 1, 1955, *ibid.*, OCB Central Files series, Box 99; Johnson, Richard A., *The Administration of United States Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 110–111; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 86; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 349. For description of the operation of the OCB of the State Department see Melbourne, “Coordination for Action,” 1958, pp. 25, 28–29. For an account of the OCB with special reference to the military participation see Mendez, Louis G., Jr’s “The Soldier and the National Security Policy,” *Army Information Digest*, Volume 14, January 1959, pp. 32–39. About the establishment of the OCB and its transfer to the NSC structure see DSB, September 28, 1953, pp. 420–422 and March 25, 1957, pp. 504–506.

fact implemented policies. He adds that “it merely had the authority to coordinate the implementation of policy”. President’s representative on the OCB Karl G. Harr, Jr. has said that, for example, some State Department desk officers did not like other “less knowledgeable types from other agencies criticizing him” and interfering with his job, which resulted in a “watering-down” of some of the fine points”. Harr, Jr. continues that the OCB was also a forum for “inter-agency battles”. The Executive Secretary Staats admitted that the OCB was “something of an experiment”. The President himself later wrote that the OCB had “functioned fairly well”.³¹

The President received support from two White House Staff members: the above-mentioned Special Assistants for National Security Affairs and for Security Operations Coordination (a post founded in 1953). The former was a key figure in the NSC apparatus. He was not a source of policy advice, as Burke asserts, but instead he was a manager, whose tasks were to give the President advice on the NSC agenda, brief the President in the Oval Office before each meeting, present items for consideration at the meetings, solicit the views of NSC members, appoint special committees and consultants whom the President had approved. The agenda-setting for NSC meetings was done between the President, the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and the Executive Secretary of the NSC. The Special Assistant was in charge of supervising the Executive Secretary, who directed the professional, non-partisan NSC Staff³², which, as Odeen points out, managed the interagency decision process under the direction of the Executive

31 Herter quoted in Noble, G. Bernard, *The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy*, Volume XVIII: Christian A. Herter (New York: Coopers Square, 1970), p. 29. Thayer complains that he hardly ever saw White House personnel. It was not, according to Thayer, “a very popular job” to be on the OCB as they had “to ride herd on them and report them back to the NSC if they didn’t do it [carry out policies]”. Yet, he argues the OCB was “an effective instrument” Robert H. Thayer Oral History Transcript, COHP. Smith also comments that “the sovereignty of the departments was great”, which meant that “the OCB was limited to more or less looking over”. Bromley K. Smith, Karl G. Harr, Jr. and Elmer B. Staats Oral History Transcripts, COHP. Eisenhower commented that “a highly competent and trusted official with a small staff of his own, rather than by a committee whose members had to handle the task on a part-time basis”. Eisenhower, Dwight D., *The White House Years*, Volume 2: *Waging Peace, 1956–1961* (Garden City: Doubleday), 1965, p. 634.

32 In 1956, for example, the NSC Staff consisted of 28 members of whom eleven were considered, as Hess puts it, “think people”. Hess, Stephen, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976), p. 71; Korb, Lawrence J. and Keith D. Hahn, eds., *National Security Policy Organization in Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), p. 15. The professional staff members were either on temporary assignment from the armed forces, the CIA or other departments and agencies or were recruited from universities and think tanks. A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Documents of the National Security Council. Seventh Supplement. Comp. Blair D. Hydrick (Bethesda: UPA, 1996), p. v. Prados argues that the Council and its staff “peaked” in various ways during the second term of the Eisenhower Administration. Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 559. For more about the NSC Staff see, for example, Moose, Richard M., “The White House National Security Staffs Since 1947,” in *The President and the Management of National Security: A Report by the Institute for Defense Analyses*. Ed. Keith C. Clark and Laurence J. Legere (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 60–70 and Shoemaker, Christopher C., *The NSC Staff: Counseling the Council* (Boulder: Westview, 1991). See also Heinlein, J. C., “Presidential Staff and National Security Policy.” *Occasional Papers*, No. 2 (Center for the Study of U.S. Foreign Policy of the Department of Political Science, University of Cincinnati, 1963).

Secretary. The “NSC staff system”, Thomas argues, “imposed a comprehensive framework of order on all aspects of national security affairs”. The Special Assistant served as the Chairman of the PB. He was an executive officer, who, as Hoxie points out, could not come between the President and his Secretary of State. Rubin adds that the Special Assistant and the NSC Staff under his supervision “were still more expeditors than decision makers”.³³

The Staff Secretary’s³⁴ job was to coordinate the flow of day-to-day national security business. He handled mainly foreign or defense policy-related correspondence and almost every day gave the President an intelligence briefing. He also acted as a liaison and arranged for meetings and the communication of decisions on operational matters. Several participants praise Staff Secretary Goodpaster and refer to him as a channel who kept Eisenhower properly informed. The Staff Secretary’s “responsibilities paralleled, complemented, and supplemented those of the national security assistants”, Bock argues and concludes that the Staff Secretary was, indeed, “a national security assistant” as well. Kinnard agrees that the President approved the overlapping of the roles of the Staff Secretary and the Special Assistant and that he regarded the national security-related aspects of the former’s work as “more important than his other functions”. Even though Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff³⁵ controlled the Chief

- 33 Burke, John P., *The Institutional Presidency* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 183; Odeen, Philip A., “Organizing for National Security,” *International Security*, Volume 5 (Summer 1980), p. 116; Miller, David Paul, *The Interagency Process: Engaging America’s Full National Security Capabilities* (Hollis: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1993), pp. 8–9. Falk, Stanley L. and Theodore W. Bauer, *The National Security Structure* (Washington, D.C.: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1972), p. 40; Rubin, *Secrets of State*, 1985, p. 76. Gray recalls “guiding the meetings” as Eisenhower only “technically” presided. He told it was “unhappy duty” to “call time on the discussions” as it was at times “to the displeasure of the President and NSC members”. Arthur S. Flemming (# 504) and Gordon Gray Oral History Transcripts, DDEL; James C. Hagerly Oral History Transcript, PUL. Nelson points out that the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs “acted as presider, moderator, and even chairman”, who also “steered conversation back to the subject or paper at hand”. At the end of the discussion he would often inquire about what kind of action would be taken. Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 309, 311; Thomas, Norman C., “Presidential Advice and Information: Policy and Program Formulation,” in *The Institutionalized Presidency*. Ed. Norman C. Thomas and Hans W. Baade (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana, 1972), p. 125; Hoxie, *Command Decision and the Presidency*, 1977, p. 254. For more on the Special Assistants see Bock, Joseph G., *The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant: Friendship and Friction at the Water’s Edge* (Westport: Greenwood, 1987); Bock, Joseph G., “The National Security Assistant and the White House Staff: Conflict within the ‘Inner Circle,’” in *Public Policy and Political Institutions: United States Defense and Foreign Policy – Policy Coordination and Integration*. Ed. Duncan L. Clarke (Greenwich: JAI, 1985), pp. 61–89; and Bowman, John F., II, “The Role of the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs in the Formulation and Implementation of National Security Policy: An Evaluation.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh 1986).
- 34 Eisenhower’s Staff Secretaries were first Paul T. Carroll (also a Defense Liaison Officer in the White House) and, from September 1954, Andrew J. Goodpaster.
- 35 Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff (the Assistant to the President) until September 1958 was Sherman Adams who was succeeded by Wilton B. Persons. About Chief of Staff’s role see Adams, Sherman, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper, 1961), passim; Donovan, Robert J., *Eisenhower: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 71; and *Chief of Staff: Twenty-Five Years of Managing the Presidency*. Ed. Samuel Kernell and Samuel L. Popkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 13.

Executive's meetings and readings, neither NSC matters nor the Staff Secretary's papers required his clearing. The Chief of Staff, however, occasionally sat in at the NSC meetings, but only as an observer.³⁶

According to Harr, Jr., the "front burner crises were lifted out...of the NSC-OCB 'machinery'". However, he adds, "they weren't lifted out of the NSC, itself". The problems were, if time allowed, discussed at the Council meetings, Harr, Jr. writes. He points out that the most delicate items were not "formally processed within the NSC machinery, primarily for security reasons". Sometimes attendance at the meetings was limited for the same reason. In the words of Gray, "he [Eisenhower] didn't want the full paraphernalia of NSC involved". Then the meetings were called special meetings. Eisenhower did not take "crucial" foreign policy issues to the Cabinet, Burk concludes, but to the Council and "its smaller informal subgroups".³⁷

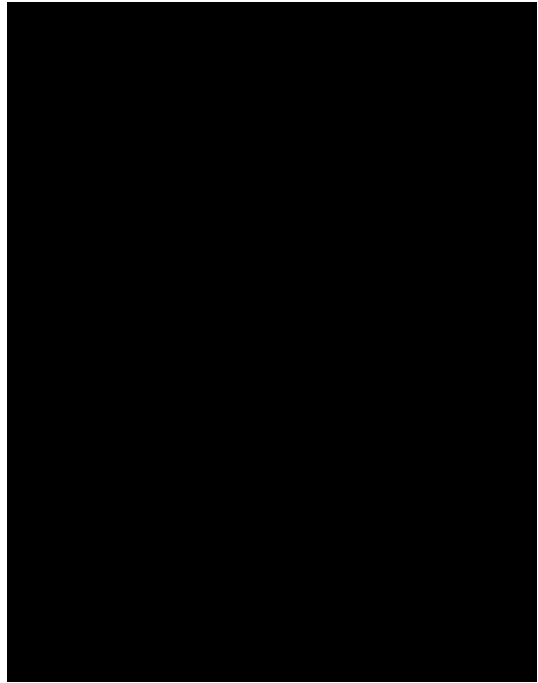
Eisenhower augmented the NSC system with the above-mentioned smaller informal meetings and also made quite extensive use of outside consultants. Special ad hoc advisory groups, committees and panels on the policy issues were convened, as Henderson writes, "to supplement formal channels of NSC machinery". Within the Council the State Department had an important role. Milton S. Eisenhower has emphasized that the NSC was "the top coordinating agency for foreign affairs". The State Department representatives, for example, participated, and in most cases chaired, at all levels of the NSC structure: the NSC, the PB, the OCB and the Board's interdepartmental Committees and Working Groups³⁸. Yet already in 1956, the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles

36 Robert Murphy Oral History Transcript, PUL; Bock, "The National Security Assistant and the White House Staff," 1987, pp. 33–35; Kinnard, *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management*, 1977, p. 41; Destler, "National Security Advice to U.S. Presidents," 1977, p. 156; Eisenhower, Dwight D., *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953–1956* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 117; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, pp. 134, 142; Schoenenbaum, Eleonora W., ed., *Political Profiles: The Eisenhower Years* (New York: Facts on File, 1977), p. 233. Bock notes that there are several people who consider the posts of the Staff Secretary and the Assistant for the National Security Assistant "as parallel and complementary. According to Bock, those include I. M. Destler; Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 1965, p. 319, footnote 6; Moose, "The White House National Security Staffs Since 1947", 1969, pp. 61–62; Fenno, Richard F., Jr., *The President's Cabinet: An Analysis in the Period from Wilson to Eisenhower* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 152; Bernard M. Shanley Oral History Transcript, DDEL.

37 Harr, Jr. served in various positions within the NSC machinery of the Eisenhower Administration. Harr, Karl G., Jr., *Eisenhower's Approach to National Security Decisionmaking in Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III*. Ed. Thompson, 1984, pp. 96–97; Gordon Gray's and Andrew J. Goodpaster's comments in the Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, NAPA; Burk, Robert F., *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Hero and Politician* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), p. 127. Bissell, Jr. of the CIA has told that, for example, the U-2 project was decided upon and the meetings on the subject were held "completely outside of the NSC framework. Richard M. Bissell, Jr. Oral History Transcript, PUL. The President decided not to deal with disarmament through the NSC. Gordon Gray Oral History Transcript, PUL.

38 An illustrative example of this is that State Department officials were serving as chairmen of 33 of the 41 inter-departmental Working Groups under the OCB. The NSC work needed personnel from various departments and agencies. For example, in the fall of 1958 there were 13 officers and 10 members of clerical staff from the Pentagon's Office of International Policy and Plans primarily concerned with NSC (PB) and OCB matters. In addition, several other personnel from all services "frequently devoted 100 % of their time for varying periods in connection with" the Council machinery. Special Assistant to the JCS for NSC Affairs, Rear Admiral C. O. Triebel's memorandum for Gordon Gray, October 16, 1958, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, NSC Registry series, Box, DDEL.

Eisenhower's second Staff Secretary and his defense and intelligence liaison officer, Colonel (later General) Andrew J. Goodpaster, was like the "second Special Assistant for National Security Affairs", although he was not officially part of the NSC system. Goodpaster, who had graduated with a Ph.D. in international relations from Princeton University, was very close to the President. He was a tremendous note-taker, who was in charge of briefing the President daily on intelligence matters. He had access to NSC meetings and sat in a back seat. (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library)



complained about the time-consuming nature of the NSC work, which produced watered-down papers. Dulles argued that his policy planners were “too much immersed with preparing equally papers for the NSC” and therefore, he continued, they were “not providing adequate long-range thinking and new ideas”. Elder points out that towards the end of the Eisenhower era, the State Department officials were trying to find ways to solve critical problems outside of the NSC machinery. As the Council “emerged as the dominant factor”, Elder continues, the State Department’s advisory role on foreign policy was “one step removed from the President”. Only because of the good rapport between Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles, the State Department was “a little more equal than the others in NSC negotiations”, Elder concludes. Dulles’s Special Assistant John W. Hanes, Jr. has said that Eisenhower conducted discussions on foreign policy either with the NSC or with the Secretary of State accompanied with a couple of “substantive officers”.³⁹

39 Burke, *The Institutional Presidency*, 1992, pp. 65–66; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al., *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, p. 170–172; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency* 1988, pp. 115–118; Stanley, Timothy W. *American Defense and National Security* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs, 1956), p. 42; Eisenhower, Milton S., *The Wine is Bitter: The United States and Latin America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 200; Bell, Jack, *The Presidency: Office of Power* (Boston: Allyn, 1967), pp. 104–106. Secretary Dulles referred to the NSC papers, which “represented the lowest common denominator of agreement”. Notes on meeting between John Foster Dulles and psychological warfare adviser C. D. Jackson (held on April 14, 1956) attached to C. D. Jackson’s letter to Henry Luce, April 16, 1956. C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 69, ‘Log-1956’, DDEL. Also quoted in Oikarinen, *The Middle East in the American Quest for World Order*, 1999, pp. 19–20; Dulles’s memorandum of conversation with William H. Jackson, April 8, 1956. John Foster Dulles Papers 1952–1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda series, Box 1, DDEL;

Raymond asserts that military matters were a priority in the NSC “in the crisis atmosphere of the 1950s” and, therefore, “the influence of the military experts was substantial”. Partly owing to his position on the Council, the Secretary of Defense had to handle questions reaching “far beyond the purely military”. Winnacker adds that the Council evolved to a “staff mechanism through which military advice had to be filtered”. Yet, the former Defense Secretary Neil H. McElroy recalls that “the relationship between State and Defense was very good at that time”. In fact, the various services had “a lot of private lines in the State Department”, Gray has added. The OCB mechanism, however, as Nuechterlein asserts, “took authority away from the State and Defense Departments, and other agencies involved in the NSC process”.⁴⁰

According to Sapin and Snyder, “military-civilian cooperation and coordination in foreign-policy decision-making goes on at various organization levels and in a variety of ways, informal as well as formal”. The NSC and the JCS were, Huntington writes, “the most important committees in the Executive Branch of the National Government” for the reason that “they play such important roles in military affairs and national security policy”. Civilians in the NSC lacked skills in strategic thinking, Brodie pointed out. Thus, he continued, they were incompetent to deal properly with military issues. Civil-military relations (or rivalry) aspect was also evident at different levels of the NSC machinery.⁴¹

Porter, Roger B., *Presidential Decision Making: The Economic Policy Board* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 176; Koenig, *The Chief Executive*, 1964, p. 173; Elder, *The Policy Machine*, 1960, pp. 82–84, 87–88, 161–162; Herbert Brownell, Jr. Oral History Transcript, PUL. Hanes, Jr. recalls that Secretary Dulles “did very frequently take somebody along if he felt that someone either knew the subject better or had a completely divergent view which he wanted the President to hear”. John W. Hanes, Jr. Oral History Transcript, DDEL. The President and the Secretary of State were having a telephone discussion eight to ten times a day. Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, COHP. President’s Press Secretary presumes it was five to six times a day in crisis situations. James C. Hagerly Oral History Transcript, PUL.

40 Raymond, Jack, *Power at the Pentagon* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 243; Slocombe, Walter B. and Franklin D. Kramer, “The Secretary of Defense and the National Security Process,” in *Public Policy and Political Institutions*. Ed. Clarke, 1985, p. 109–127; Rossiter, Clinton, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt, 1956), p. 11; Gavin, James M. *War and Peace in the Space Age* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 164; Twining, Nathan F., *Neither Liberty Nor Safety* (New York: Holt, 1966), p. 148; Winnacker, Rudolph A., “The Roles of the Secretaries of Defense,” in *Evolution of the American Military Establishment since World War II*. Ed. Paul R. Schratz. (Lexington: George C. Marshall Research Foundation, 1978), p. 32. The Pentagon people were not so much worried about Secretary Dulles’s views, but rather his confidant’s and representative’s on the PB, Robert Bowie, because, Gray recalls, he had a “lack of understanding and appreciation of the military necessities”. Neil H. McElroy and Gordon Gray Oral History Transcripts, PUL. Nuechterlein, Donald E., *National Interests and Presidential Leadership: The Setting of Priorities* (Boulder: Westview, 1978), p. 124. Mills emphasized the need to have machinery like the NSC to balance the military and political factors in decisions. Mills, C. Wright, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 293. About the Pentagon’s role within the NSC apparatus see Kitzner, William R. (in association with Joseph I. Coffey and Raymond J. Albright), *Forging a New Sword: A Study of the Department of Defense* (New York: Harper, 1958), pp. 80–83. See also Hitch, Charles J., *Decision-making for Defense* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). The power of the Secretary of Defense was enhanced in 1958. For discussion about the effects of the change see, for example, Krulak, Victor H., *Organization for National Security: A Study* (Washington, D.C.: United States Strategic Institute, 1983), pp. 63–73.

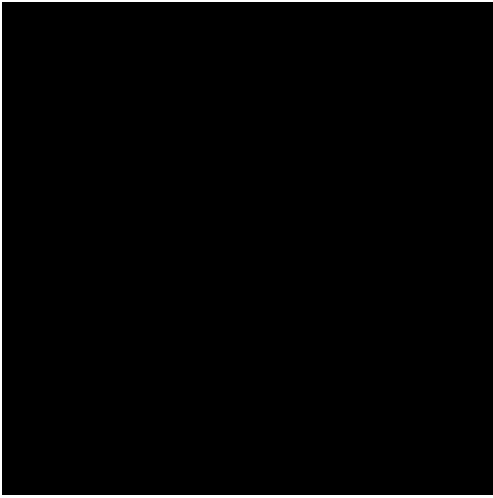
41 Sapin and Snyder add that contacts take place “over the telephone or at lunch as well as in working groups and committees”. Sapin, Burton M., and Richard C. Snyder, *The Role of the*

Eisenhower was not completely satisfied with his NSC system. In the spring of 1958, the President instructed the Council members on how to conduct NSC meetings. He ordered that from then on the NSC “meetings should focus less on discussion of papers and more on discussion of issues”. Eisenhower wished to end the plain review of existing Policy Papers and preferred to “discuss provocative issues which required high-level thought”. During 1959, the interval of various reports coming before the Council was extended from six months to a year. Gordon Gray explained to the OCB members in October 1959 that the number of NSC papers should be further reduced and the remaining papers “should emphasize active discussion and promotion of ideas, along the lines of thinking things out without the necessity of having a record thereof made”. Whitman recalls that the President occasionally complained in their private conversations about the fact that he was often familiar with the content of the presentations that were made in the Council meetings.⁴²

Senator Henry M. Jackson headed a Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, which studied the Eisenhower NSC in late 1950s. The Subcommittee’s critical report argued that the Council had not functioned well owing to too many items on agendas and overly elaborate procedures. According to other contemporary critics, Eisenhower was governing by committee and the NSC

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 Military in American Foreign Policy (Garden City: Doubleday, 1954), p. 37; Huntington, Samuel P., *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 153; Brodie, Bernard, *Strategy in the Missile Age*. A RAND Corporation Study (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 8. Civil-military relations, as Goodpaster suggests, go deeper than is usually thought in that they refer to “the direction and control of military activity and military power already in being”. Goodpaster adds that the relations are also “involved...in the shaping of military power”. Goodpaster, Andrew J. and Samuel P. Huntington, *Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 29. Paone concludes that the NSC system had “given the military a much greater peacetime opportunity to influence United States foreign policy”. Paone, Rocco M., “Civil-Military Relations and the Formulation of United States Foreign Policy,” in *Civil-Military Relations*. Ed. Charles L. Cochran (New York: Free, 1974), p. 80. For more on the issue by contemporary scholars see, for example, Sapin, Burton M. and Snyder, Richard C., *The Role of the Military in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Doubleday, 1954); Ekirch, Arthur A., Jr., *The Civil and the Military in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Stanley, *American Defense and National Security, 1956; Military Policy and National Security, 1956*; Huntington, Samuel P., *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Millis, Walter, *Arms and State: Civil-Military Elements in National Policy* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1958); Mansfield, Harvey C., “Civil-Military Relations in the United States,” *Current History*, Volume 38 (April 1960), pp. 228–233; Lyons, Gene M., “The New Civil-Military Relations,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume Volume 55 (March 1961), pp. 53–63; and Stein, Harold, ed., *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies* (Birmingham: University Press of Alabama, 1963). For a good overview see Kinnard, Douglas, “Civil-Military Relations: The President and the General,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, pp. 199–225.

42 Neu, Charles E., “The Rise of the National Security Bureaucracy,” in *The New American State: Bureaucracies and Policies since World War II*. Ed. Louis Galambos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 89; Guidance from President on Conduct of Council Meetings from Robert Cutler to the NSC members, April 2, 1958, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 18, DDEL; Memorandum of Conversation of the 395th Meeting of the NSC, January 26, 1959, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL; Preliminary notes of OCB meeting of October, 14, 1959, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; Whitman quoted in Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 133.



The former president of General Motors, Eisenhower's first Defense Secretary Charles E. Wilson is said to have performed in somewhat indifferently. "Engine Charlie" did not understand much about politics or military strategy. It was enough for Eisenhower that Wilson "ran" the Pentagon like a big business and left matters of substance to those qualified to handle them. Wilson was not particularly articulate but he actively participated in the NSC debates and offered alternative recommendations. With respect to US policy on Vietnam, Wilson was somewhat doubtful and cautious. (Newsweek)

papers received the Council's rubber-stamp approval. PB was seen as "a paper mill" which nearly overshadowed the NSC itself. The PB was accused of having produced watered-down compromise papers. In addition, the OCB was blamed for having little influence upon the coordination.⁴³ In part because of the criticism, Kennedy decided to dismantle the OCB, which meant also the demise of over 45 interdepartmental committees. Furthermore, the new President chose not to utilize his NSC to an extent his predecessor had done. However, Johnson's Council meetings "bore resemblance to" Eisenhower's until the fall of 1964, and Nixon wanted to restore the role of the NSC. Williams writes that especially

43 See e.g. US Senate, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations, Organizing for National Security: Selected Materials, 86th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960); US Senate, Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations, February 23, 24 and 25, 1960, 86th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960); The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee Papers on Policy-Making at the Presidential Level. Ed. Senator Henry M. Jackson (New York: Praeger, 1965), chapter one; Robert Cutler argued that Senator Jackson did not comprehend the nature of the NSC mechanism; Jackson also objected to Eisenhower's national security policy. See Cutler's memorandum to Staff Secretary Wilton B. Persons, June 5, 1959, WHO, Office of Staff Secretary, Subject Series, Alphabetical subseries, Box 18, NSC v. I (6), DDEL; also quoted in Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 92; see also *ibid.*, pp. 93–95; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 56–57; Anderson, *The President's Men*, 1968, p. 177–178; Hilsman, Roger, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Delta, 1967), pp. 18–23. Neustadt suggests Eisenhower's personal power was disturbed by his staff system. Neustadt, Richard E., *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 159–160. Eisenhower's NSC was also criticized in the press and periodicals. In 1954, Millis called the NSC "an uneasy compromise", whereas Phillips described it "a super-cabinet". Two years later, Phillips's theme was elaborated upon. Reston complained in 1958 that the extent to which NSC was utilized in policy-making was not publicly known. The next year Morgenthau, who called the Council "cold war strategy board", questioned whether the NSC was effective. Millis, Walter, "The Policymakers," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 9, 1954; Phillips, Cabell, "The Super-Cabinet for Our Security," *New York Times Magazine*, April 4, 1954; "How Ike Makes the Big Decisions?," *U.S. News and World Report*, April 20, 1956; Reston, James, "The Anonymous Advisers," *New York Times*, June 26, 1958; and Morgenthau, Hans J., "Can We Entrust Defense to a Committee?," *New York Times Magazine*, June 7, 1959.

Republican Presidents have preferred “formal, structured” way of organizing the operations of their NSCs; as a matter of fact, Ronald Reagan’s use of the Council was similar to that of Eisenhower.⁴⁴

Pusey writes that Eisenhower’s Council was transformed into “a precision instrument by which the momentous issues affecting our survival as a nation are weighed, measured, analyzed, and pondered by some of the best minds in the government”. For Finer, the NSC was the “supreme strategy board”. Falk and Bauer conclude that Eisenhower institutionalized the NSC and made it into “a form of super department”. The NSC system, they continue, consisted of the central Council supported by a grid of highly standardized procedures and staff relationships and a complex interdepartmental committee substructure. Hoxie notes that Eisenhower’s NSC was based “on the premise that diplomatic, military and economic affairs were necessarily related”. Therefore, Hoxie writes, the Secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury were “made...a triumvirate to review national security plans and operations”. According to Pinkley, Eisenhower’s NSC was “a strategic planning group at the highest peak of government”. Kinnard points out that Eisenhower’s “refurbished” NSC was placed “at the apex of the defense and foreign policy process” and that his approach to managing national security matters remained essentially the same throughout his term of office. Ambrose refers to Eisenhower’s intentions to “upgrade” the Council “into a sort of British War Cabinet” (the British Committee of Imperial Defense). Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Jr. as well as Rubin argue that the Council was another Cabinet for foreign affairs. The system, Watson and Thomas conclude, “imposed a comprehensive framework of order on national security affairs”. Hult and Walcott argue that it was a “collegial-competitive governance structure”, which was to produce options and define disagreements. Only Eisenhower used

44 Kennedy’s decision to reorganize his NSC was based on Professor Neustadt’s suggestions. See “Memorandum (to JFK) on Staffing the President-Elect Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, October 30, 1960,” in *Managerial Presidency*. Ed. James P. Pfiffner. 2nd ed. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), pp. 54–68; Destler, I. M., “National Security Management: What Presidents Have Wrought,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 95 (Winter 1980–1981), p. 578; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 325; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 1967, p. 23; Sorensen, *Decision-making in the White House*, 1963, p. 13. Later on, Kennedy had second thoughts about his decision. He even called Eisenhower’s OCB representative to the White House to discuss whether the OCB guidance on implementation would have prevented the failure of Bay of Pigs. Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 104; Humphrey, David C., “NSC Meetings during the Johnson Presidency,” *Diplomatic History*, volume 18 (Winter 1994), p. 30; Kolodziej, Edward A., “The National Security Council: Innovations and Implications,” *Public Administration Review*, Volume 29 (November–December 1969), p. 573; Williams, John Allen, “The National Security Establishment: Institutional Framework for Policymaking,” in *National Security Strategy: Choices and Limits*. Ed. Stephen J. Cimbala (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 325, 328. Patterson, Jr. points out that the NSC retained its position as “a principal instrument” until the 1990s. At the end of the Reagan Administration, he writes, the combined NSC Staff, consisting of 190 persons, was overseeing the tasks of the PB and the OCB. Patterson, Jr., “Eisenhower’s Innovations in White House: Staff Structure and Operations”, 1993, p. 38; Patterson, Bradley H., Jr., “Teams and Staff: Dwight Eisenhower’s Innovations in the Structure and Operations of the Modern White House,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Volume XXIV (Spring 1994), pp. 279, 282.

the Council, Cunliffe asserts, “in the ways in which planners had intended”. For Greenstein, the NSC was “an impressively rigorous process of deliberation and team building”.⁴⁵

The Research Task

This study encompasses one aspect of the foreign policy-making process of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidency. It seeks to answer how the NSC functioned as an advisory system in a concrete political environment during the Eisenhower era, 1953–1961. In reconstructing the NSC’s work in the context of Vietnam policy-making, both the organization of the advising process (i.e. how information, advice and analysis reached the President) and the interaction between the participants are explored. Furthermore, the possible malfunctions of the advisory process are highlighted. Secondly, this study illuminates what kind of content the NSC-OCB system produced. In addition to analyzing US policy objectives, it is useful to illustrate the optional courses of action contemplated by the NSC Staff in the preparation of the Council meetings and advocated in them by certain NSC members. In its examination of the functioning

45 According to Pusey, the NSC was intended to “be capable of consistent, systematic, long-range security planning at a high-level”. Pusey, Merlo J., *Eisenhower the President* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 39, 94; Finer, Herman, *The Presidency: Crisis and Regeneration: An Essay in Possibilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 234. In referring to “a super department”, Falk and Bauer conclude that it was “placed atop the traditional structure of executive departments and agencies to solve the problems that individual departments were unable to handle”. Falk and Bauer, *The National Security Structure*, 1972, pp. 39, 44; Hoxie, *Command Decision and the Presidency*, 1977, p. 254; Pinkley with Scheer, *Eisenhower Declassified*, 1979, p. 277; Kinnard, Douglas, *The Secretary of Defense* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), pp. 45, 57; Kinnard, Douglas, “Civil-Military Relations: The President and the General,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, pp. 201–202; Neu, “The Rise of the National Security Bureaucracy,” in *The New American State*. Ed. Galambos, 1987, pp. 88–89; Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume Two, 1984, p. 25; Williams, Phil, “The President and Foreign Relations,” in *The Modern Presidency: From Roosevelt to Reagan*. Ed. Malcolm Shaw (New York: Harper, 1987), pp. 229–230; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *American Foreign Policy*, 1986, p. 138; Rubin, *Secrets of State*, 1985, p. 86; Watson, Richard A. and Norman C. Thomas, *The Politics of the Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 1988), pp. 468; Hult, Karen M. and Charles E. Walcott, *Governing Public Organizations: Politics, Structures, and Institutional Design* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1990), p. 74; Walcott, Charles E. and Karen M. Hult, *Governing the White House: From Hoover Through LBJ* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 169; Cunliffe, Magnus, *The Presidency*. Rev. and enl. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1987), p. 292; Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, 2000, p. 55; Greenstein has also written that the Council meetings “served informally to foster coordination, cohesion, and common thinking”. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 133. See also Weaver, James D., “Eisenhower as Commander in Chief,” in *Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Ed. Krieg, 1987, pp. 138–139; Hartmann and Wendzel, *Defending America’s Security*, 1988, p. 99; and Pickett, William B., *Dwight David Eisenhower and American Power* (Wheeling: Davidson, 1995), p. 101. Carnes Lord reminds us that Eisenhower did not attempt to have “a genuinely top-down national security policy-making process with the NSC as its prime instrument”. Carnes Lord quoted in *The Fettered Presidency: Legal Constraints on the Executive Branch*. Ed. L. Gordon Crovitz and Jeremy A. Rabkin (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1989), p. 109.

of the Council and its policy papers, this study builds, in part, on a large existing body of scholarly literature and thus looks at how scholars have studied the topics at hand.

The Eisenhower years provide a good period for studying the organization and workings of the NSC-OCB mechanism, because the era was the heyday of the Council system. None of the US Presidents since the 1950s has chosen as formalized and structured a management model for their national security policy-making and advisory arrangements. The refurbished NSC suited Eisenhower's methodical administrative style particularly well. In this study, the domestic dimension of the statutory function of the NSC is excluded. The Vietnam case is suitable as well for this study as the examination of NSC procedures reveals the nuances of the system. The issue was discussed in some 20 percent of all of the Council meetings between 1953–1961 and there are enough source materials to conduct a study. The functioning of the NSC is studied here against the background of its original mission to determine whether the consideration of the Vietnam question by the NSC machinery had an effect on the structure and operating procedures of the Council system, whether interdepartmental and interagency coordination functioned in practice or whether it was hindered by "secret agendas" of the participant departments and agencies.

US national security can be defined in various ways. During the Cold War, Katzenstein argues, it was defined by scholars and policy-makers narrowly in military terms, whereas in the 19th century the concept included the "economic and social dimensions of political life" and nowadays it even covers environmental dimensions. Buzan, Crabb, Jr., Mulcahy and Smoke, for example, all agree on the difficulty of formally defining the concept. Crabb, Jr. has analyzed a number of definitions of national security. He has found three ideas included in most of them. They are based on the assumption of the independence of the United States today and in the future. Secondly, the independence is threatened by hostile forces. Finally, the safety of American society would have to be preserved by using military force.⁴⁶ National security policy emerged as a major

46 Katzenstein, Peter J., "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. Ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 10; Buzan, Barry, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), introduction; Crabb, Cecil V., Jr., *American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age*. 5th ed. (New York: Harper, 1988), pp. 92–93; Crabb, Cecil V., Jr. and Kevin V. Mulcahy, *American National Security: A Presidential Perspective* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1991), pp. vii–viii, 4–8, 16; Smoke, Richard, *National Security and the Nuclear Dilemma*. 2nd ed. (New York: Random, 1987), p. 301; Sarkesian, Sam C., *U.S. National Security: Policymakers, Processes and Politics* (Boulder: Rienner, 1989), pp. 4–8, 11; Sarkesian, Sam C., "The President and National Security," in *Presidential Leadership and National Security: Style, Institutions, and Politics*. Ed. Sam C. Sarkesian (Boulder: Westview, 1984), p. 5–6; Trager, Frank N. and Simonie, Frank L., "An Introduction to the Study of National Security," in *National Security and American Society: Theory, Process, and Policy*. Ed. Frank N. Trager and Philip S. Kronenberg (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973), p. 36; Brown, Harold, *Thinking about National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World* (Boulder: Westview 1983), p. 4; Clark and Legere, eds, *The President and the Management of National Security, 1969*, p. 33; Renner, Michael, "National Security: The Economic and Environmental Dimensions." (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Paper, May 1989), passim;

dimension of the foreign policy process after World War II. It was influenced by Carl von Clausewitz. Hunter argues that national security policy means “managing the nations’s international affairs”. According to Leffler, the concept contains those decisions and actions that are absolutely necessary “to protect domestic core values from external threats”. Goodpaster writes that it simply refers to the “guiding plans, preparations, deployments, operations, and actions of all kind”. Sarkesian notes that in many instances “policy” and “strategy” are thought of being the same thing and that national security and foreign policies “are almost indistinguishable”.⁴⁷

Knorr, Klaus and Frank N. Trager, eds, *Economic Issues and National Security* (Lawrence: Allen, 1977), *passim*.; Friedberg, Aaron L., “The Changing Relationship between Economics and National Security,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 106, Summer 1991, pp. 265–276; Tarr, David and Alden Williams, eds, *Modules in National Security* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), *passim* and its follow-up Trout and Harf, eds, *National Security Affairs*, 1982, *passim*; Falk, Stanley, *National Security Management: The National Security Structure* (Washington, D.C.: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1973), *passim*; Snow, Donald M., *National Security: Enduring Problems of U.S. Defense Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987), p. 4; Mangold, Peter, *National Security and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1. See also Jordan, Amos A., William J. Taylor, Jr., and Lawrence J. Korb, *American National Security: Policy and Process*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), *passim*. US national security has often been said to have incorporated American values and national interests. Lovell, for example, specifies that the national interests of the US refer to the justification of particular policies. Lovell, John P., *Foreign Policy in Perspective: Strategy, Adaptation, Decision Making* (New York: Holt, 1970), p. 297. According to George and Keohane, national interest has serious “limitations as a theoretical and scientific concept”. They add that “national interest has become so elastic and ambiguous a concept that its role as guide to foreign policy is problematic and controversial”. George, Alexander L. and Keohane, Robert O., *The Concept of National Interests: Uses and Limitations in George, Alexander L., Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview, 1980), pp. 217–218; George, Alexander L., *Domestic Constraints on U.S. Foreign Policy in Change in the International System*. Ed. Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson and Alexander L. George (Boulder: Westview, 1980), p. 234. See also Hastedt, Glenn, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1988), p. 2 and Louw, Michael H. H., *National Security: A Modern Approach* (Silverton: Promedia, 1978), pp. 101, 103.

- 47 Crabb, Jr., *American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age*, 1988, p. 92–93; Hunter, Robert E., *Organizing for National Security* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1988), p. 3; Hunter, Robert E., *Managing National Security: The Reagan/Mondale Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1984), p. 1; Leffler, Melvyn P., “National Security,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*. Ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 202; also printed in the *Journal of American History*, Volume 77 (June 1990), pp. 143–152; Goodpaster, Andrew J., “The Role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the National Security Structure,” in *Issues of National Security in the 1970’s*. Ed. Jordan, Jr., 1977, p. 220; Sarkesian, U.S. National Security, 1989, p. 13; Palmer, Bruce, Jr., *Strategic Guidelines for the United States in the 1980s in Grand Strategy for the 1980s*. Ed. Bruce Palmer, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1978), p. 73; Knorr, Klaus, “National Security Studies: Scope and Structure of the Field,” in *National Security and American Society*. Ed. Trager and Kronenberg, 1973, p. 6; also quoted in Sarkesian, U.S. National Security, 1989, p. 14; Palmer, Jr.’s and Knorr’s definitions are also quoted in Sarkesian, U.S. National Security, 1989, pp. 13–14; Rockman, Bert A., “Mobilizing Political Support,” in *National Security and the U.S. Constitution: The Impact of the Political System*. Ed. George C. Edwards III and Wallace Earl Walker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 18. See also Sarkesian, Sam C., *The New Battlefield: The United States and Unconventional Conflicts* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 226–227.

US national security has usually been studied from three perspectives that emphasize the policy-making manner. The “concentric-circle approach” oversimplifies the process as it holds the chief executive “at the center of the national security process”. The next approach is the “elite versus participatory policy-making”, which assumes that “national security policy is made by an elite”. Various inputs go into the policy process creating political dynamics in the “systems-analysis approach”. The impact of policy is measured by feedback. Historians are forced, Leffler points out, to analyze all factors – both foreign and domestic – that shape policy if they study foreign policy by using national security approach as “an overall interpretative framework”. In this study none of the four approaches is utilized as none is used when studying particular issues or government institutions.⁴⁸ Even though the study has some connections to the field of political science, it is not meant to be a theoretical account. A political scientist, as Alexander L. George suggests, formulates theories that “attempt to absorb the lessons of a variety of historical cases within a single comprehensive analytical framework”.⁴⁹ Yet in the United States several scholars who have contributed to the field under examination in this study are professors at departments of history and political science. The two disciplines are often linked.

George’s multiple advocacy theory has turned out to be a useful analytical tool in conducting this study. Multiple advocacy is a theory or a model of policy formulation that one might use to describe the way in which some Presidents have utilized the NSC to reach decisions. The initial idea of George’s proposal was to avoid a premature consensus in the policy-making process and restrictions on the advice given by the Council members. Thus the quality and effectiveness of policy-making can be improved by building a multiple advocacy of policy alternatives into the policy-making process. There are certain requirements or process norms for the model (see figure 2). Firstly, the President is required to act as a “magistrate” and structure his advisory process as a series of adversary proceedings⁵⁰. He should also take actively part in it. Secondly, the NSC

48 Sarkesian, *U.S. National Security*, 1989, pp. 14–16. National security studies emerged by the 1960s. However, Leffler points out that despite the accumulating scholarly literature on national security it took historians and political scientists two decades before they utilized the concept “to develop an overall interpretative framework for studying American diplomatic history or international politics”. Bock, P.G. and Morton Berkowitz, “The Emerging Field of National Security,” *World Politics*, Volume XIX (October 1966), pp. 122–136; Leffler, “National Security,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*. Ed. Hogan and Paterson, 1991, pp. 202–213.

49 Theory, George adds, “accounts for the variance in historical outcomes” as it aims to “identify the many conditions and variables that affect historical outcomes and to sort out the causal patterns associated” with them. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, p. 245; George, Alexander L., “Case Studies and Theory Development in Diplomacy,” in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*. Ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New York: Free, 1979), p. 44. See also Knorr, Klaus, “Introduction: On the Utility of History,” in *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems*. Ed. Klaus Knorr (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976), pp. 1–4.

50 Adversary proceedings is used to describe how the policies recommended by advisers and staffers to the high-level decision-makers are “subjected to critical scrutiny by someone other than those who advocate that policy”. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, p. 207, footnote 2.

members as advisers should be able and competing “advocates” of policy alternatives. They should be highly motivated and, like the President, committed to the process. In addition, they should possess equal knowledge, analytical resources, bargaining skills and influence. Thirdly, the presentation of conflicting views should be encouraged to ensure thorough consideration of alternatives. Fourthly, if a diversity of advocacies – including unpopular ones – cannot be offered by NSC members, outsiders should be brought in to speak up for them. This is done in order to secure a wider range of options for the President to base his choice-making on and thus determine policy. Finally, The Special Assistant for National Security Affairs is required to play the role of a “custodian-manager”, who is responsible for focusing and eliciting different advocacies. He is also to ensure an open and balanced process. The custodian himself can not participate in the substance of policy discussion and its implementation.⁵¹

Figure 2. Requirements of the multiple advocacy model

1. Presidential-level – “magistrate’s” – active participation in order to monitor and regulate the workings of multiple advocacy (“Participation Principle”).
2. No major maldistribution among the various actors – “policy advocates” – in the policy-making system of the following intellectual and bureaucratic resources (“Fairness Principle”):

a. Intellectual resources

- 1) Competence relevant to the policy issue;
- 2) Information relevant to the policy issue;
- 3) Analytical Support (e.g., staff, technical skills);

b. Bureaucratic resources

- 1) Status, power, standing with the President;
- 2) Persuasion and bargaining skills.

51 For the development of the multiple advocacy model see George, Alexander L., “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 66, (September 1972), pp. 751–785; George, Alexander L., “Rejoinder to ‘Comment’ by I. M. Destler,” in *ibid.*, pp. 791–795 and George, Alexander L., “Toward a More Soundly Based Foreign Policy: Making Better Use of Information,” in Appendix D of Appendices, Volume 2. Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1975), pp. 1–136; George, Alexander L., “Adaptation to Stress in Political Decision Making: The Individual, Small Group, and Organizational Contexts,” in *Coping and Adaptation*. Ed. George V. Coelho, David A. Hamburg and John E. Adams (New York: Basic, 1974), pp. 176–240; George, Alexander L. and Holsti, Ole R., “The Effects of Stress on the Performance of Foreign Policy-Makers,” in *Political Science Annual*. Ed. Cornelius Cotter. Volume Six (Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1975), pp. 255–308; and George, Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy, 1980, p. 191–208. There are four large applications of multiple advocacy model to the real life setting. For these see Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982; Porter, *Presidential Decision Making*, 1980; Moens, Alexander, *Foreign Policy Under Carter: Testing Multiple Advocacy Decision Making* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); and Bose, Meena, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy: The National Security Decision Making of Eisenhower and Kennedy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998). For detailed discussion on multiple advocacy and criticism of the model by academics, see APPENDIX X.

3. Time for adequate debate and give-and-take among all the participants (“Competition Principle”).
4. The use of outsiders to advocate wide range of policy options (“Diversity Principle”).
5. “Custodian’s” managerial control of the NSC system.

Source: The figure is partially adapted (requirements 1–3) from George’s *Presidential Decision-making in Foreign Policy*, 1980, p. 194. David K. Hall’s four principles (bracketed) are taken from his “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 58–59.

As George himself admits (APPENDIX X), there are, of course, problems associated with the application of multiple advocacy. It is not easy to install. There are nine typical malfunctions of the advisory process which can occur under any organizational model, including multiple advocacy. In the first place, the President and his advisers may agree too willingly on the nature of the problem and on a response to it. In their debates the advisers might not present all of the optional courses of action to the President (the disagreements do not cover the full range of relevant hypotheses and alternative options) or there might not be anyone to speak up for an unpopular alternative. The advisers may also “thrash out” views among themselves and present the President with a unanimous recommendation⁵². There might be a situation that the advisers are unwilling to alert the Chief Executive that he “should face up to a difficult decision”. Likewise, in making an important decision, the President may only have a single channel of information. Malfunction also occurs if “the key assumptions and premises of a plan have been evaluated only by the advocates of that opinion”. It is problematic if the advisers do not possess equal standing and status and thus the Chief Executive could easily disregard a negative opinion by one adviser, but instead accept “the seemingly impressive rebuttal” by a more influential adviser unless they are not examined by “a qualified group”. Finally, the consensus among the advisers on a policy might impress the President so that he takes it for granted without determining “how firm the consensus is, how it was achieved, and whether it is justified”. Yet, there is a good chance of overcoming the malfunctions if the President chooses to adhere to multiple advocacy in the NSC work.⁵³

Moreover, possible examples of bureaucratic juggling as well as interdepartmental or interagency and civil-military rivalries among the advisers in the

52 Eisenhower later pointed out that he was not expecting for unanimous recommendations from his advisers. If there had been unanimity, Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs, “I would have suspected that some important part of the subject was being overlooked, or that my subordinates had failed to study the subject”. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 1965, p. 632.

53 George asserts that the malfunctions are “impediments to information processing”, which are caused by the dynamics of organizational behavior and bureaucratic politics. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 121–136, 204–206. About the bureaucratic politics paradigm by Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin see Clifford, J. Garry, “Bureaucratic Politics,” *Journal of American History*, Volume 77 (June 1990), pp. 161–168; also printed in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*. Ed. Hogan and Paterson, 1991, pp. 141–150.

foreign policy process have to be taken into consideration. It is also important to determine if all advocates had, indeed, enough status and staff support to perform their tasks. Could mistaken perceptions – despite multiple advocacy procedures – have an impact on Presidential decisions? Even though there are obvious problems attached to multiple advocacy, when used as a tool in analyzing the advisory activities of the NSC and policy decisions, the model assists, for example, in explaining the Presidential choice.

According to Nash, access to information does not guarantee Presidential power, but it is impossible to exercise power without it. The power of the Chief Executive depends on his ability to persuade and influence others. Therefore, Nash adds, in order to “move government in new directions” the skilled President requires “an efficient advisory system that is synchronized with the President’s needs and objectives”. Barrett points out that an adviser needs to have access and influence. Thus a Presidential adviser is, as Barrett correctly adds, an individual “who could request and reasonably expect to communicate with the president”. Hult argues that advising means “providing input into or support for presidential decision making”. Advising is also to provide information, define problems, structure choices, generate alternatives and communicate viewpoints. Thus, the concept includes socio-emotional aspects and cognitive dimensions. Hult refers to “policy-relevant advising” which might include “counsel on the articulation and selection of substantive policy objectives or the means of achieving them”. It may also involve counsel in decisions about “whether and when to take action, and on the choice of strategies for preserving or enhancing presidential capacity to achieve policy goals”. The bulk of the relevant studies, as Hult has found, deal with actual decision-making without distinctions. She adds that those who provide the President with information, counsel, and support “may not be those who are actively involved in the choice process itself”. This means, Hult concludes, that there is a possibility that advisory and decision processes “may [or may not] be quite different”. She refers to the existence of advisory networks, or systems, which “link actors at several levels of analysis”. On the other hand, Haney, who has examined the organizational configurations, prefers the concept of an advisory structure. The above-mentioned Barrett defines the advisory system in terms of Presidential rationality: “as responding to the environment by developing an advisory system to help determine and reach policy goals, seeking diverse views and information, and connecting means to ends”.⁵⁴

54 Nash, Henry T., *American Foreign Policy: A Search for Security*. 3rd ed. (Homewood: Dorsey, 1985), pp. 176; Hargrove, Erwin C. and Michael Nelson, *Presidents, Politics, and Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 190; Barrett, David M., *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), pp. 7–9. Cronin and Greenberg regard NSC as part one of White House advisory channels, “an inside network”. Cronin, Thomas E. and Sanford D. Greenberg, eds, *The Presidential Advisory System* (New York: Harper, 1969), introduction, p. xvii. If there are several advisers without one clearly above the rest, Goldhamer argues, “almost inevitably develop rivalry among themselves”. Goldhamer, Herbert, *The Adviser* (New York: Elsevier, 1978), p. 98. Hult treats advising “as a task rather than a property of particular indi-

As Hanhimäki correctly points out, national security interests and needs do not dictate all policy. He points out the importance of ideology and personalities.⁵⁵ This is, therefore, also a study of people, the Presidential advisers and their respective roles in the NSC-OCB machinery. The examination of input and the contribution of individual advisers is needed to understand the policies, for it is they who make, or at least influence, policy. Competent individuals within the Administration can be considered to be of the utmost importance in politics and governance at all levels. The majority of the principal actors in the NSC, the “main characters of the cast”, are briefly introduced in appendices in order to show their relationship to the NSC process as well as interaction and inter-personal dynamics among the major participants. Ideological considerations are reflected in the NSC documents. The goals and motives of the NSC members with regard to Vietnam as well as the degree of influence exercised by them in the process are interesting questions. Could, for example, the indifferent or ignorant attitude of a certain key adviser change the preconceptions of the President and thus even affect policy in a negative way? Or, on the other hand, could the anxieties of a senior official (possibly acting on the initiative of a lower official) make a difference in promoting the Vietnamese cause? Would those officials, whose advocacies were not accepted, commit themselves and their departments or agencies to the effective execution and implementation of adopted and approved policies? Furthermore, it is useful to examine to what extent issues themselves affected the process or whether the initiatives came from within the NSC system or possibly from outside.

Policy-making can be understood to refer to the high-level elaboration of governmental policy. This includes planning. On the other hand, decision-making refers to the act or process of deciding a decision arrived at after due consideration. The Council’s activities were associated with long-term policy guidance and preparatory functions and giving advice before actual choices

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viduals or of units”. She adds that some popular books, like Anderson’s *The President’s Men*, 1968, place their focus on individual advisers. Hult, Karen M., “Advising the President,” in *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*. Ed. George C. Edwards, III, John H. Kessel and Bert A. Rockman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 112–114, endnote 1, 149; Haney, Patrick J., *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises. Presidents, Advisers and the Management of Decision Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 3. See also Light, Paul C., *Vice Presidential Power: Advice and Influence in the White House* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) and Meltsner, Arnold J., *Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). For discussion on Presidential advisory processes, see chapter 4 of George’s *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 81–108. Best has studied Lyndon B. Johnson’s advisory system from the point of view of Presidents’ interactional choice environments (interaction partners, medium and timing). Best argues that Johnson chose with whom, how and when he interacted with the advisers he inherited from Kennedy. Best, James J., “Who Talked to the President When? A Study Of Lyndon B. Johnson,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 103 (Fall 1988), pp. 531–545. Moens focuses on Carter’s decision process, seeing the President not only “as an indecisive man”, but also concluding that there was a “lack of help around him”. Moens, Alexander, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” *ibid.*, Volume 106 (Summer 1991), pp. 211–237.

55 Hanhimäki, Jussi, *Rinnakkaiseloa patoamassa: Yhdysvallat ja Paasikiven linja 1948–1956* (Containing Coexistence: The United States and the Paasikivi Line, 1948–1956) (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996), p. 183.

and decisions were made. Therefore, the broader concept of policy-making is better suited for use in terms of the NSC mechanism.⁵⁶ In addition, the NSC is continuously referred to as the Council, the OCB as the Board, the OCB Assistants as the Board Assistants, the CIA as the Agency, the Department of Defense as the Pentagon, the JCS as the Chiefs, some of the Working Groups as the Groups, Operations Plans as Plans and the Civil Guard as the Guard. Furthermore, dozens of abbreviations and acronyms have been used.

In geographical terms, Southeast Asia refers to an area which then consisted of Indochina (Vietnam[s], Cambodia and Laos), Thailand, Burma and Malaya. Some of the documents define the area to include a broader region including Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore. It is common that in some of the sources Indochina is viewed as being one entity, even though it clearly encompassed separate and heterogeneous countries. The Indochinese states were generally referred to as the Associated States until the Geneva Conference of 1954. Some American documents use the terms “free Vietnam” or “Viet-Nam” when referring to South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam). On the other hand, Eisenhower is reported not to have even mentioned the word Vietnam.⁵⁷

This study, among other things, analyzes change over time. It is thus divided into chronologically arranged chapters emphasizing the role of the NSC. After the introduction, the second chapter briefly examines developments during the Truman Administration before focusing on the beginning of the Eisenhower Administration, particularly on the views of the NSC toward French actions in Indochina. The third and fourth chapters analyze the NSC and the Dien Bien Phu crisis during the spring of 1954, even though this has already been used as

56 Processes of foreign policy-making refer, as Haney writes, “to the tasks that are performed by a group that lead to a foreign policy decision or choice”. Tasks like this, he adds, “include conceptualizing goals and objectives, searching for information, and developing contingency plans”. Basically, the policy process involves four policy phases: policy issue, approval, implementation, and feedback. In terms of the flow of policymaking in an orderly fashion, as George asserts, search and analysis is followed by a choice. He adds that in a system which includes iteration in between the phases there decision/choice “rehearsals”, which means that search and analysis “are not compartmentalized and separated from choice”. Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 1997, p. 12; Sarkesian, *U.S. National Security*, 1989, pp. 118–119; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 180–182.

57 Olson, James S. and Roberts, Randy, *Where the Domino Fell. America and Vietnam, 1945–1990* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), p. 72. For an account of Eisenhower’s briefing on Indochina to his successor on January 19, 1961, see Greenstein, Fred I., and Richard H. Immerman, “What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception,” *Journal of American History*, Volume 79 (September 1992), pp. 568–587. There are also various names for different parts of the Vietnam War. According to Kimball, the internationally accepted term for the 1946–1954 war was the First Indochina War. The US Army, however, used the term French-Vietminh War, France the Indochina War (*la guerre d’Indochine*) and Vietminh the Anti-French War of Resistance. The international term for the war that was waged from 1959 to 1975 was the Second Indochina War, whereas the National Liberation Front (NLF) used the War of Liberation. The US-dominated phase of the war was called by the Vietnamese either the Anti-US War of Resistance for National Salvation or the American War. Americans have used the term the Vietnam War. Kimball, Jeffrey P., *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War* (New York: McGraw, 1990), pp. 1–3.

a case study in scholarship. It is worth exploring because in the first half of 1954 Indochina was deemed so important that it was discussed at almost every Council meeting. The study next examines the deliberations within the NSC during the peace conference at Geneva. This Geneva Conference of 1954 should not be confused with the Geneva Conference of 1955 between the two superpowers. The replacement of the French in late 1954 follows in the sixth chapter. The NSC discussions during the spring of 1955 underlying the President's decision to support Ngo Dinh Diem are addressed in the seventh chapter. The sub-section on the All-Vietnam elections differs from the other chapters. The whole issue, which was crystallized in the context of NSC policy-making from 1954 to 1956, is treated in a compiled way. The two penultimate chapters are devoted to the treatment of policy revisions by the NSC, the OCB reporting and plans as well as the development of counterinsurgency and other concepts with respect to Vietnam during the years 1956–1961. In the concluding chapter, the arguments and interpretations are presented in the light of the malfunctions of the advisory process and the multiple advocacy theory.

The Tradition of Research

Scholarly literature on Presidential decision-making, the NSC, and the United States and Vietnam is abundant. Former foreign policy officials and historians have also written a great deal on American foreign policy in general and in particular during the Cold War. The same is true with respect to the Eisenhower Administration. In addition, political scientists, psychologists and other social and behavioral scientists have published copious works on the various aspects of the Presidency, government and public policy institutions. This literature has usually been intended for scholars, government officials, and students of international relations, American politics, the Presidency, executive decision-making or public management. Furthermore, books on Presidential advising or advisory systems include, for example, psycho-biographical studies, biographies, personality and personal character studies or research on approaches to foreign policy of individual Presidents and the relationship between Congress and the President in the conduct of foreign affairs.

How have the scholars – in addition to interpretations presented earlier in the sub-section “Advising the President” – in general, viewed the functions of Eisenhower's NSC? The “rather simplistic critique”, Kinnard has persuasively argued, of the Jackson Subcommittee “seems to have misled a decade of scholars”. In the 1960s two schools of thought on Eisenhower's NSC prevailed. The first group maintained that a system such as the one that existed was necessary even though “it may have been ponderous and that the bureaucracy tended to run away with” it. Another perception was that the NSC was sluggish and routinized and therefore incompetent to deal with key questions. Some have even incorrectly accused the Council of taking votes on issues and that Eisen-

hower governed by committee, thus making policy decisions that were compromised and flawed.⁵⁸

It is possible to identify two broad approaches in the literature; the first could be called the “critical school”, whereas the second supported the existing system. The basic arguments of the critical school are that the NSC system could not function as it had become bureaucratized and thus cumbersome and inflexible. Johnson wrote that the “informal practices of the Council members and the NSC staff began to erode the theoretical ideal of how the NSC should operate”. On the other hand, Patrick Anderson agrees, and is supported by Doyle. He concludes that the oversized meetings inhibited “the free flow of discussion”, which meant that the system did not always function as it was intended. A General and NSC participant on the JCS, Maxwell D. Taylor also complained that the Council had not worked as it should have. Rostow focuses on the uselessness of the NSC process by claiming that the President “was forced to sit through the elaborate exposition of problems” that he was already familiar with. The “watered-down papers” argument is carried on by Nuechterlein and Sanders. The insistence on consensus, the size of the Council and its very formality, they argue, had a negative impact on NSC recommendations. Nash writes about the “paper mill” and argues that “NSC personnel adhered to prespecified roles” and followed a routine, “rigidly scheduled existence”. Williams refers to the “slow and laborious process of consensus-building”.⁵⁹ The interpretations of the representatives of the critical school help to draw attention to the possible defects of the Council system.

The supporters of Eisenhower’s NSC focus on its important role in providing the necessary coordination and integrated set of policy recommendations for the President and its effectiveness as a deliberative advisory body in such activities. Hammond, for example, gives the Eisenhower Administration credit for improving the staff mechanisms of the NSC along with its increasing use of

58 Kinnard, *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management*, 1977, p. 133; Moose, “The White House National Security Staffs Since 1947,” in *The President and the Management of National Security*. Ed. Clark and Legere, 1969, p. 67–68. About criticism see also Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 56–57.

59 NSC members, Johnson added, “would try to keep controversial items off the agenda by coming to agreement beforehand. In addition, Eisenhower’s respect for the Council “made attendance...a status symbol”. Johnson, Richard Tanner, *Managing the White House* (New York: Harper, 1974), pp. 91–92; Anderson, *The President’s Men*, 1968, p. 175; Doyle, William, *Inside the Oval Office: The White House Tapes from FDR to Clinton* (New York: Kodansha, 1999), pp. 84–85. Taylor writes that Eisenhower’s NSC had by the late 1950s “developed a reputation for being nothing more than an overgrown committee, long on paper work but short on decisive action”. Taylor, Maxwell D., *Responsibility and Response* (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 62; Rostow., *The Diffusion of Power 1957–1972*, 1972, p. 165; Nuechterlein, *National Interests and Presidential Leadership*, 1978, p. 124; Sanders, Ralph, *The Politics of Defense Analysis* (New York: Dunellen, 1973), pp. 81–82. Nash argues that there was a tendency to measure accomplishment by the number of policy papers produced over a fixed period of time. Nash, *American Foreign Policy*, 1985, p. 204; Williams, Phil, “The President and Foreign Relations,” in *The Modern Presidency*. Ed. Shaw, 1987, p. 235. Bundy, for example, accepts Jackson Subcommittee’s critique of cumbersomeness and rigidity. Bundy, William P., “The National Security Process: Plus ça Change...?” *International Security*, Volume 7 (Winter 1982/1983), p. 99.

the Council. Coordinated counsel aspect is emphasized by Koenig. For Falk, the Council was, by 1960, “a highly complicated but nonetheless smoothly operating machine, with clear lines of authority and responsibility and elaborate yet systematized staff work”. Lord accounts Eisenhower’s clear view of NSC’s function as the reason for the smoothness of its operations. “Near-mechanical precision”, Lowenthal writes, gave the NSC means to handle a volume of matters. In the view of Edwards and Wayne, the NSC “meshed well” with Eisenhower’s needs. Kinnard, Burke, Greenstein, Henderson and Prados, whose assessment seems to be by far the most positive one, stress the informal meetings of the NSC as there the decisions were made, whereas the Council meetings provided a regular forum for teamwork and for hammering out policies. In addition, Destler, Gelb and Lake agree on the sophisticated nature of the NSC. The latter two assert that the NSC “offered balance between careerist expertise and political leadership, between the White House and the State Department, between capacity for planning and for operational command”. They, together with Destler, DiClerico and the authors of the official NSC history, point out that it was not the dominant factor in making foreign policy, but one of the structures in a broader system. Crabb, Jr. and Mulcahy argue that the NSC’s very formality brought coherence and accountability to foreign policy. Bose regards Eisenhower as having been a careful decision-maker whose NSC advisers did not present him with single recommendations. Even though Eisenhower’s orderly decision-making process might have discouraged creativity, she adds, this was not usually the case with national security policy.⁶⁰

60 Hammond, Paul Y., “The National Security Council as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination: An Interpretation and Appraisal,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 54 (December 1960), pp. 899–910; Hammond’s article is also printed in Altshuler, Alan A., ed., *The Politics of Federal Bureaucracy* (New York: Dodd, 1968, pp. 140–156; Koenig, *The Chief Executive*, 1964, p. 173; Falk, “The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy,” 1964, p. 418; Falk and Bauer, *The National Security Structure*, 1972, p. 39; Destler, “National Security Advice to U.S. Presidents,” 1977, p. 148; Lord, *Carnes, The Presidency and the Management of National Security* (New York: Free, 1988), pp. 70, 87; Lowenthal, Mark M., “The National Security Council: Organizational History”. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 27 June, 1978), p. 18; Edwards, George C., III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1985), pp. 301–302; Kinnard, *The Secretary of Defense*, 1980, p. 46; Kinnard, *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management*, 1977, pp. 17, 65, 134; Greenstein, Fred I., “Nine Presidents in Search of a Modern Presidency,” in *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*. Ed. Fred I. Greenstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 308; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 126; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 19. According to Greenstein, the institutionalized machinery of the NSC was “the crown jewel of Eisenhower’s advisory system”. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, 2000, p. 55; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al, *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, pp. 153, 155, 183–184; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, pp. 80, 89–90, 118; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, Part II; Destler, I. M., “The Presidency and National Security Organization,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, pp. 230–232, 236–237; Gelb, Leslie H. and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon, 1984), pp. 173, 181; DiClerico, Robert E., *The American President*. 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1995), p. 206; *History of the National Security Council, 1947–1997*. Office of the Historian, US Department of State (Washington, D.C., August 1997), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/NSC/html/NSChistory.html>, pp. 7–8. Crabb, Jr. and Mulcahy, *American National Security*, 1991, p. 102; Bose, *Shaping and*

The supporters' works have assisted in focusing this study on the advising process and its malfunctions, the interplay between advisers as well as policy content. Furthermore, they have affirmed the perception that the Council bloomed during the Eisenhower years, thus making it a suitable topic for a detailed study. This study is the work of a supporter of Eisenhower's NSC. While examining the topic, it advances our understanding of the functions of the Council and of the way in which the decisions were made.

This study owes much to the treatment of the importance of advisory systems by Burke and Greenstein, who are also supporters of Eisenhower's Council system. Their book *How Presidents Test Reality* and a couple of spinoff articles concern advice and information in Presidential decision-making and the effects of Presidential personality on national security policy-making. They have examined the 1954 and 1965 decisions on Vietnam by adopting a three-leveled approach: the larger political environment, the individual characteristics of the President, and the advisory system. According to Burke and Greenstein, the models set forth in Johnson's typology of Presidential advisory systems – competitive (Roosevelt), formalistic (Truman, Eisenhower and Nixon) and collegial (Kennedy) – “are too simple and too few to capture the varieties and complexities of advising in modern presidencies”. Multiple advocacy actually combines features from the two latter models. Burke and Greenstein analyze the structures, dynamics and produced content of the advisory systems, and in the case of the impact of the President, his core personal attributes, and how he works with his advisers and responds to the political environment. In the treatment of the third level, the effect of the political environment, Burke and Greenstein look for pressures and opportunities and ask “how malleable is the environment?”. Congressional and public opinions as well as that of the allies have to be taken into consideration.⁶¹

Signaling Presidential Policy, 1998, pp. 99–101. See also Burke, John P., “The Institutional Presidency,” in *The Presidency and the Political System*. Ed. Michael Nelson. 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 1995), p. 391. A Polish scholar Mania has utilized NSC approach in his analysis of American policy toward Eastern Europe. Mania analyzes the policy papers, but does not consider at all the advisory character of the NSC. He concludes that the Council “as the president's tool...played a decisive role in creating American policy”. While Mania reminds us that the status of the NSC is dependent upon the President and his Administration, he argues that the “only fault” of the mechanism was “its lack of efficiency in solving international crises”. Mania, Andrzej, *The National Security Council i Amerykanska Polityka Wobec Europy Wschodniej w Latach 1945–1960* (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, 1994), pp. 223–224.

- 61 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 5–7, 20–24, 41, 256, 277; Greenstein, Fred I. and John P. Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing: Evidence from Two Vietnam Decisions,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 104 (Centennial Year 1989–1990), pp. 557–558, 565, 580; Burke, John P. and Fred I. Greenstein, “Presidential Personality and National Security Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Vietnam Decision-making,” *International Political Science Review*, Volume 10 (1989), pp. 73, 78–82, 90. See also Burke, John P., “Responsibilities of Presidents and Advisers: A Theory and Case Study of Vietnam Decision Making,” *Journal of Politics*, Volume 46 (August 1984), pp. 818–845; Burke, John P., *The Institutional Presidency*, 1992, p. 66. Important books by Greenstein are *Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization* (Chicago: Markham, 1969) and *op. cit. Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982. Similar approach to Burke's and Greenstein's had already been chosen a decade earlier by Scribner for his dissertation. See Scribner, Charles R., “The Eisenhower and Johnson Administrations' Decision-making on Vietnamese Intervention: A Study of Contrasts.” (Ph.D.

Burke's and Greenstein's advisory arrangements approach is useful in terms of the NSC process. In the advisory context, Burke and Greenstein examine the structure and dynamics of the advisory system as well as the content it produced. Firstly, they were concerned with how the advisory system and the communication between members was organized, and with what was the mixture of formal vis-à-vis informal components in the process. In addition, they asked if there were managers and what kind of information and advice the President was exposed to. Secondly, the dynamics referred specifically to the character of interaction within the advisory system. They also inquired whether it was predictable and if there were limitations to the advisers. Generally, they examined what "aspects of the performance of the advisory system enhance or diminish the quality of information and advice that come to the attention of decision makers". Thirdly, they stressed the need to "identify both the political and the policy content of the advisory process" with special emphasis on feasibility. They conclude that the way in which advisory systems are organized might have a great influence on the decision-making process. The advisory systems matter as a well-devised system can cover for the possible shortcomings of the President in his choice-making effort, whereas a poorly devised one may easily mislead him. Furthermore, they add, "the formal organization of advising has underappreciated strengths". In the case of the Indochina crisis, the advocacy of options was important, including those that never were considered and whether some were advocated in a manner which "precluded taking them seriously". Burke and Greenstein also inquired into whether the decision-making process was "underpinned by rigorous information gathering and analysis". Burke and Greenstein are the only scholars who have sought to account for the 1954 Indochina crisis partly in terms of the (NSC) advisory process.⁶²

Many scholars have tended to underplay the role of the Eisenhower Administration, and especially the role of the NSC, when dealing with the origins of the US commitment to the fate of South Vietnam. There are some scholars who have commented on the role of Eisenhower and his NSC on a general level in the context of Vietnam (see APPENDIX XI). Smith, for example, stresses that various agencies and departments participated side by side in the defense-related decision-making conducted through the Council. According to Billings-Yun, the NSC work suited Eisenhower's style and he seems to have felt at home at the Council meetings. President Eisenhower "often used the NSC and his close advisers in a special way", Gardner asserts and adds, "he would lead them

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Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1980). Richard Tanner Johnson's classification scheme was based on Richard E. Neustadt's work and was used by Alexander L. George in developing multiple advocacy. According to Johnson, the formalistic model was hierarchical system. See, for example, Johnson, *Managing the White House*, 1974, pp. 262–300; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 145–168; Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 1997, pp. 43–46; and Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, 1998, pp. 7–8.

62 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 21–22, 58–5, 293 and passim; Greenstein and Burke, "The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing," 1989–1990, p. 563.

along, hinting at something or other, until he could get them to express ideas that he was testing out privately or, alternatively, that he wanted to smoke out so as to clear the boards". David L. Anderson concludes that regular participation in the Council meetings – and conferences with Secretary Dulles – made the President a constant and substantive part of the policy process.⁶³

Why did Eisenhower decide not to intervene in order to help the French at Dien Bien Phu? This theme has attracted a number of interpretations. Ambrose writes that, regardless of the recommendations made by his advisers (also in the NSC), Eisenhower declined to approve the proposed air strikes. This decision matured, Richardson adds, as the President met with NSC members. In contrast, Neustadt suspects that even though the President turned to his Council for advice he may have come up with the decision in his own mind. Yet, as Anderson asserts, in the NSC Eisenhower indicated he was ready to deepen the US involvement in Indochina, but the area was not so important that it would be the cause for an allout war, Duiker continues.⁶⁴

How, then, did the Council function during the Dien Bien Phu crisis? George (partly together with Smoke) maintains that "vigorous multiple advocacy" was applied, with Cutler as the custodian-manager. This conclusion is supported by Hall. Furthermore, Burke and Greenstein write that the ways of functioning closely resembled multiple advocacy, but that the impact of the concept on the actions of the Eisenhower Administration is difficult to assess. According to Prados, the NSC mechanism functioned in a smooth manner and produced policies that could be implemented. The American policy-makers were not prepared for the crisis, Spector argues, as they had not heard negative information but merely falsely positive intelligence reports. Still, Haney, like Herek, Janis and Huth, praises the performance of Eisenhower and his NSC during the Dien Bien Phu crisis.⁶⁵

63 Smith, R.B., *An International History of the Vietnam War. Volume I: Revolution versus Containment, 1955–61* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), p. 191. Billings-Yun's book was basically her Harvard dissertation from 1982. Billings-Yun, Melanie S., *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 59; Gardner, Lloyd C., *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 199–200; Anderson, David L., *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953–61* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 20.

64 Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume Two, 1984*, pp. 206–207; Ambrose, Stephen E., *Eisenhower: Soldier and President. Rev. ed.* (New York: Touchstone, 1990), p. 379; Pach, Jr. and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1991*, p. 76; Neustadt, Richard E., *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York, Free, 1990), p. 300–301; Anderson, *Trapped by Success, 1991*, p. 33; Anderson, David L., "'No More Koreas': Eisenhower and Vietnam," in Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ed. Krieg, 1987, p. 273; Duiker, William J., *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 171.

65 George, Alexander L. and Smoke, Richard, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 251–253, 256–257, 262; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy, 1980*, pp. 124, 229, 236; Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980", 1982, pp. 66–67, 359–360, 701; Greenstein and Burke, "The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing," 1989–1990, pp. 569–570; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality, 1991*, pp. 6, 286–288; Prados, John, *The Sky Would Fall: Operation Vulture: The Secret U.S. Bombing Mission to Vietnam, 1954* (New York: Dial, 1983), p. 206; Spector, Ronald H.,

Scholars have stressed various policy papers, the main products of the Council system, and different meetings of the NSC held during the first part of 1954. Nelson, for example, reminds us that earlier NSC papers were used during the crisis and she also emphasizes the frequent conferences between the President and his NSC advisers, Secretary Dulles in particular. Burke and Greenstein point out the January 8 Council meeting as the beginning of the handling of the crisis in Washington. In addition, the meeting is revealing in terms of Eisenhower's advisory system. Herring and Immerman emphasize the decisive importance of the April 29 meeting. Even though there were options, they add, they did not result in "anything of substance". Likewise, Paul A. Anderson continues that the confusing and ever-changing situation in the field made the NSC's options papers obsolete by the May 8 NSC meeting, which was, in Anderson's words, "decision-external" in nature.⁶⁶

In what way have the scholars analyzed the content of NSC's policy papers on Vietnam? Spector, Watson and Buzzanco have written that the adoption NSC 162/2 "Basic National Security Policy" (October 1953) already indicated that the US was willing to fight for Indochina. In Gibbons's treatment it means the reevaluation of the situation. Gibbons and Immerman point out that an NSC paper NSC 177 (December 1953; renumbered NSC 5405 in January 1954 and titled "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia") was basically NSC124/2 (June 1952, with the same name) in a rewritten format. George and Smoke argue that there is a contradiction in NSC 5405: it would only be defended in cooperation with the French. The document, Hess maintains, noted that Indochina was of "critical importance" for US security. Nelson and Destler have found that it was based on the principle later to be known as the domino theory. For Prados NSC 5405 was not realistic, and, as Arnold adds, it was overtaken by events. The Eisenhower Administration, however, adopted a new approach with the approval of NSC 5429 "Review of

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 The United States in Vietnam: Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1983), p. 211; Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 1997, pp. 66, 86, 90–93, 106–110, 116, 126–127, 130, 139; Herek, Gregory M., Irving L. Janis and Paul Huth, "Decision Making During International Crises: Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Volume 31 (June 1987), pp. 203–226.
 66 Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill,'" 1983, p. 315; Nelson, Anna Kasten, "National Security I: Inventing a Process (1945–1960)," in *The Illusion of Presidential Government*. Ed. Hugh Heclo and Lester M. Salamon (Boulder: Westview, 1981), p. 250; Nelson, "The Importance of Foreign Policy Process," in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 123; Burke and Greenstein, "Presidential Personality and National Security Leadership," 1989, pp. 78, 80, 82; Greenstein and Burke, "The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing", 1989–1990, pp. 563–565; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* 1991, pp. 31, 61–62; Greenstein, Fred I., "Eisenhower's Leadership Style," in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, pp. 61–62; Burke, *The Institutional Presidency*, 1985, p. 66; Herring, George C. and Immerman, Richard H., "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: 'The Day We Didn't Go to War' Revisited," *Journal of American History*, Volume 71 (September 1984), p. 361; Anderson, Paul A., "Deciding How to Decide in Foreign Affairs," in *The Presidency and Public Policy Making*. Ed. George C. Edwards III, Steven A. Shull and Norman C. Thomas (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), p. 165; Anderson, Paul A., "What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision? The Implications for the Comparative Study of Foreign Policy," in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and James N. Rosenau (London: Harper, 1991), pp. 301–303.

U.S. Policy in the Far East” (August 1954), Herring argues. According to Gelb and Betts, the new policy paper addressed “Asia in its own rights”. Anderson argues that, when discussing the NSC 5429 and dealing with Third World nationalism, the NSC members were incapable of understanding the situation at hand. The Council did not, for example, Buzzanco adds, believe that the Communists could achieve a victory in Indochina.⁶⁷

Kahin concludes that a draft NSC policy statement NSC 5519 “U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections” (June 1955) clearly indicates that the US was not going to pressure Ngo Dinh Diem to negotiate over the reunification of the two Vietnams because the Communists would have won the elections. This view is shared by Short. According to Arnold NSC 5519 included some new thinking. According to Gelb and Betts as well as Condit the next Policy Paper, “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia” NSC 5612 (August 1956), was constructed on earlier Policy Papers NSC 5405 and NSC 5429. Greenstein and Henderson have argued that the language in NSC 5612 reflects the goal of maintaining “a balance of power in the area”. NSC 5809, “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia” (April 1958), Stavins, Barnet and Raskin write, hints that US officials were not interested simply in South Vietnam but also North Vietnam. The document also indicates, Kahin goes on, the NSC Staff members had not forgotten the goal of reunification. Anderson construes that since 1956 the NSC Policy Papers – including NSC 6012 (July 1960) with the same title as NSC 5612 and NSC 5809 – had not actually contained significant changes.⁶⁸

67 Specter, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 194; Watson, Robert J., *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1953–1954. History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986), p. 251; Buzzanco, Robert, *Masters of War: Military Dissent & Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 38, 41; Gibbons, William Conrad, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships. Part I: 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 146, 149, 155; Immerman, Richard H., “Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable: Eisenhower and Dienbienphu,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, p. 125; George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 252–253; Hess, Gary R., “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia: The United States and the Geneva and Manila Conferences,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1990), p. 124; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 316; Destler, “The Presidency and National Security Organization,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 230; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, pp. 155–156, 203, 207; Arnold, James R., *The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military, and Intervention in Vietnam* (New York: Morrow, 1991), p. 135; Herring, George C., *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*. 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw, 1986), p. 44–45; Gelb, Leslie H. and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 183; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 69.

68 Kahin, George McT., *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (Garden City: Anchor /Doubleday, 1987), pp. 66, 90; Short, Anthony, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 209; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 287; Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, pp. 183–184; Condit, Kenneth W., *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1955–1956. History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VI* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Joint Staff, 1992), pp. 233–234; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 130; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al., *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, p. 163; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 98; Stavins, Ralph, Richard J. Barnet and Marcus G. Raskin, *Washington Plans an Aggressive War* (New York: Random, 1971), p. 15; Anderson, *Trapped by Success* 1991, p. 151.

Most of the above-mentioned scholars have been working with inadequate NSC-related source materials (see sub-section “Primary Sources”) and therefore they have produced one-sided and not particularly well-argued interpretations. Even Burke and Greenstein, who are in many ways exceptions, have admitted that much of the NSC material had remained classified in the late 1980s. They wrote that they had, for example, been unable to answer whether information had been rigorously gathered and analyzed by the PB in 1954⁶⁹. Partly because of missing documentation other scholars have not taken into detailed consideration the deliberations and role of the NSC machinery behind Eisenhower’s several key decisions with respect to Vietnam. Those are the decisions, together with decisions to continue Truman’s policies and not to intervene at Dien Bien Phu, to “take over” from the French in the fall of 1954, to back Ngo Dinh Diem in the spring of 1955, to assist Diem in cancelling the all-Vietnam elections scheduled to be held by July 1956, to revise US policies toward Southeast Asia (including Vietnam and Indochina) in 1956, 1958 and 1960. Given the above, it can be concluded that the viewpoint of the NSC organization can be used in studying the development of the Eisenhower Administrations’s Vietnam policy. This approach offers augmented and supplementary insights in the study of the Eisenhower Presidency, particularly generalizations about his use of the NSC as an advisory body, and also, to some extent, into the historiography of the Vietnam War.

Primary Sources⁷⁰

The records of the NSC (Record Group, RG 273) are deposited in Archives II of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at College Park, Maryland. They comprise General Records, and Records of the Executive Secretary, Secretariat, PB (including Staff papers), and OCB. In addition, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (DDEL) in Abilene, Kansas, holds NSC-related materials, which are scattered in various series of the White House Office (WHO) records. Noteworthy are the records of the Office of Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Staff and NSC series in Eisenhower: Papers-as-President file (Ann Whitman File, AWF). A general trend in the chronology and thus the Council’s documentation on Vietnam is that the collections are rich

69 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 59–60.

70 This sub-section draws, in part, upon my own findings and on *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Documents of the National Security Council*. Comp. Hydrick, 1996; *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States*. Compiled by Robert B. Matchette et al. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), 1995), 3 Volumes; *Historical Materials in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library* (Abilene: NARA, 1993); and *The John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue*. Revised (Princeton: Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library/Princeton University Libraries, 1994). See also Tuunainen, Pasi, “Eisenhowerin kausi Yhdysvaltojen arkistoissa.” (*The Eisenhower Era in the US Archives*). *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, Volume 94, Number 2, 1996, pp. 153–158.

in material until mid-1955, after which the records become, to some extent, more scarce, reflecting the thinking in Washington that Vietnam was not a problem in the latter part of the 1950s. On the other hand, material on the organization of the NSC is abundant. The existing Council documents cover almost all aspects of the NSC's work. Hall points out that any study of multiple advocacy and the dynamics of the Council system "requires nearly comprehensive data on the nature of the decision-making process".⁷¹ The data Hall was asking for twenty years ago is almost all available today. Its use is, however, slightly obstructed by classification, particularly in relation to the spring of 1954.

The historian Dr. S. Everett Gleason was present at Council meetings, and kept a running account of the discussions. There has been uncertainty whether the NSC members knew about Gleason's activities. In any case, the notes were not intended, Nelson comments on Gray's recollections, as official reports to Eisenhower. Therefore Gleason was free to "write as he wished" and was capable of understanding. The summaries of discussion were compiled from Gleason's notes. Gleason, Prados writes, "tried hard to capture the flavor of the exchanges, often paraphrasing the NSC principals, sometimes capturing their words, always their meaning". Prados comments that "Eisenhower was aggressive debating at council meetings; the NSC records show him questioning facts and motives, arguing points, issuing blanket warnings, and stating intentions. His remarks could be sharp and cutting, even emotional". Eisenhower's military background, Prados continues, "enabled him to interpret proposals and debate the minute details that recommended responses" to the crises. After Gleason's retirement in the summer of 1959, the note-taking task was taken over by political scientist and NSC staffer since 1948, Marion W. Boggs. According to Prados, this change meant that "the summaries lost some of their narrative quality". However, Prados regards the summaries as one of "the most authoritative records of the United States Government". McMahon shared Prados's view and commented that they were "critically significant" and among "the most important sources on the Eisenhower years". Furthermore, Ewald regards them "magnificent". Nelson describes Gleason's "copious notes" as capturing "nuances and subtleties, as well as straightforward text". The NSC released the meeting summaries in an orderly fashion through a systematic review starting in the early 1980s. Nelson, who examined the declassified NSC meeting summaries printed in the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) documentary collection, cautioned in their use. She commented that "the extracts are limited in subject and thus may give a distorted view of the participation of individual members". Subsequent changes in the participants

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71 Data includes "the range of options considered, the number of advisers consulted, and the frequency of policy review, and nearly comprehensive information on the behavior of key actors (including magistrate's views on interpersonal conflict and the performance of the custodian). In order to cope with his data problems and to be "able to reconstruct the intricate organizational cultures found in a series of NSC systems", Hall conducted a large material collections through interviews of key actors. Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947-1980," 1982, pp. 750-752.

“unquestionably influenced the dynamics” of the Council meetings, she continues. According to Nelson, “the educational or informational nature of the council meetings is the most obvious aspect of the summaries on Indochina”. Records of Actions as recorded by the Executive Secretary of the Council have a separate series. Actions which became policy after circulation were numbered consecutively upon completion. If there was no need to have a formal NSC discussion of a report, the Council acted on the report by Memorandum Approval. The Records of Action and Memorandum Approvals have been arranged by action number.⁷²

After using a large number of the summaries, it can be concluded that the summaries of discussion seem reliable, indeed the best material for this study. They make it possible to reconstruct the actual situation in which Eisenhower was advised and thus present a detailed narrative of the discussions in Council meetings. In fact, the summaries could be considered invaluable, and without them this study could never have been completed. They seem to be rather exact and accurate reports of the exchanges between the NSC principals. It should be noted that they are not minutes, which could come public and hence some comments might have been excluded for their nature. Unfortunately, they still are subject to some classification. Some summaries are even missing or it has been unable to locate them. There is actually no way to determine whether Gleason missed a point or misunderstood one while taking notes at the NSC meetings. Some minor conflicting accounts are offered in, for example, memoirs, which, in turn, have to be used with care. Furthermore, the oral intelligence briefings titled “Significant World Events Affecting US Security”, given by the

72 According to Gordon Gray, Eisenhower thought in the beginning of his term “that some of these things would be so highly privileged that there should be no record of them at all”. Gordon Gray Oral History Transcript, DDEL. Gleason’s and NSC’s Executive Secretary Lay, Jr’s task at the NSC meetings was to assist the Special Assistant “in reducing to clearest possible language the decision”. He adds that it was not easy to follow discussions on papers and “in the fast give and take that was going on there, it was quite easy to miss a nuance”. When that nuance, Anderson continued, was “a true miss, [it] could grow into kind of thing that when construed in Taiwan, in Korea, or Vietnam could play hell with things”. Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, DDEL; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, pp. 310–311; Nelson, “The Importance of Foreign Policy Process,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 114. According to Ann Whitman’s Diary, the President had told her in the summer of 1959, when Gleason was resigning, “that contrary to policy, Mr. Gleason had kept notes on NSC meetings...one copy only...and was going to give” them to Eisenhower. Diary entry, July 23, 1959, AWF, Ann Whitman Diary series, Box 10, DDEL. According to Prados, it was Gray who had reminded the former President, who was writing his memoirs, of the existence of the summaries in the Presidential papers. Eisenhower used them to some degree in his writings. Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 58. Parts of the memoranda of discussion were sometimes used for briefing purposes. Vice-President Nixon, for example, had been absent from the NSC and thus at the beginning of March 1954 he received a memorandum of the February 26 meeting. The memorandum, which contained only Secretary Dulles’s remarks, was prepared especially for Nixon. Since Dulles had not cleared the paper “and since the President is generally opposed to the preparation of detailed accounts of the discussion at Council meetings”, Gleason asked the Vice-President to return the memorandum for destruction. Gleason’s letter to Nixon, March 1, 1954 with the Memorandum of Discussion of the 186th Meeting of the NSC, February 26, 1954 as an enclosure, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; McMahon, “Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism”, 1986, p. 471; William Ewald’s comment quoted in *The Eisenhower Legacy*. Ed. Warshaw, 1994, p. 137.

CIA Director at the beginning of each meeting, are often short and thus incomplete. On the other hand, reports by Generals or Ambassadors are often filed together with the summaries. But other documentation which is referred to as having been filed together with the summaries of meetings has, as the editors of FRUS correctly point out⁷³, normally been found neither in the Eisenhower Papers at DDEL nor in the NSC Records at Archives II, where the Meeting Minutes, consisting of brief agenda, are held as well as the NSC Agenda, Records of Action and Memorandum Approvals.

Policy Papers were prepared by the NSC Staff and sometimes by one or more departments controlled by the Council members. The first drafts were prepared in the State Department. Policy Paper drafts dealing with specific problems, and basic, functional, organizational, geographical area and country policies, are the outcome of the work and deliberations of the PB, which aimed at identifying policy issues and setting forth alternative solutions, including dissenting arguments. The majority of Papers had various types of “splits” – differences of opinion – in them. The President, Reid later told in an interview, wished to be presented with “the fullest range of alternatives”. The members in the NSC machinery would in fact comment on all kinds of issues, not only on those that represented their own departments. Reid continues that it led to the fact that “essentially every NSC paper which came before the Council had in it a variety of alternatives, which represented imagination, innovation, and not...occasionally, just sheer disbelief in some of the intelligence papers that were presented as a basis for the introduction of the paper”. John Foster Dulles’s representative on the PB, Bowie, has said that the drafts were “relatively unhelpful, because they were more or less generalities or obvious kinds of comments about what purposes were or what your general courses of action were”. The President augmented his NSC, Henderson argues, as the PB papers occasionally restricted the scope of the Council’s focus. Hoopes, a former Pentagon official and consultant, used a metaphor to illustrate that, in his opinion, the bulk of the “NSC papers were soon lifeless, like wills in a safe deposit box that have been rendered irrelevant by altered circumstance in a fluid world”. The PB – or special groups – also developed long-range studies, which looked ahead for five to ten years in order “to project trends or forecast developments in various political, economic and military areas”. The studies did not in themselves call for immediate decisions.⁷⁴

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73 US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS) 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1: National Security Affairs (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1984), p. 394, footnote 1.

74 “An Organizational History of the NSC by Lay, Jr. and Johnson”, 1960, pp. 41–42. Reid recalled that a typical NSC position paper began with an intelligence estimate followed by facts, conclusions and recommendations. The splits were applied to any part of the paper in parallel columns or in footnotes. Ralph W.E. Reid Oral History Transcript, COHP. Henderson, who quotes Bryce N. Harlow papers of DDEL, notes that there were splits on “an average of two out of every three papers”. Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 77. For the development of a NSC paper see Roche and Lewy, *The Presidency*, 1964, pp. 171–175 and for the Financial Appendices. Executive Secretary Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, May 11, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 95, Box

The PB drafts are useful to some extent, but the substance matters and differing views can be identified by analyzing the memoranda of discussions of the NSC meetings. The minutes of the PB meetings are, however, too vague in nature. They often just briefly state the action taken: “reviewed...discussed the subject/studies...and agreed or noted”. The PB papers were prepared to form the basis for Council consideration. Some PB documents, such as the memoranda of PB meetings, still remain classified and hence not all preparatory stages of policy formulation can be followed through. Splits are, however, identified in policy paper drafts and briefing notes. Agency positions can also be picked out from the course of discussion at the NSC. The PB material is valid. The actual Records of the Planning Board at Archives II remain classified.

Formal NSC Policy Papers were prepared by the NSC Staff in order to analyze current and potential national security issues and to make policy recommendations on the issues. A typical Policy Paper consisted of a general consideration of the problem, the objectives of US policy (in list form), a description of options/courses of action which dealt with the ways of obtaining the goals (in many cases divided into categories such as political, economic and military), and an estimation of the costs of implementation (Financial Appendix), reflecting Eisenhower’s concern for oversized budgets. Completed Papers were distributed among the Council members for study and comments. The Policy Papers covered various subject matter areas: individual countries, regional issues, the US position on an alliance or on a specific question. Gordon Gray recalls that the NSC machinery was able to “bring up to date” almost every NSC paper. If the NSC wanted to alter a Policy Paper, a revised draft was prepared and redistributed to the NSC members. The NSC Actions contain records of actual actions, directives and decisions, which were usually recorded at the Council meetings. Policy Papers are stored in the OSANSA series at DDEL and in the PB Records at Archives II, whereas the Actions are kept in the Eisenhower Papers at DDEL and in the Records of the Office of the Executive Secretary at Archives II. Bundy notes that the policy papers towards the end of the Eisenhower years were “long checklists of actions”.⁷⁵

105, NSC – Administration 1950–1954, RG 59, NA. Bowie has referred to some country papers as having been “quite sterile in the sense that they didn’t clarify anything and didn’t set a lot of policy”. Robert R. Bowie interview quoted in Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 334; Robert R. Bowie Oral History Transcript, COHP; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 126. Cutler defended the policy papers in 1959. He wrote “that policies adopted by the President, at the very apex of Government, cannot be stated in specific detail”. Cutler, “Defense Organization at the Policy Level,” 1959, p. 12; Hoopes, Townsend, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York: McKay, 1969), p. 4; Gordon Gray’s letter to Eisenhower, January 13, 1961, AWF, Administration series, Box 16, Gray, Gordon NSC (and Harr, Karl)(2), DDEL.

75 The approved policy papers represented the national security policy of the US until they were amended or rescinded. The four main categories of the policy papers were: basic overall policy papers covering a wide range of national security problems and containing related political, economic and military strategy, papers covering individual foreign countries or large geographical regions, functional policies (for example on mobilization, trade etc.) and organizational policies on the organization of the NSC itself. The policy papers were assigned four-digit numbers. The first two digits reveal the year the work had been begun on

Policy Papers, as the main products of the Council machinery, are vital source materials for anyone who is conducting research on US policies. In the present, they help to answer the question of the content produced by the NSC process. Policy Papers reveal a lot, but sometimes they are quite vague and general in nature as they most often dealt with long-term policy guidelines. Vietnam is in most cases dealt with in larger Indochina or Southeast Asia policy papers. They include long and difficult sentences. A critical examiner of Policy Papers is forced to read long chapters of identical text in comparison to earlier revisions or reevaluations.

An important group of documents is intelligence reports as they illustrate the coordinated evaluation of a situation in a specific country or in relation to an international issue and projections of possible trends in reactions to likely US policies. The CIA Director's oral briefings at NSC meetings supplemented official intelligence estimates, which covered notable and acute current events or dealt with the intelligence background of policy decisions. Intelligence estimates reveal what kind of background information the NSC members were given about the Vietnamese situation. New policy initiatives always included an assignment to produce an intelligence estimate within the Eisenhower NSC process. They were incorporated into a subsequent Policy Paper. Hall notes that foreign intelligence "was carefully filtered and presented" in the planning as well as "at the time of final deliberation by Eisenhower and his assembled advisers". Intelligence reports are scattered in various places; they can be found in published documentary collections and in the archives. According to Ambrose, "Vietnam makes a good case study" of the CIA's activities as the Agency "filed voluminous reports on the prospects in Vietnam". National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs) were based on the input of different intelligence agencies, thus representing the views of the entire intelligence community. SNIEs were shorter estimates addressing urgent policy problems. Often only the conclusions were read to the NSC principals. Allen Dulles's oral briefings for discussion at NSC meetings partly drew upon NIEs and SNIEs, but, as Burke and Greenstein have found, "appear not to have been based on a written text that can be assessed". They were cleared with the NSC representatives. Helgerson writes that the briefings addressed subjects that had been agreed with the Executive Secretary of the NSC, James S. Lay, Jr, and thus represented the interests of the Special Assistant. According to an inquiry by the CIA of the year 1955–1956, the senior policy-makers – including the NSC

paper and the latter two the sequence of the paper. Revised drafts were assigned the same numbers as the original policy papers with a slash (/) followed by the number of the revision. If the Council decided to reevaluate the same national security question later on, the policy paper was assigned a new number. The only paper which was not updated was the one on the United Nations. The State Department refused to agree to an update. Gordon Gray in Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, NAPA; Bundy, *The National Security Process, 1982–1983*, p. 99. The number of papers is understandable as Hall correctly points out "that the very essence" of Eisenhower's NSC system was "continuous review and reconsideration of policy issues". Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980", 1982, p. 349.

principals – did not read the estimates. On the other hand, as Flanagan writes, the NIEs “were used by second and third echelon officials for background in briefing cabinet officers and the President”. Betts adds that the NIEs were commonly used by “second-level staffers”. Eisenhower did not want to read written intelligence reports or did not want to hear frequent briefings by CIA operatives either. He preferred periodic high-level briefings, which usually had a long-term focus. According to Andrew J. Goodpaster, Eisenhower’s Staff Secretary, the President was interested in the solidness of the information; he was often skeptical that the military, for example, were promoting their own programs. Intelligence briefings are filed as part of the minutes of the Council by Gleason. Splits were marked, as in the PB papers, in parallel texts or footnotes or then the drafts were redrafted to reflect the dissenting views. On the other hand, Neustadt and May argue that the CIA contributors to the NIEs “got least evidence from the secret intelligence people under the CIA’s own roof”. Reid remembers that other than CIA representatives on the PB often had splits in intelligence estimates. Betts evaluates the NIEs related to Vietnam policy. He maintains that “the record of NIEs in the 1950s and 1960s looks quite good today, in that they warned cogently and consistently” against deepening the commitment.⁷⁶ NIEs were incorporated into PB documents. The method of

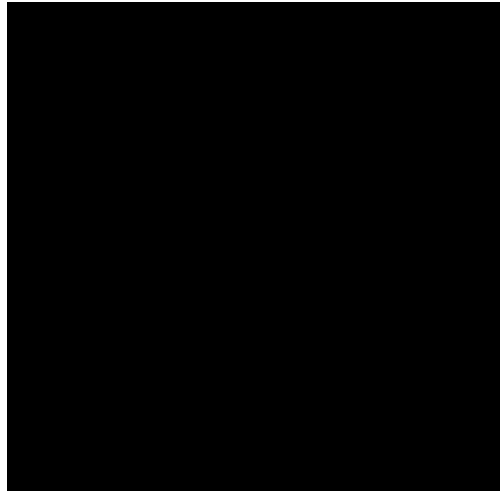
76 Dulles, *The State of Our Intelligence*, 1960, p. 37; Leary, ed., *The Central Intelligence Agency*, 1984, p. 54. Bissell, Jr. recalls that Allen Dulles “took a lot of trouble with his preparation” of his weekly briefings. The conclusions of NIEs were included in his words. Richard M. Bissell, Jr. Oral History Transcript, PUL. Kirkpatrick, Jr. asserts it was Eisenhower’s military background which caused him to prefer oral intelligence briefings. Kirkpatrick, Jr., Lyman B., *The Intelligence Community in National Security Affairs*, 1982, p. 266. For contemporary accounts of the role of intelligence in decision-making see Hilsman, *Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions*, 1956 and Ransom, *Central Intelligence and National Security*, 1958. For a good historiographical article of the US intelligence see Ferris, John, “Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence, 1945–1990,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 19 (Winter 1995), pp. 87–115. Hall refers to “orderly integration of foreign intelligence and presidential decisionmaking”. Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980,” 1982, p. 292. The Acting Director of the CIA, Allen W. Dulles issued on January 9, 1953, an intelligence directive, which included the production of NIEs and SNIEs. Director Dulles had in mind regularly submitted intelligence estimates which covered certain topics. Prados, John, *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Intelligence Analysis and Soviet Strategic Forces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 13–14. The cover pages noted that “the following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: the CIA, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Joint Staff”. It bore the signature of the Director of Central Intelligence. Sometimes the length of an NIE was over 30 pages, and never under 10 pages. Ambrose, Stephen E. with Richard H. Immerman, *Ike’s Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), p. 257; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 60. The drafting work was done by the representatives of the CIA, but, as Flanagan points out, “bureaucratic rivalries” made the whole NIE process “cumbersome”. Some NIEs were often issued annually, while others were updated when “events warranted it”. Flanagan, Stephen J., “The Coordination of National Intelligence,” in *Public Policy and Political Institutions*. Ed. Clarke, 1985, pp. 183–184, 192, footnote 5; Betts, Richard K., “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable,” in *Power, Strategy, and Security*. Ed. Knorr, 1983, p. 228; Goodpaster quoted in Helgerson, John L., *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates 1952–1992* (Washington, D.C.: CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence, 22 May, 1996), chapter 2, pp. 9–10; Neustadt, Richard A. and May, Ernest R., *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: Free, 1986), p. 217. Reid adds that at one time John Foster Dulles agreed with Reid.

compiling intelligence estimates raises serious questions: one wonders on what kind of data they were actually based. What was the quality of the information or the validity of the conclusions? This is interesting, as the whole NSC system relied on NIEs and SNIEs.

The President approved the policy papers and directed their implementation by all appropriate executive departments and agencies of the US Government, and designated the OCB to be the coordinating agency. When this took place, the Board, which even had some Council principals amongst its members, assigned its Working Groups the task of helping the OCB to carry out its responsibility of overseeing the necessary actions in support of the approved policies. The responsibilities of the Working Groups included interdepartmental and interagency coordination and reporting under NSC Policy Papers. OCB Working Group (on Indochina, Vietnam, on Southeast Asia or on NSC 5405) documents, such as studies with respect to the Vietnamese situation or memoranda of meetings, reveal details of the planning of the implementation of specific policies. The major responsibility of the OCB was reporting. Hence, Progress Reports of the Board were prepared in order to keep the NSC members informed on the status of approved policies, i.e. to monitor the activities of various departments and agencies implementing the policies set forth in approved policy papers and to evaluate the effectiveness of the former. The Progress Reports were transmitted to the NSC and presented as items at Council meetings. The Progress Reports were assigned the number of the Policy Paper under evaluation. They summarized the developments in Vietnam and the major actions which had been taken to implement the policy papers during a specific period, normally six months. From 1959 on, the Progress Reports – which were then called plainly Reports – were submitted at yearly intervals. OCB reports were Weekly Status/Activity Reports by the Working Groups were about “sufficiently important” events and the main actions taken in light of achieving US policy objectives. They were not used for emergency problems. They were to be brief and self-explanatory. Operations Plan (previously Outline Plan of Operations, which were normally prepared immediately by the Working Groups for all NSC country policies assigned to the OCB) set forth the general and special guidance for agency operations. The Plans were instruments specifically developed to facilitate the interdepartmental and interagency coordination of the forward planning of operations. They consisted of a list of the objectives of a specific policy, the actions that had been agreed upon, the responsible departments and agencies in implementation, the department and agency programs for carrying out the Plan, and the proposed actions without interdepartmental agreement. According to Henderson, the Operations Plans assisted the departments and agencies to “identify, clarify, and resolve

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The Secretary of State had commented that it seemed “as if it (that specific intelligence estimate) had been put together by a group of dyspeptic young men”. Ralph W. E. Reid Oral History Transcript, DDEL; Betts, Richard K., “Intelligence for Policymaking,” Washington Quarterly, Volume 3 (Summer 1980), p. 128.

Executive Secretary of the NSC, James S. Lay, Jr., was also a central figure in the NSC mechanism. Nevertheless, he clearly worked under the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. The Executive Secretary's main task was to supervise the NSC Staff, but he also participated in setting of the Council agenda, together with the President and the Special Assistant. In order to ensure that the Records of Action reflected the exchange of views expressed at the NSC meetings, Lay, Jr., who sat at the end of the Cabinet Room table together with the Council principals, made sure that the substance of discussions was precisely taken up and that no nuances were missed. The copious memoranda that were distributed to the Council members normally bore his signature. Lay, Jr. was a non-partisan professional official with a military background. He was a reserve US Army officer who had specialized in intelligence matters. During World War II he rose to the rank of colonel and served as the Secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lay, Jr. brought continuity and experience to Eisenhower's NSC machinery since he had worked for the NSC since its establishment in 1947. (Newsweek)



differences of policy interpretation or operating responsibility”. Thus, the Plans offered, as Henderson suggests, “a basis for practical recommendations for more effective implementation of policies”. The Plans were to “avoid generalities and minor details”.⁷⁷

The OCB records show the way in which part of the NSC machinery oversaw the advancement of implementation. Progress Reports offer detailed information on the internal situation in Vietnam, whereas Operations Plans also give a more thorough view of the policy objectives and the implementation responsibilities

77 In the fall of 1955, the format of the Progress Report was altered. “[The] Summary of Major Actions and Decisions” was redesignated as a “Listing of Major Developments During the Period” (one page), “Evaluation of Progress in Implementing NSC Policies and Objectives” became “Summary Statement of Operating Progress in Relation to Major NSC Objectives” (with a statement whether operating considerations required a review of NSC policies or objectives), and “Emerging Problems and Future Actions” to “Major Problems or Areas of Difficulty” (the previous section entitled “Detailed Developments” was omitted and the annexes were used if the points needed to be elaborated upon). Financial Annex accompanied the Progress Reports. See OCB’s Executive Officer Elmer Staats’s memorandum to the Board Assistants, October 31, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 11, RG 59, NA; “Functions and Organization of the Operations Coordinating Board”, August 1, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 99, DDEL; Memorandum of Discussion of the 395th Meeting of the NSC, January 26, 1959, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL. Some of the draft Progress Reports had also split positions instead of vague consensus language. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of July 11, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes II, RG 59, NA; Notes of the OCB Meeting, March 25, 1959, *ibid.*, Box 10, Miscellaneous memoranda – 1959. After the Operations Plans had been approved they “set forth useful guidelines for agency operations in Washington and abroad, with particular attention focused on activities that required interagency coordination”. Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 87. *Iain* For OCB papers see “An Organizational History of the NSC by Lay, Jr. and Johnson”, 1960, pp. 55–58. About implementation of NSC papers see *Implementation of NSC Papers, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC*, Lot 66 D 95, Box 105, RG 59, NA.

than were written in Policy Papers or NSC Actions. Unfortunately, it was a common practice in the mid-1950s to destroy the early drafts of OCB Progress Reports as they were considered obsolete. The differences between the drafts and final reports are, however, identified in memoranda by the Executive Secretary of the OCB. The minutes of the OCB meetings are missing information. Some items were only discussed at the Board luncheons that preceded the formal meetings. In rare cases, supplements of points made before the meeting have been added to the minutes. The luncheon items are, however, known. There are also a few minutes of the Board and its Working Groups that remain classified. Luckily, copies of informative preliminary notes of the OCB meetings are available. They were often prepared on the same day as the meeting was held and even include exchanges of views and other details which have been excluded from the actual minutes. Furthermore, the minutes had to be approved at the following meeting of the Board before they became official. Points were sometimes deleted. The OCB central decimal files are un to 1957 are held at DDEL, and those for later years at Archives II.

The role of the State Department was crucial at every level of the NSC apparatus. At Archives II there is a substantial archival collection on the State Department participation in the OCB and NSC (in RG 59). The State documents, which include, for example, numerous memoranda from other participant agencies, have offered a shortcut and thus have helped to cover for the classified NSC records (RG 273).⁷⁸ PB drafts were also sent to the JCS for comments. The Chiefs replied in writing.⁷⁹ NSC matters were often discussed in regularly scheduled State-JCS meetings at which Gleason or someone from the NSC machinery was present. The substance of those meetings has been documented and can be found at Archives II (RG 59). Other JCS materials can be found in RG 218 at Archives II, especially in the enormous CCS 092 Asia file and relevant Army documents in the Records of the Army Staff in RG 319. Some-

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78 In 1955, there were, for example, altogether 45 State Department officials involved in the OCB work. Chief of Records & Mail of the OCB's Administrative Office Joseph B. Russell's memorandum to the State Department's Mrs. Duncan, October 19, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 12, Handbook, RG 59, NA. In early 1959, the State Department personnel chaired 34 of the 44 Working Groups of the OCB. Special Assistant to the Secretary of State Roderic L. O'Connor's memorandum for the Acting Secretary of State Christian A. Herter, March 20, 1959, *ibid*, Box 10, Miscellaneous memoranda – 1959. Furthermore, there is a historical file on the NSC which was put together by the Executive Secretary of the NSC, Bromley K. Smith, in 1967. Smith asked Gordon Gray for copies of his speeches on the Council. See Smith's letter to Gray, January 9, 1967. Gordon Gray Papers 1946–1976, Box 1, DDEL. Bromley K. Smith took six years in the 1980s to write his "Organizational History of the National Security Council During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations", 1988. Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 571.

79 In August 1957, the JCS was complaining that it did not have enough time to consider the papers. They had been promised a ten-day minimum, but in reality the time had been only a little over five days and still their written comments had to be submitted at least three days before NSC meetings. The JCS had in some cases submitted their comments only on the morning immediately prior to the Council meeting. See Cutler's memorandum for Radford, August 1, 1957, Records of the JCS, Chair's File (Twining), Box 27, CJCS 334 NSC, RG 218, NA and the Chairman of the JCS Nathan F. Twining's memorandum for Cutler, August 20, 1957, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Administration subseries, Box 6, DDEL.

times various agency reports, such as evaluations of Vietnam program, came up for Council use.

When the NSC Staff produced Policy Papers they prepared various kinds of background documents. This material consists of memoranda, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and uncirculated early Policy Paper drafts. In addition, reports and comments on Policy Papers by Council members and departmental and agency views can be found in chronological order in files under their specific Policy Paper number. The Procedure (“P”) Files contain studies dealing with special issues that demanded a rapid review and action and those prepared outside of the NSC. “Mill” Papers refer to the working files for proposed or expected Council studies. They were related to formal Policy Papers, but did not produce one. If an issue was, however, to become the subject of a Policy Paper, the paper work became the background documents. If either “P” or “Mill” Papers were used to produce a Policy Paper they became Policy Paper files. Both of the above-mentioned groups of documents up to 1959 are filed in the papers prepared by NSC Staff in the Records of the PB, but there are not many on Vietnam. There are also NSC Staff papers in DDEL. Documents of this kind are not numerous and are often repetitive.

According to Goodpaster, “a great number of them (ad hoc meetings of the NSC) – many of them not on the record”. The recollections of John S. D. Eisenhower emphasize the importance of such meetings.⁸⁰ The missing documentation of the informal side of the NSC process has constituted a slight problem in the conduct of this study. It is, for example, problematic to determine how Eisenhower indeed used the advice, analysis and information that he received at those meetings. In many cases there are supplementary sources, such as diaries, letters or notes on telephone conversations, available which help in reconstructing the past. Incomplete documentation is especially evident at the beginning of Eisenhower’s first term, which had been, according to the staff of DDEL, caused by, for example, the change of personnel in the Administration. Likewise, some advice may have been offered on the telephone or in private conversations of which there is no record. In addition, Eisenhower may have “informally” guided and instructed the NSC process, for example, through the Special Assistant.

The circulation of the most of the NSC papers was restricted. The papers were distributed a certain number of days beforehand, sometimes for “eyes only” or on a “need-to-know basis”. Secretary Dulles’s Special Assistant O’Connor, for example, did not have access to NSC documents.⁸¹ Some documents have been removed from the folders. They are, however, indicated by the use of withdrawal sheets, at archives in the United States. Some NSC documents or superseded pages of them, especially OCB papers, have been known to have been destroyed by burning. Quite often it is mentioned in the OCB memoranda that the document would be “downgraded to confidential when removed from

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80 Andrew J. Goodpaster in Joint Oral History Interview on the Eisenhower White House, NAPA; John S. D. Eisenhower Interview with Author, June 26, 2000.

81 Roderic L. O’Connor Oral History Transcript, PUL.

attachments". As noted before, classification has affected the conduct of this study, even though 1995 was a watershed year in the declassification of NSC materials. In addition, the principle of provenience has not always been followed. Some documents have thus been removed from their original contexts and placed, for example, with documents on a certain geographical area.

Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States is an annual publication in which materials are arranged in a chronological manner. The volumes primarily contain Eisenhower's messages to Congress, public speeches, various statements, letters to heads of state as well as transcripts of news conferences. Eisenhower arranged press conferences less frequently than once a fortnight.⁸² Public Papers are only occasionally utilized in this study. His public statements were naturally also intended for his voters and thus some information has deliberately been left out.

In order to evaluate the US position on the question of Vietnam, Robertson argues, cannot be done "without access to the (John Foster) Dulles papers". They consist of "very complete, minute memoranda"⁸³ and press conferences etc. Secretary Dulles almost always kept notes of his conversations. A collection of materials relating to the life and career of Secretary Dulles are held at PUL. In addition, there are his papers at DDEL, which in part duplicate the collections at Princeton.

Diplomatic correspondence (also in RG 59 at Archives II) is utilized to the extent to which the NSC machinery was kept informed by the US delegation at the Geneva Conference of 1954 or by diplomats in Hanoi, Saigon, Paris or London. Sometimes, urgent messages, for example, from Secretary of State Dulles were conveyed via American Embassies and read at the Council meetings.

Some of the NSC documents have been published in different versions of the so-called Pentagon Papers⁸⁴. The original version, titled United States–Vietnam

82 Goehlert, Robert U. and Martin, Fenton S., *The Presidency: A Research Guide* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1985), pp. 6–7. Eisenhower held far fewer news conferences than his two successors. The yearly average for Roosevelt was 81.48, for Truman 41.76 and for Eisenhower only 23.75. Pollard, James E., *The Presidents and the Press* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs, 1964), p. 87. Kail has analyzed the public statements and counted the dominant words of the rhetoric. In other words, he has utilized quantitative evidence to support his qualitative assertions. During 1954, for example, the top words with numerical occurrences are 1) Communism, 2) outside powers, 3) freedom/liberty, and 4) aggression. Kail, F.M., *What Washington Said: Administrative Rhetoric and the Vietnam War, 1949–1969* (New York: Harper, 1973), appendix I. During his era, Tulis points out, Eisenhower was criticized "for not speaking out on a number of important policies". Tulis, Jeffrey K., *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987), p. 16. According to Mueller, Eisenhower "was extremely likable", but he had an "amateur status". He ended the Korean War and that contributed to his popularity. Mueller adds, and cites analysts, that his Administration did not do much. Furthermore, his terms "coincided with a period of national goodness". Mueller, John E., *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (Lanham: UPA, 1985), pp. 233–240. For a different view see Brands, Jr., H.W., "The Age of Vulnerability and the National Insecurity State," *American Historical Review*, Volume 94 (October 1989), pp. 963–989. According to Michael R. Beschloss, Eisenhower had become a President "at the apex of presidential power". Beschloss quoted in *Power and the Presidency*. Ed. Robert A. Wilson (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), p. 49.

83 Walter S. Robertson Oral History Transcript, PUL.

84 For an account of the strengths and weaknesses of the different versions of the document collections see Kahin, George McL., "The Pentagon Papers: A Critical Evaluation," *American*

Relations (USVNR), for example, comprises even miscellaneous PB papers, in particular, documentation on the Defense Department participation in the NSC-OCB machinery. Many of the early scholars, such as Gelb and Betts, George and Smoke, and Hall, based their arguments upon the Pentagon Papers. In addition, a large amount of NSC materials, together with diplomatic materials, are printed in FRUS. This constitutes the official record of US foreign policy. It is a documentary collection, which contains documents selected for publication by the Department of State historians. The editors maintain that the principle of historical objectivity has guided their work. Hence, no alterations to the text have been made and the deletions have been clearly indicated and the omissions do not include important facts. They add that the released documents are “subject to necessary security considerations”. Those are reasons related to matters which could have a negative effect on current US diplomatic relations, the need not to break the confidence of individuals and foreign governments, that could be offensive to other nationalities or individuals, and to avoid revealing personal opinions, which did not result in action taken by the State Department (in some cases alternative views are published). The editors have aimed at revealing a compact documentation and at avoiding unnecessary repetition.⁸⁵ Sometimes, quotations from minutes or memoranda have been published in several volumes. The volumes until 1954 were thicker than afterwards. The selected NSC documents in FRUS do not offer a good view of the planning process (or State Department’s participation in it) or the motivation of the NSC principals and staffers. FRUS is, however, an easy-to-use tool in researching the foreign policy of the Eisenhower Administration.

There are scores of oral histories of the key figures in the Eisenhower Administration. They are principally from three oral history projects: Columbia University, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library of Princeton University Library (Dulles Papers). The relevance of the oral history transcripts has proved to be quite minor for this study. The

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Political Science Review, Volume 64 (June 1975), pp. 675–684. Kahin concludes that the collections have a Defense point of view, “a view out of a Washington window from a cool, tidy office”, *ibid.*, p. 676. See also Ellsberg, Daniel, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon, 1972), pp. 9–41.

85 FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I: Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1985), preface, p. III; University Publications of America (UPA) Research Collections Guide 1991 (Bethesda: UPA, 1990), P. 150. Lees and Treadway have noted that the prolonged clearance process of some NSC documents caused some delays in the publication of some FRUS volumes. The search for materials in Presidential Libraries, private manuscript collections, and oral history repositories had proved to be “time consuming and often futile”, because the CIA, Pentagon, the NSC, and some other organizations had been “reluctant to allow editors (of the FRUS series) to review documents for inclusion or to grant security clearances for publication”. This means, as Lees and Treadway conclude, that FRUS volumes “may not include all those necessary (documents) to provide a comprehensive record of major foreign policy decisions”. Lees, Lorraine M. and Treadway, Sandra Gioia, “Review Essay/A Future for Our Diplomatic Past? A Critical Appraisal of the Foreign Relations Series,” *Journal of American History*, Volume 70 (December 1983), pp. 625–626. Edel has also noticed similar deficiencies, especially relating to the activities of the CIA. Edel, Wilbur, “Diplomatic History – State Department Style,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 106 (Winter 1991–1992), pp. 697, 700–701.

recollections have not, in general terms, changed the picture completely, but have merely offered some additional details. In some cases, such as that of General Matthew B. Ridgway's, the views expressed in an interview supplemented the views offered in his memoirs. Most of the policy-makers interviewed have tended to recall the events and the NSC process inaccurately and vaguely. Whether this has been done deliberately or not is hard to comment upon. Much, of course, depends upon the role in which the interviewee is speaking in. However, when used together with diaries, personal papers (of the Dulles brothers etc.), letter collections, memoirs (which reveal to some extent what the process of advising Eisenhower on the issue of Vietnam looked like from inside the White House or from the point of view of other executive departments or agencies), autobiographies and the oral histories offer insights into personal relations, opinions and other kinds of "insider" information. In a few cases, access limitations have hindered utilization of the oral histories.

The Eisenhower Administration officials, including the President himself, were active diarists. They apparently did not know at the time that some of their diaries were going to be published.

The problem in using diaries or summaries of telephone conversations as sources arises from the fact that the person examining them needs to know all of the events which they refer to. Many members of the Eisenhower Administration at different levels were personal friends and thus their messages, their letters in particular, tend to be frank and contain much more confidential assessments than the official memoranda in which the relationship between the sender and recipient could have been such as to have either promoted or complicated the presentation of facts as they appeared in reality.

In the light of the discussion in this sub-section, it can be concluded that the various groups of available source materials as exploited together to supplement each other have provided a sufficient documentation base for the conduct of this study. Despite the obvious limitations and some classification, the sources have proved out to be homogeneous, reliable, valid and sufficient to answer the research questions. With the available documentation coverage it is possible to reconstruct the Presidential advisory functions – both formal and informal levels – of the NSC in relation to the Vietnam policy-making. The summaries of discussion, however, do not either reveal all of the nuances of the exchanges at the Council meetings and what the NSC members actually knew or the content of oral intelligence briefings at the beginning of the meetings. Moreover, the policy content together with most of the optional courses of action as produced by the NSC can be analyzed with the utilization of available source materials. The coordination of implementation is somewhat problematic since the OCB materials have been destroyed and not all have been declassified. Multiple advocacy has not always been easy to use as a tool in analyzing the policy decisions and NSC-OCB work as a whole. The sources do not, for example, cover all of the activities of the custodian-manager, which is essential for the model. This is particularly evident when examining the developments during Eisenhower's second term (1957–1961) in the Vietnam context. Likewise, it has been hard at times to determine whether all of the relevant options were, indeed, advocated.

■ The Eisenhower Administration Takes Over – No Significant Shifts in US Policy toward Indochina (January–December 1953)

The National Security Council and Indochina from the 1940s to Late 1953

The Legacy of the Truman Council

“The extension of Communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if Southeast Asia also is swept by Communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world...”

National Security Council Policy Paper NSC 48, December 1949¹

“It is recognized that the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated Communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia...It is important to [the] United States that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia.”

National Security Council Policy Paper NSC 64, February 1950²

“The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to Communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences...”

National Security Council Policy Paper NSC 124/2, June 1952³

Despite the fact that this study excludes the deliberations and courses of action taken with respect to Indochina by Harry S. Truman’s NSC, it is useful to first look briefly at present-day interpretations of the NSC Policy Papers before Ei-

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- 1 NSC 48, “Draft report by the NSC on the Position of the United States With Respect to Asia,” December 23, 1949, US House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, United States-Vietnam Relations (hereafter USVNR), 1945–1967. Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Book 8, p. 248. For the text of NSC 48/5, “United States Objectives, Policies, and Courses of Action in Asia,” May 17, 1951, see FRUS 1951, Volume VI: Asia and the Pacific (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1977), p. 33 ff.
 - 2 NSC 64, “The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina,” February 27, 1950, FRUS 1950, Volume VI: East Asia and the Pacific (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), pp. 283, 285
 - 3 NSC 124/2, “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia,” June 25, 1952, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XII, Part 1: East Asia and the Pacific (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1984), p. 127.

senhower took office. The reason for this is simple: those Policy Papers – of which the essential extracts are cited above – continued to influence the Council machinery after 1953. The pre-1953 Papers were often referred to by the NSC participants, especially during the first years of the new Administration.

The United States interests in French Indochina had clearly intensified in the midst of World War II. Even though Americans historically had few ties with the region, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration had gotten involved in the premise of Roosevelt's conviction, as Hess argues, "that France had relinquished its claim to be a major world power".⁴ During the final stages of World War II, agents of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the CIA, cooperated with the nationalist Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Chi Minh Hoi, i.e. the Vietminh (Vietnamese Independence League) against the Japanese in Indochina.⁵ After the war the French colonial rule dating back to 1880s was reintroduced into Indochina. In 1946 the First Indochina War broke out between the Vietminh forces led by Ho Chi Minh and the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC).⁶ The Americans were seeking, Leffler argues, for ways to retain French influence in Indochina because they were worried about anti-Western movements and Communist domination. He adds that "US policy [toward Indochina] was as much influenced by ideology as it was by France's domestic economic and political needs".⁷

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- 4 Hess, Gary R., *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), pp. 28–29. For further discussion during World War II see Hess, Gary R., "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," *Journal of American History*, Volume 59 (September 1972), pp. 353–368; Patti, Archimedes L., "Development of a Vietnam Policy: 1939–1945," in *Vietnam Reconsidered: Lessons from a War*. Ed. Harrison E. Salisbury (New York: Harper, 1984), pp. 22–30; LaFeber, Walter F., "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942–1945," *American Historical Review*, Volume 80, (December 1975), pp. 1277–1295; and Thorne, Christopher, "Indochina and Anglo-American Relations, 1942–1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 45 (February 1976), pp. 73–96. See also Drachman, Edward S., "U.S. Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940–1945." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1968). About the first contacts between the Americans and the Vietnamese (Cochin Chinese) see Miller, Robert Hopkins, *The United States and Vietnam 1787–1941* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1990), preface, p. xv. See also Immerman, Richard H., "Prologue: Perceptions by the United States of its Interests in Indochina," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, pp. 1–26.
 - 5 Hess, *Vietnam and the United States*, 1990, p. 30; As far as the American wartime relations with Ho Chi Minh are concerned, the OSS is said to have "maintained a position of strict neutrality" and taken no sides. State Department's Paul M. Kattenburg's memorandum to Bromley K. Smith, February 9, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Subject Files Bureau of Intelligence and Research (hereafter INR) 1945–1960, Lot 58 D 116, Box 11, RG 59, NA. For insights of OSS's activities in Indochina see Patti, Archimedes L. – then a Major and the head of OSS mission in Indochina –, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), passim; Miles, Milton E., *A Different Kind of War* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), passim; and Smith, R. Harris, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 320–360.
 - 6 Irving, R.E.M., *The First Indochina War: French and American Policy, 1945–1954* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), passim; Gibson, James William, *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How We Did* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1986), p. 28; Patti, *Why Viet Nam?*, 1980, pp. 86, 127, 187; Sullivan, Marianna P., *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study of French-American Relations* (Westport: Greenwood, 1978), pp. 35–36. See also Kahin, George McT., "The United States and the Anticolonial Revolutions in Southeast Asia," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*. Ed. Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 338–361.
 - 7 Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 1992, pp. 165–166.

Gardner asserts that “soon, Indochina appeared in [NSC] policy papers on China, as a matter related to the precedent set in the containment policy devised for China”.⁸ In the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the US was truly concerned about threat of Communist expansion, which had to be countered. This view, together with the ultimate US goal of eventually eliminating the Soviet influence in Asia, was spelled out in NSC 48/2.⁹ The objectives of the containment policy, George and Smoke argue, “increasingly dominated the administrations’s attitude toward the conflict in Indochina”. Kort adds that this policy led to a quest to obtain military bases in Third World countries.¹⁰

Despite the Policy Papers produced by the NSC, the Truman Administration had remained, at first, neutral in relation to Indochina as it did not wish to support French colonialism. But with the intensifying Soviet threat in Europe the United States, together with Britain, recognized in February 1950 the independent governments of the three newly formed states, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Despite the fact that the chances of the success of Emperor Bao Dai were bleak, the Americans decided to accept the so-called Bao Dai solution, which provided guidance to the French. According to Hess, the decision was made, because the US needed France as an ally to carry out its containment policy in Europe and also because Indochina had become a military question overriding French colonialism.¹¹

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- 8 Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, p. 57; The US policy-makers accepted the containment policy because they had learned from World War II that appeasement (Munich) was followed by aggression. Bernard Brodie, Michael D. Intriligator and Roman Kolkowicz, eds, *On Memories, Interests, and Foreign Policy: Vietnam in National Security and International Stability* (Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, 1983), p. 362. For a fine treatment of the containment paradigm see Gaddis, John Lewis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); since the late 1940s, reasoning by historical analogy, especially Munich analogy, was extensively used in the conduct of US foreign policy, also in the context of Vietnam. Khong has argued that the decision-makers utilize analogies to justify political action and to perform certain cognitive and information-processing tasks. Khong, Yuen Foong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), *passim*; Göran Rystad’s Munich syndrome incorporates the Munich analogy, the aggression thesis and the Domino analogy. Rystad, Göran, *Prisoners of the Past? The Munich Syndrome and Makers of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War Era* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1982), *passim*.
 - 9 NSC 48/2, “The Position of the United States With Respect to Asia,” December 30, 1949, FRUS 1949, Volume VII, Part 2: The Far East and Australasia (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), pp. 1215–1220; Graebner, Norman A., “The United States and East Asia, 1945–1960: The Evolution of a Commitment,” in *The American Military and the Far East*. Ed. Joe C. Dixon (United States Air Force Academy and Office of Air Force History, Headquarters USAF, 1982), p. 55. For discussion on the impact of the Chinese Revolution see Blum, Robert M., *Drawing the Line: The Origin of the American Containment Policy in East Asia* (New York: Norton, 1982), *passim*.
 - 10 George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, p. 154; Kort, Michael, *The Columbia Guide to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 44.
 - 11 Boll, Michael M., *National Security Planning: Roosevelt through Reagan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 91; Herring, George C., *America’s Longest War*, 1986, pp. 7–8; Hess, Gary R., *The United States’ Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 331; Hess, Gary R., *Vietnam and the United States 1990*, pp. 38–41; Grosser, Alfred, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945* (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 131; Herring, George C., “The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina,” *Diplo-*

NSC 64, which was approved by Truman on April 24, 1950, envisaged that the loss of Indochina would offer the rest of Southeast Asia to Communist domination. The policy paper concluded that special programs should be prepared to provide efficient assistance to France and to the three so-called Associated (Indochinese) States in the French Union. Yergin asserts that the definition of American national security was expanded to include Vietnam in 1950. Herring shares this view and stresses the importance of the year 1950 in US Indochina policy for the NSC; earlier, it had been “a low-priority issue”. He sees the outcome of the Chinese Revolution as the main reason underlying the reorientation of US foreign policy whose outcome was that Vietnam ironically and “suddenly became so important”. Kolko adds that the explosion of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union in 1949 was also an important factor underlying the review of NSC policies. Thus, according to the first all-inclusive statement of American national security policy, NSC 68, dated April 1950, the US was to police the whole world and stand on guard for the non-Communist nations in consequence of the global nature of American interests.¹² In the summer of 1950, following the outbreak of the Korean War, the Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) and Military Advisory Group (MAAG) were established and stationed in Indochina. The estimates of the amounts Americans were paying to finance the French war efforts in the First Indochina War have

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- matic History, Volume 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 97–117; Rotter, Andrew J., *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 170–172. About the so-called Bao Dai Solution see Hess, Gary R., “The First American Commitment in Indochina: The Acceptance of the ‘Bao Dai Solution’, 1950,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 2 (Fall 1978), pp. 331–350.
- 12 “A Report from the State Department to the NSC,” February 27, 1950, FRUS 1950, Volume VI, p. 744; NSC 64, “The Position of the United States With Respect to Indochina,” February 27, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 744–747; Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, 1977, pp. 404–405; Herring, George C., “American Involvement: 1950,” in *Vietnam Reconsidered*. Ed. Salisbury 1984, pp. 34–37; Herring, George C., “The Vietnam War,” in *Modern American Diplomacy*. Ed. John M. Carroll and George C. Herring. Rev. and enl. ed. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), p. 207; Kolko, Gabriel, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 47; NSC 68, “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” April 14, 1950, *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950*. Ed. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 385 ff; “NSC-68 and Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary,” *Naval War College Review*, Volume 28 (May-June 1975), pp. 51–108; Young, Marilyn B., *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1990* (New York: Harper, 1991), pp. 27–28; On the preparation of NSC 68 see Nitze, Paul H., “The Evolution of National Security Policy and the Vietnam War,” in *The Lessons of Vietnam*. Ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, 1977), pp. 2–7; Hammond, Paul Y., “NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament,” in *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*. Ed. Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond and Glenn H. Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 267–378. See also Ambrose, Stephen E., *Risen to Globalism: American Foreign Policy 1938–1970* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973), pp. 188–191, 221. NSC 68, which warned that the Soviet Union was trying to dominate the world, has received a lot of attention from the historians since the late 1970s; for detailed discussion on NSC 68 see for example Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* 1982, *passim*.; Melanson, Richard A., “The Foundations of Eisenhower’s Foreign Policy: Continuity, Community, and Consensus,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, 34–40, and Graebner, Norman A., “The Sources of Postwar Insecurity” and Challener, Richard D., “The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower: Did the ‘Hidden Hand’ Leadership Make Any Difference?,” both in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, pp. 23–27, 45–53.

varied in the literature. For example, according to McMahon it was already 40 percent of the total costs incurred by the end of 1952.¹³

The key NSC documents from 1948 to 1950, Graebner points out, did not make “distinctions between indigenous Communist movements, whether in Europe or Asia, and Soviet imperialism”. The President, therefore, approved on May 15, 1951 the NSC policy statement NSC 48/5, which sought to limit the Soviet influence. The US was to continue assisting the French and to try to persuade them to make economic and social reforms.¹⁴

Neither the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, especially Indochina, to US security interests nor the future of the area was not, according to Lewy, seriously “discussed or questioned” until early 1952. They were stressed in the early summer of 1952 in NSC 124/2. According to the Policy Paper, the US was ready, even without the support of its allies, to use its military forces against the Chinese if they intervened in Indochina. In the words of Kinnard, China then “was perceived as the principal source of Communist threat to Southeast Asia”. Gibbons concludes, and is supported by Short, to the effect that the new Policy Paper “took an even stronger position on the question of US interest in defending that area [Indochina] against the Communists”. McMahon asserts there was a contradiction in US policy toward Southeast Asia; even though the loss of the area was considered “a severe blow to US national security”, the policy-makers still “accepted limits on its actions”. The Truman Administration, McMahon adds, “struggled in vain to resolve that contradiction”. In analyzing NSC 124/2, he points out that the NSC had agreed upon this “nightmarish – if familiar – scenario” which consisted of “a set of interdependent global interests” that called for the preservation of non-Communist Southeast Asia, which was perceived as vital to US security.¹⁵

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- 13 Gurtov, Melvin, *The First Vietnam Crisis: Chinese Communist Strategy and United States Involvement, 1953–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 22; McMahon, Robert J., “Harry S. Truman and the Roots of US Involvement in Indochina, 1945–1953,” in *Shadow on the White House*. Ed. Anderson, 1993, p. 38; Cahn, C.N., “United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1950–1954.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1982), passim. A pentilateral agreement for mutual defense in Indochina, which established MAAG, was signed on December 23, 1950. In addition, an economic cooperation agreement between the United States and Vietnam was signed on September 7, 1951; Operations Plan for Viet-Nam, June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I: Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986), p. 45. For detailed treatment of MAAG see Eckhardt, George S., *Command and Control 1950–1969* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974), Krepinevich Jr., Andrew F., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) and Spector, Advice and Support, 1983.
 - 14 Graebner, Norman A., “Containment in Asia: The Road to Vietnam,” in *Democracy, Strategy, and Vietnam: Implications for American Policymaking*. Ed. George K. Osborn et al. (Lexington: Lexington, 1987), p. 19; NSC 48/5, “United States Objectives, Policies, and Courses of Action in Asia,” May 17, 1951, FRUS 1951, Volume VI, Part 1, pp. 33–39.
 - 15 Lewy refers to “the correctness of the dire predictions regarding the consequences of the loss of the area, of the probability of success in the military struggle, or of the costs of winning the war in Indochina”. Lewy, Guenther, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 5; US Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making on Vietnam*. Senator Gravel Edition. Volume 1 (hereafter PP Gravel, Volume 1) (Boston: Beacon, 1971), pp. 385–390; Kinnard, Douglas, *The War Managers* (Wayne: Avery, 1985), p. 16; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 105; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 102;

The New President and the Refurbished National Security Council Consider Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia

“This war [in Korea] is, for Americans, the most painful phase of Communist aggression throughout the world. It is clearly a part of the same calculated assault that the aggressor is simultaneously pressing in Indochina and in Malaya, and of the strategic situation that manifestly embraces the island of Formosa...”

Eisenhower’s State of the Union message February 1953¹⁶

As can be concluded from the previous sub-section, the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in US policy had been growing steadily during the latter part of the Truman Presidency. In Washington it was perceived that an essential area of that region was Indochina. This view had been stated in clear terms in NSC 124/2 in the summer of 1952. The inauguration of Eisenhower did not mean that the bases of the US policy toward Indochina had been changed, but the new Administration was, as George C. Herring has noted, “...even more determined than their predecessors to prevent the fall of Indochina.” Herring also writes that this was a result of the Republican Presidential Campaign of 1952 in which they had accused Truman Administration of inability to prevent the expansion of Communism in Asia. Ho Chi Minh was, to Eisenhower and Dulles, “an instrument of international Communism”. In addition, the two held the view that the loss of Indochina would have a domino effect, which, in turn, would have grave political, economic, and strategic effects upon the United States.¹⁷

At the special request of the NSC the State Department prepared a series of status reports on NSC papers to be used for briefing President-elect Eisenhower on current foreign relations problems after the elections in October 1952. One of the papers dealt with the implementation of NSC 124/2. Basically, it stated that the US was assisting the Indochina war efforts with “about one-quarter billion dollars annually” and furnishing the Vietnamese army of 50 battalions. Because of the time limit, the papers were not processed through the Senior NSC Staff channels but were instead drawn up on an informal and unofficial basis and in certain cases without wide clearance. The State Department thus

McMahon, “Harry S. Truman and the Roots of U.S. Involvement in Indochina, 1945–1953,” in *Shadow on the White House*. Ed. Anderson, 1993, pp. 36–37. See also Bowie, Robert R. and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 152–153.

16 Eisenhower’s Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, February 2, 1953, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), p. 16.

17 Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, p. 25. Truman’s Secretary of State Dean Acheson was briefing President-elect Eisenhower on the situation in Indochina in November 1952. He felt that the US could not achieve the reforms they had wanted, although the United States had already paid approximately half of the costs of the French war efforts. According to Acheson, the situation was unclear and hard to predict. All the parties were weary of the fighting. Smith, Gaddis, *The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy*. Volume XVI: Dean Acheson (New York: Cooper Square, 1972), p. 328.

emphasized that the reports did “not have any status” and “therefore should not be sent out as approved Departmental documents”.¹⁸

As a measure to create a kind of orientation for national security thinking and to start the system functioning, the new NSC members were briefed, as some of the principals submitted on January 19, 1953, in a report to the Council in which they wrote that in Greece, Turkey and Korea “the burden of the military effort is so heavy...and whose economic capabilities are so limited” that US assistance would “be necessary and desirable”. US support, the report continued, would have to be indefinite “in meeting a part of the financial burden of their defense”. Pakistan and Vietnam were also seen as potential countries in which the development could be analogous to that of the three mentioned above.¹⁹

In the meantime the State Department – as the dominant part of the NSC system – had begun work on its Far Eastern policies. The State representatives noted that Secretary Dulles had in private conversations indicated that he considered, as the President commented in his State of the Union message, the wars in Korea, Indochina and Malaya all to be parts of the same struggle. NSC 48/5, for example, was generally seen as a compilation or summary of country papers, which made it outmoded. Planning for alterations of NSC 124/2 was also initiated. The representatives of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff (PPS) believed that the Senior NSC Staff wanted “to avoid thoroughgoing revision of NSC 124/2”. Philip Bonsal of the PPS saw that to prevent the fall of Indochina into the hands of the Communists, as the document called for, overt Communist aggression would have to be defeated or “at least radically weakened within the next two years”. He added that the Policy Paper should reflect the military conversations between Britain, France and the ANZUS countries²⁰. Bonsal suggested that the Indochina section of the Paper “should stress the importance of definite progress” and the primary responsibility of France. As a matter of fact, the SNSCS had already agreed on February 2, 1953, that it would complete reports on the Far East, starting with an overall report to replace NSC 48/5. During the preparation of NSC 148, “U.S. Objectives, Policies and Courses of Action in Asia”, Paul H. Nitze disagreed with the other policy planners. He considered that, to limit the influence of the Vietminh, the Vietnamese forces would have to be increased by 40 battalions, and that it would be necessary to take “other measures to give a reasonable chance of a decisive military success in the next campaigning season”. Nitze recommended that the Council should not approve the Asian paper until his proposals had been discussed. The turn of NSC 124/2 came on February 17. It was agreed that the document would be reviewed in connection with a series of policy papers being

18 There were only ten copies made of each of the unofficial status reports for the State Department. They were retained in the files for information only. MSA’s Christopher Van Hollen’s memorandum for the files, January 19, 1953, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 125, RG 59, NA; Implementation of NSC 124/2, an informal Status Report, undated, *ibid*.

19 “Report to the NSC by the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Mutual Security,” January 19, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 215, 217–218.

20 The US had signed the ANZUS Pact in 1951 with Australia and New Zealand.

prepared on specific countries and other regions in Asia. In all of these cases the State Department would prepare the first drafts. CIA presented its views on the difficulties in developing the Vietnamese national army at the meeting of the SNSCS on March 16, 1953. Yet it discussed the issue in its meetings at least three times in February and on another three occasions before March 18.²¹

Consideration of the subject took place at the highest level of US Government at the Council meeting of March 18, which was the first meeting of the new NSC²². Stassen briefed the principals that the proposed cuts in the Mutual Security Program (MSP) would have “extremely gloomy” effects, as would the end of the French war effort in Indochina. It could mean, the MSA Director warned, that France would not ratify the European Defense Community (EDC) plan, which included the rearmament of West Germany. On the same day it was time for the new Council structures to take up the question of Indochina. The PB, which continued the work of the SNSCS, agreed at its meeting on March 18, 1953, that Secretary Dulles would be asked to give an oral presentation to the NSC on March 25 on the US position vis-à-vis Southeast Asia in the forthcoming talks with the French. Furthermore, the PB agreed that “the policies in NSC 124/2 should be reaffirmed” but that they would be “subject to certain changes of emphasis” in its implementation, which would be reflected in the forthcoming Progress Report on NSC 124/2. The PB Assistants were assigned to make preparations for inclusion in the Far East policy statement draft paragraphs reaffirming NSC 124/2 which would take note of the various changes in emphasis. Five days later, the PB concluded that it would defer further discussions on NSC 124/2 until the US representatives had met with the French

21 Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, John M. Allison’s memorandum, “United States Far Eastern Policy,” February 3, 1953, Records of the Policy Planning Staff Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 61 D 167, Box 9, Far East (NSC 148), RG 59, NA; PPS’s Bonsal’s memorandum to Allison, February 9, 1953, *ibid.*, Southeast Asia, U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action. 124, 124/1, 124/2; the PPS Director Paul H. Nitze’s memorandum to the Deputy Under Secretary of State H. Freeman Matthews, February 12, 1953, *ibid.*, Box 9, RG 59, NA; NSC’s Executive Assistant Charles E. Johnson’s memorandum to Bromley K. Smith, April 2, 1953 (on NSC 124/2 and PB discussion (still accidentally used Senior Staff) scheduled for April 3, 1953, *ibid.*; CIA paper, “Serious Problems Facing Development of Viet-Nam National Army,” not dated., *ibid.*; State Department’s view on CIA’s estimates was devastating. According to one memorandum, the paper “is full of inaccuracies and half-truths”. The State’s officer in charge of Indochinese affairs, Robert E. Hoey’s memorandum to Bonsal, March 18, 1953, *ibid.*; NSC 124/2 and the Far East policies were considered on February 3, 5, 17 and 26–27 and March 9, 11 and 18. Agendas of Senior NSC Staff, February 3 (dated February 2), February 5 (dated February 4), March 9 (dated March 6), March 11 and March 18, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Senior NSC Staff Agenda 1951–1953, RG 273 NA; Records of Meeting of the SNSCS, February 3, 17, 26 and 27, 1953, *ibid.*, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Senior NSC Staff Record of Meeting 1951–1953, RG 273, NA.

22 Eisenhower approved on March 17, 1953 the new concept of NSC organization and operation based on Cutler’s recommendations, which had been – including various procedures for working up policy papers for NSC consideration – carefully studied during January–March 1953. Eisenhower had, however, convened his first Council meeting on January 29, 1953. “Memorandum with Reference to Proposed Report of Hoover Commission Task Force on ‘Procurement’ Relative to National Security Council Mechanism,” March 25, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 18, DDEL.

Ministers.²³ This seems to indicate that the new members of the PB, pre-occupied with the change in the personnel and strange duties, merely chose to note the prevailing situation. They obviously were uncertain about the situation and thus at that point had no real idea of the direction in which the US should proceed regarding Indochina.

This kind of hesitancy was naturally reflected in the Council, where the principals did not challenge the current policies but simply chose to be briefed on the issue of Indochina on March 25, 1953. The Acting Director of the CIA Frank G. Wisner, informed the participants by mentioning there were “two schools of thought” on the question of Indochina. The first maintained there would not be changes in the overall situation unless the Communists were to suffer military defeats. The latter argued that military success depended upon favorable political conditions. According to the intelligence sources, Wisner concluded, both schools failed to take into consideration the fact “that military and political progress must go along hand in hand”. Secretary Dulles reminded the NSC members that Indochina was in fact a burden to the French. According to Dulles, a program was going to be developed in order to “reduce the strain on French human and material resources”. This was to be discussed between US and French officials. Secretary Dulles thought that it was probable that the US contribution to NATO would “have to be somewhat curtailed to take up the increase in cost in Indo China”. Congress, the Secretary added, would view US assistance in a positive way if the French would grant “a real autonomy” to the Associated States and if they could turn the situation in Indochina to their advantage through a special program. This would satisfy the American public. Eisenhower commented on Dulles’s remarks by saying that the French Premier René Mayer could assure the people of the United States that they were not going to continue colonialism and that they were going to leave the area.²⁴

It is noteworthy that the NSC advisory system was not unanimous on the question of Indochina. This is revealed in a presentation by CIA’s Wisner. According to NSC’s later standard operating procedures, the splits should have been brought to the attention of the Council members by Special Assistant Cutler. This kind of CIA interference in and blocking of a custodian’s performance should, however, be understood against the background that the

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23 It was usual, later on, that a PB meeting followed a NSC meeting. Memorandum of Discussion of the 137th Meeting of the NSC, March 18, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4 , DDEL; also quoted in editorial note, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume VI: Western Europe and Canada, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986), p. 534; Records of meetings of the PB, March 18 and 23, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA.

24 Memorandum of the Discussion of the 138th Meeting of the NSC, March 25, 1953 (drafted by Gleason on March 26), AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1: Indochina (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1982), pp. 426–428 and *ibid.* Volume VI: Western Europe and Canada, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986), pp. 1323–1325. See also Secretary Dulles’s notes on remarks at NSC Meeting, March 31, 1953, John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 2, DDEL. According to the biographer of Dulles, the Secretary viewed the French attempts to regain their authority in Indochina “as the lesser of two evils”. Pruessen, Ronald W., John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power (New York: Free, 1982), p. 505.

practice of the custodian's work had not been made clear. Furthermore, Gleason's notes do not reveal who within the SNSCS were advocating the two different schools. During its first Indochina encounters the NSC was thus forced to operate on a vague basis. On the other hand, the system seems to have received information through multiple channels, thus making it easier to take a wider range of possible options into consideration. It is apparent that the feeling among the top American foreign policy leadership, as the comments by Dulles and Eisenhower show, was that the French should be given a chance with the US in the supporting role. This reflected the spirit of NSC 124/2. In addition, their remarks refer to the possibility of an enlarged US role.

The substance of the briefings to the Council were repeated to the French. In the discussions between Eisenhower and Mayer, the former assured the French leadership the US was not going to do anything to make the French position more difficult in Indochina than it already was. On the contrary, Eisenhower went on, the US intended to lend its helping hand. To that effect, referring to the State Department's role within the NSC machinery, a "statement was now being prepared within the US Government concerning the Far East, and Indochina and Korea would be linked there," like the President had said in his State of the Union message. At the same time, the President quoted US representatives who were not pleased with the speed of the French strategies. The US was to continue to assist the FEC, and the problems could be solved by military representatives, concluded the President.²⁵ In an unnumbered special meeting of the NSC, Secretary Dulles said that Mayer's visit had produced a statement which warned the Communists not to have any false hopes that an armistice in Korea would leave Indochina open to their intervention.²⁶

The PB, who had now received the reaffirmation it had been waiting for, met on April 3 to review NSC 124/2. They agreed to commence considering the financial summary on the Far East, which was to be prepared by the Department of the Treasury.²⁷ Prioritization of economic considerations was in consonance with Eisenhower's overall concern about budgets.

There were certainly problems associated with the change of Administration. Far Eastern issues, for example, were not only pressing for their own reasons, but instead circumstances forced the NSC to consider them. In addition, it is likely that neither the Council machinery nor the actual NSC were too well prepared for handling the papers. This is suggested in a letter from the Special Assistant Cutler to Secretary of Treasury Humphrey on April 10, the day on which the minutes of the previous meeting were circulated. Cutler writes that:

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25 Secretary Dulles's cable to the US Embassy in Paris, March 30, 1953, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 435-436.

26 Memorandum of Discussion of the Special Meeting of the NSC (unnumbered), March 31, 1953, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume II, Part 1, p. 266.

27 Record of Meeting of the NSC PB, April 3, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA.

“I should apologize for putting so much material on the Agenda for the April eighth Council Meeting, however, it was thought advisable to bring up the Far Eastern Policy Papers [NSC 148] for an initial look before the President went away on his vacation.”²⁸

In late April, the Council touched on the subject of Indochina again. The NSC principals had had doubts about French capabilities from the start, but this time they received harsh criticism of the French war effort. The CIA Director Allen Dulles told the NSC about the recent events in Laos. The Vietminh had invaded the neighboring nation of Vietnam. The French, Dulles went on, did not take the initiative into their own hands. This was supported by General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, who spoke for Admiral Radford. The French would have to be active to earn US assistance. The General told that the French wanted to borrow six C-119 aircraft²⁹ with pilots. Eisenhower did not understand the need for aviators. Secretary Dulles had informed the French that US aid to France would concentrate on Indochina and depend upon the French ability to design a plan which would satisfy the Americans. The French military leadership was then criticized for poor performance. The President would have liked to see the French appoint the most skillful military leaders for duty in Indochina to boost the morale of the local forces. Eisenhower said he had thought the French would sooner or later win the war. But this had been his feeling before the Vietminh invasion of Laos. “Neither the United States nor the French”, Eisenhower stated, “could possibly hold this region by themselves”. The key to success was the will of the Vietnamese. Then the discussion turned to the French honesty and aims. The President feared that the fall of Laos would lead to a chain reaction in the region. The US had so far considered the Indochina situation “a civil war”, but now it seemed like “a traditional colonial war”, Eisenhower concluded. The Council decided to send the French the requested C-119s and gave Secretary Dulles authority to talk with the French representatives about changing the FEC leadership.³⁰

Apparently, President Eisenhower did not gain any real advice from this meeting. It seems likely, however, that it was not caused by any consensus that

28 Cutler’s letter to Humphrey, April 10, 1953, WHO, NCS Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL. SNSCS had already considered the issue on February 27 and tentatively agreed on the draft statement on March 2, 1953. The new PB discussed NSC 124/2 on March 18, March 30 and April 3, 1953. In their March 30 meeting the discussions were also based on the conversations with the French Ministers and the most recent intelligence estimates. On April 3, the PB discussed a draft paragraph on Southeast Asia for inclusion in the Far East paper. See NSC PB Agendas, March 20 (dated March 19), March 30 (dated March 27) and April 3 (dated April 2), 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, RG 273, NA.

29 Allen Dulles expressed his wish to “sanitize” the planes i.e. by painting over US insignia. Memorandum of Discussion of the 141st Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 519.

30 Memorandum of Discussion of the 141st Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 516–519. Eisenhower also said the fall of Laos would “likely” cause the losses of the rest of Southeast Asia and Indonesia. This would, according to the President, leave “the gateway to India, Burma and Thailand” open. *Ibid.*, p. 519.

would have been reached in privacy without the knowledge of the President. He simply used the NSC for testing his ideas. In the absence of counterarguments the Chief Executive was free to presume that his thoughts were practicable. On the other hand, the President had understood the seriousness of the situation. He had most likely drawn his own conclusions and made up his mind outside the formal NSC machinery. He might have been advised beforehand by NSC principals in an informal setting. The meeting served the purpose of providing the President with information. Eisenhower appears to have already adopted a magisterial approach at the beginning of his new Council work.

Towards the end of the first week of May, Laos did not appear to be as critical as earlier. In addition, the rainy season was about to arrive in mid-May, thus bringing the fighting to an end for the whole of summer, Allen Dulles said. Eisenhower asked the CIA Director what the French were going to do vis-à-vis Indochina. Dulles replied that France was going to give independence to the three states within the French Union, but the internal situation had to be secured first. The Indochinese did not, Dulles added, trust the French. The President was determined that to “save the situation” the French would have to announce their plans with regard to independence. By doing so they would at least secure a foothold in the economies of the Associated States. Also, Eisenhower reiterated his standpoint, the FEC leadership would have to be relieved of their command and replaced. After having talked with the French, the Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey mentioned that there was a feeling among the junior French officials, which favored the continuation of the colonial rule. Eisenhower answered that if this sentiment could not be rooted out, the French Indochina would most likely be lost and in that case “continued United States assistance would amount to pouring our money down a rathole”.³¹

Further information was provided by Vice-President Nixon, who reported on his recent talks with the King of Cambodia. According to Nixon, the King had said Communism was appealing to the nationalists. The local population in Indochina, the Vice-President added, did not resist communism in order to protect French colonial rule. Eisenhower adamantly replied that the best thing the French could do would be to beat the Vietminh and then grant independence to the three states. It was a hard task to get this sensitive issue through to the French. After having done that, Secretaries Walter Bedell Smith³² and Humphrey

31 Memorandum of Discussion of the 143rd Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 546–548. The “Rathole” quote had been used a little over a week before in a report to the NSC by Radford’s aide General Vandenberg. See Memorandum of Discussion of the 141st Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 517. This case illustrates the attentiveness of the President. Eisenhower apparently was briefed well, read NSC-related papers and listened to the discussion at the Council meetings, even though his drawings (human figures or objects of different shapes) on his agenda copies and other memoranda would suggest his being bored.

32 Brands, Jr. asserts that Eisenhower “relied most heavily” along with the “inner circle” consisting of the Dulles brothers and his own brother, a Latin America expert, Milton on the Under Secretaries of State Bedell Smith and Robert Murphy. They acted in particular “as implementers of policy choices made at the top” and as President’s able “men on the spot”. Eisenhower knew that the two achieved results and could pursue US policy objectives even in critical situations in which “the distinction between policy formulation and implementation

concluded, the French feared that “they [the Indochinese] would switch their trade patterns from France to Japan”. Cutler interrupted the exchange of opinions and said that according to the existing policy paper “Basic National Security Policies and Programs in Relation to their Costs” (NSC 149/2) the US would intervene in Southeast Asia if “a basic change” would take place. In Laos that could be the case, Cutler went on, whereas normally the US would only intervene if China started intervention first. The NSC unanimously agreed to back up the President’s views. In addition, it decided to strengthen Thailand militarily by granting it more aid. The NSC agreed it was important that France promised to the Indochinese that they would have a chance to “choose their own form of government” after internal security was secured.³³

The anti-colonialist sentiment clearly made the NSC members tough. The President felt – without opposition from his advisers – that US assistance would have to be conditional upon independence. As far as the process is concerned, efficient use of the time available was obviously of primary concern. Cutler thus performed his task of custodian-manager and set the discussion back on track as it had moved off the topic for a while.

The Council system was just forming in the first months of the new administration. There were people who wished the process to be shaped up. On May 11, 1953, for example, Eisenhower’s confidant adviser C. D. Jackson suggested a change in the way how the Council viewed the world. He urged the NSC machinery not to place emphasis on specific crises but instead to adopt a “global approach” so that the pressing crises, including the Indochina situation, “would automatically fall into proper perspective” and thus could be resolved.³⁴

In early June the intelligence community issued a negative assessment of the outlook for the situation in Indochina. This was meant for the NSC machinery as background information. The NIE predicted that political stability in the Indochinese states and the backing for the French war effort were going to decline unless there was “a marked improvement in the French Union military position”. The intelligence analysts only believed that there had been a slight change, which meant deteriorating. Furthermore, a JCS staff study had already argued two weeks earlier that “a military stalemate presently exists in Indochina”.³⁵

blurred”, Brands, Jr. adds. On the other hand, Helgeson states that Bedell Smith felt uncomfortable being an Under Secretary of State and did not respect Secretary Dulles. Brands, Jr., W. H., *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower’s Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), chapter 4; Helgeson, *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates 1952–1992*, 1996, chapter 2, p. 8.

33 Memorandum of Discussion of the 143rd Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in *FRUS 1952–1954*, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 546–549. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 127. Eisenhower sent on the following day a letter to Mayer explaining the US position. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 172.

34 Jackson’s letter to Cutler, May 11, 1953, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 45, Cutler, DDEL; also quoted in Oikarinen, *The Middle East in the American Quest for World Order*, 1999, p. 81.

35 NIE-91, “Probable developments in Indochina through mid-1954,” June 4, 1953, *FRUS 1952–1954*, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 592–602; The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Arleigh A. Burke’s memorandum to the JCS with a staff study of “Evaluation of Military Operations in Indochina,” May 18, 1953, Records of the JCS, B. P. Pt. 9, Box 9, 092 Asia (6–25–48), RG 218, NA.

To acquaint the new Administration with approved policies, a Progress Report on NSC 124/2 was issued on June 15, 1953. It was the first of its kind (later to be written by the OCB). The Progress Report basically reiterated the content of NSC 124/2. The main objectives continued to be “to prevent the countries of Southeast Asia from passing into the Communist orbit” and to give assistance in order to accomplish that aim. The Report added that Indochina should have been included as a rice exporter. The Progress Report stated that the US had supported the applications of the Indochinese states for membership in the UN and also listed the ways in which the US had supported the French cause and assisted them in their war. The implementation of paragraph 9a calling for urgent aid for the FEC’s campaign against the Vietminh, planned to commence in October 1952, had been problematic. The Vietminh had, however, at the time seized the initiative and launched an attack against Laos, where the US had sent planes to evacuate beleaguered garrisons. The so-called Navarre Plan³⁶, which was an answer to the NIE of June 4, would produce 117,000 additional indigenous troops organized into light battalions and security forces by early 1955 to allow the French to commence large-scale operations in Indochina.³⁷

Indochina also came up in larger studies made by the NSC. The so-called Project Solarium, which constituted a series of studies of US national security policy, also mentioned Indochina as an area in the context of Southeast Asia. The region was seen as having been under the threat of takeover by the Communists. That and notions about China and their impact upon the security interests of the US and its allies were adopted from NSC 124/2. The NSC Staff summarized its conclusions for the use of the Council in July 1953. The Solarium Task Force representatives concurred in the summaries. According to the documents, the US was to pressure the French “to grant full dominion status” to the Indochinese states by February 1954 and to allow them to take a vote on prolonged membership in the French Union after the war was over. The war was also to be won swiftly in order to stop the drain on France’s resources and to give her a chance to fulfil her NATO commitments. The French were also going to be made to agree on the election of a Vietnam National Assembly as soon as possible, as well as to “clearly define the status” of the French in Indochina. The local military forces, which were to be trained by utilizing US methods, were also to be expanded. In addition, the Franco-American military cooperation should be improved to promote a “more vigorous prosecution of the war” with the change of military and political leadership. To achieve a rapid victory, the US was to “provide major assistance” to the French and the Indochinese. Despite the enlarged US role, the French were to be responsible for the defense

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36 The Plan was also often referred to as the Laniel-Navarre Plan. It was named for the French Premier, Joseph Laniel, and a French General, Henri Navarre.

37 Progress Report on NSC 124/2, June 15, 1953, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 3, DDEL. In the PB records, the date for that Progress Report is August 5, 1953. It could not have been approved on that day because there was no Council meeting then. NSC Action No. 904. Record of meeting of the PB, October 26, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA.

of Indochina, the “crucial front”. There was a fear that France would lose its will to wage war if it believed that it would eventually lose its position in Indochina. Therefore, the US should “undertake the support of a substantial part of the cost of stepping up action”. In exchange, the FEC and the indigenous forces were to improve their performance to the maximum. Political courses of action on the part of the Americans also included attempts to seek the admission of the Associated States to the UN and their inclusion in a regional mutual defense pact. The summaries also emphasized expanded trade relationships with Asiatic countries, especially with Japan. Furthermore, propaganda activities were to be directed towards the Vietminh and to ensure the loyalty of the Vietnamese. Basic solidarity and regional consciousness as well as improved neighbor relations – particularly with the Philippines – were also to be strengthened.³⁸

From NSC 124/2 to NSC 177/NSC 5405 – The Council Discussions to Revise NSC 124/2

The Congressional debates were followed in the highest quarters of the Executive Branch. On July 27, 1953 the President and Secretary Dulles discussed the situation in Indochina at length. Eisenhower was annoyed that in the Senate there had been suggestions that the aid to Indochina could be reduced by 100 million dollars. Dulles reminded him of the psychological effects of such a cut at that point. The President said, after first assigning his Deputy Assistant General Wilton B. Persons to talk with the Senators concerned, that he intended to take up the matter with them personally.³⁹

The promising Navarre Plan called for additional material support to be provided to the FEC. The requested aid package was discussed during the late summer of 1953 within the national security apparatus of the Eisenhower Administration. State Department officials favored the granting of more assistance on four grounds. Firstly, the Laniel Government would likely be the last to wage war in Indochina. Secondly, a negotiated settlement would grant victory to the Communists. Thirdly, the “loss” of Indochina would pose a threat to the security of the United States. Lastly, the Navarre Plan would – if it succeeded – strengthen the position of the “free world” and the United States.⁴⁰

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38 There were Task Forces A, B and C to deal with the various alternatives for US policy. All of them commented on Indochina questions. Lay, Jr’s memorandum to the NSC, July 22, 1953, with “Summaries Prepared by the NSC Staff of Project Solarium Presentations and Written Reports” (undated) as an enclosure, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 399, 409, 417–431. In the discussions between the military representatives of the Task Forces (Generals Charles H. Bonesteel III and John W. McCormack) expressed the idea of a US policy to “ease the French out in a couple of years in order to develop indigenous forces” in Indochina. The war in Indochina was regarded as “peripheral”. Notes taken at the First Plenary Session of Project Solarium, June 26, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 389–391. For full documentation of the Project Solarium Summaries see Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 129, RG 59, NA.

39 Dulles’s memorandum of conversation with Eisenhower, July 27, 1953, John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 4, DDEL.

40 State Department memorandum to the NSC, August 5, 1953, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 128–129.

There is evidence that the NSC met on August 6, 1953, to discuss the Indochina issue. It is impossible to reconstruct the exchange of views in the course of that meeting as there is no memorandum available of the conversation. It is, however, possible to make some observations about the substance of that discussion based on other available documentation. It is, for example, certain that the Council talked about the State paper from the previous day. The State Department officials had written about further US assistance to France and the Indochinese states. They had concluded that with American support the French could change the situation to their advantage. It was for the Council to decide if it could follow an opportunity to assist in victory during the following two years, or perhaps replace the FEC with US troops, or alternatively allow Indochina to fall. They wrote that “for the first time, the French program offers a real hope of solving this problem”. The end result of the meeting can be concluded by quoting the Record of Action. The Council, who also viewed the planned aid package as a promising venture, gave the State, the FOA and the JCS (Pentagon) permission to continue working on, and later, if the three concluded that the Navarre Plan proved to be promising, also implement, the proposed aid package together with the French. The above-mentioned were to “submit for Council consideration detailed recommendations”. Going ahead with planning work meant that the US was prepared to grant additional aid worth 200 million dollars during the following spring and an equivalent sum for the next fiscal year (FY), depending on the success of the FEC. The NSC wanted to make sure, as Eisenhower had continuously insisted, that the independence of the Associated States would not be forgotten and that the French would take US advice in military matters and try hard to get the EDC ratified. The Council noted that the President could let the French pull out a battalion from South Korea to be sent to Indochina.⁴¹

The Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), the predecessor of the OCB, prepared several papers on the Indochina situation. Some of them were just chronologies of events. In one of them, Edmund A. Gullion warned against making any comparisons between the situations in Korea and Indochina. Another background paper by Gullion had already become outdated by late August, 1953.⁴²

A change in advisers normally results in differing recommendations. This was also the case with respect to Indochina. General Bradley’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were the main military advisers to the NSC, were in early August

41 Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC with a report by the Department of State as an enclosure, August 5, 1953, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 3, DDEL; USVNR 1945–1967, Book 9, p. 125; Record of Action by the NSC at its 158th Meeting, August 6, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 718–719. DDEL does not have minutes of that meeting in their summaries of discussions collection of AFW’s NSC series, Box 4; see also FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 718, footnote 1. For State’s views see Bowie’s memorandum in *ibid.*, pp. 713–714; also quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 136.

42 An unsigned memorandum for the Acting Director of the PSB G. Morgan, August 25, 1953, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Psychological Strategy Board Central Files series, Box 12, DDEL.

basically content with the Navarre Plan as it was. Nevertheless, Admiral Radford's JCS, which took over in mid-August, 1953, went a bit further. The new Chiefs demanded that – as a precondition of aid – the French should stick to the Plan and that they should take American advice into consideration.⁴³

As has been noted, the first draft versions of NSC papers originated in the State Department. In late August and early September 1953, the State Department's PPS, as was routine in the PB work, drafted a paper for NSC consideration on the granting of assistance to Indochina. This paper, which was drafted by Gullion and Charles C. Stelle of the State Department's PPS, was based on NSC Action No. 874 of August 6. At its end it recommended the Council should grant a 385 million dollar aid package to the French under the condition that they implement the Navarre Plan, which had been considered promising by Secretary Dulles, the Director of the newly established FOA and the JCS. In addition, they should not let the campaigns in Indochina affect the defense of Europe and they should keep the Americans posted on developments in the situation. The independence of the Associated States was also mentioned and that there could be no alterations in the French contingents within NATO. The US could end the shipments of additional assistance if the French failed to carry out the Plan. The PB took up the subject as its first item in its meeting on the morning of September 8. The limitations in the sources available permit us only to conclude that the substance of the discussion was based on advance copies of the paper.⁴⁴

Preparation by the Council machinery did not always take a long time if the situation called for rapid action. In relation to Indochina, for example, after only a week's preparation the 385 million dollar aid to the FEC was on the NSC's Agenda by September 9, 1953. The Secretary of State reminded the participants that Eisenhower, who was not presiding at the meeting, had regarded the Indochina problem "a first priority", which came "after Korea if not now [the Korean war had ended a little over a month earlier] actually before it". Eisenhower, Dulles went on, feared that the domino effect would follow. The President did not wish to act in the matter without Congressional consent. In his statement, Dulles referred to his American Legion speech in St. Louis on September 2⁴⁵ in which he had warned the Chinese that intervention in

43 JCS memoranda to the Secretary of Defense Wilson, August 11 and 28, 1953, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 134–135, 138–141.

44 NSC's Executive Secretary Lay, Jr's memorandum for the NSC, September 8, 1953, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Paper Subseries, Box 3, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 767–770. On the same day, in preparation for September 9 Council meeting, Counselor of the Department of State, Douglas MacArthur II, forwarded to Secretary Dulles a memorandum which had been prepared by the PPS. It was an answer to the NSC's request of August 6. The memorandum stated that it was very important that the NSC made decision on the additional aid to the French. According to the editors of FRUS, MacArthur II's views were reflected in the above-mentioned memorandum. MacArthur II's memorandum to Dulles. September 8, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 766–767; also quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 137–138; Record of meeting of the PB, September 8, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA.

45 Dulles had cleared the content of his speech in advance with the President. See Dulles's cable to Eisenhower (Lowry Air Force Base, Denver, Colorado), August 29, 1953, AWF, Dulles-Herter series, Box 1, DDEL.

Indochina would possibly lead to US retaliation. The speech had given a push, Dulles told the Council members, to the French to continue their war efforts. The Secretary also commented on the aid package: he said it would be the “cheapest money we ever spent” and said that loss would result without the expenditures. If the French succeeded, it would result in more support for NATO on their part, Dulles concluded.⁴⁶

In the absence of Eisenhower, Vice-President Nixon, who presided, backed Dulles’s views and agreed with the President’s appraisal of the situation and its gravity. He questioned whether the amount would be enough. “Ought we to indicate a willingness to do more”, the Vice-President asked aloud. He then turned to Radford on the matter. The Admiral was not quite sure whether it would be adequate in the long run, but for 1954 it should have been. When being asked by Wilson, Radford said he did not think that the Chinese would intervene at this point. Dulles shared Radford’s evaluation and foresaw that the French could need more aid in the following year. The Secretary of the Treasury hastened its implementation. The US did not have any choices but to grant the funds as fast as possible.⁴⁷

Funding was not an easy task. Stassen said that “it was impossible to re-screen” the sum then. He suggested the transfer of 317 million dollars from Title I. This would mean that “the impact of such a transfer”, he said, “would fall most heavily on the future lead time of Army end items for NATO”. The rest could be taken either from the French franc counterpart funds or from the funds “earmarked in the appropriations for Far East military”, Stassen continued. The Director of the newly established FOA also wished to know exactly that the funds were being used for the execution of the Navarre Plan. Secretary Dulles commented by reminding the participants that it had been agreed that the total sum included 100 million dollars which was to cover the current expenses, especially for the expenses of the local troops under FEC supervision. In reply to Cutler’s question, Radford reported that the JCS did not believe in the success of the Navarre Plan, but he personally saw possibilities in it. At the end of the meeting, the discussion turned to the question of how the matter should be presented to the Members of Congress. Stassen favored meeting appropriate Members of Congress and informing them of the matter, whereas Wilson said that the President could OK a new assistance program without consulting the

46 Memorandum of the Discussion of the 161st Meeting of the NSC, September 9, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 780–783. For the list of actions by the NSC in relation to State Department’s memoranda of August 5 and September 8, 1953, see memorandum for the NSC, “Further United States Support for France and the Associated States of Indochina”, September 11, 1953, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant Series, Presidential subseries, Box 1, DDEL; the document can also be found in Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, Additional Aid to Indochina – 1953, RG 59, NA. In one of the background documents under the same title the amount is 400 million dollars. Draft paper “Further United States Support for France and the Associated States of Indochina,” undated, *ibid*.

47 Memorandum of Discussion of the 161st Meeting of the NSC, September 9, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 783–786.

Congressmen first. Nixon stated that the issue should be announced “as dramatically as possible” in order to avoid leakage. Preventing a leak was also stressed by Secretary Dulles as it would place both the US and France in a peculiar position. To that end, Cutler had expressed, it was dangerous to demand any kind of assurances for the ratification of the EDC in writing, because, in the case of a leak, the Laniel Cabinet would be in a difficult spot.⁴⁸

After the discussion the Council proposed to the President that the French be given 385 million dollars of additional aid for the execution of the Navarre Plan. In return, the NSC wanted the French to execute the Plan swiftly and effectively, to grant independence to the Indochinese states, and to keep the US Government informed of the expenditures. In addition, US military personnel should be instructed to take the latter’s views into consideration and to make sure there would be “no basic or permanent alteration of plans and programs for NATO forces”. The Council pointed out that the French should be told there would not be more funds for the year 1954, and that it could be terminated in the case of a failure in the Navarre Plan.⁴⁹

The agreement among the NSC members meant that the State Department recommendations were elaborated upon and forwarded to the President for approval. It was an easy task for the President to make his decision. In this instance, Eisenhower was not personally involved in the “fine-tuning” of the details. His deputy, the Vice-President, apparently filled his place and took a more active role than he had been used to taking. He could play the part of an expert as he had recently visited several Far Eastern countries. There is no indication that the issue was considered in secrecy or that the President was not alerted, even though he was absent, as the whole system was designed for him. A wide range of options were presented, and several agencies participated in evaluating the proposed programs. Since the US support for the Navarre Plan had been chosen to be an essential ingredient of NSC’s policy toward Indochina, Cutler aimed at obtaining clear-cut military views on the feasibility of the Plan. The Special Assistant needed to use the Council discussions as instructions for the fulfillment of his duties. There was obviously enough time to engage in thorough give-and-take and debate.

The NSC reserved a major role for the Americans in Asia, but the theaters of operation in Asia and Europe were nonetheless not completely separate. With the statement of policy “Basic National Security Policy” NSC 162/2 of October

48 Memorandum of Discussion of the 161st Meeting of the NSC, September 9, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 784–787. The news broke the following day in the New York Times. It mentioned the NSC was considering the French request for 385 million dollars. The next day it was announced that the NSC had approved the aid package. *Ibid.*, p. 787, footnote 11.

49 Memorandum of Discussion of the 161st Meeting of the NSC, September 9, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 788–789 and in USVNR, Book 9, pp. 144–149. President Eisenhower approved on September 11 the additional aid as proposed by the NSC. NSC Action No. 897. It was circulated to the NSC members on September 11 as an addendum to the Memorandum by the Executive Secretary Lay, Jr. *Ibid.*, pp. 153–155.

30, 1953, the Americans were, as Anderson has put it, to regain the initiative and reduce costs. The Policy Paper, for example, stated that in the Far East the military strength of the American allies rested “largely on US military power”, but that in the case of Indochina it rested on “that of France...and [the] indigenous forces of Vietnam”. The so-called New Look defense policy sought “more bang for the buck”, thus calling for reductions in the force levels of the US armed forces, but for increases in nuclear weapon technology. Spector argues that with the adoption of NSC 162/2 the US signaled that it was “determined to fight for Indochina if necessary”. On the other hand, Gibbons sees the policy paper as the first step in “reevaluating the situation in Indochina”. To Buzzanco the policy paper meant that the Council “did want to put troops into Vietnam”, because “the politicomilitary situation” in the country had reversed beyond any turning point.⁵⁰

Information to the NSC machinery was being received through the intelligence community. A new NIE, which came out on October 23, predicted that the Navarre Plan had boosted the morale of the French “at least temporarily”. The Plan, which was referred to as probably the last French effort in Indochina, had no chance of success without American support. The French were not going to achieve a military victory, NIE continued. There was a possibility that they would enter into negotiations with the Vietminh, who would use such peace negotiations for their own propaganda purposes.⁵¹

50 NSC 162/2, “Basic National Security Policy,” October 30, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, p. 586. The same point was included in the draft version of the policy paper dated September 30, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 498. As a matter of fact, the above-mentioned Project Solarium led to the New Look policy. It was the first time Eisenhower employed a consultative body to augment his NSC. From then on he utilized – in accordance with multiple advocacy – on a regular basis outside scientific, military and economic consultants in order to be presented with the broadest possible range of views on important issues. The following year, US missile and U-2 programs were stepped up on the basis of the work of the so-called Killian Committee. In 1957, the Gaither Committee provided the Eisenhower Administration with an assessment of the need for expanded expenditures on continental and civil defense. See for example, Snead, David L., *The Gaither Committee, Eisenhower, and the Cold War* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1999), *passim*. For an account of the employment of “an extraordinary variety of informal and formal planning processes” and the uses of multiple advocacy in the development of New Look see Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, 1998, chapter 1, pp. 19–41. According to Anderson, the new strategy was, in fact, “an amalgam of various doctrines of containment, liberation, deterrence, and negotiation”. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 21; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 194; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Part 1*, 1986, p. 146; Buzzanco, *Masters of War*, 1996, p. 38–39. Short also emphasizes the idea of liberation, which had been incorporated into NSC 162/2. Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 111. For a detailed discussion on the New Look defense policy see, for example, Snyder, Glenn H., “The ‘New Look’ of 1953,” in *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*. Ed. Schilling, Hammond and Snyder, 1962, pp. 379–524 and Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 1982, pp. 127–197. Morgenthau has regarded Dulles speech of January 12, 1954, as he announced the New Look, “the most far-reaching and most widely commented-upon announcement”. It had been, Morgenthau adds, as an outcome of “some basic policy decisions” by Eisenhower and the NSC. Morgenthau, Hans J., “John Foster Dulles 1953–1959,” in *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Norman A. Graebner (New York: McGraw, 1961), p. 294. See also Dockrill, Saki, *Eisenhower’s New-Look National Security Policy, 1953–1961* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

51 NIE-99, “Estimate of the World Situation Through 1955,” October 23, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 559–560.

The NSC machinery did not require specific assignments from the Council for its revisions of the policy papers. They needed continuous review and reconsideration. The NSC Staff and the PB could function independently under the Special Assistant. On October 26, 1953, for example, the PB directed the PB Assistants to prepare the possible revisions of NCS 124/2 for its consideration on November 2. They were to be based on the recommended revisions by the State Department representatives, which had been circulated at the meeting. On November 2, the PB considered the draft statement of policy on NSC 124/2, which had been completed by the PB Assistants on October 30. It appears that the members of the PB were not satisfied with the recommended revisions as they referred it back to the Assistants and agreed to discuss it again in a week's time. The PB Assistants prepared a revision by November 6, which was discussed on November 9 by the PB. They "agreed to give further consideration" to it, however, in ten days or in a fortnight, together with the Financial Appendix, which was in preparation. On November 19, after hearing a briefing by a JCS adviser, the PB members agreed to include some of the military courses of action in an Annex to be drafted by the JCS by November 23. The stage of the preparation caused the PB to postpone the NSC consideration of the subject, scheduled for December 3. The PB agreed to invite Chief MAAG O'Daniel and Bonsal from the State Department to participate in a general discussion in two days' time. The Record of Meeting does not indicate that anything was resolved in the meeting of November 25,⁵² although the easiest solution would have been simply to agree on the paper presented to them. The PB mechanism was intended for thorough preparation and not for consensus-building as the representatives of the critical school have often maintained. In this case, the PB members, however, did not even receive an agenda beforehand. The PB, instead, postponed consideration of the subject rather than submit it to the NSC "half-baked". There was also need for adequate debate at lower levels of the Council machinery. The declassified PB documents do not offer clear answers to the question posed by Burke and Greenstein about vigorous information gathering.

Towards the end of 1953, the Eisenhower Administration found itself caught in the crossfire from Indochina, as the situation was rapidly deteriorating. The Korean War had ended and thus the Chinese material shipments to the Vietminh had increased considerably. The Navarre Plan was not functioning as had been expected. In addition, the position of the Lanier Government, as had already been reported to the NSC members by Secretary Dulles on September 9, was not in no way stable. The Americans were worried about the French plans to end the war by negotiating, according to the assessment of the CIA. NSC 124/2, therefore, needed to be reappraised. Late October had seen the completion of a

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52 Records of meeting of the PB, October 26, November 2, 9, 19, 23 and 25, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA. No agendas had been issued for the first three meetings.

new Policy Paper, NSC 162/2: “Basic National Security Policy”, in which Indochina was considered to be of vital strategic importance to the US. It stated that in the case of some countries, including Indochina and Formosa, overt aggression against them “would compel the US to react” militarily. This would be carried out at the actual location of any attack or against the military targets of the aggressor. Furthermore, the principle of collective security was to “be upheld” [through the UN].⁵³

On occasions, the interval between the planning and the proposed implementation of NSC programs was quite long. In late November 1953, the State Department commenced in late November 1953 planning for assistance up to mid-1955. On September 8, in its memorandum to the NSC, the State Department concluded that the Navarre Plan was still promising. The Department considered that in 1955 the need for assistance was going to be as high as during the previous year. The reasons for the continued aid were contained in NSC 124/2 and its revision, which was being considered by the PB.⁵⁴ The State Department played a major role within the NSC machinery. These suggestions seemed to have been based on rather vague information, since the Council had continuously been hearing reports about the problems of the Navarre Plan. The treatment of the question lacked logic. The performance of the French had earlier not been praised, but now FEC was trusted again. The possibility that the State Department had, indeed, received additional information from sources outside the intelligence community is unclear and thus remains unanswered in the light of the available source materials.

Ho Chi Minh had given the Swedish newspaper *Expressen* an interview at the end of November, where the North Vietnamese leader had stated he was ready to consider all French proposals as a basis for negotiations. The news did not go unnoticed in the NSC. Allen Dulles touched on the issue at the NSC. The CIA Director reported that Ho’s offer to negotiate had had serious repercussions in Indochina. At first it had not done so, but after “the friendly reception accorded this overture in Paris”, it affected the morale of the local troops. Nobody knows if Ho is even alive, Dulles added.⁵⁵

53 Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, pp. 338–340; Radford, Arthur W., *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford*. Ed. Stephen Jurika, Jr. (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1980), p. 381; Memorandum of Discussion of the 167th Meeting of the NSC, October 22, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 4, DDEL; also quoted in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 832, footnote 2; NIE 63/1, “Probable Short-Term Developments in French Policy,” December 1, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 894–895; NSC 162/2 hinted – as was stated in Dulles’s St. Louis speech – at US retaliation if the Indochinese states were attacked. Lay, Jr’s report to the NSC, October 30, 1953 with NSC 162/2, “Basic National Security Policy,” October 30, 1953 as an enclosure, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, p. 584. For the whole document see, for example, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 412–429.

54 The Acting Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Mutual Security Affairs Fredrick E. Nolting, Jr’s letter to the Deputy Director for Programs and Planning of the ICA John H. Ohly, November 27, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 884–885.

55 “Significant World Events affecting U.S. Security,” a briefing by Allen Dulles at the 173rd Meeting of the NSC, December 3, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also quoted in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 89, footnote 3. About Ho’s démarche in *Expressen* on November 29, 1953, see also Ambassador Donald Heath’s cable to Secretary Dulles, December 7, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 900.

Radford apparently took pride in his position as an adviser at the NSC and thought that he was somehow indispensable. While reviewing with General John K. Gerhart the tentative Council Agenda for December 31, he had noticed that Cutler had scheduled discussion on Southeast Asia for that date. The JCS Chairman was worried that he was not going to be present then as he was scheduled to be on a trip to the Far East between December 18 and January 6, accompanied by Robertson of the State Department. Radford suggested, therefore, that Cutler could ask Eisenhower to defer the subject until early January. The JCS Chairman argued that, as he was going to meet “with the major individuals in the Far East who are concerned with these problems”, his presence would be beneficial to NSC discussions.⁵⁶

The JCS used to submit their comments on the proposed NSC papers. In late 1953 the Chiefs commenced preparations for the upcoming consideration of the draft paper. They did so, because one of the important issues was possible US military courses of action in Indochina in the case that the French decided to quit fighting for political reasons. Since the former paper of July 2, 1953 (JCS 1991/227) dealing with that specific problem was not viewed as valid by the Services, the Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JSPC) would be given two weeks to come up with recommendations.⁵⁷

The predictions by the intelligence community did not necessarily change even though it used a new type of estimate, the Special Intelligence Estimate. They produced, for example, a report on the situation on December 18. This was in line with earlier reports. In the report, possible Communist reactions were assessed in relation to American intervention in Indochina in the year ahead. The estimate indicated that the Chinese, upon learning of a forthcoming commitment by the US, would not immediately intervene openly with substantial forces in Indochina.⁵⁸

Outside organs were sometimes needed to weigh the situation. The JSPC reviewed the validity of a previous JCS paper entitled “Possible Courses of Action in Indochina” in which the Joint Chiefs considered the level of US and allied force deployments in addition to supporting and intensifying the development of the native forces. After a careful and thorough examination of the pros and cons of the four optional courses of action, the JSPC recommended limited military commitment. They came to the conclusion that if the US was to decide on its participation in the defense of Indochina “the only course that can

56 Radford's letter to Cutler, December 10, 1953, Records of the JCS, Chair's File (Radford), Box 29, CJCS 334 NSC, RG 218, NA.

57 The Director of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General F. F. Everest's memorandum for the JCS, December 14, 1953, Records of the JCS, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48), Box 7, Section 51, RG 218, NA. For the initiation of planning see NSC Representative General Gerhart's memorandum for Everett, December 9, 1953, *ibid.* Despite the fact that the PB paper was scheduled for NSC consideration on December 31, the Joint Staff action would be necessary at the latest by December 28.

58 Special Intelligence Estimate 53, “Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible U.S. Courses of Actions in Indochina Through 1954,” December 18, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 924–929.

be considered under [the] present circumstances” was the one in which sufficient ground forces would be deployed in order to hold critical strong points that the French would vacate. Furthermore, the US could provide operational aerial and naval support only until the indigenous forces would be ready to reduce “Communist activity to the status of scattered guerilla bands”.⁵⁹

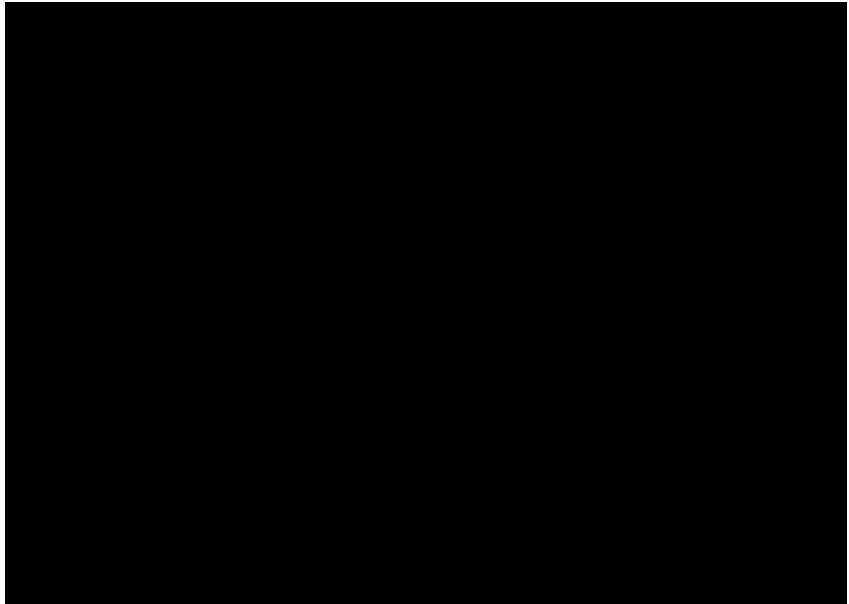
This kind of approach constitutes a problem from the point of view of Eisenhower’s wish to be presented with a wide range of options. Nevertheless, it added an outsider recommendation to the system. In the case of only one alternative and in order to get multiple advocacy working, the presentation of other possible courses of action would then have to be made orally, such as the views offered by Council members from their foreign travels. On the other hand, President Eisenhower was not normally impressed by consensus, aiming instead at penetrating below the surface of information.

Vice-President Nixon had returned late in 1953 from his fact-finding trip to the Far East, South Asia and the Middle East with a number of fresh ideas. Nixon had visited Vietnam in late 1953. When reporting to the NSC on December 23, he argued that the Communists were definitely strong in Indochina. According to Nixon, China was an essential supporter of the local Communists and without it they “would not last three months”. The Vice-President was convinced that the events in Indochina “were more important, from the standpoint of [US] strategic interests of Europe, than what happens in Korea”. The time was not right for negotiations because the Communists would certainly achieve a landslide victory, Nixon pointed out. He said it would be wise to wait. In his report to the State Department the Vice- President said that in the event of a Communist takeover in Indochina “it would become the internal subversion problem”. He warned that the US should have no illusions that the Navarre Plan would solve the problem once and for all. In Nixon’s opinion, “one of the greatest lacks” in Indochina was a leader. Of utmost importance to him was that the US could “get the French and the Vietnamese to cooperate in a real training program for the Vietnamese national army”. In an OCB meeting in early February, Nixon is reported to have put forward suggestions of which there is unfortunately no declassified documentation.⁶⁰ The Nixon biographer Aitken argues that Nixon’s briefing gave “a pessimistic warning about the

59 JSPC 958/141, “Review of U.S. Policy Toward Southeast Asia” with a draft enclosure “Estimate of the Situation in Indochina,” December 21, 1953, Records of the JCS, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48), Box 8, Section 52, RG 218, NA. For the force levels of friends and enemies see Appendix “Military Forces”, *ibid*.

60 Memorandum of Discussion of the 177th Meeting of the NSC, December 23, 1953, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 929–931. For a report by Nixon see “Vice-President Nixon’s Report to Department of State Officers on his Trip,” January 8, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 69, Far East, DDEL. The OCB also invited Nixon after their meeting of January 6, 1954, to brief them on Far East information. It took almost a month before the Vice-President went to the OCB to make suggestions, which were noted by the Board. OCB Minutes, February 3, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA. See also Nixon’s (40-page) “Report to State on FE Trip,” January 8, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 69, OCB091.4 Far East, DDEL.

The NSC principals were not always present at Council meetings. They were then represented by their alternates. Absence was often caused by travel. Vice-President Nixon, for example, toured the Far Eastern countries in late 1953. Here he is seen inspecting the Vietnamese nationalist troops. After his return Nixon reported to the NSC on his trip. Unlike other NSC members, Nixon, however, did not have a stand-in, but, if the President was absent, he occasionally chaired a meeting. The record of the meetings chaired by Nixon suggests that the Vice-President had some problems in performing his task. (E.C.P. Armées-France)



French” effort. Aitken adds that the timing of the Vice-President was “uncanny” as the NSC members were briefed as he spoke about a major Vietminh offensive. Nixon’s briefing, Aitken concludes, had a significant effect upon his career.⁶¹

Even though the function of this specific Council meeting was clearly educational or informative, as has been argued by Nelson to have been the case with most of the meetings on Indochina⁶², it gave Vice-President Nixon, who had so far not been an active Council member in deliberations on Indochina, a chance to be a substantive part of the process itself. Nixon was an example of a committed policy advocate. As reporting in writing and orally on his trip to the Far East, Nixon could bring to the attention of the NSC principals his views, warnings and advice through different channels of the NSC machinery. Eisenhower had other channels through which he could be briefed on the discussion in the NSC meetings which he had been unable to attend. During the whole of 1953 – at a total of 20 percent of the Council meetings – Indochina was on the NSC Agenda only ten times.

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61 Aitken writes that after Nixon’s two-hour briefing “President Eisenhower, the Secretary of State Dulles and all the members of the Council rose from their seats and applauded him”. Therefore, Aitken continues, citing de Toledano, the briefing “marked a turning point” for Nixon. Aitken, Jonathan, *Nixon: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993), pp. 229–230; de Toledano, Ralph, *One Man Alone: Richard Nixon* (New York: Funk, 1969), p. 163.

62 Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, pp. 310–311.

■ The Beginning of the Dien Bien Phu Crisis – The National Security Council Considers the Question of Unilateral Intervention (January–March 1954)

A New Policy Paper and a Special Annex at the January 8 Council Meeting

The perception of the strategic importance of Indochina (and Southeast Asia as a whole) to the security of the United States was not questioned at the time. Events in Indochina and in France forced the NSC to consider the chance of a French pull-out from the area. This meant that the Council machinery would have to weigh the advantages and costs of a possible intervention. But could Eisenhower afford to send American troops to an Asian war since the war in Korea had just ended? Or would his Administration simply have to use hawkish rhetoric?

Important and pressing issues were considered in detail by the NSC machinery and outside actors. Given the circumstances, the PB had used the month of December for hammering out a draft statement on US policy toward Southeast Asia. On December 3, the PB discussed in particular Indochina and directed the PB Assistants to prepare a revised draft policy and a draft Annex consisting of several possible courses of action in certain contingencies, which would not be included in the actual policy statement. For the meeting of December 9, the CIA Director discussed probable Communist reactions to possible US courses of action in Indochina based on the preparation of Special Intelligence Estimate of December 18, 1953. In addition, on December 9 the PB noted two drafts (of December 8 and 9). At its meeting the PB revised some parts of the earlier draft and decided to devote its December 14 meeting “to completion of a report to the Council on Southeast Asia”. At the meeting of December 14 the PB used the December 8 draft as a basis. It was considered and amended together with the Special Annex of December 10 (excluding paragraphs 7 through 11, which needed to be reviewed by the Joint Staff) and the draft of the Financial Appendix of December 14. All the revised documents received further consideration on December 16 and 23. Finally, on December 29 the PB considered and amended a draft policy statement based on an earlier draft of December 16. In the meantime, the State Department and the Joint Staff were revising the wording of

the Special Annex¹. The PB thus approved submission of the amended draft, which was issued as NSC 177, to the NSC for consideration. The following day, the PB amended the Draft Special Annex of December 30 by the PB Assistants and agreed to submit the Special Annex to the Council in connection with NSC 177.²

The PB had a clear recommendation to make about the intervention, in which it proposed new guidelines for US Indochina policy. In the Special Annex the NSC officials contemplated what were the alternatives for Washington in the case that the French threatened to get out of Indochina unless the US committed its military resources in Indochina. If the Americans said no, it would cause the French to negotiate a solution “on unacceptable terms” which would result in the loss of Indochina. The second contingency took into account the possibility that the French would stop fighting and withdraw from the area in any event, regardless of extended US aid. The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson, wrote to Secretary Dulles about NSC 177, where he suggested that the options for the US were either not to send in any troops and accept the end result or to send in troops “to supplement or replace the French”. Robertson was pleased with the actual NSC 177 and recommended “that the NSC Secretariat be authorized to make further changes to smooth out the drafting of the paper and to take into consideration further comments on minor points”. He saw, however, the Special Annex as controversial and did not expect the Council to reach a final decision on the alternatives set forth in the Special Annex on January 8. In the case of intervention the NSC planners considered the possibility of all-out war with the Chinese and the anti-colonial reactions of countries in the Middle and Far East. The Special Annex mentioned the training of the local armed forces and UN and allied participation in any military action.³ The NSC was thus faced with a true dilemma. The nature of the problem was political.

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1 The Joint Staff Review of paragraphs 7–11 of the Special Annex was assigned on December 14 and they were made available before the meeting of December 29. State Department amendments to the Special Annex were circulated by a memorandum of the Christmas Eve. No such documents have been found.

2 Most of the meetings did not have an agenda. Records of Meeting of the PB, December 3, 9, 14, 16, 23, 29 and 30, 1953, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1953, RG 273, NA.

3 Special Annex (to NSC 177, which was renumbered NSC 5405) was first circulated at the end of December. In early January 1954, Eisenhower decided the Special Annex would not be discussed at the NSC, and that the discussions about it would only be off the record. Radford remembers that it was Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger M. Kyes who was not pleased with the logistical requirements of the Special Annex were too vague. Kyes had convinced Secretary Wilson about the issue. The Secretary of Defense, Radford continues, then appealed to the President. It was re-distributed on March 26, 1954, only for the PB members on “an absolute need-to-know basis”. All papers were to be returned after consideration to the Executive Secretary. Special Annex (to NSC 177) on Indochina, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1182–1186. The Assistant Secretary of State Robertson’s memoranda (2) to Dulles, both on January 6, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 76, NSC 177 memoranda, RG 59, NA. See also Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, pp. 382–383. The draft statement of policy prepared by the PB titled “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia” (NSC 177) was intended, if adopted, to supersede those portions of NSC 124/2 not previously superseded by NSC 171/1. For the versions of NSC 177 see WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 8, DDEL.

Eisenhower's NSC machinery was not a consensus-building structure. The intervention scheme, for example, divided opinions between the national security policy-makers and advisers. According to a later account by Radford, the Special Annex turned out to be a controversial paper. The JCS discussed it on January 6. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC), which was subordinate to the JCS, had concluded that the Special Annex was in fact too inaccurate. One of the options of the Special Annex was that the US would leave Indochina if the French decided to withdraw. The JSSC went on to explain that if Indochina was vital to US security, it would not be possible to accept that option. The Committee suggested that the US should make a decision as to whether it was ready to intervene in Indochina to keep it a non-Communist or not. The Chiefs, who basically agreed with the JSSC, were caught in a dilemma, and could not take a stand on the matter.⁴

The Council meetings were venues for major policy consideration. On January 8, for example, Allen Dulles gave to the NSC an oral briefing in which he reported that the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu⁵ in the Northwestern corner of Vietnam was encircled by the Vietminh. Director Dulles reminded his listeners of the psychological effect of the Vietminh siege of the fortress. Special Assistant Cutler went through NSC 177 and its Special Annex. The JCS, Cutler said, had so far been unable to present their stance on the paper, and, therefore, the Chiefs had hoped the NSC would not take any action on the document. The President and the Vice-President were not satisfied with the actions of the French with regard to Indochina. Eisenhower clearly stated that he would not under any circumstances favor sending US ground troops to Indochina. He said that it was unreasonable to even talk about the possibility that the US would replace France in Indochina, because the war would, in his words, "absorb our troops by divisions". Anti-colonialist sentiment, Eisenhower warned, would be directed towards the Americans. Eisenhower called on the UN to solve the problem. Secretary Dulles then noted that France opposed the idea of UN interference, because it would mean that North African questions would be discussed in New York at the same time.⁶

At that same significant meeting, the discussion then turned to the question of training of the indigenous forces in Indochina. Eisenhower mentioned that

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4 The Chiefs recommended only minor corrections to the draft text of NSC 177. See JCS memorandum to Wilson, January 6, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 352, Box 76, NSC 177 memoranda, RG 59, NA; Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, p. 382.

5 For more about Dien Bien Phu see, for example, Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, passim; Fall, Bernard B., *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966); Poole, Peter A., *Dien Bien Phu, 1954: The Battle That Ended the First Indochina War* (New York: Watts, 1972); Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983; Roy, Jules, *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Harper, 1965); and Simpson, Howard, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (McLean: Brassey's, 1994).

6 Memorandum of Discussion of the 179th Meeting of the NSC, January 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 947-949. The Americans had made plans to help the French in the air already in late 1952. See Hooper, Edwin B., Dean C. Allard and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Volume I: The Setting of the Stage to 1959* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), p. 190.

several hundred US officers could be sent to the area if “General Navarre could be induced to agree to let us take over some considerable number of their training camps”. This would free French instructors to the field, the President concluded. The West had been unsuccessful, he continued, in providing military training for the Asians, whereas the Communists had produced “great fighters”. France was willing to win the war, Nixon added, yet they were not prepared to train the Vietnamese so that they would be able to achieve victory without the help of the FEC. Eventually, the Vietnamese, who lacked a cause to fight for, might leave the French Union. The Vice-President supported the training idea. According to Radford, there were already “a lot of men in Indochina”. Although they were not taking part in combat operations, the Admiral said, “we are really in this war today in a big way”. The Secretary of the Treasury, Humphrey, commented that the monetary restraints prevented the US from despatching troops to Indochina, which would cause the US to become entangled in the war.⁷

The French had requested planes flown by American pilots. The issue was also taken up by the NSC on January 8. Eisenhower explained that even if the US decided not to give aviators, aircraft could be given as assistance. They would require, the President went on, maintenance personnel. Radford then proposed air strikes in order to lift the siege and save Dien Bien Phu. The President elaborated on the idea; he spoke about using the latest weapons technology and giving the job to a handful of skillful flyers, who would fly bomber planes from aircraft carriers but without US insignia. Humphrey then restated his opposition and warnings and was backed up by Cutler. Secretary Dulles and Eisenhower supported Radford’s standpoint. The President referred to a “leaky dike” and US “vital interests” even though he said he truly wanted to “keep our men out of these jungles”. Secretary Wilson suggested the French be given aircraft. This would be on top of the aid package, Radford replied.⁸

In outlining the discussion near the end of the January 8 meeting, Cutler inquired from the President what the NSC should do concerning the situation in Indochina. Eisenhower answered that the French were unable to leave from Indochina and therefore the question was how to help them. Radford suggested that the Chief MAAG, General John W. O’Daniel, should stay there. O’Daniel was also, Wilson added, to be granted greater leverage in handling the aid. This

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7 Memorandum of Discussion of the 179th Meeting of the NSC, January 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 949–952; Pentagon Papers’ account of the meeting is different. The memorandum does not support their claims. According to the Pentagon’s historians, the State Department representative argued that the US had no choice but to decide whether to employ its ground troops in Indochina, because the position of the French was critical. The Pentagon’s representative was against the idea as he reportedly believed the French would win with help from the US, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 89–90.

8 After having consulted with the Secretary of the Air Force Harold Talbott, Eisenhower specifically mentioned B–26 bombers. Memorandum of Discussion of the 179th Meeting of the NSC, January 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 951–953. Brodie has argued that it is not certain if Radford “really believed the air strikes would so much effect or whether he simply wanted to intervene”. Brodie, Bernard, *War & Politics* (London: Cassell, 1974), p. 123.

was agreed upon by the Council. The President gave the Pentagon and the CIA an assignment to find out ways to help the French to implement the Navarre Plan. The NSC also decided to recall NSC 177 for consideration by the PB.⁹ This leads us to believe that Secretary Dulles had in fact forwarded Robertson's views to the President in an off-the-record informal meeting.

Burke and Greenstein have captured the essence of the January 8 meeting. It is easy to agree with the basics of their analysis. They regard the meeting as the starting point of the attention paid by the Council to the Dien Bien Phu crisis. Furthermore, the record of the meeting shows clearly what kind of roles the presidential advisers had and what was the structure of the advisory arrangements. The "outspoken" NSC members, Burke and Greenstein assert, "were comfortable in challenging" the President "often tenaciously" and did not simply state their views. The President did not like "yes-men". In the light of multiple advocacy, Burke and Greenstein argue, Cutler "acted as a brake on any impulse to intervene precipitously". In addition, the Special Assistant – equipped with a sense of ease – reminded the participants that the intervention "had not been fully explored". In commenting on Eisenhower's cognitive style, Burke and Greenstein conclude that the President, who was not satisfied with the options that were presented to the NSC, proved his capacity for strategic thinking and thinking "in terms of the trade-offs presented by policy alternatives" as well as "in terms of consequences". This latter part of the interpretation is consistent with that of Billings-Yun, who has referred to the military-style Eisenhower used at the Council meetings. Nelson also refers to the meeting by writing that, as the President wished to stress the attitude of the French, "the discussion on Indochina that day revolved around the president's concerns rather than the substance of the NSC paper". Hall asserts that the Special Annex certainly "prompted heated discussion", which was important in many ways. The Council debate mirrored Eisenhower's view at the August 6 NSC meeting as it helped "to reinforce administration sensitivity to the importance of local political forces", which was, strangely, about to be ignored by Secretary Dulles. Furthermore, Hall continues, Secretary Wilson's attention to "political factors represented an important triumph of the Eisenhower-Cutler norm that Council members perform as "statesmen, not specialists". According to Immerman, the fact that the Council "debate illustrated the lack of accord within the NSC" and that the French would not collapse soon, the President directed the Pentagon and the CIA to study the issue further. Gardner calls the discussions of January 8 "the first full-fledged debate". In analyzing the various views of Eisenhower, Gardner writes that it is difficult to identify reasons for the President's thinking, but that Eisenhower's "prohibition against sending American ground forces" to Indochina was his "only definitive pronouncement". For Patti, the January 8 meeting did

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9 The NSC made a note of the President's decision to destroy all the copies of the Special Annex of NSC 177. Memorandum of Discussion of the 179th Meeting of the NSC, January 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 954.

not address the question what the US would do in that the case that “troops were indisputably necessary to prevent” the fall of Indochina. The situation at Dien Bien Phu, Anderson argues and refers to the Council meeting of January 8, “created concern but no sense of immediate crisis in Washington”.¹⁰

It is, however, useful to notice that the meeting of January 8 apparently was not, as we will see later, more significant in the handling of the crisis than the subsequent meetings held especially during late April and early May 1954. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the Council members clearly performed their roles as policy advocates. There seems to have been a considerable amount of disagreement at the meeting. The NSC turned to give-and-take and debate and did not agree too readily about the nature of the problem. In a sense, it delayed reaching any decision in anticipation of a military solution. This could have been the result of missing information or even conflicting reports, but in practice it meant that a vague attitude and indecisiveness prevailed. Even though the available summary of the January 8 Council meeting does not indicate that Secretary Dulles was particularly active in the discussions, Short writes, basing his argument on Pentagon Papers, that Dulles “must have presented the State Department view” calling for a rapid NSC decision on the use of combat forces in Indochina to relieve the French, whose position was already critical.¹¹

The State Department officials did not even believe that they could assess the feasibility of purely military programs. The Pentagon and the CIA had plans to increase US support for the Navarre Plan. This meant reconsideration of policy, sending United States Air Force (USAF) maintenance and ground personnel, and placing emphasis on unconventional warfare activities. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Everett F. Drumright, recommended to Secretary Dulles that he would endorse the plan and “insist “that the NSC take [a] formal decision in this matter” the following day. In addition, Drumright wrote, it was in the interest of the State Department “that Defense be asked to furnish periodically to NSC its views of [the] probability of success of [the]

10 Burke and Greenstein add that “Cutler’s obvious sense of ease at calling the president short on procedural issues was paralleled by his other associates’ sense of freedom to debate with him on substantive issues”. Burke and Greenstein, “Presidential Personality and National Security Leadership,” 1989, pp. 78, 80, 82; Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, pp. 563–565; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* 1991, pp. 31, 55, 61–62, 266. Later Greenstein used the performance of the President at the January 8 Council meeting – “our troops by divisions” reply – as an example how “Eisenhower made his most important contributions to his administration’s Indochina decision making at the strategic level”. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, 2000, p. 52; Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, 1989, p. 59; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 310–311; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947–1980,” 1982, pp. 362–363; Immerman, “Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, p. 124. Gardner asserts that “the problem of providing what was needed appeared to fall somewhere between” the CIA and the Pentagon. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 166–167; Patti, *Why Viet Nam?*, 1980, p. 429; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 25. Greenstein and Immerman concluded that at the January 8 Council meeting the President first opposed intervention but later “flirted with the possibility of” an air strike on a covert basis. Thus he “weighed in on both sides of the equation”. Greenstein and Immerman, “What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina?,” 1992, p. 579.

11 Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 126.

Laniel-Navarre concept". As it became clear that the JCS would not consider the report and therefore could not make a presentation at the NSC meeting, Walter Robertson suggested that Dulles could "secure the designation of State as one of the agencies...which is to report to NSC on this subject".¹²

The Council could not usually settle issues in a single meeting, partly because the members often disagreed on the language. In the aftermath of the January 8 meeting the CIA Director Dulles briefed the NSC members in mid-January that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was not in any way critical, even though the besieged French were outnumbered by more than two to one. It was also announced that the JCS had completed its work on NSC 177. Secretary Dulles led the discussion on the possibility of a French disaster regardless of US actions. He recommended that the US would consider a guerilla type of response against the Vietminh. This would be, Dulles added, a cheap way to act. Eisenhower then reminded them of the fate of China. The President also approved of Dulles's suggestion. In sketching NSC 177, a French pull-out was not viewed as an option, Cutler said. The Vice-President, who now was an active participant in the discussions, was hesitant about Dulles's proposal. If the French left Indochina, Nixon continued, it might give a boost to the Vietnamese to continue fighting and offer the US a chance to assume training responsibilities, which the Americans could do better than the French. This would not lead to the deployment of US ground troops.¹³

After discussion, the Council approved NSC 177 with two changes in the text. At Secretary Dulles's suggestion, a sentence which stated that France's loss or withdrawal would "diminish France's value as a factor in free world defense (in Europe and in North Africa)" was removed, even though Cutler had clarified the wording of the PB¹⁴. Also deleted was a paragraph which dealt with US actions in the case of an attack against Thailand. Planning work for a secret Operations Plan was ordered to be started with the main responsibility in the hands of the CIA.¹⁵ Eisenhower gave his blessing to the policy paper two days later and it became NSC 5405.¹⁶

The basic assumption set forth by the PB in the approved new Policy Paper was that Communist control over Southeast Asia did "seriously endanger in the

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- 12 Everett F. Drumright's memorandum to Dulles, January 13, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 76, NSC 177 memoranda, RG 59, NA; Robertson's memorandum to Dulles, January 13, 1954, *ibid.* The JCS agreed with the draft version of NSC 177. Lay, Jr's memorandum to the NSC, January 12, 1954 with enclosed views of the JCS in JCS's memorandum to Secretary Wilson, January 6, 1954, *ibid.*
 - 13 Memorandum of Discussion of the 180th Meeting of the NSC, January 14, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 961-964.
 - 14 Secretary Dulles insisted "that the proper focus of interest of the NSC was the effect of a French abandonment of the struggle in Indochina on U.S. security interests, and it was accordingly academic to get into an argument as to the effect of such abandonment on French security interests." Memorandum of Discussion of the 180th Meeting of the NSC, January 14, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 962.
 - 15 Memorandum of Discussion of the 180th Meeting of the NSC, January 14, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 964.
 - 16 NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 434-443.

short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests". In addition, the paper referred to "by whatever means", which seems internal subversive threats were being taken seriously by the NSC. The Indochina war was viewed as an ideological struggle which would have worldwide effects, especially on "US and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere". Armed rebellion and subversion were seen as more likely than a general Chinese attack. Yet the French position was predicted to weaken. "The keystone of the defense of mainland Southeast Asia", the PB concluded, was "the successful defense of Tonkin" as the majority of possible attack corridors passed through it. The paper credited the Navarre Plan, which was a prerequisite for additional US aid as the NSC had decided on September 9, 1953, as having achieved some success for the time being. The Plan was considered by the NSC Staff to be France's last chance to win the war and retain its position in the Far East. The paper predicted that the French intended to discontinue the war and were willing to negotiate. Initiatives for negotiations on the Vietminh side were seen as propaganda. With US assistance, however, there was not, the paper assumed, any immediate danger of a Vietminh victory unless the Chinese intervened. There was "a substantial risk" of this if the US took up fighting.¹⁷

The objective in the NSC 5405 was "to prevent the countries of Southeast Asia from passing into the Communist orbit" by keeping them as members of the "free world". The threatened states were to be assisted "to develop toward stable, free governments" which would want to check both internal and external attacks of the Communists. The possible courses of action, therefore, included increased aid to the Franco-Vietnamese forces. In doing so, "an aggressive military, political and psychological program, including covert operations" should be launched with the aim of destroying "organized Viet Minh forces by mid-1955". Another task was to create sufficient local forces which could guarantee internal security "without assistance from French units"¹⁸. The US was to calm the French and persuade them to carry on waging war by promising to continue assistance "as long as" the French maintained their share of the bargain. Toward the goal of independence of the Indochinese states, the US should act as a mediator in order to encourage both sides to raise the status of the Indochinese states within the French Union. Thus the French influence in the internal affairs of the three states should be reduced. The latter should be told that the French position should not be forgotten and "untimely demands" be made. The French were not to be allowed to make peace "on terms inconsistent

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17 General considerations of NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 971-973. For the full text of the policy paper see WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 9, DDEL.

18 This meant the US had to "exert all feasible influence to improve military capabilities of the French Union-Associated States forces, including improved training of local forces, effective command and intelligence arrangements, and the reposing of increased responsibility on local military leaders". Courses of Action section in NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 974.

with basic US objectives". It should be made clear to the French that unless there was military success negotiating position was not – or at least for acceptable terms for the US – strong enough. The French should also be warned, as the intelligence community had predicted, that a non-Communist coalition government would “turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh”. According to the Policy Paper, the US was to oppose any cease-fire as it would cause the French military posture to deteriorate. If the French decided to negotiate, the US should “seek to influence the course of the negotiations”.¹⁹

Moreover, in the case of open or covert Chinese intervention the wording of NSC 5405 stated that when the Tonkin Delta area was in danger the US “may be prepared to take whatever action may be appropriate in such circumstances”. This meant consultations with the ANZUS countries and the Indochinese states and support of a request for a Korean style of UN operation. The US was prepared to take “minimum courses of military action” also with other Western nations. This would mean a support role to “provide, as may be practicable, air and naval assistance”, with the French and the British “interdict [against] Chinese Communist communication lines, including those in China” and to render logistical support to those who took part. These would also be strikes against targets inside China – not too close to the Soviet border – together with at least France and Great Britain. If the two refused, the US should not rule out attacking China alone, bearing in mind the possibility of a world war.²⁰ In the words of Admiral Radford, the aim of the US in NSC 5405 was “to strengthen France to the point where it would hold out for a settlement that also protected US security interests in the Far East”.²¹

NSC 5405 was, as George and Smoke view it, an example of the difficulties involved in analyzing the “likely possibility of a Vietminh success without Chinese intervention”. In any case, George and Smoke continue, NSC staffers, as in the preparation of NSC 5405, “had recognized and even emphasized the important role political and psychological factors would play in any eventual French defeat in Indochina”. Gelb and Betts assert that the Eisenhower Administration sought to “extend and limit the commitment to a non-Communist Vietnam”. NSC 5405, they continue, vetoed a coalition government including Communists and urged US intervention if the Chinese intervened, thus giving “further detail” to the basic objective. Gelb and Betts regard as paradoxical the fact that “Indochina was worth the risk of war with China but not worth trying to save without the French”. Immerman argues that NSC 5405 was intended “to

19 Courses of Action section in NSC 5405, “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia,” January 16, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 973–975.

20 The US was also ready to establish a naval blockade of China, utilize secret operations against China and its lines of communication, use Taiwanese forces in combat duties in Southeast Asia, Korea and China proper, aid the British in Hong Kong and evacuate the French nationals and troops from the Tonkin Delta area. Courses of Action section in NSC 5405, “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia,” January 16, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 975–976.

21 Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, p. 383.

prevent the fall of any Southeast Asian country to the Communists". Yet the document "went little beyond" NSC 124/2", he adds. Immerman, who has assessed the studies and reports on Indochina – including NSC 5405 – circulated within the first year of the Eisenhower Presidency, maintains that the documents "coincided with the analyses of his predecessor's administration". Likewise, for Gibbons NSC 5405 was "basically a rewrite of" NSC 124/2, even though the paper was to establish new guidelines for the US commitment in Indochina. Hess confirms Gibbons's conclusion by stating that the paper underlined "set forth the critical importance of Indochina". According to Nelson, the document "elaborated on the 'domino theory' and stated the basic policy position that was to influence all others". Destler shares the view that it laid down "a primitive version of the domino theory" and that it broadly defined US "policy goals, military options, and dilemmas". Nevertheless, the document, Destler concludes, "said virtually nothing about local or regional political forces and rivalries". The Policy Paper, Prados reminds us, "contained language warning of political problems with allies, and of increased risks of war in the event atomic weapons were used in Indochina. Arnold asserts that, "as was often the case", the Paper was outdated because it had been overtaken by events.²²

In comparison to NSC 124/2, the newly adopted NSC 5405 put more emphasis on the importance of Indochina in the region in keeping Southeast Asia free from the Communists. The significance of Indochina to US security interests and the dangers of the Indochinese situation to US national security were also stressed. The Policy Paper envisaged a larger role for the US as the position of the French – despite the omissions – was considered to diminish. The policy was not developed for the moment because the notion of an enlarged US involvement, as well as some of the other features of the new Policy Paper, were to a great extent consistent with the reasoning contained in the Project Solarium summaries in the summer of 1953. It appears likely that the document followed the spirit of the NIEs, which formed the basis for NSC papers. The content of the NIEs is debatable. Destler rightly points out that it did not take note of the situation nor did it understand the cultural factors.

22 George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 252–253; Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, p. 183; Immerman, "Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable," in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, p. 125; Immerman, "Prologue: Perceptions by the United States of Its Interests in Indochina," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 12; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 149, 155; Hess, "Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 124; Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill,'" 1983, p. 316; Destler, "The Presidency and National Security Organization," in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 230; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, pp. 155–156, 203, 207; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 135.

The Special Committee

As has been asserted by several scholars, informal meetings augmented the NSC process. On the same day as NSC 5405 was approved, a small group of policy-makers met at the Oval Office. The discussion centered on Indochina and Southeast Asia as a whole. The participants agreed that a Communist victory in Indochina would have grave consequences for the region. The US was ready to give 800 million dollars to the French during the next two fiscal years. Yet it was agreed that the use of indigenous forces was essential in winning the struggle. The French, the participants in the meeting thought, had done a poor job in training the Vietnamese and the Americans could do it better. Eisenhower called Secretary Dulles that same day, and as Dulles was out of his office, said to Bedell Smith that he should urge that nothing be said to the French about a possible increase in military assistance before he had heard and seen the latest reports about the situation in Indochina. To deal with the problem, the President formed a new high-level committee which consisted of the Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith as the Chairman, Allen Dulles, Assistant Secretary of Defense Roger M. Kyes, Radford and the psychological warfare specialist C. D. Jackson. The Special Committee, which had a Sub-Committee headed by General Graves B. Erskine, the former Chief MAAG-Indochina, was charged with studying the question and making suggestions. At the meeting of January 16, the President gave specific instructions to the Special Committee, which not only was to be “self-contained” but that “neither NSC nor OCB need be cut in on its deliberations”. The President urged the Committee to take a regional approach,²³ which was almost in line with C. D. Jackson’s global approach recommendation in May, 1953.

Gibbons asserts that the regional plan “was, in fact, of the highest importance in the evolution of the administration’s position on Indochina”. This was so because, Gibbons clarifies, it marked “the beginning of a shift from an emphasis on the critical importance of Indochina to emphasis on a wider framework”. This approach could justify and make “politically acceptable” the fall of Indochina or part of it. Gibbons adds that the President and his advisory system had probably not finalized its policy, but it was likely that they began to make preparations for an FEC pull-out and “a compromise settlement” at Geneva. At

23 C. D. Jackson’s memorandum of the meeting in the Oval Office, January 18, 1954 (held on January 16), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 981–982; memorandum of telephone conversation between Eisenhower and Bedell Smith by Roderic L. O’Connor, January 18, 1954, John Foster Dulles Papers, Special Assistant’s Chronological Series, Box 4, DDEL. Brands, Jr. asserts that Eisenhower “relied most heavily” along with the “inner circle” consisting of the Dulles brothers and his own brother Milton, a Latin America expert, on the Under Secretaries of State Bedell Smith and Robert Murphy. They acted in particular “as implementers of policy choices made at the top” and as the President’s able “men on the spot”. Eisenhower knew that the two achieved results and could pursue US policy objectives even in critical situations in which “the distinction between policy formulation and implementation blurred”, Brands, Jr. adds. For more about Bedell Smith’s role at Geneva see Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors*, 1988, chapter 4.

the same time the US would prepare contingencies for collective security. Gibbons is joined by Burke and Greenstein, who argue that by calling “for a comprehensive conceptualization” and suggesting “an area plan” President Eisenhower did not rule out “the possibility of accepting a defeat in Indochina without conceding the rest of Southeast Asia to the Communists”. The behavior of Eisenhower in the meeting illustrates the notion that he viewed questions on a larger scale.²⁴

Burke and Greenstein have captured the spirit of the assignments of the Erskine and Bedell Smith groups. According to Burke and Greenstein, Erskine’s group was “a working committee for the formulation of policy options, especially long-range plans”. It was responsible for reporting to the Special Committee, they add, which in turn acted as “a higher-level body” and thus also “the formal conduit to the NSC”.²⁵

Radford, Allen Dulles, and C. D. Jackson were the President’s and the NSC’s trusted advisers. It is not odd that Bedell Smith and Allen Dulles with their intelligence experience and C. D. Jackson as a psychological warfare expert and an NSC consultant were chosen to be members of a special high-level committee. Basically, this was the core of the OCB. Allen Dulles’s role raises questions about his influence on his brother in this field. The State Department representative was chairing the committee. The Committee’s establishment serves as a good example of Eisenhower’s wishes concerning ad hoc organs with the task of studying alternatives and making recommendations. Furthermore, it could be argued that the designation of such committees of consultants or advisers was almost like a standard operating procedure within the NSC machinery designed to augment the system. The participants were, however, not real “outsiders” consisted, rather, of NSC and OCB principals, who probably turned to the NIEs.

The participant departments and agencies were capable of real coordination. This is illustrated by the paper-producing effort. The State Department went through a JCS-CIA paper which concentrated on how the Navarre Plan could be made to work. On January 20 the Assistant Secretary of State Robertson, who again acted proactively, forwarded the recommendations about the paper to Secretary Dulles for NSC consideration. The suggestions, which had been drafted by Bonsal, emphasized long-term developments. They included the purchase of 35 additional bombers, and for 400 mechanics from the French NATO contingent or disguised American personnel to be released for duty in Indochina, the establishment of Civil Air Transport (CAT)²⁶ be studied and for

24 Gibbons refers to the “area plan” as “this seemingly minor and almost routine proposal”. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 156. Burke and Greenstein continuously and incorrectly refer to January 18 meeting, even though it had been held on Saturday, January 16. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 37, 61.

25 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 37.

26 For more about CAT, which was a front company for the CIA, see Marchetti, Victor and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Dell, 1975), pp. 137–152. The CAT pilots – who were officially civilians – had the task of becoming acquainted with the terrain if US intervention was to be carried out. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place, 1966, p. 241. See also Leary, William M., “CAT at Dien Bien Phu,” *Aerospace Historian*, Volume 31 (September 1984), pp. 177–184.

the French to be encouraged to adapt to unconventional warfare methods. Robertson also recommended that the NSC's PB would "re-examine" the policies and that the OCB should intensify its work with respect to informational and psychological warfare programs. The State Department should not, according to the paper, demand that the French should announce publicly that they would continue the war nor that the US should, as proposed by the JCS and CIA, declare what it would do in the case of a Chinese intervention. Bonsal and Robertson did not care to comment on the point, which called for only qualified MAAG personnel to be allowed to be sent to Indochina.²⁷

Robertson and Bonsal were State Department officials who could make a difference within the NSC system. Bonsal is an example of the type of lower echelon official who had influence because of his deep involvement, unlike Robertson, at various levels of the Council structure. He worked at the State Department and was in a position to make recommendations to the NSC principals. He was also drafting NSC papers and was present at the regular State-JCS meetings as well as being associated with the formulation and implementation of NSC policies in the PB as well as the OCB Working Group. On the other hand, Robertson had direct access to Secretary Dulles, who actually paid attention to the recommendations made by his Assistant Secretary. There may have been similar second or third echelon officials who could have had an influence upon the policy formulation – and to some extent upon implementation – in other departments and agencies, but the available source material does not permit the identification of any such figures.

Planning called for concrete decisions and clear instructions. Ways of helping the implementation of the Navarre Plan, as called for by the NIEs, was on the agenda of the NSC meeting on January 21. The Council discussed a paper prepared by the JCS and the CIA regarding the matter on the basis of a presentation by Radford. For the Chairman of the JCS, who was accompanied for this item by all members of the JCS, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and three Service Secretaries, there had not been enough time for thorough planning work and so the paper had been "very hurriedly formulated". He went on to talk about guerilla methods and psychological warfare. Allen Dulles felt that such "long-term" actions needed time for preparatory work. France had requested additional bombers and maintenance personnel. According to the present JCS members, it would be wiser to hire civilian mechanics instead of USAF people. The President said the US could send there 25–26 "supervisors" and the bomber planes. In addition, he expressed his concern over the situation at Dien Bien Phu

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27 Memorandum by the JCS to Wilson, January 15, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 968–971; memorandum by Robertson to Secretary Dulles (drafted by Bonsal), January 20, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 memoranda, RG 59, NA; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 985–986. According to Eisenhower's speechwriter Hughes, Robertson favored – together with Secretary Dulles and Radford – the use of the US military in Indochina. Emmet Hughes Oral History Transcript, PUL.

and criticized the French tactics²⁸. Allen Dulles was unhappy with the Special Committee's task of making plans considering the whole of Southeast Asia. He thought this would interfere with the priority of the Indochinese situation. The President ordered the Special Committee to commence its work without delay. The NSC took note that the Special Committee was to "determine urgently further feasible steps to assist in achieving the success of the 'Laniel-Navarre' Plan in accordance with NSC 5405". There was no time to waste; the Committee was to work directly with the OCB in this matter. Concerning plans for the whole region, the Committee was to submit its suggestions to the Council.²⁹ Basing his argument on NSC 5405 and the memorandum of the discussion at the January 21 Council meeting, Buzzanco writes that "the NSC balked, optimistically arguing that a Communist victory in Indochina was not likely, but anomalously clamoring for US intervention to stem the disintegration there".³⁰

An interesting contemporary view of the NSC work in the context of Vietnam policy-making is presented by Philip Bonsal, who wrote a letter to Ambassador Heath on January 22. Bonsal was apologizing he had not been able to keep his personal friend informed of the latest developments. In his "eyes only" letter Bonsal was writing about what he referred to as "the flavor" of what had been happening in Washington:

"We have been struggling on the preparation of a new NSC paper to take the place of NSC 124/2. That paper has now been approved by the President and I am seeing to it that copies are forwarded to you. It fully covers our present policies toward Indochina and in fact gives added support to the vigorous prosecution of the 'enterprises' within present policies."

28 Eisenhower later recalled that he had been "horror-stricken" as a soldier, because of the fact that the French had penned their troops in a fortress. Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, PUL. According to Challenger the President had a "deep and abiding suspicion of the French and French policy" and their military planning. Eisenhower was even "hostile" towards "French colonialism". Challenger, "The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower," in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 62. Hellers also point out that Secretary Dulles "as a moral man" continuously urged the French to give independence to the Indochinese. Heller, Deane and David Heller, *John Foster Dulles: Soldier for Peace* (New York: Holt, 1960), p. 202.

29 Memorandum of the Discussion of the 181st Meeting of the NSC, January 21, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 986-988, 990. The State Department sent 10 copies of NSC 5405 to US embassies in Southeast Asian and Far Eastern countries. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Everett F. Drumright instructed the Ambassadors that the policy paper would "be called to the attention of the appropriate policy officers" in the posts. Drumright added that "in view of the very sensitive nature of this document" and the security directives of the Council, "it is mandatory that special security precautions be observed in handling this document". No unauthorized personnel were to be allowed to view it and no copies were to be made. See Operations Coordinator Walter N. Waddell's memorandum for the Deputy Director of US Mission to Netherlands Howard R. Cottam, January 25, 1954 and Drumright's letters (10) to US ambassadors, dated February 2, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

30 Buzzanco, *Masters of War*, 1996, p. 41.

Writing about the Council machinery, Bonsal was also referring to a “serious soul-searching in the highest quarters” in order to determine if the present actions were enough and prepare for the worst. O’Daniel’s decision was in fact taken without first informing or consulting “the lower echelons in the Pentagon or the State Department”. Bonsal wondered why the State Department representatives were not asked by the NSC to take part in the preparation of a paper to find ways to help in making the Navarre Plan work. The Pentagon and the CIA came up with a paper which stressed the importance of “unconventional warfare activities”.³¹

There is clear indication that the proper channels of the Council machinery within the departments were bypassed. This may have been caused either by the pressing time element or by the need to avoid leaks and keep the decisions secret. Bonsal’s complaints can be understood against the background of his defense of the State Department’s leading role in drawing up the draft papers. The State representatives apparently also wished to have a say in the military matters being contemplated by the NSC. Despite the fact that Bonsal was soon to become a member of a Working Group assisting the Special Committee, he was a lower-echelon State Department official and therefore not in a position to be familiar with all the details on the highest levels of the US Government and within the NSC system. This case probably is not a typical instance in which the Pentagon attempted to “get equal” with the State Department. It is more likely that the President may have considered that the nature of the issue was military rather than political. He also had great faith in the covert operations as a standard means of US foreign policy, which explains in part the strong CIA representation.

The ad hoc committees of the NSC seem to have adopted working methods from the Council. Discussions were frank, give-and-take prevailed, various options were considered and further studies assigned. The Special Committee on Indochina convened at the end of January. It went through the question of sending planes to the French and discussed other practical measures to assist the French. When Bedell Smith mentioned the need for 200 US maintenance personnel, it provoked Secretary Kyes to repeat Humphrey’s concern that this act would deepen the level of commitment and probably lead to the introduction of combat troops. Bedell Smith disagreed and added that he would choose to employ only air and naval power. He was supported by Radford. Allen Dulles then referred to “bargaining with the French as we supplied their most urgent needs”. He continued that the French were reluctant to let the Americans run missions in Indochina as they wanted to keep a peaceful negotiated solution as an option. CAT aviators were to be used to help Dien Bien Phu, even though the French were initially against the idea, because otherwise the Chinese might

31 Bonsal’s letter to Heath, January 22, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 992–996. Bonsal had himself written a memorandum two days earlier through Walter Robertson to Secretary Dulles in anticipation of NSC consideration of the paper. For the text see *ibid.*, p. 985.

have been given an excuse to intervene. Director Dulles also proposed sending an “unconventional warfare officer”, Colonel Edward G. Lansdale³², to Indochina. The JCS Chairman argued that Erskine’s preliminary report was too much restricted to the basic assumption that the US would not be dispatching troops to Indochina. According to Radford, the importance of Indochina to the US made it necessary to weigh all possible options. JCS Chairman proposed a report consisting of two parts, one on Erskine’s alternative and the other on the alternative in which troops would be sent. Bedell Smith concurred and another Working Group was appointed to work on Erskine’s report. The deadlines for reports were set for February 6 and March 17. The Committee suggested that the US should send some bombers, 200 USAF mechanics, and CAT pilots to help the French in Indochina. Another far-reaching decision was made at the meeting: Lansdale was sent to Vietnam as a member of MAAG. Radford reiterated his hard-line views as he did not wish to rule out any choices, even the use of US ground forces³³ to prevent the Vietminh victory, because it would have led to the loss of Southeast Asia and thus would have had grave psychological effects. The Special Committee did not want to use OCB facilities for revision work. They therefore decided to establish a Working Group, with the task of redrafting Erskine’s paper.³⁴

32 About Lansdale see his *In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper, 1972) and Cecil B. Currey’s biography *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Boston: Houghton, 1988). According to Kendrick, he “played both ends if the Indochina game” by being in touch with most of the parties as a good CIA operative should. Kendrick, Alexander, *The Wound Within: American in the Vietnam Years, 1945–1974* (Boston: Little, 1974), p. 61. Lansdale is the model for the main characters in the novels by Graham Greene and William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick. See Greene’s *The Quiet American* (London: Heinemann, 1955) and Lederer’s and Burdick’s *The Ugly American* (New York: Norton, 1958). The latter was also made into a Universal International motion picture in 1963 by director Robert H. Englund with Marlon Brando in the leading role. About Lansdale see also Drinnon, Richard, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: Meridian, 1980), pp. 355–442. According to Gardner, in the 1980s Lansdale was still an example and role model for Oliver North. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam, 1988*, pp. 17–18. My previous studies indicate that Lansdale was in fact a significant “grey eminence”, who strongly advocated unconventional warfare methods. See Tuunainen, Pasi, “Yhdysvaltojen Etelä-Vietnamin-politiikka 1954–1961.” (US Policy toward South Vietnam 1954–1961) (Master’s Thesis, University of Joensuu, 1993), passim and Tuunainen, Pasi, “Huojuva domino: Yhdysvaltojen Etelä-Vietnamin-politiikka 1954–1961.” (The Swaying Domino: US Policy toward South Vietnam 1954–1961) (Licentiate Thesis, University of Joensuu, 1993), passim.

33 Both Army Chief of Staff General Matthew B. Ridgway and Vice Admiral Arthur C. Davis were against sending combat forces to the area, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 89–91; Ridgway, Matthew B., *Soldier. The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper, 1956), pp. 274–277. See also Buzzanco, *Masters of War, 1996*, passim.

34 Brigadier General Charles H. Bonesteel III’s memorandum of discussion at the meeting of the President’s Special Committee on Indochina. January 29, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 90–91; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1002–1006. About French reluctance towards CAT see Heath’s cable to Secretary Dulles, January 23, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 996–997; General Graves B. Erskine, ex-Chief MAAG, headed a Subcommittee on Indochina assisting the Special Committee. The members of the Working Group were Vice Admiral Davis and William H. Godel from the Pentagon’s Office of Special Operations, Captain George W. Anderson, Jr. from the US Navy (USN), Philip Bonsal from the State Department, CIA’s George E. Aurell, and above-mentioned Brigadier Bonesteel III. He was the Assistant for National Security Council Affairs in the office of Frank C. Nash, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA).

The Special Committee's wish not to utilize the OCB does not appear strange. The decision coincided with the surfacing of some serious information breakdowns within the NSC-OCB machinery. The Executive Officer of the Board and those of the OCB Working Groups as well as the OCB Staff had not been fully informed about the developments concerning OCB assignments. In order to solve the problems, the OCB suggested increasing the normal contacts between the OCB staffers and agency representatives and improving the distribution of copies of pertinent action documents.³⁵

President Eisenhower seems to have trusted the advice from the high-level committees he appointed. The President, for example, made his decision to send ten more B-26 Bombers to the French. He altered to some extent the suggestions of the Special Committee, but also approved the sending of 200 USAF mechanics to "*augment temporarily*" (italics in original document) the French Air Force. The mechanics were to return by mid-June 1954. The issues of more aircraft and maintenance personnel had, however, to wait for the return of General O'Daniel.³⁶

The general attitude among the Council members could change rapidly in response to the situation as set forth in reports from the field. The question of Indochina was again on NSC's Agenda in early February. The Council members apparently no longer believed in the capabilities of the French. The problem, therefore, had to be solved in a different manner, possibly with active US involvement. At the beginning of the meeting Allen Dulles briefed the participants on the developments in Indochina. According to him, the French troops – including the indigenous forces – were poorly led. The Vietnamese, Dulles continued, were for the Vietminh, because many of them thought the war to be "a French colonial war"³⁷. Eisenhower asked if it was possible to exploit religion in the matter. By using an analogy with Joan of Arc, he said, a new Buddhist leader could give the Vietnamese a cause to fight. In spite of his obvious faults, Emperor Bao Dai was the best choice for the US as there were no other acceptable candidates in sight, responded Nixon. Then the discussion turned towards the French incapability in propaganda activities. The Vice-President suggested that Congress would authorize informational and economic assistance to the Indochinese states rather than military aid. He went on to propose, and was backed up by Secretary Wilson, that "the very best men" in the

35 Operations Coordinator for the Under Secretary of State, Walter A. Radium's memorandum to the chairmen of OCB working groups, January 26, 1954, Records of the NSC, OCB Central Files, Staff Studies and Reports and OCB Working Papers, 1951–1955, Box 1, OCB Procedural Memos, RG 273, NA.

36 Memorandum by the Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes to the Secretary of Air Force Talbott. January 29, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1007. On that very same day a member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Senator John C. Stennis, wrote to Secretary of Defense Wilson strongly opposing US intervention. Stennis's letter to Wilson, January 29, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, p. 239.

37 The President stated at his news conference on February 17, 1954 with reference to a question on distinguishing between aiding the anti-Communist forces and supporting colonialism that "there is no colonialism in this battle at all". Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 277.

USIS be sent to Vietnam. Nixon concluded and stated Ambassador Heath was being too pro-French.³⁸ Short argues that at that point the Council “could still afford the luxury of more relaxed debate”.³⁹

The NSC affairs were conducted behind a veil of secrecy. Nevertheless, the media had found out about the Special Committee on Indochina under the NSC and the secret Council discussions about Radford’s initiatives. The matter of the Special Committee was announced in a CBS newscast on the morning of February 4. The President, who had continuously urged that the workings of the NSC be kept on a need-to-know basis, was furious that classified information had once again leaked. He wanted to find out which of the Council members was responsible. “Did every member of the Council”, Eisenhower questioned, “warn his subordinates to shut up about such matters?”⁴⁰

The NSC machinery apparently did not have sufficient policy relevant information available and thus it was not well prepared for handling the Indochina question. Not least, they were unfamiliar with the historical background. A good indication of this is a request for information on Ho Chi Minh from the INR made by Cutler on February 7. In the State Department’s reply, Fisher Howe sent a recent biography of the North Vietnamese leader, a paper on OSS activities, referred to a small amount of French literature and concluded that a detailed appraisal of past American activities in Indochina would require the study of OSS and State Department records.⁴¹

The foreign policy decisions of the President were not self-explanatory even though they were often based on multi-faceted advice provided by his NSC. On February 10, for example, Eisenhower was forced to explain to the Members of Congress and to the public that mechanics could not be regarded as combat troops and that they would return in June. The United States, he added, was not becoming involved in the war. The President clarified his views to Secretary Dulles by pointing out that the reason for the opposition on the part of some Congressmen against US mechanics being sent to Indochina was that “they fear that this may be opening the door to [the] increased and unwise introduction of American troops into the area”. According to Eisenhower, the 200 additional air technicians had to be brought back by mid-June as promised. He also pledged to

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38 Memorandum of Discussion of the 183rd Meeting of the NSC, February 4, 1954. AWF, NSC series, Box5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1013–1017.

39 Short notes that Eisenhower referred to the Buddhist leader “against a background of recorded and presumably good-tempered laughter”. Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 129.

40 Memorandum of Discussion of the 183rd Meeting of the NSC, February 4, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1016. See Joseph Alsop’s and James Reston’s articles in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, dated February 3 and 4, 1954, respectively. See also Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, p. 170.

41 Bromley K. Smith had called Fisher Howe on behalf of Cutler to ask for wartime information on Ho Chi Minh. Cutler wanted “particularly to learn for whom he was fighting in 1941 and whether he was getting assistance from the United States”. Fisher Howe’s Memorandum for File, February 8, 1954 and Howe’s memorandum (with attachments) to Smith, February 9, 1954, Subject Files of INR 1945–1960, Lot 58 D 116, Box 11, RG 59, NA.

continue US assistance to the French and stated that “there is no ground whatsoever for assuming we intend to reverse or ignore US commitments”. The key to the success of the FEC depended, the President added, on the premise that “French will to win and complete acceptance by Vietnamese of the French promise of independence as soon as victory is achieved”.⁴²

The NSC principals, especially the Secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA Director, had to use alternates from time to time. These were normally well-placed Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries or Deputy Directors who had in most cases attended the Council meetings previously. The alternates had to be briefed like the principals, in particular if they were expected to contribute in one way or other. In the State Department the briefing procedures had been regularized. On February 10 Robertson briefed Bedell Smith for the Council meeting scheduled to be held the following day. The Acting Secretary of State was to give an oral presentation about the Special Committee’s work. Robertson reminded him of the status of emergency assistance in the form of airplanes and the talks between the allies. He reported that the recent military setbacks in Indochina and the reaction to them in the United States and in France “have weakened support of and confidence in French war effort”. According to Robertson, Bedell Smith might wish to make “recommendations for measures to recover psychological warfare losses of past few days”.⁴³

The conclusions of the ad hoc committees were not only intended for the use of the PB or the Chief Executive but to be discussed in detail at the Council meetings in order to offer a basis for expanding the current thinking and subsequently to produce a wider range of options. The Special Committee’s report came up for NSC consideration on February 11. There had not been any significant changes at Dien Bien Phu, and General Navarre believed his Plan would work, the CIA Director Dulles told the participants. Furthermore, he said that the “major problem in Indochina remained political rather than military”. Then came the turn of the Special Committee Chairman, Bedell Smith, who said that the problem the Committee was reviewing was two-fold. Firstly, it dealt with emergency aid to the French, and secondly, it involved a political dimension. Regarding the emergency assistance, Assistant Secretary Kyes shed light on the mechanics and planes which had been sent to Indochina. Other French aid requests had been “impractical”. General O’Daniel’s suggestions were under review, Kyes added. Admiral Radford mentioned that the preparations

42 Eisenhower’s press conference, February 10, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 245–255. For the reactions in the Senate see, for example, Congressional Record (hereafter CR), February 8–9, 1954, pp. 1503–1506, 1550–1552; Devillers, Philippe and Jean Lacouture, *End of a War: Indochina* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 53; Eisenhower’s cable to Dulles, February 10, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1031–1032. In his message, the President believes in the success of the Navarre Plan and relies on the report by General O’Daniel. For the text of O’Daniel’s report dated February 5, 1954 see USVNR, Book 9, pp. 246–258.

43 There were 200 US Air Force mechanics taking care of 22 B-26 planes and civilian (CAT) pilots flying C-119’s. Robertson’s memorandum to Bedell Smith (drafted by Bonsal), February 10, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 memoranda, RG 59, NA.

to send more planes and, possibly, more mechanics were going ahead. CAT pilots were also ready, but the French had not requested them so far, Director Dulles said.⁴⁴

Concerning the other side of the problem, Bedell Smith pointed out that the Soviet Union had actively attempted to get France to withdraw from Indochina. In addition, Paris wished to do just this because of all their difficulties, Bedell Smith pointed out. A Working Group headed by General Erskine under the Special Committee had made plans for the future with respect to the situation in which the Navarre Plan might turn out to be a disaster and the French decided to pull out. Eisenhower was not pleased with the “extraordinary confusion in the reports” from the area. According to the President, “there were almost as many judgments as there were authors of messages”. To Radford, this was due to the different status of personnel; some had been stationed there too long whereas others had simply visited there briefly. The President, in consequence, considered changing the diplomatic representatives in Indochina. Stassen offered a far more optimistic appraisal of the situation. He said that things were actually going better than had been the case during the previous year. Commenting on the “prevailing pessimism”, as Stassen had mentioned, Eisenhower thought that the reason for it was the lack of will on the part of the French and the Vietnamese. Spirit-boosting was, the President added, “excessively difficult for one nation to supply to another”.⁴⁵

George has stressed that multiple advocacy is difficult to install and operate. Difficulties are also evident in the handling of the topic examined in this study. Although all the requirements for multiple advocacy could have been in place, the policy advocates – or even the outsider specialists – were unable to make the system function at its optimum. The NSC members could not come up with feasible options upon which the President could have based his choices and decisions. It seems obvious that the situation was in reality in a constant state of change, making predictions hard to make and outdated reports as soon as they

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- 44 Memorandum of Discussion of the 184th Meeting of the NSC, February 11, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1035–1037.
 - 45 Memorandum of Discussion of the 184th Meeting of the NSC, February 11, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1037–1039. The Indochina situation was also discussed in the following week’s NSC session. The Council considered a proposal to send a South Korean division for service in Indochina. Eisenhower questioned what the American people would think if a South Korean division could be spared whereas US troops stayed on the Korean Peninsula. The Commander in Chief of US Far East Command, General John E. Hull was authorized to tell Rhee “that this contemplated offer is being considered at the highest levels in the United States Government”. No decision was thus reached, but the PB prepared recommendations for the NSC. Memorandum of Discussion of the 185th Meeting of the NSC, February 17, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1054–1056. Later it was planned to send the Korean troops to Laos. The PB, after three careful studies of the problem, recommended the rejection of the South Korean offer of troops. The NSC did not agree to accept the offer owing to the evitable public reaction in the United States. Memorandum of Discussion of the 187th Meeting of the NSC, March 4, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1094–1095.

had been received. The lack of relevant information, advice and analysis annoyed Eisenhower, who had hoped for a better performance from his Council system. The confusing nature of various reports suggests that information – which was apparently not of good quality – was not coming from a single source but possibly through both formal and informal channels.

The Council policies were put into effect without delay. The OCB members under the item “emergency business” in their meeting on February 24, 1954 learned from C. D. Jackson that the Communists were characterizing the forthcoming Geneva Conference as a “Big Five Meeting” in their propaganda. They therefore requested the OCB Staff “to develop countermeasures on an urgent basis”. On March 10, the Board discussed the issue again, but they decided to defer action because the State and Defense Departments were going “to develop a mutually agreeable draft” which was going to be circulated for approval by vote-slip.⁴⁶

International developments affecting US national security were not only presented to the Council members by the CIA Director but at times briefed in more detail by the Secretary of State or some other principal. The reporting on the “Big Four” conference in Berlin is an example of such an activity. In the conference which had started in late January 1954 V. M. Molotov proposed a five-power conference on Far Eastern affairs – including Mao Zedong’s People’s Republic of China. At first, this had been hard for the Americans because they did not want to recognize Communist China as a sovereign nation. In late February Secretary Dulles outlined the discussion in Berlin at another educational and informational meeting of the NSC. He said the talks had not been easy. There had been a real debate about getting Indochina on the agenda of the forthcoming peace conference to be held in Geneva. According to Dulles, the US wished that the French would fight on and join the EDC. Thus he had not put pressure on Premier Georges Bidault. The outcome of the talks related to the issue of Indochina depended on the military success and the fate of the Bidault Government. In addition, Dulles told the Council members, both he himself and Premier Bidault felt quite calm with respect to the forthcoming Geneva Conference.⁴⁷

Even though the NSC machinery was not responsible to Congress, some of the secrets of the Council work had to be shared occasionally with Congressmen. In Washington during early 1954 the policy-makers and officials opposed the

46 OCB Minutes, February 24 and March 10, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA. C. D. Jackson’s name is no longer in the participant list of the OCB members after March 31, 1954. Two weeks later, the OCB noted that the planning for the Geneva Conference should include economic considerations with respect to Far Eastern countries. OCB Minutes, March 24, 1954, *ibid.*

47 Memorandum of the Discussion of the 186th Meeting of the NSC, February 26, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1079–1081. For Dulles’s views on Berlin see his cable to Eisenhower, February 6, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1020–1021; Hoopes, Townsend, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, 1973), pp. 205–207. See also Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, pp. 342–343.

five-power Geneva Conference. The main reason for this, Secretary Dulles confided to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), was that it would raise the prestige of Communist China in the eyes of the rest of the world, and it would also mean – at least indirectly – recognition of China. The Laniel Government, Dulles predicted, would fall unless it had a chance to negotiate with regard to Indochina. The events could even develop to a point where France left the area regardless of the consequences. In addition, the ratification of the EDC would be endangered by the introduction of a new government in Paris, Dulles warned when he later justified the presence of the US in Geneva. Speaking about the same thing, Admiral Radford remembers in his testimony to the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) that “within the privacy of the NSC, however, Secretary Dulles admitted that the United States had little to gain at Geneva, although we would probably lose nothing.”⁴⁸ Secretary Dulles’s view concerning Geneva, and with respect to Indochina, was that “it is a holding action in order to provide time for the French to ratify the EDC and to permit a favorable military build-up and execution of the ‘Navarre Plan’”. Consequently, it was not in the interests of the US to prepare for the conference together with the British and the French.⁴⁹ According to Dulles’s biographer, Townsend Hoopes, in the case of Geneva the Secretary applied delaying tactics in order to give the French time to ratify the EDC, to execute the Navarre Plan, and to improve their military position.⁵⁰ The NSC discussed no new initiatives in its meeting.

At best, the PB and NSC staffers received considerable help from the ad hoc committees, such as the Special Committee, which completed the first part of its report by the beginning of March. Various courses of immediate action – short of open military intervention – were proposed to secure the defeat of the Communists in Indochina and to form a Western-oriented coalition among the nations of Southeast Asia⁵¹. In order to illustrate the point of importance, the report emphasized that Indochina was the essential “keystone of the arch of Southeast Asia”, which should not be lost to the Communists. Certain steps had already been taken in order to improve the position of the FEC. France’s posture as a world power was at stake in case of a pull-out. The Special Committee

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 48 Dulles’s testimonies before the SFRC, February 24 and May 12, 1954. US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (hereafter SFRC), Historical Series, Volume VI. 83d Congress, 2d Session, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1977), pp. 175–176, 260–261; US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Executive Sessions of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Historical Series (hereafter HFAC Hist. Ser.), Volume XVIII, 83d Congress, 2d Session, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1978), pp. 101–109. For Dulles’s views on the recognition of China and the use of the terms “Five Power Conference” and “Big Five Conference” see his cable to US delegations, February 27, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI: The Geneva Conference (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1981), pp. 424–425.

49 Memorandum of the State Department staff meeting by the Deputy Director of the Executive Secretariat Jeffrey C. Kitchen to the Acting Secretary of State, March 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 427–428.

50 Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 207.

51 The paper mentioned the Indochinese states, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines.

assumed that the proper use of the local troops could reverse the situation. “The US objective in Indo-China should be centralized US control and coordination of all US military, military aid, and ‘unconventional warfare’⁵² mechanisms...”, the report suggested. According to the paper, there was enough military strength, assuming that US aid would not be discontinued, to achieve victory in Indochina. In addition, US measures would serve as an example of US backing for those nations in the quest of freedom throughout the whole region as well as a warning to the Communists. The OCB amended and approved the report (Phase “A”) at its meeting on March 3. The Board also authorized the transmittal of the report to Eisenhower “with the indication that implementation is under way”. At the same time, the OCB assumed responsibility for the coordination of actions in the report.⁵³

Moreover, the Special Committee also recommended certain urgent actions. Firstly, the French Air Force should be strengthened. A possibility to form a voluntary air force from US personnel should be examined. Its intention would be to continue the work of the uniform-clad mechanics (who were to return by June 15). In addition, the Foreign Legion should be developed by attaching air units to it and recruiting more men from certain Western countries, including the United States. In order to implement the proposed courses of action, the amount of overall military aid should be increased by more than 10 percent. The French should be made, the report went on, to accept deeper US military involvement in Indochina; this meant expanding MAAG. The US military advisors should, for example, have a say in planning and carrying out operations.⁵⁴

To accompany the suggestions of priority, the Special Committee made some less urgent recommendations with regard to Indochina. The OCB was to boost the morale of the Indochinese by pointing out that the US favored the independence of the Indochinese states and by trying to use the Emperor Bao Dai in the struggle against the Vietminh. The MAAG should intensify its efforts to train the Vietnamese armed forces. The all-encompassing objective of the program

... ..
52 This included psychological warfare, guerilla warfare and some aspects of pacification operations.

53 Only 20 copies of the 13-page report were made. Report by the President’s Special Committee on Indo-China (Phase “A”, NSC Action No. 1019a), Part I, March 2, 1954 as an annex of the memorandum by the Chairman of the OCB Bedell-Smith to Eisenhower, March 11, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central File series, Box 37, DDEL; *ibid.*, Special Staff File series, Box 7, SEA; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1108–1111. As the OCB took over the coordination of actions it discharged the Special Committee “from any further responsibility”. OCB Minutes, March 3, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA.

54 The Special Committee called for additional aid of 124 million dollars. “Report by the President’s Special Committee on Indochina,” Part I, March 2, 1954 as an annex to the memorandum by the Chairman of the OCB Bedell Smith to Eisenhower, March 11, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1108–1109, 1111–1113. The report was transmitted to the OCB on March 3. The Board assumed responsibility for continued coordination of actions contained in the report. Memorandum of Discussion of the 193rd Meeting of the NSC, April 13, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1326.

was to “achieve the subjugation of Communist forces in Indo-China and the pacification of the area”. The US should also launch an information campaign to promote the French and Vietnamese cause and to initiate a psychological warfare campaign which was to include overt and covert dimensions. The actions described in the report were to be carried out – under the coordination and guidance of the OCB – by the Pentagon, the State Department, the CIA, the FOA and the USIA. The cooperation of their field representatives should be improved. At the end of its report, the Special Committee urged the Defense Department to make plans for using the US military in Indochina.⁵⁵

The report of the Special Committee apparently cleared the thinking among the NSC principals. The report was met with praise from within the Council machinery. Stassen, for example, wrote to Bedell Smith and called it “an excellent report”.⁵⁶ According to Bedell Smith, the Geneva Conference further complicated the position of the US. He had referred to Radford’s remarks that no negotiated settlement was acceptable. Erskine’s group was in the process of working on Phase 2 of their report, which consisted of plans to be implemented in the event of the collapse of the French. They were directed by Bedell Smith to “be phased into the work of those planning for Geneva” and draft a policy position on Indochina for Geneva.⁵⁷ The researchers of the Historical Division of the JCS have concluded that the Special Committee “reiterated the conclusions of NSC 5405”.⁵⁸

Reports to the Council on foreign travel such as the one concerning the Far East tour made by Nixon in late 1953 were typical at the NSC meetings. FOA Director Stassen reported to the NSC on his recent trip to Southeast Asia on

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- 55 “Report by the President’s Special Committee on Indochina,” Part I, March 2, 1954 as an annex to the memorandum by the Chairman of the OCB Bedell-Smith to Eisenhower, March 11, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1108–1109, 1113–1116. Part II of the Special Committee’s report was completed a month later. It concentrated on long-range policy with respect to the whole Southeast Asia and the forming of a collective security organization. On April 14 Executive Secretary Lay, Jr. sent part II of the report to the NSC PB in order to be used as background material in further studies. See *ibid.*, p. 1108, footnote 1 and p. 1257, footnote 8. For the text of the draft report see “Special Committee Report on Southeast Asia,” Part 2, April 5, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 346–358.
- 56 Stassen suggested that a much more “effective and expeditious” way to “back-up the Indo-China was” would be to hand over the command to the Commander-in-Chief Far East, who would have “within his command in Japan, Korea, and Okinawa, the military items and supplies that are needed in Indo-China, and he has personnel with recent experience in similar operations in Korea”. Stassen was worried about the logistic support issues. Stassen’s letter to Bedell-Smith, March 2, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA. See also Stassen’s observations about Far East Regional Conference of the FOA held in Manila, February 22–26, 1954. Stassen suggested that the US should consider victory in Indochina as its objective without direct US military participation. As the main tactics to serve the objective Stassen suggested continued military and economic aid, support for the FEC as well as “accelerated training and equipment of Vietnam forces”. Stassen’s letter to Secretary Dulles, March 1, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL.
- 57 NSC Special Staff’s T. B. Koons’s memorandum for Lay, Jr., March 4, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, SEA, DDEL.
- 58 “The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident 1940–1954.” (Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat, JCS, 20 August, 1971), p. 364. The unprinted study is in the collections of the textual reference branch of Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

March 4. According to Stassen, he had been surprised by the military situation, which had been “a great deal better” than he had anticipated. The French believed, Stassen continued, in their own strength and ability to train the indigenous forces. Emperor Bao Dai was abysmal, Stassen concluded.⁵⁹

The Special Committee received further clarification of its tasks at the Board Assistants’s meeting on March 5. Thus the JCS was to submit their recommendations concerning military policy vis-à-vis Indochina. The Pentagon had reminded the Chiefs to consider that at Geneva there could be strong pressures for finding alternative solutions. It was still, however, open whether the recommendations of the Special Committee would go directly to the NSC or first, most probably, to Douglas MacArthur II of the State, who had been designated as the Coordinator of the preparations for Geneva and Bedell Smith. In the latter case, William H. Godel from the Defense Department thought, T. B. Koons wrote to Lay, Jr., would “be such that their resolution can only be made by the Council”.⁶⁰

The intensity of the Council consideration of specific issues depended largely on the activities of the Special Assistant: in other words, whether he chose to take it up with the President and thus put it on the agenda. At NSC meetings in mid-March, for example, Indochina was a mere secondary issue and thus no new policies were advocated let alone initiated. This was the case despite the fact that the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu was still encircled by the Vietminh and the situation had not improved. On March 11, Indochina was barely discussed. Allen Dulles only informed the Council about Vietminh raids against airfields in the Tonkin Delta. The CIA Director saw these events as a way to try to entangle the US maintenance personnel in combat. A week later, the CIA sources estimated that the French had roughly a 50 percent chance of victory at Dien Bien Phu. The President asked whether the French had gained any benefit from the planes which had been given to them by the US. Eisenhower was not sure why Navarre had decided to take on the Vietminh forces in a decisive battle in an isolated fortress. Secretary Dulles responded positively to Stassen’s question, whether this was the largest maneuver on the part of the Vietminh during the whole war. It was due, Dulles explained, to the Geneva Conference that the Vietminh wanted to improve their negotiating position.⁶¹ Referring to the March 18 Council meeting, Anderson has argued that, as on January 8, “Eisenhower did not exhibit any particular sense of urgency” over the situation at Dien Bien Phu.⁶²

The JCS’s views were a substantial part of the NSC process. During the month of March at the request of Bedell Smith the Defense Department

59 Memorandum of Discussion of the 187th Meeting of the NSC, March 4, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XII, Part 1, pp. 1093–1095.

60 NSC Special Staff’s Koons’s memorandum for Lay, Jr., March 9, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL.

61 Memoranda of Discussion of the 188th and 189th NSC Meetings, March 11 and 18, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1107–1108, 1132–1133.

62 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 25.

considered the military implications of a political settlement at Geneva. The JCS regarded NSC 5405 as still “entirely valid” and shared the conclusions of the paper. The Chiefs urged the French not to stop fighting and to agree to a cease-fire prior to “satisfactory settlement would, in all probability, lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration” of the French and Vietnamese negotiating posture. Coalition government, the JCS wrote, would lead to a gradual takeover by the Communists and partitioning would be almost a half defeat to the friendly governments, and the Tonkin Delta could therefore be lost. There were also considerable dangers if elections were allowed to be arranged as the Vietminh possessed efficient propaganda skills. If a settlement were to include concessions, it would be viewed as a Vietminh victory in Asia. The Chiefs also referred to the threat of a chain reaction as more and more Southeast Asian countries could be lost, and they suggested that it could harm US security interests in the Far East and even have effects in Europe. Keeping Japan in the West should be the goal for the US to pursue. If the French were to sign a settlement, the US “should decline to associate itself with such a settlement, thereby preserving freedom of action” to wage war against the Vietminh together with the Indochinese states and Britain. The JCS urged the NSC to discuss “the extent to which the United States would be willing to commit its resources in support of the Associated States in the effort to prevent the loss of Indochina to the Communists”. This was to be done together with the French or, if this did not work, then with its other allies or alone.⁶³

The objective of the NSC to keep the Japanese economy as part of the Western system was consistent with the long tradition of US Asian-Pacific Policy. Borden, for example, emphasizes the importance of Southeast Asia for the recovery of the Japanese economy. He holds that since the 1880s the Western powers had considered “Japan as a junior partner in the development of Asian resources and markets”. Hess adds that by 1950 it had already become clear that the perception that US “influence could assure a politically stable, economically viable, and non-Communist Southeast Asia” did not apply to Indochina. As Eckes, Jr. notes, the Korean War caused an increase in the demand for strategic minerals. The region was an important producer of minerals, especially tungsten,”and also a crossroads of vital sea routes”.⁶⁴

63 JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, March 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 472–475. The Chiefs asked that the staff members of the JCS be allowed to participate on the Department of Defense working team which cooperated with the representatives of the Department of State to consider all US position papers concerning Geneva negotiations, *ibid.*, p. 475. In early March, the OCB had directed the Special Committee to study the intervention and to examine the US position for Geneva. “The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam”, 1971, p. 366.

64 Borden adds that from 1950 onwards “as U.S. involvement grew in Southeast Asia, the problems of economic recovery in Japan also increased, and the two became even more closely entwined”. Borden, William S., *The Pacific Alliance: United States Foreign Economic Policy and Japanese Trade Recovery, 1947–1955* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 104, 142; Hess, *United States’ Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power*, 1987, p. 371; Eckes, Jr., Alfred E., *The United States and the Global Struggle for Minerals* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 152, 164–165; Gelb and Betts., *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1977, p. 33. Herring notes that, as well as being a source of raw materials

Eisenhower was known to have a distaste of reading long reports, even though they consisted of clear recommendations like the Special Committee's report. When it was forwarded to Eisenhower, the President was informed by Bedell Smith that the OCB had approved the report on March 3 and that its implementation was already "under the coordination of the Board". General Erskine's Subcommittee also commented on the upcoming negotiations in Geneva on the basis of the report by the JCS. The Subcommittee concluded that victory in the war was the only acceptable solution for the US and that this must be the basis for the negotiations. In addition, the Subcommittee recommended that the NSC should make sure that the Western position would be coordinated prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference. The members of the Subcommittee did not believe in the success of the Navarre Plan. Defeat in Indochina would have a severe domino effect in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, as the Subcommittee concluded, there was no need to revise NSC 5405. It also accepted other conclusions of the JCS from its report on March 12. The Subcommittee wrote that they were "such as to warrant their review at the highest levels and by the National Security Council, after which they should become the basis of the US position with respect to Indochina at Geneva". The Council should also, the report continued, "determine the extent of US willingness" to send in forces. In this respect, the NSC should also find out the "present domestic and international climate of opinion" toward US military actions and take steps to "ensure world-wide recognition" with respect to action in Indochina. The NSC should develop a substitute base of operations, keeping in mind that "the hope of implementation thereof would be one of major expenditure and long-term potential only". Secretary Wilson, who was often cautious in the NSC context, agreed with the conclusions of both the JCS and Erskine's Subcommittee.⁶⁵ The question as such was that its handling required the Council to adopt a wider range of committee structure in order to secure a thorough preparation and presentation of a wide range of options.

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and market to the Japanese, Southeast Asia was also Japan's "rice bowl and breadbasket". Herring, *America's Longest War*, 1986, p. 13. For an account on the the importance of raw materials to the US in early 1950s see Kolko, Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York: Harper, 1972), p. 685. On the US dependence on cobalt see Blechman, Barry M., *National Security and Strategic Minerals* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), passim. For further discussion on NSC deliberations see Schaller, Michael, "Securing the Great Crescent: Occupied Japan and the Origins of Containment in Southeast Asia," *Journal of American History*, Volume 69 (September 1982), pp. 392–414 and Schaller, Michael, *The American Occupation of Japan: Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), passim.

65 Bedell Smith's memorandum for Eisenhower with OCB memorandum of March 2 from General Erskine as an enclosure, March 3, 1954. Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/3–1154, RG 59, NA. The JCS referred to US assistance to the French since 1950 to be worth 1.6 billion dollars (see previous footnote), whereas Erskine's paper mentioned "in excess of 2.4 billion dollars. Erskine's (the Chairman of the Subcommittee of the President's Special Committee) memorandum to the Special Committee of the NSC, March 17, 1954 with a 4-page report "Military Implications of US Negotiations on Indo-China at Geneva" as an enclosure, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, SEA, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 9, pp. 272–275 and in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 475–479. Wilson enclosed both papers in his message to the Secretary of State. Wilson's letter to Secretary Dulles, March 23, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 471. The letter and the enclosures can also be found in the USVNR, Book 9, pp. 276–290.

Ely in Washington – The Case of Informal Contacts

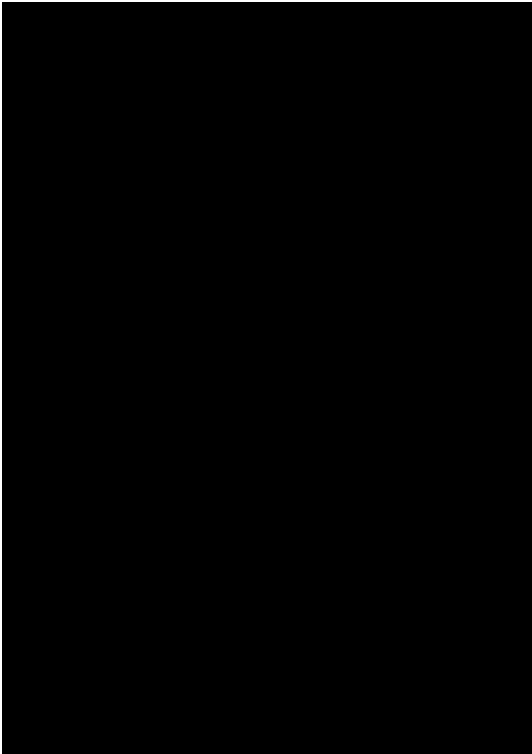
The visit of the French Army Chief of Staff General Paul Ely to Washington deserves to be treated here as it highlights the opinions of the Council members and offers insights into the “behind the scenes” action by the informal level of the NSC. Ely flew to Washington in order to brief the American policy-makers on Indochina and to ask for more US aid. In discussion with the Vice-President and the CIA Director, Ely did not deny that the French were tired of the Indochina war. Nixon and Ely shared, in principle, the idea that Bao Dai would have to improve his performance. A military solution was not anticipated during 1954 or even during the following year, Ely went on. He requested rapid delivery of 40 more B-26 bomber planes. Allen Dulles inquired whether the FEC had adopted unconventional warfare methods in order to repel the Vietminh guerillas. General Navarre, Ely explained, had taken action in this direction.⁶⁶

While Ely was in Washington, Eisenhower and his closest aides met with a group of Congressional leaders to go over the events in Indochina. According to Hagerty’s diary, Radford had said that there actually was a need for additional bombers. The French, the Admiral had also said, were still holding out, but the aim of the Vietminh was to win the war before the Geneva Conference.⁶⁷

Ely had brought with him a message from the French Government. In that memorandum the US Government was asked what it would do if Chinese fighter planes flew into the airspace of Indochina to harass French planes supplying Dien Bien Phu. Ely brought the matter up in his talks with Secretary Dulles, who said he could not comply directly because of the complexity of the whole issue. According to Dulles, as a precondition to intervention the US would have to be sure of a victory, because US intervention in Indochina would tie American prestige to the area and thereafter withdrawal would be difficult. Dulles also reminded Ely that “open participation” in the struggle would require the French to co-operate more closely than before. Dulles referred to the

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66 Captain G. W. Anderson, Jr’s memorandum of the discussion between Ely and Nixon, Radford and Allen Dulles, March 21, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1137–1140. For Ely’s and his host’s, Radford’s, accounts of the Ely visit, see Ely, Paul, *Mémoires: L’indochine dans la tourmente* (Paris: Plon, 1964), pp. 59–81 and Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, pp. 391–401. According to a chronology of events prepared in the State Department, Radford had raised the possibility of US air intervention at the White House on March 20 over the weekend (March 20–22). The issue was then frequently discussed between Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Radford and others. Chronology of Events, undated, John Foster Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 9, Material on Indochina (1954–1956) for Use of L.(ivingston) Merchant in Senate Hearings on his Nomination as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, DDEL.

67 The Hagerty Diary is the only record of this meeting, which was held at 8 a.m. Hagerty Diary entry, March 22, 1954, James C. Hagerty Papers, Box 1, DDEL. The Hagerty Diary and the President’s daily appointments book reveal that some two and a half hours later Eisenhower had in fact met with Ely; Daily Appointments, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, DDEL. No other indication of the meeting has been found. It has also been noted by the editors of FRUS and is confirmed by the staff of DDEL. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1140–1141.



On March 13, 1954, the French Union forces were encircled at Dien Bien Phu by Vietminh troops. The valley floor in the northwestern corner of Vietnam near Laos was transformed into a besieged camp. The fortress of Dien Bien Phu was supplied from the air by planes flown by volunteer American pilots. The transport plane on the airstrip in the upper left corner has been hit by Vietminh artillery, which was one of the main reasons for the shortage of supplies. In the foreground, French Union soldiers, suffering from fatigue, improve their positions between bombardments. In the first months of 1954, the NSC devoted a considerable amount of time to discussing the fate of Dien Bien Phu. The fortress finally fell on May 7, 1954. (National Archives)

independence of the Associated States and to the training of their armies on the basis of US experience in Greece and Turkey.⁶⁸

During Ely's stay in Washington, Eisenhower confessed to his Secretary of State that he would not want to abandon completely the scheme of carrying out a "single strike" to save Dien Bien Phu. Both men agreed that the United States should not get involved in the war in Indochina if the political conditions continued to be unstable and as such they could not guarantee successful intervention. Dulles also suggested, and Eisenhower agreed, that the US should employ "harassing tactics" against the Communists from the other areas in the Far East, namely Formosa, and thus affect their influence in Southeast Asia. Eisenhower was hesitant to give any binding promises to the French.⁶⁹

Following the meeting with Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles called Admiral Radford. The two talked on the telephone. Radford, whose tone was anything but optimistic, complained that Ely made requests but did not give in to the

68 Secretary Dulles's memorandum to Eisenhower, March 23, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1141-1142; memorandum of the meeting between Dulles and Ely, March 23, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1142-1144. See also Gerson, Louis L., *American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Volume XVII: John Foster Dulles (New York: Cooper Square, 1967), p. 157. For Ely's views on the importance of Dien Bien Phu see a diary entry of April 12, 1954. Sulzberger, C. L., *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries, 1934-1954* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 993-994.

69 Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, March 24, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1150.

enhanced role of the Americans in the training of the Vietnamese forces. Dulles talked about “filling the vacuum” created by the possible pull-out of the French from Indochina. He also told that he had been talking to the President and that “we must have policy of our own even if France falls down” because other regions of the world could be lost at the same time. Radford predicted that it was possible that the French would give up if they did not achieve victory in two to three weeks.⁷⁰ During that same day Radford sent a memorandum to the President briefing him on several discussions with Ely. In the memorandum the Chairman of the JCS concluded that the French would not be able to turn the situation to their advantage and hence the US should be prepared to “act promptly” [intervene] in Indochina, if the French Government should ask for it in the near future.⁷¹ In his press conference Eisenhower remarked in broad terms that Southeast Asia was of “the most transcendent importance”.⁷²

Particularly important matters required special reporting within the NSC-OCB machinery. The increased importance of Indochina made the OCB agree that a report on developments and actions under NSC 5405 and the Special Committee Phase “A” program would be included with the regular Weekly Status Report.⁷³

The possible use of atomic bombs has been a very controversial topic in the literature. Without going into details it is, however, necessary to compare some differing accounts of the question because there were NSC principals involved in the deliberations. When Ely and Radford talked about a possible bombing mission to save Dien Bien Phu – which was code-named Operation Vautour/Vulture⁷⁴ – Radford had acted as if he had had the support of Eisenhower.

70 Memorandum of the telephone conversation between Dulles and Radford, March 24, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1151.

71 Some aircraft were to be loaned to the French. Radford’s memorandum to Eisenhower, March 24, 1954, AWF, Administration series, Box 29, Radford, Arthur W. (2), DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 9, p. 288 and in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1158–1159. Radford received on March 23 from Ely a memorandum in which he asked whether US aerial intervention was possible. When the two met three days later, they concurred that US and French military officials should make plans for intervention. Radford’s memorandum to the President’s Special Committee on Indochina on his talks with Ely (March 26) March 29, 1954. Ely’s memorandum to Radford, March 23, 1954 as an enclosure to Radford’s memorandum to Eisenhower, March 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1160. For the text of Radford’s minute of the discussion see *ibid.*, p. 1160, footnote 4; USVNR, Book 9, p. 281. See also “The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam”, 1971, pp. 369–373.

72 Eisenhower’s news conference, March 24, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 339–349.

73 OCB Minutes, March 24, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, Box 1, RG 59, NA.

74 The plan of a massive air raid on the Vietminh positions around Dien Bien Phu to lift the siege was originated by the French and American officers in Vietnam. The operation was to be carried out by 60 B-29 bombers based in the Philippines, supported by 150 carrier-based fighters. The plan included the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 204, Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, *passim* and Schulzinger, Robert D., *American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*. 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 236. Anderson points out that even though the Pentagon Papers and other sources have continuously used the French code name for the operation, Radford became familiar with the name only during late April 1954. Anderson, David L., “Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam,”

France would have to make an official request for such intervention. Radford's "promise" of intervention was, in the words of Ely, based on some sort of misunderstanding. Radford remembers that Ely, who claimed that Secretary Dulles had offered the French two atomic bombs, misread the signals in Washington – mainly Dulles's opposition – and deliberately writes selectively of the events. According to him: "He [Ely] discounted what he heard Mr. Dulles say that particular day." Radford denied in 1965 that he "had specifically urged" Eisenhower to use nuclear weapons. The Admiral explained that it was not really at all about the use of atomic weapons and that his support of the French had been conditioned upon "proper military and other arrangements". Secretary Dulles had agreed with Radford's position. Atomic weapons were a standard consideration in situations like Dien Bien Phu at that time, Radford added. Nixon also maintains that Operation Vulture included three small atomic charges. He calls it Radford's plan. Radford has more than a decade later reportedly admitted that he was ready to consider the use of atomic weapons to save Dien Bien Phu. He was supported by General Twining. On the other hand, Gavin, who was second to Ridgway at the time of the crisis, later wrote that "there was even talk of using one or two nuclear weapons" but that the strike with nuclear weapons "would have destroyed" friends and foes alike.⁷⁵ According to

Mid-America, Volume 71 (April-July 1989), p. 106; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 26. Apparently, the operation plan was not workable as Eisenhower clarified on January 13, 1960. According to his account, "there was never any plan developed to put into execution in Indochina". Eisenhower quoted in *Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place*, 1966, p. 313; Secretary Dulles's legal adviser Herman Phleger noted in 1964 that the carrier strike "was discussed at the highest level...but I think that it never got very far". According to Phleger, Dulles had wanted to hear and see the reactions of Congressmen and possibly "prominent citizens". Herman Phleger Oral History Transcript, PUL. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 204–208 and McClintock, Robert, *The Meaning of Limited War* (Boston: Houghton, 1967), p. 167.

75 Ely, Paul, *Mémoires*, 1964, pp. 64–77; Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, pp. 395–397. Commenting on Ely's account in 1965, Radford said that Ely covered the events "fairly accurately", even though it had partly been "wishful thinking" and that there had been "difficulties in translating" the account. The press had exaggerated the issue. Radford was, however, disappointed that his plan did not work out. Arthur W. Radford Oral History Transcript, PUL; Nixon, Richard, RN: *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset, 1978), p. 150. Twining said the plan was devised as an answer to the State Department's pleas to save the fortress "at all cost". The time for conventional attack had passed, Twining continued. He referred to "three small tactical A-bombs", which could have "clean[ed] those Commies out of there and the band could [have] play[ed] the Marseillaise and the French would [have] come marching out of Dien Bien Phu in fine shape". He also still in 1965, when the actual Vietnam War began, held that it would have been worth while. According to Twining, Eisenhower has misunderstood Radford and him by commenting later that the two "wanted to bomb" Mainland Southeast Asia. Nathan F. Twining Oral History Transcript, PUL; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 208; Gavin, James M., *War and Peace in the Space Age* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 127; Gavin, James M. in collaboration with Arthur T. Hadley, *Crisis Now* (New York: Random, 1968), p. 41. Ridgway referred to "extremists" – without pointing to Radford – who at the time thought nuclear weapons were almighty and thus could stop Communism anywhere. Matthew B. Ridgway Oral History Transcript, PUL. On the other hand, Ambassador Dillon maintained in 1965 that the question of atomic weapons was not addressed in official discussions with the French. C. Dillon Douglas Oral History Transcript, PUL. See also Césari, Laurent and Jacques de Folin, "Military Necessity, Political Impossibility: The French Viewpoint on Operation Vautour," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, pp. 105–120. According to a contemporary observ-

Anderson, despite staff discussions and contingency plans neither Eisenhower, Dulles nor Radford gave “serious consideration to the use of atomic bombs at Dienbienphu”. Ely’s visit was followed by a two-week long period, Anderson argues, the President “and his inner circle of Dulles and Radford” during which they contemplated US intervention. Kolko seconds Anderson’s point with the exception of Radford. Secretary Dulles and Eisenhower, Kolko argues, never “supported the use of American air or sea power, much less that of atomic weapons”. Hammond, who did not have access to NSC sources, strangely refers to Radford’s plan – consisting of carrier-based air strikes – which “was duly processed in” the Council and which was approved by the President and “his principal advisers” (Dulles, Wilson and Humphrey). According to Hammond’s apparently erroneous interpretation, the opinion of “key Congressmen” argued for United Action in return for Congressional authorization.⁷⁶

The former Executive Officer of the OCB, Elmer Staats recalls that Eisenhower had been briefed by the JCS on the possibilities for intervention. Staats remembers that the Chiefs had shown from their maps that there were no airfields as well as numerous hamlets and a lot of jungle in Indochina and argued that in the case of intervention only nuclear weapons could have guaranteed a victory. Staats said later that the President then decided against the use of nuclear weapons and directed Bedell Smith to fly to Paris in order to negotiate. Eisenhower, Staats confirms, referred over and over again to the notion that nuclear weapons were “non-viable means of warfare” and that escalation would surely follow because there was, in his view, no such thing “as limited nuclear war”.⁷⁷

Despite the fact that Randle did not have access to NSC documents, he assumed that the Council apparently had discussed the French war efforts

er “it was widely suspected” that the Council “at the urging of Dulles and Radford was seriously considering immediate atomic intervention”. Tugwell, Rexford G., *A Chronicle of Jeopardy 1954–55* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 438; Childs, Marquis, *Eisenhower: Captive Hero. A Critical Study of the General and the President* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), p. 202. According to other scholars’ accounts, Secretary Dulles was not fond of Radford’s intervention scheme. See for example Randle, Robert, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochina War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 65 and Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 209. However, Raskin argues that it was Dulles and Nixon who advocated the use of atomic weapons. Raskin, Marcus G., *The Politics of National Security* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1979), p. 52 .

- 76 Anderson, “Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam,” 1989, p. 105–106. Kolko continues that the two aimed at “raising doubts and fears about a possible US adventure, for even if it found itself militarily and politically incapable of acting, the administration could still serve its goals if it looked as dangerous as possible”. Kolko, Gabriel, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 81–82; Hammond, Paul Y., *The Cold War Years: American Foreign Policy since 1945* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), p. 82. Schulzinger is referring to a fortnight-long campaign of Radford to get the US to make an air strike, “possibly using nuclear weapons. Schulzinger, Robert D., *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 62. See also Guhin, Michael A., *John Foster Dulles: A Statesman and His Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 221–242; Specter, *Advice and Support*, 1983, 199–202; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, pp. 152–156; Nixon, RN, 1978, pp. 150, 154.
- 77 Staats referred to “a very long briefing in the Cabinet Room”. Staats quoted in *The Eisenhower Legacy*. Ed. Warsaw, 1992, pp. 13–14.

before Ely came to Washington. Randle asserted correctly that the NSC had agreed on the vital strategic importance of Southeast Asia. The Council, Randle presumed, had obviously determined that the US should defend the region together with its allies as the region was important also to them. Randle questioned in 1969 that “if the NSC discussions of early and mid-March were somewhat academic or hypothetical” the Council would from then on, as Ely had reported about the gravity of the situation, have to take into consideration the option that the French position could collapse if Dien Bien Phu fell. Randle also assumed that the NSC members felt “that the French war effort would not precipitously collapse”.⁷⁸ Randle’s interpretation is logical, but fails to take into account the fact that the NSC members had suspected the French military performance for some time already. He is, however, right in assuming that the discussions on Indochina were to intensify.

The NSC machinery had clearly been preparing for the worst. Yet, the Americans did not want to tie their hands prematurely; reserving their own freedom of action seems to have been their goal. This is consistent with their overall custom of not having to agree on problems too willingly or not ruling out any options, even unpopular ones. In reserving more time for thorough NSC consideration, further studies were normally assigned. Apparently acting under President’s advice, Secretary Dulles was careful not to make any promises to the French. The President decided to stay in the background during Ely’s visit, probably because the General was not his counterpart. Furthermore, Eisenhower’s direct share in this matter cannot be unraveled on the basis of the available sources, but one may suspect that he had some knowledge of the actions and thinking of his closest NSC associates. The President would not have tolerated such subordination. He might have been more active than has been suspected and thus might have given his blessing off the record. In any case, it is highly unlikely that the Chief Executive could have been totally unaware of the discussions between his aides and the French on the nuclear weapons. In line with NSC Policy Papers and discussions at the Council level, the US did, however, attempt to persuade the French to let the Americans deepen their military involvement in the field of training. They demanded this in exchange for military aid.

The Lull before the Storm – The March 25 Council Meeting

As has been illustrated, the Council did not act hastily. How then did it react to the possible loss of the French fortress at Dien Bien Phu? Allen Dulles remained quite neutral in his briefing to the NSC on March 25. The CIA Director commented on the maintenance difficulties of the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu and the prospects for the French. But at the same time he hinted at “the heavy

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⁷⁸ Randle, Geneva 1954, 1969, p. 111.

psychological blow” against the French if the Vietminh were to overrun the fortress. Eisenhower himself touched on a tactical question when he asked why the French had not attempted to stop the Vietminh bringing in reinforcements by cutting the only road leading to Dien Bien Phu. The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ridgway⁷⁹ said the French had explained that “too much guerilla resistance” hindered them from operating. If an airlift was the last resort for getting the French out of there, Eisenhower concluded, it was evident that the Vietnamese had given up the struggle against the Communists. The President then inquired whether General Navarre’s hands were tied by the political decision-makers in Paris. The General was obliged to stick with the Navarre Plan, Secretary Dulles replied.⁸⁰

At the same NSC session Secretary Dulles referred to a JCS memorandum which he had received through Secretary Wilson two days earlier. In it, the Chiefs responded to the Council’s consideration question about what the US would do in order to stop the Communists from taking the area under their domination. The JCS presented three options: that this would be done together with the French, with other friendly nations or alone. Dulles proposed, and was supported by Wilson, the PB be directed to make preparations. Cutler was curious to know, if the PB should make note of a possible US military intervention. This issue had been examined, Cutler went on, in the Special Annex of NSC 5405, but it had been turned down by the NSC. Eisenhower answered by remarking that he wanted to know “the extent to which we should go in employing ground forces” to prevent the loss of Indochina. In addition, he wondered why the JCS had not mentioned the UN, which would be essential in getting US and allied backing for “going full-out in support” of the Indochinese states. When Secretary Dulles commented it would be very hard to get the UN to favor intervention, Eisenhower said that it would not happen if the French asked for it, but would have a chance if Vietnam requested it and referred specifically to the Chinese assistance to the Vietminh.⁸¹

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- 79 Prados has pointed out that on March 25 the President “had Admiral Radford in fifty minutes early and the council session itself was much larger than usual, including the full Joint Chiefs and service secretaries”. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 79. After Congress passed amendments to the National Security Act in 1949, the three service secretaries lost their places on the Council. Hewes, James E., Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900–1963* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1975), pp. 271–272.
- 80 Memorandum of Discussion of the 190th Meeting of the NSC, March 25, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1163–1164. As commenting on reports to the NSC on March 25, Gibbons argues that a majority of US policy-makers were “pessimistic about the ability and desire of the French to do anything substantial to improve the situation in Indochina”. This had been a result of recent Franco-American talks. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 124. Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs that “some of my advisors” believed that the French would soon rather withdraw from Indochina “or lose it as a result of a military defeat, than save it through international intervention”. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 417.
- 81 Dulles thought the Asian-Arab bloc would oppose intervention. Memorandum of Discussion of the 190th Meeting of the NSC, March 25, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1164–1165. According to Pentagon researchers the JCS memorandum had been dated March 24, 1954. See USNVR, Book 9, p. 290. See also Hooper, Allard and Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*, Volume I, 1976, p. 251.

Secretary Wilson was not certain what the US would do if the Chinese used planes in Indochina. Cutler said the US would act in accordance with NSC 5405. Secretary Dulles shared this view and added that Congress would still have to be consulted before dispatching the American forces. After having been reminded by his Secretary of State, the President said that Cutler should urge the Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, Jr., to hurry up with his report, which was to deal with the relationship between the Chief Executive and the Legislative Branch with respect to engaging US forces in combat overseas. In addition, Eisenhower pointed out, it was time to start finding out what Senators and Congressmen thought about sending troops to Indochina. To Secretary Dulles it seemed premature to do so as the issue needed to be worked on by the national security apparatus. He reiterated that the weather would bring the battles to a halt without results and that he expected the Vietminh to prefer “a political rather than a military victory”. What was evident, Dulles continued, was that France was certainly going to lose its position as a world power. This would lead to a situation in which the US should decide who is to “fill the void”, especially in the old colonies, Dulles added. He urged the PB to consider worldwide effects of such action. The Secretary of State believed the French were going to leave Indochina – but not right away – instead of “saving it through United States intervention and assumption of French responsibilities”.⁸²

The question of UN action was then raised by Secretary Dulles. FOA Director Stassen recommended that UN observation teams be quickly sent to the area. The President asked what countries would participate in a joint operation. He envisaged a Korean-style action, which would be based on enlarged ANZUS organization. It would either mean that the UN had been lured into intervention or that Vietnam had asked some countries for rescue on a bilateral basis. The latter could be acceptable to Senate and it would eliminate the possibility of “solely Occidental assistance”. Admiral Radford remained reserved, but he accepted President’s suggestion in principle. The initiation could, Stassen thought, take place as NATO had been formed in an economic conference of the region as the defense issues could be brought in later. Eisenhower thought it would be best basically to accept France, Britain and the Southeast Asian countries “to join us [the US] in a broadened effort to save Indochina”. The French could prove to be problematic, the Secretary of State argued. The US would either have to “beat the French into line” or accept the difficulties in Franco-American relations. Either way would harm the EDC plan.⁸³

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82 Memorandum of Discussion of the 190th Meeting of the NSC, March 25, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1165–1166. The point on the possible Chinese introduction of air power in Indochina had already been taken up as the representatives of the JCS and State Department conferred almost two weeks earlier. The JCS concluded there were no air fields in Indochina and possibly in the whole of South China available for jet aircraft. See Substance of Discussions of State-JCS Meeting, March 12, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Miscellaneous Lot Files, Lot 61 D 147, Box 51, Meeting Summaries and Project Files 1951–1959, State-JCS Meetings, Substance of Discussion, Volume VI (1), RG 59, NA.

83 Eisenhower mentioned Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Formosa, the free nations of Southeast Asia, Great Britain and France. Memorandum of Discussion of the 190th Meeting

As the discussion came to its end, the President was absolutely positive about the fact that the Vietnamese invitation to intervene would be a prerequisite for US intrusion into Chinese territory. The Secretary of Defense Wilson suggested that the US would stop worrying about Indochina for the time being and shift its emphasis onto the other “remaining free nations” in the region by strengthening them to the point where they would be able to stop Communist advances. The President turned down Wilson’s idea when he predicted that the fall of Indochina would produce a domino effect in Southeast Asia. The Council agreed with Secretary Dulles’s proposal as it gave its PB the task of writing a paper along the lines of the JCS recommendations. By using to its advantage the findings of the Special Committee, the PB should weigh up the possibilities for intervention.⁸⁴

Radford’s own account of the meeting simplifies the essence. Dulles had concluded that the US should, in Radford’s words, either “write off Indochina or...assume responsibility there if the French relinquished their hold”. Eisenhower stated four preconditions for the US intervention: 1) the Associated States would have to request it; 2) the UN should impose sanctions; 3) the US would not intervene without the help of other nations (United Action); and 4) Congress would have to approve the action. Secretary Dulles said that there was a need for planning before assent would be obtained from Congress. The NSC contemplated the use of ANZUS to implement the coordinated military action of several countries. The task of producing further recommendations regarding Indochina was then given to the PB.⁸⁵

In analyzing the NSC meetings of late March and early April, especially the March 25 Council meeting, Burke and Greenstein asserted that Eisenhower had not forgotten his military background, which is illustrated by the fact that he made comments about clearly technical military matters, but, that he also attached political considerations to military ones. They add that from the latter part of February through late March, both the Erskine Subcommittee and the Council attempted “to explore policy alternatives” in order to answer the challenge of the deteriorating situation in Indochina. While Radford requested

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of the NSC, March 25, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1166–1167; Arend, Anthony Clark, *Pursuing a Just and Durable Peace: John Foster Dulles and International Organization* (Westport: Greenwood, 1988), 176–179. Pruden has noted that the French had opposed the American recommendation to utilize the UN as the Vietminh invaded northern Laos in April 1953. Secretary Dulles believed over-optimistically that a UN Security Council condemnation – regardless of the obvious Soviet veto – would legitimize the French war efforts and even have a positive effect upon Vietnamese loyalty to the French. The Eisenhower Administration, Pruden continues, failed to pressure the French and did not otherwise “actively pursue other possible avenues to UN involvement”. The US position on the issue remained basically the same until the Geneva Conference. Pruden, Caroline, *Conditional Partners: Eisenhower, the United Nations, and the Search for a Permanent Peace* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), pp. 100–101.

84 Memorandum of Discussion at the 190th Meeting of the NSC, March 25, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1167–1168. The NSC’s decision constituted NSC Action No. 1074. See AWF, NSC series, Box 1, Record of Actions, DDEL.

85 Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980, p. 396.

the Subcommittee to propose contingency plans for US intervention, “the NSC served as the major formal setting within the administration in which the president conveyed his views to his top foreign policy aides and explored policy options with them”. Anderson argues that in late May Eisenhower was considering the use of US military power in Indochina, possibly an air strike and the use of ground forces. The remarks of the President to the NSC on March 25, Anderson continues, hint that he had neither forgotten allied participation nor the Congressional opinion, but that he was still to be the sole decision-maker.⁸⁶

The meeting of March 25 is a good example of the orderly NSC procedures. The JCS paper provoked a fruitful discussion of options. Thus President Eisenhower received clear alternatives but also warnings and doubts from his principal advisers. Eisenhower did not take them for granted, but questioned the depth of the recommendations. He obviously harnessed or yoked the NSC machinery for the preparation of contingencies for intervention. Various options were considered and Cutler skillfully performed the custodian’s role by eliciting the views and requesting clarification. The notion of clarifying the executive and legislative roles and relationships in the Presidential powers in foreign policy points to the recently resolved Bricker Amendment controversy⁸⁷.

The OCB also was dependent upon its own committee structure. On March 25, in order to implement NSC 5405 the OCB provided terms of reference for a Working Group to that effect. Its task was “to collaborate with the OCB Staff in the preparation of a consolidated report thereon suitable for transmission to the NSC”. The deadline for submission to the OCB was May 15. The subsequent reports were due at intervals of approximately six months thereafter.⁸⁸ The Executive Secretary Lay, Jr. sent a memorandum to the members of the PB on March 26 in which he listed the points set forth by the Council as well as an analysis of the problem by Cutler. Attached to Lay, Jr.’s memorandum was the Special Annex on Indochina to NSC 5405 (originally NSC 177). The paper was forwarded for the use of the PB.⁸⁹

86 The issue of Indochina was also briefly discussed in the regular Cabinet meetings, Burke and Greenstein add, “thus providing a second forum for discussion and briefing”. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 41, 61–62; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 28. Short argues that the question for Secretary Dulles was – and he conveyed this to the Council on March 25 – that the US was going to have to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawing French instead of China. Eisenhower contemplated how far towards a ground invasion the US was to go. Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 132.

87 The so-called Bricker Amendment would have limited the foreign policy powers of US Presidents. The whole debate in the Senate, which faded in February 1954, bothered and frustrated Eisenhower, particularly as some of the supporters of the Amendment were Republicans like him. For a detailed examination of the topic see Tananbaum, Duane, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy: A Test of Eisenhower’s Political Leadership* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), *passim*.

88 The Working Group consisted of the representatives of the State and Defense Departments, the FOA, the CIA, the USIA and the OCB Staff. Its Chairman was Kenneth P. Landon from State. Staats’s memorandum for the OCB, March 26, 1954. “Revised terms of reference for (OCB) Working Group on Coordination of NSC 5405 (Southeast Asia),” as attachment, dated March 25, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 273, NA.

89 The withdrawal decision of the Special Annex of December 31 was made in the NSC on January 8. It was recirculated on March 29 under very strict security precautions. Every copy

Interdepartmental planning was a continuous effort and not simply undertaken when needed. For example, at a meeting between the representatives of the State Department and the JCS there was a discussion about the practicalities of an aerial intervention. As Murphy inquired whether the French could operate jet aircraft, Radford answered they could not, and therefore American personnel would be needed. On the basis of talks with Ely, Radford and the JCS were quite pessimistic about the situation in general and about the strength of the FEC. The Chairman of the JCS summed up the view of the Chiefs that the situation, which might result to the loss of the area, had been the result of the fact that “too little too late” had been done. The Admiral, however, urged that the US would have to be ready to take swift military action in reply “to a last minute French request for help”. He blamed the French for waiting too long, which could mean that time was running out. Ridgway then took up Ely’s estimate of Dien Bien Phu’s “50–50 chance”, disagreeing that it was all about morale as the French at the garrison had no other choice but to fight. Bonsal did not believe in the rumors of desertions by the native forces. CIA’s General Charles P. Cabell asked Radford how the JCS felt about supplying guerilla groups, which had been already carried out on a small scale. Radford said that he had agreed with Ely to coordinate such activities better, but Cabell said the French had understood the usefulness of the guerillas. The JCS did not know, Radford added on the guerilla question, either the capabilities or the intentions of the Indochinese, and that MAAG would have to be consulted. Senate leader William F. Knowland had been curious to know how to protect the US materiel in Indochina. Radford believed some could be regained. Murphy reminded his listeners that Indochina was going to be on the PB agenda in three day’s time.⁹⁰

The results of the Council deliberation were sometimes announced to the public. Secretary Dulles wanted to form an anti-Communist defense coalition in Southeast Asia. As Eisenhower had listed as one of the preconditions of intervention at the March 25 NSC meeting, he wanted the free nations of the area to join the United States in order to stop Communism in the region. Dulles gave a speech at the Overseas Press Club on March 29 in which he expressed in a strong manner that Washington would not view the victory of Communism in the area “with indifference”. The answer was United Action. The Secretary of State reiterated the basic policy principles of the NSC in the spirit of the Monroe

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of the enclosure was to be returned to Lay, Jr. after consideration. Special Annex on Indochina as an enclosure to NSC’s Executive Secretary Lay, Jr’s memorandum to the PB, March 29, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1182–1186. Short writes that the Special Annex, which had “Doomsday minus 1 scenario”, was actually circulated for the first time. Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 136.

90 When Bowie asked for a copy of an ANNEX prepared by the JCS on the forces required to hold Indochina in the event of French withdrawal, Radford promised “to hunt up” the document and send it to the State Department. Substance of Discussion of State-JCS Meeting, March 26, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Miscellaneous Lot Files, Lot 61 D 147, Box 51, Meeting Summaries and Project Files 1951–1959: State-JCS Meetings, Substance of Discussion Volume VI (1), RG 59, NA.

Doctrine when he stated that “the freedom of the Southeast Asia area was important from the standpoint of our peace, security and happiness”.⁹¹

The NSC machinery was planning for Indochina. In the wake of the March 25 Council action on the Indochina contingencies, Cutler speeded up the process. He informed Radford of the forward agendas of the PB and the NSC as tentatively scheduled for the month of April. Cutler admitted that the system relied for some items directly on papers from the JCS through the Pentagon. In order to get the PB to complete its papers on the military strength in the Far East for Council consideration on April 13, it needed the views of the Chiefs by April 5. This, Cutler wrote, was against the wishes of Radford and Wilson.⁹²

Since the NSC had failed “to bridge the policy gap between” the State and Defense Departments, Hall argues on the basis of the Pentagon Papers that two planning processes had been initiated within the Council machinery which were to be important as “the issue gained crisis proportions in late March”. One was the Special Committee and the other the work of the PB, which was raising additional questions. The two planning processes produced results that “were trickling in” in the wake of the launch of the Vietminh siege against Dien Bien Phu in mid-March. Erskine’s report came on March 17, whereas the PB response during late March and early April was to again examine the Special Annex, previously considered in January. This was based on the conclusion of either Cutler or Eisenhower, Hall continues.⁹³ Hall’s arguments seem rather

91 Dulles’s speech “The Threat of Red Asia” (commonly known as the United Action speech) at the Overseas Press Club, March 29, 1954, DSB, April 12, 1954, pp. 539–542. Dulles had requested permission from Eisenhower for his reference to the Monroe doctrine. See memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, March 24, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1150. George and Smoke have argued that Dulles’s speech “filled the gap in the deterrence effort” of the US. It is highly probable, they add, “that much earlier systematic attention in United States policy-making circles to the gap...and to the probability that the opponent would utilize it might well have led to consideration of possible fall-back positions”. Referring to the Indochina crisis, George and Smoke conclude that deterrence cannot “make up for or rescue a poorly conceived or unrealistic foreign policy”. George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 257, 261. According to Nixon, Dulles hid his real intentions behind his hawkish rhetoric. Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 155.

92 Cutler promised that “in other cases where JCS is really concerned I will certainly try to loosen up the time interval as much as the Council demand permits”. Cutler’s memorandum for Radford, March 29, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. This issue surfaced again during Cutler’s second term as a Special Assistant. In August 1957 Cutler noted that during the past months he had received the written comments of the Chiefs only a day (Wednesday) in advance of the Council meetings. He therefore urged Radford to try to deliver the views at least three days before the NSC sessions (Monday) to allow them to “be reproduced and circulated to the interested Departments and agencies in time for adequate consideration”. The JCS had followed the instructions of Secretary Wilson from mid-October 1953 calling for the JCS views to be ready by the following Tuesday noon preceding a Thursday NSC meeting. The new JCS Chairman Twining proposed a solution to the timing. He requested Cutler that, “whenever possible”, in order to allow “appropriate staffing and consideration” the PB papers should be circulated for the JCS a minimum of ten days before their scheduled submission to the NSC. Between June and August 1957, Twining explained, the average time for the JCS had only been a little over 5 days. Cutler’s memorandum to Radford, August 1, 1957 and Twining’s reply memorandum to Cutler, August 20, 1957. Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Twining), Box 27, F:CJCS 334 NSC, RG 218, NA.

93 Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 363–364.

superficial. One might ask whether the “two planning processes” were, in fact, separate at all. It seems apparent that they were simply two sides of the same coin. The Special Committee was intended to broaden and support the PB deliberations.

The NSC machinery, which consisted mainly of civilian officials, needed military expertise. The plan to carry out an aerial bombardment of Dien Bien Phu was debated within the JCS on the last day of March in accordance with their earlier views. As the President’s chief military adviser, Radford wanted to recommend to Eisenhower that the US should make France an offer of unilateral aerial intervention. Radford asked the Chiefs, as members of the principal advisory body to the NSC, for their individual views on this urgent matter. All of them opposed the Admiral’s recommendation at that point.⁹⁴ General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Chief of Staff of the Army, submitted his memorandum to the other members of the JCS. Ridgway opposed intervention. He wrote that it was not the duty of the Chiefs to formulate foreign policy, let alone advocate it, “unless its advice was specially sought by the President, or the Secretary of Defense”. If the JCS did something else it would interfere in politics. The fate of Dien Bien Phu was not, according to Ridgway, crucial. In addition, the US intervention “would greatly increase the risk of general war”. The Chiefs should keep to offering statements about military capabilities. The General later argued that the air strikes would not help in achieving success without the introduction of ground troops. Later, Chief of Staff Taylor recalled that it had been largely because of Ridgway that any kind of intervention, especially aerial attack, was deemed at the time to “be either too late, too little, or of the wrong kind”. Eisenhower seems to have adapted Ridgway’s view. He told an interviewer in 1965 that an air strike would not have been enough, even though Radford thought it would have been “useful”. According to the former President, the reasons for not intervening were mainly French colonialism and their reluctance to internationalize the conflict. Radford also recalled admitting that the air strikes would have made the US a belligerent, but that the French were not “willing to turn over the war to us at all”. None of the NSC principals favored “a hit-and-run carrier strike”, Radford said.⁹⁵ According to Buzzanco, the contemplation

94 Radford’s memorandum to Secretary of Defense Wilson, March 31, 1954. Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Radford), Box 10, f:091-c (April), RG 218, NA; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1198–1199.

95 Ridgway’s memorandum to the other members of the JCS, April 2, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1220–1221; Ridgway, *Soldier*, 1956, p. 276. Ridgway has claimed that he had later given a briefing to the President in which he had commented on the difficult circumstances: terrain, logistical problems and definite need for ground forces. The matter is revealed in the Army Chief of Staff’s memorandum for the record about a meeting with the Acting Secretary of Defense Robert Anderson. According to Ridgway’s own account of the briefing, he had told Anderson that his views had not been requested by Eisenhower, but he had felt compelled to do so. Greenstein heard from the President’s son, John S. D., who had helped his father with his memoirs, that as Eisenhower had been working on his memoirs he had not remembered the briefing at all. Ridgway’s account is in his 2-page memorandum, which he had submitted to Congressional Research Service. Gibbons quoted it widely in his study. A team of Army officers who had been inspecting MAAG in Vietnam confirmed Ridgway’s views on the importance of ground forces in their report on June 22, 1954. See *ibid.*, pp. 275–278; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 237–238.

of intervention did not end with the opposition of the JCS. Pruessen also argues that Secretary Dulles was under the impression that the Chiefs had been overwhelmingly concerned with the risks of all-out war with China or the Soviet Union and hence were not considering the issue itself. As a result of

For an extract from the Ridgway memorandum see Biggs, Bradley, Gavin: A Biography of General James M. Gavin (Hamden: Archon, 1980), pp. 136–137. In 1964, Ridgway had suggested to an interviewer that he had first “briefed President Eisenhower almost alone” after which he remembered that he had been called upon to brief the Council. Matthew B. Ridgway Oral History Transcript, PUL; Greenstein’s interview with John S. D. Eisenhower (held on November 21, 1981) is quoted in Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 107. The report of June 22/July 12 is cited in Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 213, footnote 103. Gavin, whose immediate superior had been Ridgway, later wrote that the Chief of Staff had been “under tremendous pressure” to agree on the “‘quickie’ solution”. Gavin, *Crisis Now*, 1968, pp. 41–42; Taylor, Maxwell D., *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 24. See also Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age*, 1958, p. 126–127. Prados reminds us that the fact that Eisenhower and Ridgway had similar backgrounds must have been realized by Radford. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 111. Buzzanco has elaborated on the theme of military dissent. For a discussion of the effect of Ridgway’s views see Robert Buzzanco’s “The American Military’s Rationale against the Vietnam War,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 101 (Winter 1986), p. 563; “Prologue to Tragedy: US Military Opposition to Intervention in Vietnam, 1950–1954,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 17 (Spring 1993), pp. 220–221; and *Masters of War*, 1996, pp. 42–46. See also Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, PUL; Radford in a Group Oral History Interview on Far East Transcript, PUL; Manning, Robert, “Development of a Vietnam Policy: 1952–1956,” in *Vietnam Reconsidered*. Ed. Salisbury, 1984, p. 42; Schratz, Paul R., “Robert Bostwick Carney,” in *The Chiefs of Naval Operations*. Ed. Robert William Love, Jr. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980), pp. 253–254; and Kolodziej, Edward A., *The Uncommon Defense and Congress, 1945–1963* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), pp. 215–216.

In special cases, all of the JCS members attended the Council meetings, but normally they were represented by the Chairman. Radford (back to camera) did not succeed in persuading them to unanimously endorse US intervention to save Dien Bien Phu. The US Army Chief of Staff, General Matthew B. Ridgway (second from left), US Marine Corps Commandant, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. (center) and US Navy's Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert B. Carney (second from right) all voiced their dissenting views. The US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Nathan F. Twining (right) sided with Radford. Twining also succeeded Radford as the JCS Chairman in mid-August 1957. (National Archives)

Eisenhower's decision concerning intervention, Pruessen adds, Dulles, together with Radford, attempted to gain support from home and abroad for the French cause.⁹⁶

From the point of view of the NSC, Ridgway was only half-correct. Eisenhower wished specifically to have the honest and early views of the JCS for the Council consideration to provoke argument. Quite often the Council chose to accept the advice of the JCS. The Chiefs were usually represented by its Chairman for whom the President had reserved a particular role and elevated him to be almost a policy advocate who could take part in debates on more than military matters. The other members of the JCS were also occasionally asked to attend the NSC meetings.

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96 Buzzanco, *Masters of War*, 1996, p. 43; Pruessen, Ronald W., "John Foster Dulles and the Predicaments of Power," in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. Ed. Richard H. Immerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 27.

■ The National Security Council Directs its Emphasis toward Concerted Action (April–May 1954)

Eisenhower Takes a Decision against Intervening Alone

There were normally several items on the agenda of the Council. Even important questions were not handled alone. The NSC convened on All Fool's Day with an emphasis on Germany and the Philippines. The Council discussed only the briefings on the situation at Dien Bien Phu. Radford informed his listeners that the fortress would have to be reinforced and properly supplied. The President once again could see no point in stationing troops in a distant corner of Vietnam without the possibility of using reserves. Eisenhower, who was aware of the JCS's views, commented that the decision on the intervention would have to be made by the "statesmen". He viewed the matter as involving great risks, but said "there was no reason for the Council to avoid considering the intervention issue". Radford replied to a question put by Secretary Dulles that some assistance could be delivered to the French within a day. Eisenhower then ended the discussion and called a special meeting of the "informal NSC" to the Oval Office to be held right after the ongoing session.¹ According to Anderson by the time the April 1 Council meeting was convened the President "was rapidly coming to a decision", which he was not going to delegate to the NSC.²

Apparently, an informal NSC meeting was held later that same day. No document of that meeting is available, but in Secretary Dulles's telephone conversations made during the afternoon it is revealed that he and Radford should consult the Congressional leaders about the intervention. Burke and Greenstein refer to the planned meeting as "an emergency meeting". Dulles told Attorney General Brownell, Jr. that "something fairly serious" had happened after the morning's NSC session. The Secretary of State called Eisenhower to tell him he was going to present him with a draft the following morning. While informing Radford about the developments, Dulles heard from the Admiral that there was no time

1 Memorandum of Discussion of the 191st Meeting of the NSC, April 1, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1200–1202. No record of the following meeting has been found. *Ibid.*, p. 1202, footnote 3. The question of the legal situation with respect to US volunteers was to come up at the NSC, but it was suggested by Operations Coordinator Walter A. RADIUS that the OCB would give its Indochina Working Group the task of studying the proposal further. RADIUS's memorandum to Under Secretary Robert D. Murphy, March 31, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA.

2 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 29–30.

to be wasted and that the President could be criticized for not taking preemptive action. The two shared the view that the Congressmen would have to be told that air and naval intervention would be enough to contain the Chinese.³

Gibbons has speculated that Eisenhower, Dulles, and Radford (and possibly Wilson) may have agreed to consult Congress on the intervention issue and that “something fairly serious” referred to the task of formulating the Congressional resolution in support of such action. According to the diary of the Press Secretary Hagerty, the “Indo China situation [was] getting really bad”. Working with the French was almost impossible, concluded Hagerty in his diary. Planes from aircraft carriers would possibly have to be sent to Dien Bien Phu, the President had told two newspaper editors on April 1. “Of course”, Eisenhower continued, “if we did, we’d have to deny it forever”. Gibbons also regards Hagerty’s diary entry as evidence of Eisenhower’s possible consideration of an air strike “as of April 1”. He comments that it is, however, unclear “how a covert plan would square with a request to Congress for a resolution”. It could have been, Gibbons concludes, part of the “fairly serious” point.⁴

Eisenhower’s key NSC advisers were at his disposal at a time of acute crisis. On the morning of April 2, the draft Congressional resolution sketched by the State Department under the instructions of Secretary Dulles was discussed by the Council principals. The paper referred to the Chinese threat in Southeast Asia. The United States should, according to the draft, deter the Communist aggression in cooperation with the other friendly nations in the region (United Action) or “in pursuance of a decision or recommendation of the United Nations”. The resolution would have given the President the authority until June 30, 1955, to intervene with sea and air power. Eisenhower admitted that this followed his own views, but he thought it would be wise to first let Congress express its ideas before showing them the draft resolution. Dulles pointed out that Radford’s line was tougher than his. For the Secretary of State the Congressional consent “was designed to be a deterrent” and as such it was to strengthen the US position in the region. Dulles also mentioned United Action and the preparations to meet the diplomatic representatives of the nations attacked. In addition, he believed Radford simply wanted authorization for a “strike”. Admiral admitted he was thinking about saving Dien Bien Phu, whose

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3 Dulles was to give a congressional testify on the MSP. Stassen recommended during the late afternoon of April 1 that Dulles could point out that “for the first time (1953–1954) in seven years, no territory had gone under Communist domination”. But Dulles replied that they should be ready for the possibility that “Indochina might go under”. Dulles’s telephone conversations with Brownell, Jr., Eisenhower, Radford and Stassen, April 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1202, footnote 3. Burke and Greenstein base their account on the telephone conversation between Dulles and Radford held on April 1 at 3:01 p.m. The record of the telephone call is kept in the John Foster Dulles Papers in PUL. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 49. Prados refers to the informal meeting as “the real action”. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 89.

4 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 183–184. Eisenhower met Roy Howard and Walker Stone of Scripps-Howard Newspapers at a luncheon, which was evidently held after the special meeting of the NSC. Hagerty Diary, April 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1204.

fate was to be determined soon. The fall of the fortress could, he added, lead to the need for an American military presence in Indochina. Secretary Wilson, who was supported by Dulles, said the consent represented a card in the negotiations with the allies. The participants confessed that their minds were not clear on the issue.⁵

Burke and Greenstein assert that even though “Eisenhower had been exposed to extensive argumentation for and against intervention” by the NSC process, his decision not to intervene was made as “a paradigmatic example of the kind of lonely choice presidents make personally”. However, they add, “the liveliness of the advisory discussions and the diversity of views expressed” in the Council obviously made an important contribution to enhancing Eisenhower’s “ability to make a carefully thought-out [solitary] choice”. Despite the fact that the President had said at the luncheon that an air strike was a valid option, Burke and Greenstein argue that Eisenhower made his decision later on April 1 or – at the latest – early the following morning. From then on he changed his focus from consideration of unilateral intervention to a multilateral one. Eisenhower later questioned the usefulness of such a raid. He told an interviewer that “after these people [the Vietminh] are deployed all around Dien Bien Phu and secreted in the jungle, how are you, with a few air strikes, to defeat them?” The conclusion reached by Burke and Greenstein is also supported by Nixon’s recollection that the President decided against the intervention during the first few days of April. Neustadt agrees, as he concludes that after the President had invoked the NSC, he decided personally not to employ American military power in Indochina. Hoopes, who worked at the Pentagon at the time, argues that the President opposed Radford’s plans. Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff Adams agrees with Hoopes’s conclusions. Neither Hoopes nor Adams were present at that particular meeting and very rarely at the NSC meetings in general. According to Richardson, Eisenhower’s decision was made in his conferences with the “NSC advisers”. Ambrose goes beyond that interpretation, maintaining that the President made his decision against the advice of most of the Council members, the JCS and the State representatives. In Hammond’s account, the NSC – even though free from partisan politics – did not enjoy great rationality in the crisis.⁶

5 Draft Congressional Resolution, April 2, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1211–1212; Dulles’s memorandum of his conversation with Eisenhower, Wilson, Radford and Cutler, April 2, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1210–1211.

6 Burke and Greenstein regard the decision “against contemplated air strike on Dien Bien Phu” as Eisenhower’s “most consequential decision” in the first half of 1954. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 59, 100–101, 103, 287–288; Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, PUL; Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 151; Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, 1990, pp. 300–301; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, pp. 211–212; Adams, Sherman, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 121; Pach, Jr. and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1991, p. 76; Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 1990, p. 379; Hammond, “The National Security Council as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination,” 1960, p. 909. The decision was not an easy one. Eisenhower’s personal secretary Whitman had followed the contacts between the President and his key advisers at the height of the crisis. Once she had had to deliver personally a message from Bedell Smith to Eisenhower. The gravity of the reports from Dien Bien Phu and the urgency of the way in which the matters

Burke's and Greenstein's interpretations and that of Neustadt warrant a second look. The timing of Eisenhower's decision seems probable. It is hard to estimate the level of influence on the President by the NSC machinery, but on the basis of the available source materials it was evidently great. In spite of the acuteness of the crisis, the debate was given adequate time. Thus, neither Eisenhower nor his advisers agreed too readily on the nature of the problem. Furthermore, the President clearly would not settle for consensus recommendations and did not want to omit any option. The Council principals performed as committed policy advocates.

The attitude of Congress mattered to Eisenhower. At a meeting with a bipartisan group of Congressional leaders on April 3, which Chalmers M. Roberts has titled "*The Day We Didn't Go to War*", Radford briefed the participants on the latest developments in Indochina. Then Secretary Dulles touched upon the importance of Indochina, which was, in Dulles's words, "the key to Southeast Asia". If it fell and the US remained idle, he went on, the rest of the area would be lost in no time to Communist domination. Dulles requested Congressional support for Eisenhower in order to be able to deploy naval (air) and air forces "in the interest of national security" if he thought it was needed. Senator Knowland basically agreed, but in the following exchange of ideas some Congressmen jointly stated that Dulles would first have to achieve the promise of United Action (commitments of a political and material nature) from the allies. In addition, Congress did not wish to repeat Korea. Dulles and Radford tried to convince them that no ground troops would be sent, but various Congressmen doubted this when they argued that it would inexorably happen. Radford, who was asked about the effects of aerial intervention in Dien Bien Phu, confessed that it would no longer help the fortress. Congress criticized the French and the also the British to some extent about this matter. One of the outcomes of the meeting was that the Congressmen promised to give the green light to intervention "if satisfactory commitments could be obtained" from the allies by Dulles.⁷ Prados notes that at the same time as Congress wanted

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were handled had been shocking to her. Donovan, *Confidential Secretary*, 1988, p. 47. According to McMahon, who has written about the Eisenhower revisionists, Eisenhower as a former General was familiar with "the limits of military force". The President practiced "a policy of restraint", which sharply differed from the policies of Truman and Johnson. The above-mentioned interpretations by the revisionists seem sound to McMahon. McMahon, "Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism," 1986, p. 458.

7 Dulles's memorandum (for the file) of the meeting with Congressional leaders, April 3, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1224-1225. No information about the meeting was issued, except that Dulles and Radford "briefed a bi-partisan group of congressional leaders on the situation in Indochina". *Ibid.*, p. 1224, footnote 2. According to Dulles, he gained from the meeting what he hoped for in order to proceed in the matter. See Memorandum of telephone Conversation between Dulles and Senator William F. Knowland, April 3 (afternoon), 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1230, footnote 3. As his closing statement, Chalmers wrote that "in spite of the NSC decision, April 3, 1954, was the day we didn't go to war". It was also the title of his article, which appeared in the Reporter on September 14, 1954, II, pp. 31-35. See also Roberts, Chalmers M., *First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 113 ff. Greenstein argues that by "absenting himself from a crucial conference" Eisenhower "employed hidden-hand leadership". The President, Greenstein adds, "carefully briefed his aides in advance of the meeting and debriefed them afterward". Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, 2000, p. 52.

preconditions for intervention, the wishes expressed on Capitol Hill did not differ much from the US policy objectives set forth in the NSC papers.⁸ George has used this meeting in part to construct his multiple advocacy theory. Burke and Greenstein, however, argue that this is incorrect. They explain that George has not had access to important documents.⁹

Probably deliberately, the Eisenhower Administration kept Congress somewhat uninformed about the NSC discussions. Secretary Dulles, who was loyal to the President, reported to Eisenhower on the meeting during the early afternoon of April 3. Dulles mentioned that “on the whole it [the meeting] went pretty well”, even though it had “raised some serious problems”. Congressional support could be attained, he went on, if United Action were realized. The two shared the view of Congress that the countries of Southeast Asia were more involved than the Americans and that they should therefore be included. Eisenhower reminded them of the importance of the spirit as a prerequisite for successful intervention; according to him the FEC would be victorious within a half a year if there was the will. The British presented a problem, Dulles replied. Intervention could hardly be justified to the American public if the British would not join them. Dulles asked whether Eisenhower could send a message to Prime Minister Winston Churchill¹⁰. The President reiterated that ANZUS could be a suitable framework for United Action. The preparations were already underway as Dulles would be meeting the envoys of the ANZUS countries the following day.¹¹

The OCB was functioning with great precision, even though the NSC-OCB machinery was not meant for handling the acute crisis, but rather for long-term policy formulation and implementation. During the siege of Dien Bien Phu the OCB kept a close eye on developments. The Board received weekly status reports as had been agreed on March 24. On April 13, for example, there had been hardly any political, military or informational developments for the past week except an increase in the French Air Force by 25 Corsairs. The action continued in early May with the preparation of plans by the Pentagon for the volunteer air force and MAAG increases in accordance with the OCB discussions. The French had requested aid for airfield construction and additional aircraft. The Working Group had concluded that the inducement of Bao Dai to take strong action at Geneva and in South Vietnam was not practical. The MAAGs in Southeast Asia were also being rearranged under CINCPAC. In addition, the South Vietnamese Ministry of Defense was taking care of the psychological warfare operation with the USIS in a supportive role.¹²

8 Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 103.

9 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 286–287.

10 Eisenhower’s cable to Churchill (sent on April 4), which called for allied unity for the Geneva Conference, was drafted in the State Department. For the text see FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1238; also printed in *The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1953–1955*. Ed. Peter G. Boyle (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 136–138.

11 Memorandum of telephone conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, April 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1230.

12 The OCB was to discuss the request to supply arms to the militia in the Tonkin area. Weekly Status Reports for Review of (OCB) Special Committee Report on Indochina (Phase “A”),

Sometimes the informal small-group meetings included enlarged State Department representation. The number of people attending these advisory meetings which contributed to the NSC process was not fixed. On the fourth of April, for example, Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Under Secretary of State Bedell Smith, Admiral Radford, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes, and Counselor of the Department of State Douglas MacArthur II held a meeting at the White House. President's Chief of Staff Sherman Adams later wrote about that evening meeting that the conditions under which the intervention could be carried out had been decided upon. United Action provided the necessary basis. Then came the demand that the French should not stop fighting and that they should do their share till the end of the war. The Associated States should also, the President insisted, be granted independence because the US did not want to appear to be a protector of the colonial interests of the French.¹³

Meanwhile, the French Government had heard from General Ely about Radford's "intervention offer". Foreign Minister Bidault passed his Government's official request for US air intervention to save Dien Bien Phu to American Ambassador C. Dillon Douglas in Paris. It reached Washington late in the evening of the fourth. But Eisenhower had already rejected intervention under the prevailing conditions. In consequence, a message of refusal was sent to Paris the following morning. Secretary Dulles wrote in the cable that the US would not take any action "in the absence of understanding with France and other countries". Furthermore, he added, Congressional approval "would be required".¹⁴ Hall has traced "the quality of the Eisenhower response to French pressure for armed assistance" to the NSC process, which dated "back in time at least to August 1953". According to Anderson, on April fourth the unilateral intervention phase ended and the "phase two of Eisenhower's Indochina decision making" started.¹⁵

The top-level communication could also be handled via telephone, as has already been noted as the case on April 1. Secretary Dulles talked next morning

- April 13 and May 4, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA.
- 13 Adams, Firsthand Report, 1961, p. 122; editorial note, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1236. No other record of the meeting has been found. According to the staff of DDEL, the documentation from the early years of the Eisenhower Administration is sometimes insufficient. This has been partly due to changes in personnel.
 - 14 The period of consideration in Washington was over in less than 12 hours. Dillon's cable to the State Department, April 5, 1954 (received April 4, 9:43 p.m.), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1236–1238; Dulles' cable to Dillon, April 5, 1954 (sent 9:29 a.m.), *ibid.*, p. 1242. About Bidault's pessimistic response see Dillon's cable to the State Department, April 5, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1243; Bidault later wrote that Secretary Dulles "did not even promise to back my request in Washington" as he probably knew it would be almost impossible to get Eisenhower and Congress to go along. Bidault, Georges, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bibault*. Translated from the French by Marianne Sinclair (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 196. For the original text see Bidault, Georges, *D'une résistance à l'autre* (Paris: Les Presses du Siècle, 1965), p. 198. Radford denied in 1965 that the French had made "a formal request". They had wanted to keep control in their hands. Radford Oral History Transcript, PUL.
 - 15 Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980", 1982, p. 361; Anderson, "Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam," 1989, p. 110.

with Eisenhower on the telephone about the controversial intervention offer. In the President's mind, Radford had not acted wisely by giving promises to Ely, because now they could put "pressure on us". Dulles pointed out that in the talks with Ely and Radford everybody had agreed that the US would not intervene before the political matters were in order. He believed that Radford's words must have been misinterpreted by the French as he had not given "any committal talk". The US would not risk its prestige without Congressional approval, Eisenhower said. They noted that Radford was no longer as enthusiastically in favor of intervention. The President wanted to find out if some further action could be taken to help the French, but he added that "we cannot engage in active war". Straight after ending the call, Dulles called Radford to say that Eisenhower was against the idea of "an act of war" unless it consisted of the type of carrier-based strike they had talked with the French Ambassador, Henri Bonnet, two days previously. Dulles also wanted to hear Radford's suggestions. The latter mentioned that the CNO, Admiral Robert B. Carney, had told him about the aviators in France and that aircraft for them could be delivered within a week.¹⁶

According to Nixon's memoirs, the top foreign policy leadership – i.e. the NSC members – including the President were aware of the fact that the loss of Indochina could lead to the withdrawal of the French. This, Nixon concludes, would have meant that the US would have had to decide whether it should take responsibility or abandon the whole region. Nixon evaluates that Eisenhower hoped that preparations for intervention would not mean actual fighting.¹⁷

The Council was told in clear-cut language, in line with the JCS, not to agree to a negotiated settlement. This was done in the form of the latter part of the report of Erskine's Subcommittee under the Special Committee on Indochina. It dealt with long-range policy and courses of action in Southeast Asia. The report had been prepared in accordance with the instructions of the NSC of January 21. Part II of the report was finished on April 5. Its view was that the Vietminh would have to be defeated, if the spread of Communism was to be halted in Southeast Asia. The report suggested that the US should only accept military victory in Indochina. In the event that the French would not collaborate, the US should consider any kind of negotiated settlement at the forthcoming Geneva Conference as unacceptable. The report recommended that the US should intervene together with the Indochinese and other allies if the French pulled out.¹⁸

Secretary Dulles had developed the habit of meeting regularly with Congressmen. The Secretary briefed 25 Congressional leaders on Indochina on May 5. He presented three conclusions to the Congressmen. According to Dulles,

16 Radford answered to Dulles's question that he did not think referring to the intelligence on the possible Chinese intervention in Congress would be harmful in any way. Memoranda of telephone conversations between Eisenhower and Dulles and Dulles and Radford, April 5, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1241–1242, p. 1242, footnote 3.

17 According to Nixon, Radford "possibly" wanted military intervention. Nixon, RN, 1978, pp. 150–155.

18 Special Committee (draft) Report on Southeast Asia, Part II, April, 5, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 346–358.

intervention should not take place “until and unless prerequisites” of the April 4 meeting “were fulfilled”. The US had, he added, to continue to work to form a Southeast Asian grouping, possibly without Vietnam. Finally, the Americans should keep the French and the British “in spite of their weaknesses in Asia”, Dulles concluded.¹⁹

Despite the hierarchical system and the chain of command initiatives could come from various officials. The well-placed personal advisers of the Council principals could make a difference. The PPS’s Bowie, for example, supplied Secretary Dulles with comments to be used in the NSC discussion of possible US intervention. Bowie argued that it was of primary importance that the Council should take a “basic decision” on whether it deemed that in order to prevent the fall of Indochina military intervention undertaken with US armed forces would be necessary. If the decision was in the affirmative, the NSC would next have to decide, “at least tentatively”, if the intervention was to be undertaken alone or with regional grouping and what would be the objectives of the military action. Bowie continued that in the case of regional grouping composition, commitments and agreements would have to be agreed upon. In the case of unilateral intervention, Bowie added, there would be practical problems to be solved by the NSC, like obtaining Congressional support, preventing the French from negotiating “an unfavorable settlement”, deciding on the conditions for the French and obtaining an invitation from the French and the Indochinese states for any of the alternative courses of action. Bowie emphasized repetitively the phrase “if necessary” in reference to possible intervention.²⁰ Bowie’s memorandum did not clearly favor any of the alternatives. Nevertheless, it set forth the difficulties associated with unilateral intervention thus alarming the PB. It was easy to see the feasibility of organizing the regional grouping. The reasoning developed by Bowie, who is known to have been the confidant of Secretary Dulles, may well have had a considerable influence on Dulles’s thinking.

The NSC Actions were not necessarily final documents, but they could be scrutinized by outside bodies such as the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC). The Committee submitted its comments to the NSC members on NSC Action No 1074-a from an intelligence viewpoint. The IAC concluded that in terms of world reactions the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Indochina would not be “militarily desirable”. They also wrote that air and naval forces would not be sufficient but that the US ground troop commitment was a prerequisite for persuading the other powers to commit their combat troops. The Committee’s members disagreed on the threat of overt Chinese intervention in the case of US use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, they added that any kind of intervention in Indochina was not linked to the situation on the Korean Peninsula. If UN

19 Secretary Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, May 6, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 706–708.

20 Bowie’s memorandum for Secretary Dulles, April 5, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

troops became involved, the report continued, the Chinese would make plausible peace offers.²¹

The Council needed to widen the range of information and additional expertise vis-à-vis its member agencies, for example, in military matters. The Defense Department was needed to alert the NSC machinery to the limitations of US military power. Army planners did not think that – regardless of the use of tactical nuclear weapons – air and sea forces would be enough to guarantee successful intervention: in addition, seven divisions of ground troops would be needed. They specifically referred to airlift and amphibious lift capabilities. According to the Army planners, and in reply to the PB request for a time estimate, it would take up to four months to transport all the troops to Indochina. This was apparently noted in the PB. In an interview with Hall, a former State Department representative on the PB, Harry H. Schwartz, remembers that the reply of the JCS on the matter had been that there would be difficulties in getting the troops there as the US armed forces had very limited airlift capability at the time. This view was, Schwartz recalls, met with great awe at the PB. Furthermore, Spector calls the Army position on the NSC Action as “an emphatic dissent”.²²

Developments in April

The April 6 Crisis Meeting

Some Council meetings were of greater importance than the others. The NSC held a “crisis meeting” on April 6. Cutler’s briefing centered on the question of intervention. The Council was to decide for or against it. Cutler went through the options of the Special Annex in the event of a positive decision. He also pointed out that the IAC had been split over the intervention issue. In its memorandum, the Committee had reported that Allen Dulles and the Deputy Director for Intelligence of the Joint Staff estimated that the Chinese would not intervene in the case of US intrusion. According to them, the odds were “better than even” that the Chinese would not do anything. In contrast, all the other

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- 21 UN resolution would attract “peace proposals” from the Chinese Communists “which would, if adopted, lead to eventual Communist domination of Indochina”. The use of Taiwanese troops in Indochina would increase the likelihood of Chinese intervention. IAC’s comments in a CIA memorandum for the NSC, April 6, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 Memoranda, RG 59, NA. Citing the Chinese sources, Zhai has written that the threat of US air intervention made some of the Vietminh officers reluctant to capture Dien Bien Phu in April 1954. In addition, their men were exhausted and the monsoon season was about to begin as well. Zhai, *Qiang, China & the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), p. 48. See also Kalicki, J.H., *The Pattern of Sino-American Crises: Political-Military Interactions in the 1950s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 91–116.
 - 22 NSC Action No. 1074-a, April 5, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 9, p. 304; Army position to NSC Action 1074 A (without date), *ibid.*, p. 332; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 471–472; Schwartz interview (held on June 25, 1971) quoted in Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 365; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 203.

members²³ thought that it was likely – a more than 50 percent possibility – that China would act. In his briefing Allen Dulles said there was no confirmation of the intentions of the Chinese to intervene. The differing views were, therefore, actually not all that great. Instead, “the only issue”, he added, “was one of degree”. Dulles urged the NSC to consider this matter very carefully. The Dien Bien Phu situation had remained almost unchanged since the previous meeting. The Vietminh was going to be receiving reinforcements in the near future, Dulles stated. Air supply and evacuation action had become difficult due to Vietminh anti-aircraft weapons. He added that no MIG-15 aircraft were close enough to Dien Bien Phu. Admiral Radford supplemented CIA Director’s briefing by quoting his advisers to the effect that the French defending the garrison had food supplies for three days and ammunition for four or five days.²⁴

The Council members were made a presentation on the second part of the Special Committee’s report. The PB had also studied the preconditions for US intervention and had thus completed the task of finding out the extent to which the US should go toward ground intervention as it was assigned at the March 25 Council meeting. The study concluded that the NSC had three alternatives for intervention: together with the French, together with the French and the Indochinese, or unilaterally together with other allies if the French left Indochina. The PB warned that if US troops and prestige were involved, the US would not be able to disengage any longer and that – because of the force levels of around 300,000 – general mobilization could then be necessary. The last option would mean that the risk of a general war or war with China would be high and action would have financial and budgetary repercussions as well as necessitating a change in the plans to reduce the size of the US military. Before the general discussion Cutler reiterated the PB paper, which stated that there was no indication that the French were going to quit fighting and “accept a settlement which is unacceptable to US interests”. In addition, Cutler concluded, the fall of Dien Bien Phu would not necessarily mean a total military failure in Indochina. If that were to be the case, the NSC “would not be obliged to decide at the present meeting” the fate of the intervention, Cutler said. Secretary Wilson said that within the Pentagon the feeling was not the same about the fact that “a military decision in Indochina was actually imminent”. Allen Dulles and

23 The other members were State’s Special Assistant on Intelligence, Directors of Naval Intelligence and of Intelligence of the US Air Force and the Department of the Army’s Assistant Chief of Staff on Intelligence (G-2).

24 IAC’s memorandum to the NSC, April 6, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1251, footnote 3; Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1250–1253. In INR’s briefing paper concerning the IAC consideration and the PB paper of April 5, it was argued that China would not intervene because of its “domestic problems” and the fear of US counteraction. The latter would serve as a deterrent. The Chinese would only act against the US with the “assent” of the Soviet Union. The Chinese warnings of aggression, however, were to be taken seriously as the country wished to “achieve a great power status”. INR’s Briefing Paper for W. Park Armstrong, not dated, Records of the Department of State, Subject Files of INR 1945–1960, Lot 58 D 116, Box 11, RG 59, NA.

Radford regarded the PB evaluation as too promising. On the other hand, the President did not believe that a loss at Dien Bien Phu would settle the war, because the Vietminh had taken heavy casualties. The “most depressing feature” of the FEC performance was that the French had not been able to regain the initiative elsewhere while the siege continued. The FEC should have used their superiority in manpower to their advantage, Eisenhower remarked. The events in the Tonkin Delta were nearly as worrying as those at Dien Bien Phu, Allen Dulles commented.²⁵

The President stated clearly “there was no possibility whatever of US unilateral intervention in Indochina”. It would have been taken to Congress where they would have to “fight for it like dogs with very little hope of success”, Eisenhower argued. In addition, he went on, an invitation would have to come from the Vietnamese. Secretary Dulles then participated by agreeing that intervention would not be accepted by Congress unless United Action materialized, unless the Indochinese States would get independence, and unless the French were to continue fighting. The three conditions had been set forth by Congressional leaders three days earlier. They could not be “overlooked”, Dulles added. Yet, as the Secretary of State told the participants, he had started preparations for United Action through diplomatic channels. According to him, the British were hesitant because Winston Churchill’s government was engaged with its domestic political problems. The British participation was not totally out of the question, Dulles believed.²⁶

Secretary Dulles pointed out that at issue was not only the intervention but also “an effort to build up strength” in the whole region in order to make intervention “unnecessary”. Everything, Dulles went on, depended upon the development of the military situation. The US plans and promises of aid would help to boost the fighting morale of the French, he said. Dulles, who had apparently accepted the advice from Bowie, thought intervention remained a valid option if “a regional grouping” did not work out. The Secretary of State hinted at preventive action when he referred to the “risks which we might well not be able to take later”. Turning to the forthcoming Geneva Conference, Dulles was not certain of the French intentions. The responsibility was mainly on the part of Great Britain and the “free nations” in the area. If the states remained divided, it

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25 The PB estimated in their options that without the French the US would need almost 320,000 troops. Annex to the PB study to the NSC, April 5, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 306–309, 329, 345; Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1253. Burke and Greenstein have found that the reports of the Special Committee and of the PB were “similarly hawkish”. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 70–71. According to Gibbons “the two reports supplemented each other”. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 197.

26 Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1253–1255. Despite Dulles accepted the fact that there perhaps was not going to be any intervention, Goold-Adams argues, he was determined to make sure Indochina was not going to fall to the Communists. Goold-Adams, Richard, *John Foster Dulles: A Reappraisal* (New York: Appleton, 1962), p. 129.

would be difficult to limit the Communist gains. At the end of his lengthy presentation, Dulles felt, like Cutler, that the Council did not have to decide upon intervention at that point. Instead, the US should continue to work towards a regional collective defense organization for Southeast Asia, because this would greatly enhance the position of the West and friendly nations at the Geneva Conference. In reply to a question put by Cutler about the timing of the matter, Dulles said that more planning had to be done before taking it to Congress.²⁷

Eisenhower did not agree that the loss of Indochina would inevitably lead to the loss of the rest of Southeast Asia as Wilson had already argued. The feeling among the NSC, the President added, had earlier not been such. He reiterated the task of the Special Committee, which was to examine how to “save the rest” of the area if Indochina fell. Secretary Dulles turned to Under Secretary Bedell Smith, who was the Chairman of the Committee, to ask about the matter. Dulles quoted Bedell Smith by saying that the Special Committee had in fact finished its assignment. The Under Secretary pointed out that in fact the PB draft currently being considered by the NSC “had overtaken the report” of the Special Committee. Both organs agreed to recommend the formation of a regional alliance to prevent Indochina from being lost or, at least, to stop the Communist advances. The President voiced his “warm approval for the idea of a political organization” designed to defend Southeast Asia in both previously mentioned events. Whatever the case, a collective defense pact “would be better than emergency military action”, Eisenhower said.²⁸

Cutler directed the discussion back toward the question of intervention. He thought Dulles’s plan to create a regional pact might turn out to work too slowly. Cutler then wanted to hear the Pentagon’s comment on this. Secretary Wilson briefly expressed the military’s concern about the situation, which had been “moving...in the wrong direction” at great speed. Nixon pointed out that civil war was the reason for the current events, not any form of “outside aggression”. This fact, Nixon went on, made it hard for the Legislative Branch to authorize military action. On the other hand, the regional grouping was a good device for checking the overt threat posed by the Communists, the Vice-President said. But he also questioned whether it would be of use in the case of internal subversion, and then what was the US prepared to do in order to help

27 Dulles also said that an organizational structure had to be formed as well as the three conditions had to be approved by the pact before Congress could give its blessing to US participation in the “regional grouping”. Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting, of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1255–1256. NSC-related issues were often briefly taken up at regular Cabinet meetings. Even though a bulk of the Cabinet members also sat on the NSC and had heard, for example, his remarks about Geneva, Secretary Dulles told the Cabinet on April 9 that he was flying to Europe in order to strengthen Western unity before the Conference. Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, April 9, 1954, AWF, Cabinet series, Box 3, DDEL; also quoted in Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 114.

28 Bedell Smith sat behind Dulles in the NSC. Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1257.

the free governments of Southeast Asia in coping with the latter threat. Referring to his previous week's speech, Secretary Dulles agreed with Nixon. According to him, "the danger was indirect", and this made it "a very mixed up situation". He was supported by Wilson, who understood the gravity of the situation. The Secretary of Defense admitted that the Administration did not have a solution to the problem. Both men shared the view that it was analogous to Italy.²⁹

Eisenhower stated that "the thing to do" was to form a coalition composed of the key US allies, who would have to be persuaded to participate. The position of France, "as a decadent military power", remained open. Nixon asked Secretary Dulles if the proposed regional organization could intervene in "dealing with local Communist subversion" if the governments were too weak to do so. Dulles answered positively. It was also, he added, a way to create an effective Far Eastern Policy together with the British, who would have to reevaluate their colonial policy. Stassen pointed out that there were in fact three optional lines to be followed. Firstly, Indochina could be allowed to fall, which would also negatively affect the possibilities of forming a regional group. Another extreme was to go in and expel the Communists to China, which might lead to Chinese intervention. Stassen's final alternative consisted of keeping the southern part of Vietnam as well as creating a regional organization. Eisenhower determinedly pointed out that the US could not intervene and thus "become the colonial power which succeeded France". The Indochinese states would only welcome the intervention if other Asiatic nations joined the US, the President said.³⁰

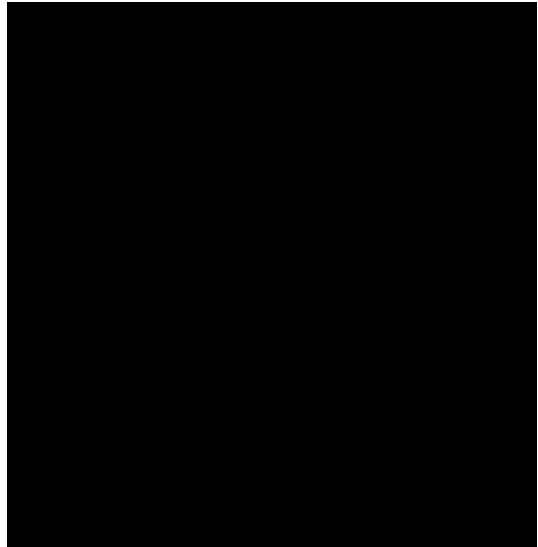
Stassen suggested that troops could be sent to Thailand, which could also help in defending the south of Vietnam. Eisenhower commented that the region would not be lost providing France and the Indochinese states could be drawn into an "Asian grouping". What was the US ready to do now, Stassen asked. Backed by Radford, Secretary Wilson mentioned that northern Vietnam was more "valuable" than the southern part. Stassen commented – as Wilson had already said on March 25 – that it would have been a lesser evil to lose a part of the region and to hold on to the rest by strengthening the defenses. For Radford this was "a very temporary solution at best". Cutler again questioned whether Indochina was to fall and what was the importance of Dien Bien Phu. The loss of the fortress could affect the will of the French to fight, Secretary Dulles believed. Radford, who agreed with Dulles, reminded the Council of the feeling among the French leaders that the future of Indochina depended on the result of the battle for Dien Bien Phu. This was evident, Radford added, and that it was "very hard to predict" what the repercussions would be.³¹

29 Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1258.

30 Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1259.

31 Radford said that the Tonkin Delta was in fact "the key to the military defense of all of Southeast Asia". Memorandum of Discussion at the 192d Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1260.

The Secretary of the Treasury, George M. Humphrey, had a strong voice in the NSC. He told the Council what the US could afford and his views on the budget were in harmony with those of Eisenhower. Humphrey, who was known as “Mr. No”, was not experienced in foreign affairs and did not speak for foreign aid. He was, however, a convincing speaker and could gather his own followers. At the NSC the Treasury Secretary strongly objected to US intervention in Dien Bien Phu and to plans for the US to police the rest of the world. (Newsweek)



At this point in the meeting Secretary Humphrey directed a question at the Secretary of State. The Treasury Secretary wanted to know whether the US would act as a world police force by forming coalitions and intervening in every instance when free governments were at risk of being overthrown. The President then “sharply” replied that so far he did not know of any free government which had voluntarily “gone Communist”. In addition, more emphasis would have to be placed on internal aggression, Eisenhower added. The Secretary of State shared the views of the JCS that Communist takeovers could no longer be tolerated, regardless of the methods by which they took place. Nixon supported Dulles and the Chief Executive. The US would have to take note of the new ways of operating used by the Communists, and act accordingly. On his trip Nixon had learned that the British were viewed as colonialists everywhere in Asia. That should not be imitated, he went on. Humphrey still insisted that there would be no end to the development if the US decided to start policing all of the governments of the world. Secretary Dulles answered this would not be the case. The President wanted to hear what Humphrey’s solution would be. Eisenhower mentioned a possible chain reaction and concluded that the domino game would leave the US threatened. The President then addressed his Secretary of Treasury, saying “George, you exaggerate the case”. In specific regions the US could not simply let the Communists gain any land, Eisenhower voiced. Although he said that the US would not act in Dien Bien Phu alone, the regional grouping “must go forward as a matter of the greatest urgency”. If this worked, the President claimed, “the battle is two-thirds won” and the US would gain the support of its people and that of the governments of the allies.³²

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32 When Eisenhower spoke using the metaphor of a row of dominoes, he concluded by changing the game to billiards. He said that the process could “end with the United States directly behind the 8-ball”. Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1260–1262.

The discussion was then summarized by Cutler. He said that approval of Secretary Dulles's proposal meant that intervention would not be decided upon. Cutler asked what further measures could be taken to help the French, bearing in mind the latest military appraisal of the effects of the battle for Dien Bien Phu. Wilson said that the French had just requested more bomber aircraft (B-29) with US maintenance crews. The planes, the French hoped, could use US field facilities in the Philippines. The Pentagon was not too anxious about the matter, Wilson confessed. Stassen favored sending the aircraft, but Radford and Chief of Staff of the USAF General Nathan Twining were doubtful because the French were not used to working with the B-29's. Stassen, however, who defended the French, insisted that the US should do its utmost, short of dispatching ground troops. In any case, the planes would not reach the area in time to be able to make a difference, Radford replied. Eisenhower agreed with the evaluation that at the heart of the problem lay the inefficiency of the French. Secretary Dulles raised the matter that Britain and France could not necessarily be persuaded to join the proposed coalition. This would force the US to rethink its free world coalition policy as the two allies would then have to be viewed only as European Powers, Dulles said. Secretary's statement made the Council members quiet for a while.³³

Next the ODM Director Flemming asked Eisenhower about the timing of the PB paper. The President explained that the urgent matter would not be taken before Congress before an initial ad hoc coalition had been discussed and formed. Flemming wanted to make sure whether his office was to initiate plans for the military and whether mobilization measures were set forth by the PB in its contingency for intervention. Eisenhower instructed Flemming to proceed. Nixon reminded the NSC members that there was no question that the President, the Secretary of State or the military advisers to the Council could persuade Congress to grant its authorization if the national interest called for it. "Congress would do what the National Security Council felt was necessary", the Vice-President pointed out. Eisenhower enthusiastically commented that the US should take the matter of sending more non-combatants to Indochina before Congress. It could work by saying that Indochina might be rescued, the President went on. He was talking about another type of aircraft than the B-29's, hopefully of a type which the French could operate. Secretary Dulles recommended Corsairs, light Navy bombers, and the President agreed. The President first suggested the planes could be flown off US aircraft carriers, but when he heard that an additional French carrier was on its way to the region, he saw no problem involved in US technicians and maintenance crews working on board the French vessels. He was supported by Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford.³⁴

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33 Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1262-1263.

34 The Congress had given permission to send 500 technicians to maintain US aircraft in Indochina. Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1263-1264.

After a long debate the NSC took note of the PB paper but made no decision on the recommendation, which had called for military intervention with ground combat forces. However, planning for this alternative was directed as had been done in late March. For the time being – before the opening of the Geneva Conference – the Council agreed that the US should work toward the regional coalition, harmonizing US and British policies in the Far East and inducing the French to boost their efforts to grant independence to the Indochinese states. Congressional authorization would have to be obtained for the regional grouping. In addition, Congress would have to be consulted in connection with the plan to send USAF maintenance crews to Indochina and to extend the tour of duties of the former. In addition, the possibility of sending additional aircraft was to be contemplated.³⁵

As a first-hand eye-witness Nixon observed that “the President was in a very serious mood in this meeting”. According to his own account, Nixon had replied to Secretary Dulles’s United Action proposal that internal security issues had to be dealt with. The Vice-President encouraged the Chief Executive to use his powers to gain Congressional and public support for his actions. In addition, Nixon had recommended that additional maintenance personnel could have been sent to Vietnam if Eisenhower “asked for them”. The President assigned the Secretary of Defense to find out about this. Nixon’s conclusion about the meeting was that Eisenhower “had backed down considerably from the strong position he had taken” on the matter of intervention during “the latter part of the previous week”. The President was prepared not to do anything without United Action and backing from the Americans. Eisenhower, Nixon wrote, “did not seem inclined to put much pressure on to get them to come along” [the allies and the country]. Immerman argues that Nixon was incorrect. According to Immerman, the President considered as strongly as his Vice-President that Indochina would have to be defended and he did not rule out Operation Vulture. In noting the views of the NSC members, Congress and the American people, Immerman asserts, Eisenhower decided that he could not risk the possibly grave “long-range consequences” of unilateral intervention. Nixon’s biographer Parmet argues that since Nixon had sided with Radford and held to his position, United Action was not enough. On the other hand, Gardner argues, the decision was a hard one for Eisenhower, but it made things easier for Dulles.³⁶

35 Memorandum of Discussion of the 192nd Meeting of the NSC, April 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1264–1265. According to Patti, Eisenhower made his decision based on the recommendations of the Council on April 6. Patti, *Why Viet Nam?*, 1980, p. 433.

36 Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 151; Immerman, “Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, p. 138; Parmet, Herbert S., *Richard Nixon and His America* (New York: Smithmark, 1995), pp. 317–318, 320–321. In 1965, Nixon told an interviewer and still argued two decades later that it had been the “first critical mistake” of the US not to intervene in Dien Bien Phu. Richard M. Nixon Oral History Transcript, PUL; Nixon, Richard M., *No More Vietnams* (New Rochelle: Arbor, 1985), p. 31; Mazo, Earl, *Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait* (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 256. Gardner regards as noteworthy that Dulles’s points attracted reactions from Nixon, Wilson and Humphrey “all of whom were concerned about the implications of a deeper American involvement in Vietnamese internal politics”. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 210–211.

Despite the fact that the JCS Chairman normally represented the JCS alone at the NSC, Hall considers that it was Eisenhower's and Cutler's standard operating procedure to invite other Chiefs to the Council meeting if they had been split over a certain issue as in this case. Hall, who has based his arguments on an interview with Robert Amory, Jr. who was the CIA representative on the PB, writes that, according to Amory, Jr., Radford had urged the other participants to use atomic weapons at Dien Bien Phu. The President, Amory, Jr. had added, had then asked Ridgway for his view. The Chief of Staff had replied in the negative. Secretary Dulles had "behaved exactly like a Wall Street lawyer" without taking any "substantive position on it". Dulles had pointed out that the French had not officially requested intervention and therefore, in Amory, Jr.'s words, "this proposal is out of order". Flemming later recalled that Ridgway was indeed present and that he had opposed Radford's view (which was supported by Nixon) on the count that the US should not become involved in a guerilla war in Southeast Asia. The "very lively discussion" had taken place mainly, Flemming adds, "among those with military background", meaning that Secretary Dulles was not too active. Eisenhower recalled that he did not believe at the time that the air strike would have been enough, although Radford thought it "would [have] be[en] helpful".³⁷ Amory, Jr.'s and Flemming's recollections seem in general to be accurate and probable, although the lengthy memorandum of the discussion at the April 6 NSC meeting does not directly imply that the Eisenhower and Ridgway exchange took place. It does, however, verify that Ridgway was present at the meeting.

The Council meeting of April 6 has been widely quoted and interpreted in scholarship. According to JCS historians, for example, the action by the NSC after the April 6 meeting reflected the views of Eisenhower on unilateral intervention. As a result of Secretary Dulles's urging, the Council did not follow the PB recommendation to reach a decision concerning intervention. The JCS historians concluded that the NSC emphasized "the tangential issue of" the regional grouping as the President thought it would strengthen the Western position at Geneva. Despite the opposition of Wilson and Radford to partition,

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37 According to Hall's direct quote of his interview with Amory, Jr. (held on May 28, 1971), the latter had recalled: "Ridgway sat stolidly in the back of the room. Eisenhower said, 'Do you agree with the Admiral, Mat?' And Ridgway barked, 'Hell, no!'" Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947-1980", 1982, p. 365. Amory, Jr. sometimes briefed the Council on military matters. Helgerson, *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates 1952-1992*, 1996, chapter 2, p. 10; Arthur S. Flemming Oral History Transcript, DDEL. During the time when the NSC memoranda of discussion had not been declassified and therefore Flemming chose not to address the issue in detailed terms. However, he has written that he had "listened to a very, very vigorous discussion, what I'm sure historians will regard as a very historic type of discussion, where the Council was split - I won't say down the middle necessarily but it was certainly split. I listened to him participate and so on and then listened to him decide very quietly that no". Flemming, quoted in *Perspective on Eisenhower's Values in The Eisenhower Presidency*. Ed. Thompson, 1984, p. 238-239; Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, PUL. It is noteworthy that in 1954 Amory, Jr.'s assistant was William P. Bundy, who was one of the leading architects of US policy toward Vietnam during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 182, footnote 19.

the NSC decided to arrange only an alliance. The action of the Council, the JCS historians asserted, gave the Pentagon a chance “to intensify its efforts in assisting the French to save Dien Bien Phu, but only by providing material aid”.³⁸

Burke and Greenstein have noted that “the distinctive advisory process” of the Eisenhower Administration is well illustrated in the documentation stretching from January through early April. The decision-making incorporated an “array of formal and informal arrangements”. The process greatly affected the content that it produced. Speaking about the Council as “a predictable forum for” the views of key advisers, Burke and Greenstein assert that the NSC “process brought professionally staffed area and contingency plans and a range of policy options before the top decision makers”. According to Burke and Greenstein, the President and his advisory system – “with consistent cast of characters” – did not thoroughly consider all of their policy decisions, but instead they focused on “the problems immediately at hand”. The handling of the Indochina crisis, however, Burke and Greenstein argue, meant that the formal machinery – i.e. the Council and “advisory committees constituted specifically for” it – was mobilized and the Administration “proceeded informally, exploring two broad policy options”, which were to conduct “a surgical air strike” and to form “a multinational coalition”. While the two advisory task forces deliberated to provide Eisenhower with “carefully reasoned recommendations”, the discussions at Council level continued on a weekly basis. The debates, Burke and Greenstein assert, revolved around the PB papers, whereas “unfolding events” triggered some discussions. Simultaneously, the President informally consulted with his advisers, namely Secretary Dulles, and also used his conversations with Cutler as one of the “sounding boards”. In addition to the two committees, Eisenhower and the NSC principals received “regular streams of information” and analysis particularly via Allen Dulles’s briefings and PB papers. Information and advice flowed steadily from the agencies of the Council principals “via the deliberations and reports of “ the PB. Burke and Greenstein add that the position of the President on unilateral intervention had been “unequivocal”: no way. Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles clarified to the other Council members that they considered the regional grouping a way of saving the rest of Southeast Asia. Even though the NSC had occupied a position to the effect that only military victory was acceptable, they heard on April 6 of that the intervention would be costly. The following “sharp debate between interventionists [Radford, Nixon and Stassen] and noninterventionists [Humphrey]” gave the President a chance to reconsider his position. According to Burke and Greenstein, an estimate of the necessary high US force levels was crucial in the NSC deliberations.³⁹

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38 “The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff”, 1971, pp. 382–383.

39 For Burke and Greenstein, the April 6 NSC meeting “was the most intensive application of the formal Eisenhower administration advisory process” during the Dien Bien Phu crisis since early 1954. Furthermore, the heading of their narrative on page 70, “The NSC Process Reopens Eisenhower’s Decision”, speaks for itself. For Burke and Greenstein, “the shift away from the NSC as forum for policy deliberation” only meant the strengthening of the informal level. Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 30–31, 53–54,

Stanley has pointed out that the PB and the Council must sometimes “operate on a crash basis, as during the Indo-China crisis”. To Gibbons the April 6 Council meeting is simply “the day the NSC met to confirm the decision to seek support for United Action”. He is supported by Herring. Gibbons argues that, despite the Council’s agreement to request contingency plans for the intervention to take place, it was obvious that Eisenhower “and most of the other members of the NSC were not inclined” to follow the PB recommendation and decided in favor of using American troops in Indochina. The President “emphatically rejected” unilateral intervention, Gibbons continues. Paul A. Anderson has called the meeting “external” thus illustrating how the US policy-makers were busy considering the deteriorating situation in Indochina and the request from Paris for assistance. According to Duiker, it was during the Council deliberations that Eisenhower had come to the conclusion that Indochina was not of vital importance to US security and thus not worth risking an all-out war. Hess concludes that the NSC deliberations reveal that the NSC members viewed United Action “as a means of deterrence”, which would have to be applied urgently.⁴⁰

After having reviewed all the available NSC-related source materials – including some of the kind to which Burke and Greenstein did not have access in the late 1980s – it is clear that the evidence – even though some of it is circumstantial – supports the account and analysis provided by Burke and Greenstein in the case of the April 6 Council meeting, but more than two options were clearly taken up in the course of the considerations. The scholars all appear, however, to be correct in pointing out the relative importance of the April 6 meeting. On the other hand, if we look at the discussion from the perspective of the malfunctions of the advisory process, we can draw some additional conclusions. Neither the President nor his NSC advisers agreed too willingly about the nature of the problem nor they did not leave any major alternative unexplored. Information was not received from a single channel and the military was unable to evaluate the plans alone. Eisenhower acted very responsively and attentively and he did not accept this advice over that given by

56, 59, 71–72, 100–101, 256–260. Later, Greenstein referred to Radford and Nixon as “the most vociferous proponents” of the intervention and Humphrey as having been the leader of “the opponents”. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, 2000, p. 52. Nor does Marks III consider Secretary Dulles to have been an interventionist even though this had been a standard view of Dulles until the 1990s. According to Marks III Dulles’s strategy during the complex Indochina crisis was “multi-faceted”. Marks, Frederick W., III, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), pp. 32, 34. See also Marks, Frederick W., III, “The Real Hawk at Dienbienphu: Dulles or Eisenhower?,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 59 (August 1990), pp. 297–322.

40 Stanley, *American Defense and National Security 1956*, p. 32; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 199–200, 204; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, p. 34; Anderson, Paul A., “What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision?,” in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Hermann, Kegley, Jr. and Rosenau, 1991, pp. 301–301; Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina*, 1994, p. 171; Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, pp. 127–128.

his other advisers. Almost all of the pieces of multiple advocacy were in place: the President was a committed magistrate, the NSC principals were policy advocates with sufficient analytical and bureaucratic resources and the Special Assistant was a custodian-manager. The participants engaged in debates and give-and-take received additional “outsider” information provided by the IAC and the Special Committee.

Regardless of significant developments at the top, the NSC machinery continued to proceed with its normal work. As the follow-up of the implementation of NSC 5405 the OCB produced a Status Report on it. This clarified the approved policies and the action agencies together with action taken and sometimes comments on it. The means of “promoting coordinated defense of Southeast Asia” were assigned to the OCB Special Committee on Indochina. Even though the Defense Department was the designated action agency, the Special Committee Report Phase “A” “further expresses means of achieving US objective” in aiding the French to carry out the Navarre Plan. The US representatives had continuously mentioned that they were aware of France’s efforts to preserve the French Union. In order to secure an acceptable solution at Geneva the US was to hold allied consultations prior to the Geneva Conference. In the case of Chinese overt aggression, the US intervention plans were valid. Dulles’s speech on March 29 clarified the issue. The State Department was the main party responsible for implementing the paragraphs of NSC 5405 relating to Indochina. The Pentagon, the CIA and the USIA had an equal number of tasks each.⁴¹

The crisis atmosphere was tangible. The following day Press Secretary Hagerty wrote about the meeting in his diary. His appraisal of the crisis hinted at its seriousness. Hagerty mentioned there had been a session on Indochina during the evening. He had reported it as being “just [a] weekly meeting which was ‘more convenient’ to hold on Tuesday”. Yet Hagerty commented: “situation getting crucial”. He also referred to the French request for 50 additional bomber planes flown by “American volunteers”, because the French lacked pilots. “Also considering [the] use of troops eventually”, Hagerty concluded.⁴²

The Dominoes are Falling

There were also important statements in the Legislative Branch which the Eisenhower Administration could not overlook. On April 6, the young pro-Vietnam Senator Kennedy spoke about the alternatives with respect to Vietnam. He dealt with the possibility of a negotiated settlement and the chance of continuing the struggle with the assistance of the US. Kennedy declared that he favored the United Action policy, but he also questioned the aid if there was no chance of success. He ended his address by saying that “In Indochina...the battle against Communism should be a battle, not for economic or political gain, but for the

41 OCB’s Status Report on NSC 5405, “US Policy with Respect to Southeast Asia,” April 6, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA.

42 Diary entry, April 7, 1954. Hagerty Diary, James C. Hagerty Papers, Box 1, DDEL.

security of the free world, and for the values and institutions which are held dear in France and throughout the non-Communist world, as well as in the United States.” In the following debate the Senators expressed their concern over the situation; they opposed unilateral intervention and colonialism and insisted that the President could not conceal essential information from them.⁴³

Eisenhower’s news conference of April 7, 1954, is famous and frequently quoted. His analogy clearly emphasized the importance of Indochina in Southeast Asia in the spirit of the NSC Policy Papers. The President explained what he meant by “falling dominoes”. He remarked in reply to a question about Indochina that:

“You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.”⁴⁴

According to Kalb and Abel, the domino speech was thereafter referred to as “justification for America’s step-by-step intervention in Indochina”. Greene agrees with Kalb and Abel and asserts it was “a variation on the cost-value theme of priorities”.⁴⁵

In the aftermath of the April 6 crisis meeting, the NSC-OCB machinery had problems in adapting to rapid situations, but this was the way it had been intended to function. On April 7, the OCB members had shared the view of the usefulness of the lengthy reports, but agreed that the Board Assistants should brief them. Furthermore, the OCB “agreed that events in Indo-China were developing so rapidly that coordination will have to be achieved informally for the most part rather than through formal Board meetings”.⁴⁶

The participant agencies sometimes needed second views, and usually the State and Defense Departments exchanged reports. The JCS, for example, had received a memorandum on the US reaction to possible Chinese air intervention in Indochina (dated March 12) from the State Department representatives⁴⁷. In their memorandum to Secretary Wilson the Chiefs explained that if a large

43 Kennedy’s address in the Senate and the debate, April 6, 1954. CR 1954, pp. 4671–4681; Kennedy, John F., *The Strategy of Peace*. Ed. Allan Nevins (London: Hamilton, 1960), pp. 86–91. See also editorial note, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1266.

44 Eisenhower’s news conference, April 7, 1954, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1954, p. 383. See also Ninkovich, Frank, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 223–224. In 1954 Eisenhower held altogether 33 news conferences, which was more than during any other year of his two terms. Pollard, James E., *The Presidents and the Press: Truman to Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs, 1964), p. 87.

45 Kalb, Marvin and Elie Abel, *Roots of Involvement: The U.S. in Asia, 1748–1971* (London: Pall Mall, 1971), p. 80; Greene, Fred, *U.S. Policy and the Security of Asia* (New York: McGraw, 1968), p. 60.

46 OCB Minutes, April 7, 1954, *Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB*, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA.

47 The Chiefs had received the memorandum at their March 12, 1954, regular State-JCS meeting. NSC-related matters were sometimes discussed at those meetings in the presence of Gleason.

number of Chinese planes were to appear in Indochina, the actions outlined in paragraph 31 of NSC 5405 would have to be actively considered. Furthermore, if the air intervention was imminent, the JCS suggested, political talks would have to be initiated to arrange for the implementation of the above-mentioned portion of NSC 5405. They wrote that they would inform the State representatives of the substance of their views the next time Indochina was on the agenda of a State-JCS meeting. When the Joint Chiefs deliberated on the military measures needed to attain the approved US objectives in Indochina, they wrote in their memorandum to Secretary Wilson that the “measures should be on as broad a multinational basis as possible”. Unilateral action should be taken, they added, “only under the most extreme circumstances, if at all”. The Chiefs recommended to Wilson that he should submit the views of the JCS to the Council as the official position of the Pentagon. The JCS complained to Wilson that there were problems in the implementation of the OCB Program for Indochina, Phase “A” (NSC Action 1019a), the responsibility for which had been assigned to the Department of Navy. The Chiefs noted that the NSC Action 1086 of April 6 had “overtaken” the requirement established by subparagraph 1 b i.e. In consequence, the JCS members announced that they would only consider the “plans generated by” the latter action. Later, the JCS suggested, when finalizing the NSC 5416, that the US should “continue to foster the development and improvement of the forces of the Associated States in order to enable them, with continuing French support, eventually to be capable of maintaining internal security without the assistance of French units and also to become an effective element in the containment of Communist China”.⁴⁸

Indochina-related issues were at times handled in a special way. After the second week of April, Cutler was probably not certain that the NSC members were going to receive enough information on Indochina. He, therefore, asked Bedell Smith to brief the Council on Secretary Dulles’s talks in Britain. Furthermore, Cutler requested that Bedell Smith should suggest to the NSC that it relieve the Special Committee of further responsibilities under NSC Action 1019b. The work of the Special Committee, Cutler added, with the OCB on

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48 The Deputy Secretary of Defense Kyes had directed the implementation of the OCB Program on March 18, 1954. JCS memoranda to Wilson, April 8 (2) and 9, 1954, Records of the JCS, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48), Box 4, section 62, RG 218, NA. In order to secure “coordinated action in consonance with actions to be taken by other Departments and agencies”, the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, Operations, was assigned to exercise coordinating authority. Admiral Donald B. Duncan’s memorandum to the offices of the Department of the Navy, April 9, 1954, *ibid.*; NSC 5416, “United States Strategy for Developing a Position of Military Strength in the Far East,” April 10, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, editorial note, p. 1307. About the NSC Actions see AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL. The State Department needed background studies for their views. Thus a report of a research project 354 of its Historical Division titled “United States Policy Toward Indochina, 1940–1953” had seen daylight in April 1954. Francis N. Dawson had access to the study, which he reported was in the custody of the State Department, at least in the early 1980s. See Dawson’s dissertation “The 1954 Geneva Conference: Eisenhower’s Indochina Policy.” (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 1985), p. 245. The JCS also later conducted historical studies of the role of the Chiefs during the Indochina crisis. See “The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff”, 1971.

NSC Action 1019a would, however, be continued. These reports were to be made in addition to the items on the formal agenda.⁴⁹ The Special Assistant thus performed his duties as a custodian-manager.

If there were problems associated with the implementation of NSC policies, they were to be brought to the attention of the Council members, especially if the opposition had come from US allies. Great Britain's role with respect to United Action, for example, was at the top of the agenda at the Council on April 13. To begin with, Allen Dulles briefed the NSC on Dien Bien Phu and reported that the French had succeeded in reinforcing its troops at the fortress as the FEC had reported about the Vietminh. Eisenhower was interested in the geographical conditions of the battle. CAT pilots continued to supply the besieged French. The fight, Dulles added, had "stepped up" elsewhere in Indochina. The President still could not understand why the French had left their forces to stand alone at Dien Bien Phu. He was accompanied by Radford in his puzzlement.⁵⁰

The Under Secretary of State Bedell Smith reported on Secretary Dulles's talks with Eden in London, just as Cutler had requested four days earlier. Bedell Smith said the British had falsely thought that the US "was trying to induce its allies to issue an ultimatum to the Communists with respect to Indochina". This impression had led to London's cautious reaction. Bedell Smith still saw the chance of success in getting the British to join the coalition. According to him, the British generals feared that United Action could result in a clash with China. Against this background, Bedell Smith went on, the joint communiqué, which called for an exploration of the possibilities for United Action, was promising. The Under Secretary of State stated that the task of the US at Geneva would be "to avoid being traded out of all our bargaining positions by our allies". This would take place even before the conference opened. This type of "sell-out" could be prevented, he added.⁵¹

Bedell Smith then turned, as he was also requested by Cutler, to the work of the Special Committee, whose assignment had been two-fold. In coming up with ways to help the Navarre Plan, the US had done its utmost, but the French action had in many cases been "worse than disappointing", the Under Secretary of State complained. At the previous week's meeting, the PB's report had "overtaken" the Special Committee's proposals concerning the US options in the situation where the French lost or pulled out of Indochina. Flemming was curious to hear whether the US was not actually trying to organize a regional defense organization before Geneva. In reply, the President said, the US "really

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49 Cutler's letter to Bedell Smith, April 9, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, Executive Secretary's Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL; also found in the Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, RG 59, NA. Normally the NSC agendas, which were compiled by Cutler, were circulated some three to six days - sometimes only a day - in advance of the meetings. See, for example, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, NSC Agenda, 1951-1961, Box 6, NSC Meeting Agendas 1954, RG 273, NA.

50 Memorandum of Discussion of the 193rd Meeting of the NSC, April 13, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1323-1324.

51 Memorandum of Discussion of the 193rd Meeting of the NSC, April 13, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1325.

couldn't hope to do more than get the nations in question to look into the problem". Although Eisenhower did not favor working out a regional grouping, he and Bedell Smith trusted that the British would "ultimately come along". Nixon did not know if the Korean and Indochinese matters would be taken up simultaneously at Geneva. The Under Secretary of State answered: "not if we could help it". It would be useful for the US, he went on, if the Communist negotiators adopted a hard-line intransigent attitude towards the Korean question, which would directly relieve "some of the pressure on" the Americans "to agree to a negotiated settlement" in the Indochinese case. The Council only noted the President's decision – at the request of Bedell Smith – to abolish the Special Committee, which had completed its work.⁵²

Intervention would have required the use of Presidential war powers. On the morning of April 14, Secretary Dulles had lunch with Eisenhower. The two discussed the war powers of the President. According to the Secretary of State, a paper which had been prepared at the Department of Justice seemed to be acceptable to a lawyer. Dulles emphasized, and was supported by Eisenhower, that if Congress was incapable of acting swiftly, the Executive Branch should be able to take rapid action. Because of the Bricker Amendment controversy, Eisenhower thought it better not to take the matter up at that point. Secretary Dulles shared this view, adding that his comments were such that he considered that the Council should keep them "in the background" of its "thinking and planning".⁵³

One suspects that the Eisenhower Administration may have exploited leaks in conducting foreign policy. Vice-President Nixon, for example, made a speech to newspaper editors on April 16, a little over week after Eisenhower's Domino speech. Following his speech, Nixon was asked whether the US would intervene in Indochina, if the French pulled out and whether this would be the only means to prevent Communist victory. Nixon replied that the question was hypothetical and that he did not believe that it would take place. But, he added, if it did happen, the President would have to make a unpopular decision and "send the boys in".⁵⁴ The New York Times reported on April 17 that Nixon had said to the American Society of Newspaper Editors that

"The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this Government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces."⁵⁵

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- 52 Bedell Smith used one example to illustrate the poor performance of the French. They had asked the Americans to provide an airlift for two French battalions to Indochina. After a positive response, both battalions had been given leave of two weeks. Memorandum of Discussion of the 193rd Meeting of the NSC, April 13, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1325–1326.
 - 53 Memorandum of Conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles (by MacArthur II), April 14, 1954, John Foster Dulles Papers, WH Memoranda series, Box 1, Meetings with the President 1954 (4), DDEL; also quoted in Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 143.
 - 54 Nixon's speech at the American Society of Newspaper Editors' annual convention in Washington, D.C., on April 16 quoted in Nixon, RN, 1978, pp. 152–153. No text has been found, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1346, footnote 2.
 - 55 New York Times, April 17, 1954; also quoted in Cooper, Chester L., *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, 1970), p. 73.

Nixon's message became public knowledge through the press. The leak caused a fuss as it was not known whether the answer was an official statement from the Eisenhower Administration. The President had talked to Press Secretary Hagerty about the matter. He ordered the State Department to prepare a press release "without cutting [the] ground from under Nixon", Hagerty wrote on April 17 in his diary. The statement explained that the Vice-President had replied to a hypothetical question and that the United States did not anticipate the French withdrawing from Indochina. According to Adams, the President called his Vice-President in order to comfort him and point out that the confusion showed the US that the situation in Indochina was serious. Secretary Dulles also told Nixon over the telephone that the "leak" would possibly have positive effects. Dulles referred to "favorable" reactions in the French media. Neither Eisenhower nor Dulles was "disturbed" – as the latter put it – by the matter. Nixon confirmed in 1965 that it had not been "an administration trial balloon" and took responsibility for his words. He explained that Secretary Dulles had informed Eisenhower and the NSC almost simultaneously about the refusal of the British.⁵⁶ Nixon's close friend, the political writer Roscoe Drummond, commented that the remarks of the Vice-President reflected "Mr. Nixon's awareness of all the information which comes before the National Security Council".⁵⁷ It is unlikely that it reflected the general attitude of the Council members. Nixon's public announcement again raised – after the incident of early February – the question of leaks.

The NSC machinery needed first-hand information from other governments to supplement their intelligence and diplomatic sources. Secretary Dulles traveled to Europe again on April 21. First he went to Paris, where he met Bidault and Eden. Bidault confessed the next day to Dulles that "the situation in Dien Bien Phu was now virtually hopeless". France was ready to internationalize the Indochinese War to save Dien Bien Phu. Bidault and Ely asked for US air intervention, but Dulles answered there were at that point many aircraft in the area which could not be maintained and operated by the existing crews and technicians. Ely disagreed with Dulles's judgement. British participation, Bidault said, was not all that vital for winning the war. If Dien Bien Phu fell, he added, that France would probably withdraw from the entire Southeast Asia and

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56 The French Press had written about Nixon's speech, merely reiterating the US intentions with regard to Indochina. It was generally viewed that the US was actually ready to intervene if the situation deteriorated. Cable from the US Embassy in Paris, April 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1346, footnote 3.

57 Diary entry, April 17, 1954, Hagerty Diary, James C. Hagerty Papers, Box 1, DDEL; Adams, *Firsthand Report*, 1961, p. 122; Randle, *Geneva 1954*, 1969, p. 93; Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and Nixon, April 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, footnote 4, p. 1347. On that same day, Dulles spoke over the telephone with Senator H. Alexander Smith. The Secretary said that "he was strongly opposed to getting American soldiers bogged down in Asia". He added the whole speech incident had been "unfortunate, but would blow over". Memorandum of the telephone conference between Dulles and Smith, April 19, 1954, *ibid*; Richard M. Nixon Oral History Transcript, PUL. For Nixon's own account see also Nixon, *RN*, 1978, pp. 152–153. Drummond was not certain, either, whether the President was worried about his deputy's speech. Drummond is quoted in Parnet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 1995, p. 320.

the French would not be interested in joining the EDC. On April 23, Bidault showed a note from General Navarre to Dulles, who concluded that the situation had worsened to the point that the only alternatives for saving Dien Bien Phu were either Operation Vulture or a request for a cease-fire. Dulles replied by saying that in the prevailing circumstances aerial intervention was out of the question. The Secretary of State promised that he would pass the message on to Eisenhower and would talk with Radford about the matter as soon as possible.⁵⁸

Back in Washington, Eisenhower was well informed about the situation, and Bedell Smith agreed over the telephone that direct unilateral intervention was not possible and that Dulles had to continue to persuade the British to accept United Action.⁵⁹ Dulles and Admiral Radford met Britain's Premier Eden on April 24. The American participants told Eden that, despite the fact that Dien Bien Phu was going to fall during the next couple of days, it was "impossible constitutionally" to carry out intervention under the present circumstances. Dulles and Radford urged the British to join the interventionists. Eden wanted to hear about the threat posed by the Chinese and the Soviets in the case of intervention. Radford replied that it was unlikely. Eden mentioned British involvement in any intervention would be "hell at home". The heads of both delegations shared the view that the French intentions after the possible fall of Dien Bien Phu remained unclear. The British leadership would need more time to consider the matter, Eden said, and went on that he was not "hopeful of immediate and favorable Cabinet decision on principle of intervention in Indochina".⁶⁰

The high-level talks between the Western allies intensified. Secretary Dulles and Eden met Bidault after their meeting. The Anglo-American participants wanted to obtain clarification as to what was the attitude of the Laniel Government towards Indochina, especially if Dien Bien Phu did not hold out. Bidault and Laniel were willing to fight on but, he added, the fall of the fortress would certainly be a great symbolic blow and have tremendous psychological effects. In addition, it would have severe military repercussions, Bidault pointed out. The French foreign minister felt quite pessimistic about the kind of stance the rest of the members of the French Government would take. Moreover, he did not believe there would be a cease-fire in Indochina before the Geneva

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58 Dulles cabled the President by stating: "The situation here is tragic. France is almost visibly collapsing under our eyes. There is, of course, no military or logical reason why loss of Dien Bien Phu should lead to collapse of French will, in relation both to Indochina and EDC. It seems to me that Dien Bien Phu has become a symbol out of all proportion to its military importance". Dulles' cable to Eisenhower and Bedell Smith, April 23, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1374-1375; Dulles's cable to Eisenhower, Bedell Smith, Wilson, and Radford, April 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1361-1362; Dulles' cable Eisenhower, Radford and Bedell Smith, April 23, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1374.

59 Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 349-351.

60 Memorandum of conversation between Dulles, Radford, and Eden (by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Livingston T. Merchant), April 26 (held April 24), 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1386-1391; Dulles' cable to Bedell Smith, April 24, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1386, footnote 1. For Eden's account of the meeting see Eden, *Anthony*, Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden (Boston: Houghton, 1960), p. 114-115.

Conference. Eden was openly reluctant about possible British participation in intervention and did not even want the French to request it, calling it a “mistake”. The tripartite meeting agreed, however, to stick to the communiqué issued a week earlier in Paris. Dulles and Bidault discussed a draft letter which contained the US position on Navarre’s message, which called for aerial bombardment of Dien Bien Phu. According to Bidault, the letter could prove useful. While in Paris, Dulles also visited Laniel, who predicted that the fall of Dien Bien Phu would promote the anti-war sentiment in France and that his government would fall as well. This had been the reason, the Premier explained, for his request for intervention. Dulles told Laniel the Administration would ask for Congressional approval if the British came along and if the Indochinese states were granted independence. The first condition, Dulles added, presented a problem as the British attitude could not be foreseen. The loss of Dien Bien Phu was also regarded as inevitable by Laniel at that moment.⁶¹

In Washington, Dulles’s draft letter was approved without discussion at the Council. It was meant to be a reply to the French request for US intervention. According to Dulles, this would make the US a belligerent. He referred to the communiqué of April 14 and reiterated the views that intervention was impossible in the present circumstances and that Congress would have to give its blessing. It was forwarded to Bidault and Eden. Dulles stated that intervention was not possible at that time, and that it could not be carried out without Congressional approval. This could not be achieved in hours and, in addition, United Action would be a prerequisite. Nothing could save any longer Dien Bien Phu, Dulles concluded. He also took up the idea of forming a collective defense organization. Bidault wrote back to his American colleague. He quoted French military advisers, who believed that it was not too late to lift the siege of Dien Bien Phu by “a massive intervention of American aviation”.⁶²

The French attempted to have some influence on the individual NSC advisers in order to gain a positive response from the President. In any event, on the evening of April 24, General Ely went to see his American counterpart Radford to pass on his Government’s request for an air strike against Dien Bien Phu. Ely stated that the request was made regardless of the fact the an aerial bombardment might not save the fortress from being overrun. The Chairman of the JCS did not promise Ely anything, because Dulles had already clarified the US position. Secretary Dulles was aware of the fact – as Dillon had written – that the collapse of Dien Bien Phu prior to a US strike could lead to the point that the French Government would no longer welcome the use of American forces. Dulles, however, was now against the idea of the immediate intervention requested by

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61 Dulles only showed the draft letter to Bidault as it had to be approved by the President. Dulles’s cables to Eisenhower and Bedell Smith (2), both on April 24, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, part 1, pp. 1391–1393, 1394–1396.

62 Dulles’s draft letter in his cable to Eisenhower and Bedell Smith, April 24, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, p. 1398–1399; Bidault’s letter in reply to Dulles in Ambassador Dillon’s cable, April 25, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1401. Dulles’ letter was sent to Bidault and Eden.

the French. “The security of the US is not directly threatened”, the Secretary wrote and continued that there were serious doubts that intervention under the prevailing conditions “would best protect our long-term interests”. He was not certain that the fall of the fortress could even be prevented by intervention. If the intervention was conducted hastily and without British support, Dulles warned, it could harm US relations with its ANZUS allies. In addition, he went on, there was not enough time to achieve an agreement with Paris on the independence of the Indochinese States or the training of their armies. “Once our prestige was committed in battle, our negotiating position in these matters would be almost negligible”, he added. For Dulles, there had been no changes in the situation during the previous three weeks with respect to the US position, whereas “deterioration militarily and politically in Vietnam as well as in Paris has been rapid”, Dulles urged Bedell Smith to tell Congressional leaders.⁶³

Despite the agreement and wishes of the NSC, London rejected United Action on April 25 because the British wanted the Geneva Conference to succeed and to achieve a negotiated settlement. This stand was presented to Dulles by Eden, who was at that time in Geneva. Dulles could not hide his disappointment. He suspected that the French would continue fighting and that the British might be blamed for the loss of Indochina. This annoyed the Secretary of State, who had also had Indochina crisis as a priority issue for some time. The recollections of his sister, Eleanor Lansing Dulles, in 1966 confirm this.⁶⁴

The issue was not settled, since President Eisenhower informed Republican Congressmen about the recent developments in Indochina on the opening day of Geneva on April 26. He considered United Action to be the best way to intervene and the US was “doing everything” to make it work. If it did not happen, the US had “to take a fresh look at the whole situation”. In the event of collective action – not only with the French – there would not be a great need for US ground troops as indigenous troops could do the work. In any case, in line with his position at the Council meetings, he “did not foresee entry” of US ground troops into Indochina. He urged the Republican Congressmen not to

63 Radford’s message to Dulles, Bedell Smith and Wilson (in Dillon’s cable), April 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1402–1403. Ambassador Dillon reported that the French Government was split over the issue. He suggested that in deciding the US “must...realize that military intervention by US Forces in next few days prior to fall of Dien Bien Phu appears to be the only way to keep the French Union Forces fighting in Indochina and so to save Indochina from Communist control”. Ibid. Dillon’s comments about the French government’s attitudes towards the aid request made Dulles cautious. He hinted that some ministers might not even be aware of the intervention request. Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, April 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1404–1405.

64 The British pursued a diplomatic settlement at Geneva. They were willing to guarantee it. Finally, they were, however, “prepared at once – if the French capitulate at Geneva – to study secretly with the US the military measures” needed to defend the remaining Southeast Asia. Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Eden (by Dulles and MacArthur II), April 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 553–557; USVNR, Book 9, pp. 388–389. See also Warner, Geoffrey, “Britain and the Crisis over Dien Bien Phu, April 1954: The Failure of United Action in Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, pp. 55–77. According to her later recollections, Indochina had been “very much on his mind”. Secretary Dulles had commented to his sister that “Eden has double-crossed me”. Eleanor Lansing Dulles Oral History Transcript, PUL.

rule out any possibilities, even that of dispatching “some units”. This would have to be done before the collapse of the FEC defense as it would “be a harder job to intervene later on”. The President cited recent reports from Paris, noting that Dien Bien Phu “was within two or three days of its fall”. In addition, the President pointed out the possible grave repercussions of the crisis. He continued that it would wise to concentrate on saving the rest of the Indochinese Peninsula. Eisenhower answered one question about sending in 400 US technicians by pointing out “how hard decisions were when it was a matter of doing unpleasant things that are not properly understood”. “Doing small things”[or making “fine judgements...in the best interest of the nation”] swiftly could in fact prevent the need to make “larger commitments later on”, the President suggested. For Eisenhower the Indochina situation constituted a dilemma, since the war seemed to continue but the possibility of “losing” the region to Communist control was highly undesirable. Eisenhower turned down the idea of isolationism, which came up in the discussion. One Senator spoke about disengagement if United Action did not work and the US was not ready to intervene alone since, he continued, the bottom line would be to “resist the Chinese”. Eisenhower did not believe in the failure of the collective action since overseas bases were an integral part of the US military scheme. The US, Eisenhower explained, was “attempting to get what we wanted at the least cost” and finding “the cheapest way out”. Eisenhower admitted that a danger lay in wait for his Administration, which might be blamed for failing to prevent the loss of Indochina, as had happened to the Democrats in the case of China. The President did not favor referring to the idea of “Fortress America”. He argued that isolationism was one of the reasons for the Dien Bien Phu crisis.⁶⁵ Eisenhower appears not to have received accurate information and advice based on the analysis of this information, because he seems to have been uncertain about which direction to take. Hence, his rhetoric was subtle and reasonably cautious.

Vice-President Nixon, who was present at the meeting, wrote in his diary that Charles Halleck had commented that dispatching the ground forces was not a good idea. According to Nixon, Eisenhower had replied by saying that the US should show its strength in those circumstances. The US, Eisenhower had continued, should stand firm while it was still possible and keep the Russians unaware of America’s real objectives.⁶⁶

65 In referring to the requests for US aerial intervention, Eisenhower concluded that the actions “would have to be on the basis of the free world against the forces of enslavement, not as a simple contest for power between the United States and Russia”. Cutler’s Summary of Principal Points Made by the President in his talk with Republican leaders, April 26, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL; memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Republican Congressmen (by Assistant Staff Secretary Arthur L. Minnich, Jr.), undated (held on April 26, 1954), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1412–1414; Adams, Firsthand Report, 1961, p. 123–124. According to Bernard M. Shanley, the President had said “we must not look as though we are making a power move”. Diary entry, April 26, 1954, Bernard Shanley Diaries 1951–1957, Box 2, V: The White House Years, DDEL, p. 1519.

66 Diary quoted in Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 153.

The President and his “Wisest Advisers” – The April 29 Council Meeting

As noted above, if a specific issue required thorough consideration in the NSC, the Special Assistant would make special arrangements. For example, in circulating three days in advance the Agenda of a Council meeting scheduled to be held on April 29 and apparently securing sufficient time for discussion on Indochina, Cutler wrote to Radford that the last item (Indochina) “looks for an oral current report” on Geneva and Indochinese situation in general. “It seemed better to put this item at the end of the meeting”, the Special Assistant confined to the JCS Chairman, “after disposing of routine matters and when only regular members would be present”. Cutler concluded that Eisenhower would be briefed by then, but that was not the case among some of the NSC principals.⁶⁷ This memorandum is particularly revealing in terms of the NSC process as it was written as a part of it and not afterwards.

The President was indeed briefed and he apparently followed the developments closely that interested him for one reason or another. On April 27, Eisenhower saw some signs of improvement at Dien Bien Phu. The French seemed to have received a boost and in consequence they had asked for supplies. The President had ordered a full inquiry into the request. The British were determined not to take part in United Action. They wanted to achieve a cease-fire at Geneva regardless of the difficulties of the French and the Vietnamese. Eisenhower considered that the British in fact feared the possibility of World War III. The ANZUS countries were thinking about cooperating with the US, France, the Associated States, Thailand, and the Philippines. Eisenhower thought about making a decision to act without Great Britain. He explained that the British Government did not understand the position of the US or the risks that were at stake in Southeast Asia.⁶⁸

Eisenhower held an off-the-record meeting on April 28. Bedell Smith, Radford and Cutler were present at the meeting. It is very probable that Indochina was on the Agenda. Mention of the meeting can be found in his Appointment Book and in Hagerty’s diary, but no minutes have been found.⁶⁹ Nixon writes that it was his idea to form a coalition without the British.⁷⁰

67 Mentioning the briefings to Eisenhower, Cutler used the expression “while the President will have been kept current”. Cutler’s memorandum to Radford, April 26, 1954 (unclassified upon removal of classified attachments), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL. According to Helgerson, the President constantly asked about the basis of information he received. He did not read the daily intelligence or other reports from any one agency. Staff Secretary Goodpaster – later with the assistance of President’s son, John S. D. Eisenhower – every early morning went through the various reports from the different departments and agencies. The reports had been merged into a single oral briefing. Eisenhower was not a passive listener; he sometimes requested to view some raw reports or analytic papers or even requested further work to be done. Helgerson, *CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates 1952–1992*, 1996, chapter 2, pp. 9–11.

68 Eisenhower’s memorandum for the files, April 27, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1422–1423. See also Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change 1953–1956*, 1963, pp. 351–353.

69 Editorial note, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1429.

70 Nixon, *RN*, 1978, p. 154.

The ambivalent nature of the situation facing the NSC is illustrated by Eisenhower's remarks at his press conference on Indochina and Geneva held on the morning of April 29. According to the President, the US would not wage war without Congressional consent. He made remarks about the solution (*modus vivendi*) by saying that "it was necessary to steer a course between the unacceptable and the unattainable". He commented that the British position was not the reason why the request for an aerial intervention had been turned down. The US had decided how to help the French and the British had no say in it. Indochina had already been discussed with Congressional leaders on a bipartisan basis already three times in April. Eisenhower refused to answer whether the requested air intervention would mean planes flown by US pilots. He declined to comment on the possible partition of Vietnam. He concluded that the defense budget would not be raised because of the Indochina War.⁷¹ Press Secretary Hagerty wrote in his diary that he and the President had gone through matters before the conference in the morning. Eisenhower had, according to Hagerty, commented about Geneva that it was difficult for him to talk about the issue as "[John] Foster [Dulles] is having a hard enough job over there as it is". In Eisenhower's thinking he would only address the question of Indochina in broad terms.⁷²

Indochina was high on the NSC priority list during late April 1954. The Council convened another important meeting on a "crisis" basis in the spirit of the April 6 meeting. Initially, Allen Dulles briefed the Council by quoting the recent intelligence estimate. Admiral Radford, who had consulted the French generals, had a much more pessimistic view on the matter – even though all of the intelligence agencies had been unanimous⁷³. Bedell Smith then reported from Geneva. He pointed out to the participants that the US went to the Geneva Conference "with a lesser degree of common understanding and position with

71 Eisenhower's press conference, April 29, 1954, Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1954, pp. 427–438. In his memoirs, Eisenhower wrote that the US had "no plausible reason...to intervene; we could not even be sure that the Vietnamese population wanted us to do so". Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 353.

72 Eisenhower was furious about the fact that the French had informed the fortress by radio without codes that planes were about to drop reinforcements, which had then led to severe casualties. Moreover, Navarre, the President added, did not "take our advice". Diary entry, April 29, 1954. Hagerty Diary, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1429–1430.

73 The intelligence community submitted "fuel" to the NSC machinery the following day. It took into account the possibility that alternative courses of action would be taken by the US in the immediate future. In its estimate, the intelligence community concluded that the loss at Dien Bien Phu "would have far-reaching and adverse repercussions, but it would not signal the immediate collapse of the French Union political and military situation in Indochina" during the following two to three months. The future depended on the reliability of the Indochinese troops. Politically, the fall of the fortress would lead to much more serious repercussions than simply militarily ones. An ultimate victory of the Vietminh would not be at hand, the estimate stated, because there were organized FEC units and "the hope among [the] Indochinese that the US might intervene". However, as a result of the fall of Dien Bien Phu the French Union position would deteriorate in a fast manner, and the position could collapse even during the year of 1954. Apparently, Allen W. Dulles's briefing partly drew upon the conclusions of this NIE. NIE-63/54, "Consequences Within Indochina of the Fall of Dien Bien Phu," April 30, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1451–1456.

its allies” than ever before. The British, Smith went on, wanted to see first what would be the outcome of the Conference before they might consider joining a regional grouping. The British behavior had annoyed the Americans. Smith read Secretary Dulles’s message from Geneva. It predicted that the French Government would have to step down and that the French were ready to agree with a settlement which would leave them enclaves that could be protected by the US and used for the training of the indigenous forces. The plan would keep the French fighting. Dulles envisioned that the ANZUS countries would join. The Secretary of State regarded Chinese intervention and the outbreak of a world war likely as a result of US intervention. The British were afraid of a nuclear war, Dulles wrote. Their allies would “follow a strong and sound US leadership, not necessarily a warlike one”.⁷⁴

Eisenhower, who was confident, next referred to his press conference earlier that day. The reporters had asked about the role of the British in assisting the French. The US, he added, made all the decisions alone, but that US-French intervention would have to be conducted “in concert with some other nations and at the request of” the Indochinese states. Bedell Smith went on to say that the ANZUS countries had doubts about the intervention because of elections in Australia. The two would probably take part in the regional grouping afterwards, Bedell Smith added. He believed that the French still hoped for relief in the form of an aerial attack by the US. Smith and Nixon wondered if the French would accept a partition of Vietnam at Geneva as they would be left with only three enclaves. Admiral Radford told the Council about his recent talks with the British and the French. Radford had issued serious warnings about the deteriorating military situation. According to him, General Ely had requested US intervention on April 24. Ely had commented that he was aware that “such intervention could have no direct bearing on Dien Bien Phu”. Ely added that it would be psychologically important to render US assistance before the fall of the fortress. Ely had implied that failure to give aid could harm US-French relations. Ambassador Dillon thought that only a limited number of the members French Government knew about Ely’s request. But, Radford quoted Dillon, if assistance was not given, the Laniel Government would fall and the its successor would not fight on. The British military saw the risk of World War III to be pre-eminent. Churchill had had a clear view of the EDC: the British and the Americans should go ahead together without waiting any longer for the French. Intervention was out of the question for Churchill as no British area – such as Malaya – was being directly threatened. Finally, Radford briefed the NSC on the military situation in Indochina. His conclusion was that the French had lost the initiative and “were actually on the defensive and in some trouble”. The size of the Dien Bien Phu fortress had been reduced to 1,500 yards in diameter. The outnumbered FEC had suffered severe casualties and was lacking

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74 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1431–1433.

supplies. Moreover, the reinforcements could not get through except by airdrop, Admiral said.⁷⁵

Even though the President had clearly abandoned the intervention option, unilateral intervention was taken up by Stassen. He urged the NSC to “make its ultimate decision” and favored unilateral US intervention in the southern parts of Indochina in the case of the French loss. This would have to be carried out regardless of the British. The Governor said the US should show strength to “save the rest of Southeast Asia”. The lack of determination now, Stassen phrased, “would not only critically endanger its [US] interests in Southeast Asia, but would have the gravest repercussions on the United States position throughout the free world”. Congressional permission and the support of the people for intervention would be obtained if the President clarified the need to act in order to stop communism, Stassen concluded. Eisenhower, who seems to have been bothered, answered by pointing out that Stassen had just simplified the issue. According to the President, Stassen was incorrect in his analysis about the attitude in Congress and amongst the people. If the French lost and the US decided to intervene, the President added, the peoples of Asia would see American colonialism succeeding that of French. Reports from Vietnam had indicated there were not many Vietnamese who believed in the French pledge of independence and thus lacked any cause to continue the war. For Eisenhower voiced concern that the US would have difficulties in finding troops to take the place of the FEC. The President ended his remarks by asking: “Where and how could the United States intervene in Indochina?”⁷⁶

Stassen disagreed with Eisenhower over the latter’s statement on Vietnamese skepticism. The Vietnamese would trust the Americans, Stassen argued, and added that the Indochinese states “would be glad to invite US intervention”. The FEC would pull out in phases, which would give the US time to deploy American troops. The President shared the FOA Director’s latter view on a transition. He was afraid that the French would leave the area in a fashion which would “prevent the United States from taking over the French responsibilities”. Stassen strongly doubted Eisenhower’s point and recommended that the US should not “go into Indochina” as allies of the French in order to improve their role but instead to “take command of the situation” to win the hearts of the local armies. The President envisioned an all-out war against China and possibly with the Soviet Union if the US went in unilaterally. To this Stassen commented that the Chinese were unlikely to go to war if the US forces operated only in the

75 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1434–1438. Eisenhower had made his concerted action point three days earlier in a letter to his personal friend Alfred M. Gruenther, Eisenhower’s letter to Gruenther, April 26, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1419–1421.

76 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1438–1439. The President later restated to an interviewer his colonialism argument that the US was “not going to be a part to any war that has its only purpose the reestablishing of colonial power”. Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Transcript, PUL.

southern parts of Indochina. The President rebutted Stassen's views by reiterating his strong conviction that collective action (allied policy) was a basic principle of the whole US national security policy. Policing the world would lead to the loss of "significant support in the free world" and to accusations of "imperialistic ambitions", Eisenhower suggested. Stassen referred to US leadership and believed that their allies would follow in due course.⁷⁷

The President could not answer Flemming's question about the possible request for US intervention by the Indochinese states. Eisenhower was strongly against the idea of tying the US to skirmishes all around the globe because it would diminish the defenses of the nation and they would continue "indefinitely". The President could not accept Stassen's suggestions about redeploying to Indochina some of those US forces stationed in South Korea, as President Syngman Rhee had in fact asked for more forces. In Stassen's opinion, there was no time to waste and the decision had to be made at that moment. Eisenhower commented that he would first have to

"...ask himself and all his wisest advisers whether the right decision was not rather to launch a world war. If our allies were going to fall away in any case, it might be better for the United States to leap over the smaller obstacles and hit the biggest one with all the power we had. Otherwise we seemed to be merely playing the enemy's game – getting ourselves involved in brushfire wars..."⁷⁸

The possibility that the US war machine would be drawn into local conflicts was rejected by Stassen, who argued that the US could go to the brink and threaten its adversaries. The Indochina war was different as the Communists had been there before Eisenhower took the office. Assistant Secretary Kyes seconded the President's views that the Americans should commit their forces to attacking the Soviet Union. Dispatching six divisions would call for a general mobilization, the President said. There might be a third solution to the problem, Bedell Smith said. He basically agreed with the President's judgement about the intervention. According to Bedell Smith, the use of US aerial power could still change the situation despite the evident fall of Dien Bien Phu, as the French had suggested. If this was true, he added, and the FEC could make the best use of their ground troops and if a few states in the region would join them, the Congressional precondition of United Action could be fulfilled. US ground forces would not then have to be sent in. This would have been acceptable to the President but the decision of Australia not to join the regional grouping had ended this option. Bedell Smith thought that, provided everything worked according to plans, US

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77 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1439–1440.
78 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1441–1442. When the President touched again the issue of World War III, he referred to sending to Indochina "six, eight, ten, however many (divisions) were required..." Before making the decision Congress and his advisers would have to address it. *Ibid.*, p. 1442.

military advisors could go there in order to take over the training responsibility of the indigenous forces, as the Navarre Plan called for. This could be contemplated regardless of the events at Geneva, Bedell Smith concluded.⁷⁹

Vice-President Nixon agreed with Bedell Smith that intervention would not necessarily mean the introduction of US ground troops. The American “chief assets” in the region were the Indochinese states, he suggested. Aerial attacks would have a psychological effect in showing the Communists that the US will continue. It seemed, Nixon went on, that if nothing was done, “the British [would] have a veto over our freedom of action”, even though the French had asked the US for help. The Vice-President believed that there would be allies for a United Action, at least Thailand and the Philippines, and also Australia, later, after its national elections. The US action should be undertaken, regardless of the British, and without Australia, if necessary. Eisenhower said he would forward this proposal to Congress if it was absolutely certain that the French would continue the war.⁸⁰

Cutler reminded the Council of the British military’s view that more ground forces would be needed to achieve a victory. Radford answered that the JCS’s position differed slightly as it was not a priority to win the war fast. Bedell Smith still had a faith in the Navarre Plan if it was correctly implemented. He added that the French should be required to give guarantees for the independence of the Associated States. To Nixon this was the task of the US. Stassen was sure the Indochinese liked the Americans but the President was hesitant even about their willingness to request intervention. Smith recommended that the Council should give him time to negotiate with the ANZUS countries and to meet Secretary Dulles at Geneva. The French, Bedell Smith said, should be told that the issue was still open and that the decision would be made by the Council the following week. After a long debate, Eisenhower agreed with Bedell Smith’s proposal and concluded that, in order to convince Congress and the Americans, talks about a ground force intervention should be ended as “people were frightened, and were opposed to this idea”. The only concrete result of the three-hour April 29 meeting was that they should continue to work towards the regional grouping without the British, and that they should also wait for Secretary Dulles.⁸¹

Eisenhower quoted the meeting in his memoirs and added that the air intervention would “raise French and Vietnamese morale and improve, at least temporarily, the entire situation”. The former President remembered also having thought of “striking directly at the head instead of the tail of the snake, Red China itself”. Yet his diary shows that two days earlier he had not regarded

79 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1442–1443.

80 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1443.

81 Memorandum of Discussion of the 194th Meeting of the NSC, April 29, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1444–1445.

the situation at Dien Bien Phu as crucial.⁸² According to Ewald, at the April 29 meeting the Vice-President had argued for the air strikes “for their psychological value”. Nixon’s own account of the meeting reveals that the Council used an hour and three-quarters to talk about the Indochinese situation. The former Vice-President wrote that Dulles’s cable had “indicated considerable pessimism”. Eisenhower had, according to Nixon’s recollections, been “extremely serious and seemed to be greatly concerned about what was the right course to take”. Nixon portrayed Stassen as hawkish and the President as hesitant and cautious. In contrast to Nixon’s views, Burke and Greenstein have detected no “uneasiness” on the part of the President, even though he had been considering the air strike against Dien Bien Phu.⁸³

Herring and Immermann, who emphasize the importance of the meeting, argue that in its course no substance was, however, produced by any of the options presented. They continue, however, that Eisenhower’s decision not to intervene received its formalization in the wake of the meeting. Herring alone concluded that the Council decision of April 29 “sealed Dienbienphu’s doom”. Gardner correctly points out that even though some Members of Congress later supported US policies on Vietnam, during the crisis of April 1954 “the basic decisions on all these questions (relating to Vietnam) were made in the National Security Council and the executive offices of its members”. A summary by Secretary Dulles “triggered the sharpest [NSC] debate yet over Indochina”, Gardner adds, and continues it was held “with practically every one of the president’s closest advisers advocating some form of intervention along lines Dulles suggested”. Short concludes that the question of intervention “was still very much alive” within the Council, although “one may judge from the respective weight of the principal opponents that it was a no-contest”. According to Short, the April 29 meeting was “long and furious” in which Stassen “mounted... the unlikely challenge [non-intervention] to US policy”. Short wonders why Radford left the interventionist position to Stassen, Nixon and Bedell Smith, while Dulles’s view was “more equivocal”, even though his subordinates favored “some sort of intervention”. In addition, Short concluded, if Dulles had been given the lead then “one feels there was hardly anyone in the NSC who would not have followed Eisenhower over the precipice. For Paul A. Anderson

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82 Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, pp. 354–355. He explained in his letters to his friends General Alfred Gruenther and Captain “Swede” Hazlett that he wanted to show the Communists and get the French to “internationalize” their war. He did not foresee a very good future for the fortress. Eisenhower’s letters to Gruenther and Hazlett, April 26 and 27, 1954. *Ike’s Letters to a Friend, 1941–1958*. Ed. Robert Griffith (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984), pp. 124–126. Both letters also printed in *FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2*, pp. 1419–1421, 1428. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 220–221 and Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 38; Eisenhower wrote to his diary that “the situation at Dienbienphu looks a bit brighter than it has for the last ten days”. Diary entry, April 27, 1954, AWF, DDE Diary series, Box 4, DDE Personal Diary, DDEL; also printed in *The Eisenhower Diaries*. Ed. Ferrell, 1981, p. 279.

83 Ewald, Jr., *William Bragg, Eisenhower the President* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1981), p. 110; Nixon, *RN*, 1978, pp. 153–154; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 263. Gibbons incorrectly refers to the April 28 Council meeting. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 218–220, 222.

this meeting is still an “external” as it shows the gravity of the situation in the minds of the Council principals and that they were contemplating the French request for aid. Burke and Greenstein conclude that even though the April 6 Council meeting had, to a great extent, spelt “the end of the extensive use of NSC meetings as a forum for examining study group reports or an arena for sharply joined multiple advocacy of impending policy options bearing on Indochina” and an end to the idea of unilateral intervention, the April 29 meeting stands out as an exception. The meeting “briefly entertained” the intervention option without the British. In this latter “card of multilateral intervention” phase, the Administration mainly utilized the Council meetings, Burke and Greenstein argue, “as a setting for briefing foreign policy advisers on ongoing events and evolving tactics”. In reply to Stassen’s pressures Eisenhower had, Burke and Greenstein add, in referring to the “wisest advisers”, employed “a New Look rationale”. Challenger shares this view. Billings-Yun writes that at the April 29 meeting Eisenhower “fought a virtual one-man battle against his security advisers to enforce his decision against war – and to give the Geneva peace process a chance”. Anderson emphasizes that in Eisenhower’s thinking unilateral intervention meant “charges of imperialism, a weakening of US global power, and the risk of total war”. Another “fundamental issue” for Eisenhower, Anderson adds, was collective security. According to Khong, the NSC record of April 1954 shows that Eisenhower had taken “multilateral injunction very seriously” and that the air raid was “a live option”. Khong explains that “the issue of multilateralism” at the April 29 Council meeting persuaded Eisenhower to drop the option of an air strike. Unlike the two-phase interpretation made by Burke and Greenstein, Khong asserts that they were simultaneous. On the other hand, Greenstein and Immerman argue that the April 29 meeting illustrates that Eisenhower acted reservedly and cautiously if his advisers recommended direct military intervention.⁸⁴ The language of the OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405 (for the period of January 16 through July 21, 1954) supports the conclusion reached by Burke and Greenstein. The OCB Working Group wrote that a phase of

84 Herring and Immermann, “Eisenhower, Dulles and Dienbienphu,” 1984, p. 361; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, p. 37. Gardner argues that the NSC members were “stimulated by the first workable plan”, which made them “raring to go”. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 129, 258; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 145; Anderson, Paul A., “What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision?,” in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Hermann, Kegley, Jr. and Rosenau, 1991, pp. 301–303; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 101; Challenger, “The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 51; Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, 1988, p. 150. About the impact of New Look on Radford’s attempts to advocate the use of nuclear weapons in Indochina see Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 1997, p. 62; Anderson, “Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam,” 1989, pp. 113–114. Khong argues, in contrast to Burke and Greenstein, that after the January 8 Council meeting “the Eisenhower administration pursued a ‘two-track policy’”: the United Action and air strike options. Khong, *Analogies at War*, 1992, pp. 75–76, 78; Greenstein and Immerman, “What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina?,” 1992, p. 579. Grosser thinks “in retrospect” that the air strike could not have saved Dien Bien Phu and it would not perhaps have “unleashed a Chinese reaction”. Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945*, 1982, p. 134.

“intensified measures to help the Navarre Plan succeed” was followed by an “emergency attempt to secure [the] ‘United Action’” phase before the “saving all that could be saved at Geneva” phase commenced.⁸⁵ Khong is, however, right in claiming that there was overlap in the respect that the NSC consideration of intervention also continued after the beginning of April, but as background and not as explicitly as the policy of concerted action had been decided.

Once again, it is quite easy to agree with Burke’s and Greenstein’s analysis of the nature of the April 29 Council meeting. Moreover, there appears not to have occurred any major malfunctions in the advisory process. The decision did not come too easily, since considerable time had been used for debate and discussion. A wide range of options were clearly set forth and advocated by committed and well-supported policy advocates in the presence of a highly motivated magistrate and under a custodian’s managerial control. Finally, information was obviously received from multiple channels.

It was not always an easy task for the Special Assistant to try to make sense of the NSC discussions and instructions. The wording of the formal record of action of the April 29 meeting, for example, required fine-tuning. The following day, Cutler sent a memorandum to Bedell Smith concerning the issue. The PB had discussed the situation in its meeting on April 29. In the course of the session it had been pointed out that a formal request from the Associated States as well as Congressional authorization were needed as the NSC action was not enough to conduct any intervention. The size of the coalition, Cutler said, should be large enough not to give the impression that the US was acting alone. It also became clear that the French would not grant independence to the Indochinese states during the subsequent two years. Thus, an essential precondition for Congressional consent had not been fulfilled. It was, therefore, very difficult to get the peoples in the area to request intervention, which was a requirement set forth by Eisenhower himself. The PB talked about the effects of using “new weapons”. The PB envisaged the options if the US were to make the decision in the affirmative or even to loan one of the weapons to the French. Should the US tell its “proposed associates in regional grouping” about the decision and would it make them scared? What would France and Britain, the PB questioned, do with respect to the American military bases since they would “take alarm”? An attack using atomic weapons would reduce the possibility of Chinese retaliatory action, whereas the inability to do so would, in turn, increase it. The members of the PB thought that neither China nor the Soviet Union was prepared to fight an atomic war, since the US was ahead in the development of such weapons.⁸⁶

85 OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, July 30, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–61, OCB Central Files series, Box 79, Southeast Asia, DDEL.

86 Draft of formal Record of Action and PB deliberations in a memorandum by Cutler to Bedell Smith, April 30, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1445–1448. Short correctly points to the PB discussions about a “loan” as the nuclear weapons in question. He wonders about the repayment. Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 151, endnote 72 .

The small-group meetings associated with the NSC work did not, as has been noted above, contain a consistent cast of participants. During the morning following the April 29 Council meeting, Eisenhower met with Nixon and Cutler. The U.S. had agreed that it should go ahead with forming the regional grouping without announcing the intention concerning the “new weapons” and that the allies would inevitably ask about the US attitude to this issue. The participants also shared the view that the atomic weapons would not have the same desired effect on the Vietminh concentrations in the jungle around Dien Bien Phu as conventional high explosive and napalm bombs. The French, Eisenhower and Nixon agreed, could be led to believe that “a few” atomic charges could possibly be given to them on loan. Previous warnings were sufficient deterrents against possible Chinese retaliation. The fast compilation of the regional grouping was a priority, the two concluded.⁸⁷

Nixon’s recollections of the meeting between Eisenhower, Cutler and himself are somewhat more informative and there is no need to doubt their objectivity. The Vice-President had been asked by the President what his opinion was concerning the use of the atom bomb. He had answered that regardless of any decision on the matter he “did not think it was necessary to mention it to our allies before we got them to agree on United Action”. It could possibly have been enough just to carry out some bombing raids in order to show the opponents that “we were determined to resist”, Nixon had added. Eisenhower had then concluded that he did not feel that the US could unilaterally use the atom bomb and that he shared the view of the Vice-President concerning the secrecy of the issue. According to the Eisenhower biographer, Ambrose, the President had commented to Cutler that “we can’t use those awful things against Asians for the second time in less than ten years”.⁸⁸ The PB had briefly contemplated the kind of situation in which nuclear weapons against the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu could be employed. Analyzing the meeting, Bundy asserts that “the same rather casual notion” which Bidault thought he had heard from Dulles came up again accompanied with military-like calculations to the effect that Dien Bien Phu was not a good target area.⁸⁹

The Council Policy Papers were often so broad that they could be interpreted and used as guidance even though there were no specific Papers available. This was facilitated by the long-range nature of the Papers and the thorough planning which multiple agencies and departments contributed. NSC 5405, for example, included references to US policy on the Geneva negotiations. The guidelines referred to persuading the French not to engage in a settlement, which would be

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87 Minutes of the meeting between Eisenhower, Nixon and Cutler in Cutler’s memorandum to Bedell Smith, April 30, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1447–1448. Prados suggests that a marginal note in Cutler’s record refers to the “question of law”, but that the President considered informing the French about an offer to give them atomic weapons. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 155.

88 Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 154.

89 Bundy, McGeorge, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random, 1988), p. 269–270.

unacceptable to the US. The French should be made aware that good terms could not be achieved in the prevailing military situation and that a coalition government “would eventually turn the country [South Vietnam] over to Ho Chi Minh”. The NSC 5405 was against a cease-fire prior to negotiations as it would lead to a deterioration in the military posture of the French and the Vietnamese. If the French decide to negotiate, the US should “be consulted and seek to influence the course of the negotiations”.⁹⁰

In their preparation of decisive NSC meetings the President and the Special Assistant sometimes needed to confer with the State Department representatives. On May 5, Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles, in the presence of Counselor MacArthur II and Cutler, discussed the regional grouping. The President commented that it was not a new idea but was consistent with US policy during the post-war years. The participants then tried to guess the current British position on the matter. Eisenhower directed Dulles not “to undercut or repudiate the UK publicly” even though there was much to complain about. The Secretary of State pointed out that the French had been, and still were, opposed to all US attempts to internationalize the war. They did not, Dulles added, have any policy at the moment on Indochina. The top two shared the view that the conditions “did not justify US entry into Indochina as a belligerent”. They made several modifications to the statement prepared by Dulles which the President was going to make at his press conference later that day. It was emphasized by the President that there would be no unilateral intervention to help the French. Dulles complained that their Western allies were misquoting the Americans and even voicing “falsehoods”. In reply to Cutler’s question about the regional grouping, Dulles said it was time to proceed with it swiftly. Eisenhower suggested, and Dulles agreed, that the US should start talks with the British to find out the areas where they could agree and then continue negotiations with other nations. After the meeting Cutler suggested that with the approval of Bedell Smith and the President himself the PB had yet to do anything about the regional grouping “lest matters be further confused through some leak of its activities”. Dulles intervened to say that the PB should commence wide range consideration of the topic “on a highly restricted basis”. Dulles and Cutler agreed to do so.⁹¹

Burke and Greenstein have regarded this meeting as illustrative of the advisory process. They explain that the informal and formal aspects of the

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90 Quoted in a memorandum by the Special Adviser to the US delegation Heath to Bedell Smith, May 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 672–673.

91 Cutler’s memorandum of a breakfast conference between Eisenhower, Dulles, MacArthur II and Cutler, May 5, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1470. Later that day, the President held a news conference in which he defined the situation in Indochina and at the Geneva Conference as unclear. Eisenhower said that much depended upon the French and the Indochinese states. In addition, he revealed that planning work for Southeast Asian collective defense mechanisms was proceeding but that it would take time. The knowledge about organizing process might, the President concluded, be advantageous at Geneva. Eisenhower’s news conference, May 5, 1954, Public Papers of Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 450–459.

process, “rather than being compartmentalized, interacted with and reinforced each other”. According to Burke and Greenstein, Cutler, who acted as “rapporteur”, told Secretary Dulles that with the approval of Eisenhower and Bedell Smith he had not directed the PB to explore the requirements for the regional grouping. This, Burke and Greenstein argue, suggests that even during a phase in which the informal aspect of the advisory process came first, “the operating procedures and understandings of Eisenhower’s aides led them to the more systematized process of NSC study and planning”. On the other hand, Destler rebuts the traditional view that the NSC meetings would have been Eisenhower’s “chief advisory channel” for his key decisions, including Dien Bien Phu. According to Destler, who emphasizes the informal advisory arrangements, the NSC “influenced policy at the margins”.⁹² Burke and Greenstein appear to be exaggerating somewhat in emphasizing the role of the informal meetings. Their arguments, however, seem more likely than those of Destler, who almost belittles the formal Council system.

The NSC-OCB machinery did not suspend its actions despite the apparent unclarity of the situation. They continued to pursue programs approved in earlier policy papers. The OCB, for example, agreed on May 5 that Chief MAAG General O’Daniel should be informed that the US, as MAAG had recommended, was going to arm the North Vietnamese militia from the stocks then being used by the FEC. They noted that the stocks would be replenished “in due course”. Two weeks later it was announced that the French had indeed agreed to supply the militia. On the other hand, the JCS was considering the suspension of American military aid to Indochina in the event of a cease-fire. In their recommendations to Secretary Wilson, which they hoped would become the Pentagon position at the NSC, the Chiefs wrote that if a cease-fire was agreed upon by the belligerents, American military assistance, with the exception of spare parts, should “immediately be suspended”.⁹³

The Council and the Fall of Dien Bien Phu

The May 6 Council Meeting

If need be, the Council could engage in time-consuming, thorough discussions on specific items. Because the President had already been briefed by Secretary Dulles, Vice-President Nixon presided during Secretary Dulles’s 45-minute report. In it, he said that the French and the British had agreed “to examine the

92 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 102; Destler, “The Presidency and National Security Organization,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 232.

93 OCB Minutes, May 5 and 19, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA. The OCB noted that there was a new “firm channel” for military aid requests from the French. They were to be made, as Pentagon proposed, through Paris and Saigon MAAGs. OCB Minutes, May 12, 1954, *ibid.*; Wilson’s memorandum for Lay, Jr. May 6, 1954, with JCS’s views (dated April 30, 1954) as an inclosure, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

possibility” of building a defense coalition in Southeast Asia. Concrete measures had, however, not taken place as Premier Eden had changed his mind. The firm British decision not to join in the use of force and or even to plan this prior to the end of the Geneva Conference had not been altered despite attempts made by Dulles and Radford. Eden had, Dulles went on, understood the danger threatening Southeast Asia, but he did not consider it to be urgent. The newspapers had frequently written about aid requests by the French. The Secretary said there had been no formal requests so far to attack Dien Bien Phu. Only two separate “suggestions for US air strikes”⁹⁴ had come. According to Secretary Dulles the French were unreliable; their government was split over the issue and they were unwilling to discuss conditions. Dulles did not see any point in going in because the French were reluctant. Yet, Dulles said, if the French accepted the conditions and the British could be expected to come along later, pressured by the ANZUS nations, the US could still intervene. Dulles had not been pleased with the way the Soviets and the Chinese accused the US during the opening phase (on Korea) of the Geneva Conference. None of the Western nations stood up for the Americans. The Communists were more confident of their strength than the US had expected and therefore, if the US decided to intervene, there was a possibility of Chinese retaliation, especially if the intervention took place without the British.⁹⁵

Allen Dulles did not have much to comment about Dien Bien Phu. The situation had deteriorated a bit further as five positions had been lost and a flooding river was causing serious problems for the French. There was no relief in sight either, Director Dulles added. He then turned the attention of the Council members towards the dangerous military situation in the Tonkin Delta area. The President called the FEC’s efforts “great gallantry”, which resembled the siege of Carthage. He did not see why the French had not “taken advantage” of the defenders’ “magnificent performance”.⁹⁶

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- 94 Dulles referred to “informal suggestions”. The first one had been conveyed by Bidault and Lanier through Ambassador Dillon on April 4. The Secretary of State traced this back to Ely, who had received “an erroneous impression” in Washington about US readiness for aerial intervention. This had happened despite the fact that he and Radford had made clear that “certain fundamentals and conditions” (independence, considerably more training responsibility of the armies of the Indochinese States, joint military planning and a promise not to withdraw) had to be met by the French. The second request came on April 23 when a cable from Navarre was shown to Dulles by Bidault. The French Premier argued that with Dien Bien Phu lost the French could not talk about preconditions and there was a period of only 48 hours in which to act. Yet Dulles had restated the earlier position of the US. Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1483–1484.
- 95 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1481–1486.
- 96 Allen Dulles reported four positions lost by the French. Admiral Radford’s sources knew about a fifth one. Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1492–1493; The IAC had concurred at the end of April – when estimating the developments in Indochina during the next two-three months after the possible overrunning of Dien Bien Phu – that the loss of the fortress “would have far-reaching and adverse repercussions, but it would not signal the immediate collapse of the French Union political and military situation in Indochina”. NIE-63/54, “Consequences within Indochina of the Fall of Dien Bien Phu,” April 30, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1451.

Secretary Dulles also referred to Eden's latest proposal to Bedell Smith at Geneva. According to this, the British were willing to hold talks on Indochina and Southeast Asia within the framework of the Five-Power Staff Agency⁹⁷. Eden added that the Colombo Conference Powers⁹⁸ and Thailand should be informed and possibly later be invited to join. He also wanted a joint public announcement. Bedell Smith regarded Eden's proposal as a true concession on the part of the British and therefore he recommended it to be agreed upon by the Council. Secretary Dulles basically shared Bedell Smith's view but he had already told Eden that including the Colombo Powers in the planning would cause difficulties as the US wanted to invite – against the will of the British – South Korea and Formosa. Eisenhower strongly opposed the idea that only “five white nations” should take part. As a matter of fact, Secretary Dulles had reported his similar conviction to Congressional leaders the previous day⁹⁹. The President then came up with the idea that the proposed Five-Power discussions could be disguised as “it would seem to be conferring voluntary aid on a group of Asian states which sought such aid cooperatively”. The joint statement should, Eisenhower added, follow on his suggestions. When Cutler inquired whether the Indochinese states and the Philippines could take part in the Five-Power negotiations, Dulles said the British were afraid of getting tangled up in the fighting and therefore they would most likely oppose the participation of the three belligerents.¹⁰⁰

Bidault was going to make a proposal at Geneva which called for a controlled cease-fire. After going through the paper, Secretary Dulles read Bedell Smith's comments on it to the NSC. The Under Secretary believed the US could not stop the French proposal – even though it was far below the guidelines of the Navarre Plan – if there was no other option to be presented. The initial position of the French in Bidault's paper was not as bad as the US had feared, Bedell Smith concluded. He had doubts that the French would be tough enough in demanding sufficient controls. Instead, he expected that they would accept their opponents' insistence on an immediate cease-fire without controls. This development could be forestalled, Bedell Smith wrote, if the US could “strengthen their [French] hand by increasing Communist uncertainty as to possible US intervention and by achieving success in organizing some kind of Southeast Asian coalition”.¹⁰¹

The President, who appeared determined, responded to the comments by saying he did not oppose the idea that the French should utilize “the idea of US

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97 The Five-Power Staff Agency was based in Singapore and included military representatives from the US, Great Britain, France and the ANZUS countries.

98 India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia.

99 Dulles said in reply to Bidault's second request that he had repeated the earlier US position about meeting political conditions, making United Action work and asking Congress for approval. For the Record of the Meeting between Secretary of State Dulles and Congressional leaders, May 5, 1954 see FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1471–1477.

100 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954. AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1486–1487.

101 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954. AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1487–1488.

intervention as a means of influencing the Communists”. Yet, he added and was supported by the Secretary of State, the members of the American delegation at Geneva should not do so. Eisenhower remarked that the US representatives were not to talk about unilateral intervention, because it would not be in line with US foreign policy. He emphasized that Congress would have to authorize the use of force in Indochina. Vice-President Nixon was confused about whether the US was going to take up the British Five-Power Staff Agency proposal or continue the creation of regional grouping also with the Asian nations. Secretary Dulles answered that, on the one hand, he was for the British proposal “as one element in a broader political framework”, but on the other he would like to have seen more countries involved. Nixon warned that the Five-Power examination as well as unilateral intervention would be viewed by the Asian countries as pure colonialism. Dulles explained that the Five-Power arrangement would not be in charge but only a mechanism to compile a larger grouping which would also include Asian nations. He doubted if the British agreed with his interpretation.¹⁰²

Secretary Dulles wanted to hear Admiral Radford’s views. The latter pointed out the British proposal would need a thorough appraisal by the JCS. The Five-Power Staff Agency talks, Radford suggested, would serve the needs of the British but not of the US, as it left out the Asian nations. Furthermore, the arrangement would take a long time to materialize, too long to meet the “current emergency”. Military issues in the defense of Southeast Asia were almost agreed upon but it would mean months of working to solve the political and economic disputes, Radford concluded. Eisenhower regarded the British proposal as psychologically appealing even though there were serious disagreements. For the President, the Five-Power Staff Agency “would at least provide a good facade behind which the real work could be done by the others”. Wilson added that the real difficulties were caused by the sizes of the Asian nations. Thailand, for instance, was not big enough to do much. Regardless of the size, there was the symbolic dimension of Asian participation, the President replied.¹⁰³

Secretary Dulles reminded the Council that Molotov had spoken at Geneva and said that no Asian nation would join the regional grouping. Eisenhower wondered why nobody did spoke against Russian colonialism. However, the President accepted the British proposal as it clearly showed a change in the British position. Flemming wanted to know about the US attitude to the French cease-fire initiative. Eisenhower answered that there was a need to let time pass and examine what their plans were. No option was to be ruled out, the President went on, and added that it did not help at all to ask the French to carry on fighting. And if, in the end, the French and the Indochinese found that the Communists’ conditions for a cease-fire were no good, the US could “really get

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102 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1488–1489.

103 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1489–1490.

somewhere and induce other Asian nations to follow our objectives”, he concluded. The matter of urgency to reply to the two proposals was then taken up by Cutler. The British proposal required an answer that same day, at least “in a preliminary fashion”, but as far as the French one was concerned there was no hurry, Secretary Dulles replied. Cutler suggested that the reply to Eden would follow the views of the President, whereas the PB could work on its response to the Bidault proposal in its meeting the following afternoon. The President accepted the idea and told Secretary Wilson, who doubted that there was much that could be done about the Bidault paper, that the French would definitely wish to hear whether the US backed their proposal. “And so”, Eisenhower stated, “do we”.¹⁰⁴

Cutler told the Council about an OCB report under progress since January. It dealt with an “international volunteer air group” which would fly planes on combat operations in Southeast Asia. The air group was to get, Cutler said, three squadrons of F-86 planes. The President urged that there should be versatile pilots in the group in case the use of B-29’s was later recontemplated and the USAF pilots would not have to be sent in. Cutler then suggested that the CIA put out an intelligence estimate of the Chinese reaction to such a group. Allen Dulles agreed. His brother asked if the air group was to be operating under the President. Cutler replied no, and Secretary Dulles added that American volunteers could join without permission from Congress. In his opinion, the Chinese were not afraid to retaliate but the actions of a volunteer group instead of regular air units would allow the Chinese “to avoid intervention without loss of face”.¹⁰⁵

The NSC agreed to go along with Eden’s Five-Power Staff Agency proposal if the aim of it all was to find ways to help the Southeast Asian nations “in a cooperative effort to defend themselves”. The Five-Power Staff arrangement was only intended, the Council clarified, to supplement the US-led actions to create a regional grouping and furthermore was “neither a substitute for nor the nucleus of such a grouping”. This was approved by the President and the responsibility for implementation was given to the Secretary of State. At the insistence of Secretary Dulles, the NSC took note of the new procedure that Dulles, Wilson and Radford would ensure that the President was swiftly briefed and advised on the situation at Geneva. The PB was assigned a quick task of looking into the Bidault proposal. The issue of a volunteer air group was to be studied further and prepared for NSC consideration.¹⁰⁶

With regard to the future actions of the US, as discussed by the NSC on May 6, Prados concludes that “the articulation of these questions and the way they were phrased suggest the answers desired”. Burke and Greenstein have analyzed

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104 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1490.
105 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL, also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1490–1491.
106 Memorandum of Discussion of the 195th Meeting of the NSC, May 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1491–1492.

Cutler's performance. In contrasting to his proposal of "dovish" views at the January 8 meeting, the Special Assistant went for "hawkish" views on May 6, thus proving "his capacity to serve as a dispassionate process manager". This Council meeting is still, like the meetings of April 6 and 29, an example of an "external" for Paul A. Anderson, because it reflected the concern and "pre-occupation of the decision makers with the deteriorating situation in Vietnam and the French request for aid".¹⁰⁷ There is no indication that the May 6 Council meeting comprised malfunctions in the advisory process. Nor did the meeting constitute any clear violation of the multiple advocacy procedures. The result of the meeting was to continue working for United Action and buy time. Eisenhower used his military expertise to comment on the military as well as political aspects of the issue. He came up with evasive ideas. The principle of plausible deniability is evident as Eisenhower did not wish to be in a position where he could not deny any knowledge of the situation. This is in line with his preference for covert activities and the secrecy of the NSC. Noteworthy is the special type of emergency briefing system, which was set up within the NSC machinery in order to speed up the process. The Council structures could be augmented as had been done by using ad hoc and other committees. This was not in conflict with the original idea of Eisenhower's Council.

Indochina was a pressing issue for the Eisenhower Administration in early May, 1954. It meant intensive preparations at different levels of the NSC. On the morning of May 7 another small-group meeting took place at the Oval Office. Only Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles and Cutler were present. The text of the tentative Record of Action of the NSC meeting of the previous day was being discussed. The talk dealt with paragraph 1b referring to a reply to Eden's proposal. Dulles suggested it was fine. However, Secretary Wilson and Radford had recommended that a new message should be sent to Eden through Bedell Smith. The draft, which had been written by MacArthur II and Radford's Assistant, Navy Captain George W. Anderson, Jr., and cleared by the JCS, mentioned the Five-Power Staff Agency as well as Thailand and the Philippines. Radford had remarked that the Five-Power Staff Agency was competent in its military planning, but if it was to be utilized in this context "its actions will be necessarily open to the world". Hence, the Chairman of the JCS, saw "Eden's proposal as an intended delaying action". In the end, the President approved the original text of the paragraph. He added that Bedell Smith should clarify to Eden that the

"Five Power Staff Agency, alone or with other nations, is not to the United States a satisfactory substitute for a broad political coalition which will include the Southeast Asian countries which are to be defended."

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107 Item 1 for discussion: Report by Mr. Dulles on Geneva and Indo-China, May 6, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, p. 425; Cutler's memorandum for Wilson and Radford, May 7, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 435-438; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 177; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 89, footnote 47; Anderson, Paul A., "What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision?," in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Hermann, Kegley, Jr. and Rosenau, 1991, pp. 301-303.

An examination was to be undertaken to determine the capabilities for rendering military assistance to the above-mentioned nations. Finally, Eisenhower said that the US did not accept that the Western nations should look into the matters alone. The President then commented on Dulles's speech draft he was supposed to give later on that same day. Eisenhower revised it. According to Cutler, he made "quite a few suggestions and changes in the text". In addition, Eisenhower wanted some simple slogans be incorporated into the text.¹⁰⁸

When the discussion turned to Bidault's proposal, Cutler quoted the PB's views from its meeting the previous day. The PB recommended that the US should turn down the French initiative because a proposal merely to make a cease-fire" would destroy the morale of the FEC and the Vietminh could "evade covertly" the control mechanisms. The military members of the PB had been against the French cease-fire proposal. The principal Pentagon member, Bonesteel III, had been thinking that intervention was needed. He had proposed that two regional groupings be established: the first, with the US, France, the three Indochinese states, Thailand and the Philippines, would be formed to facilitate intervention and that a larger grouping would subsequently be set up. The PB suggested that the US should make an offer to the French to first accept the preconditions and then the US would obtain a Congressional authority for military intervention "as a last act to save IndoChina". A fifth condition on action under UN auspices had been added to the list. The information about the proposal would have to be reported at the same time to all the possible member states of the proposed regional grouping "in order to enlist their participation". Cutler summed up the points for not listening to the PB. He said that the political situation in France was difficult (the position of the Bidault Government was not stable) and the French were probably unwilling to "internationalize" the war. Furthermore, the offer came at a point when there were no guarantees that the regional grouping would materialize even though that issue could be put on the list of preconditions. "The US would be 'bailing out colonial France' in the eyes of the world", Cutler went on, and concluded that the "US cannot undertake **alone** (in boldface in original text) to save every situation of trouble".¹⁰⁹

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108 Memorandum of meeting between Eisenhower, Dulles and Cutler, May 7, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1495–1496. For Cutler's message(s) to Wilson and Radford about the decision see his memorandum on May 7, USVNR, Book 9, p. 435. Cutler had written down the following suggestions: "The US will never start a war", "The US will not go to war without Congressional authority", and "The US, as always, is trying to organize cooperative efforts to sustain the peace". Memorandum of meeting between Eisenhower, Dulles and Cutler, May 7, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1496. Dulles's biographer Beal argues that "criticism of Dulles over his Indochina performance was probably the severest of his career". Beal, John Robinson, John Foster Dulles: A Biography (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 216.

109 The mention of a fifth condition (point e) was put in brackets by Cutler and followed a question mark. Memorandum of meeting between Eisenhower, Dulles and Cutler, May 7, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1496–1497; Bonesteel III's memoranda, undated, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 442, 460–461. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 225.

There had been uncertainty at the PB about the feasibility of intervention. Cutler told the two that some PB members had pointed out that the intervention offer “had only been hinted at” so far. Dulles inquired as to what the President thought of the fact that he would orally make “a more broad hint than heretofore” to the French Ambassador Bonnet in the afternoon. In answering Dulles and Cutler, Eisenhower reminded them that Stassen had strongly advocated intervention at the NSC meeting of April 29 and that his proposition had not “been thoroughly thought out”. As for the “internationalizing” issue, the President added, he had continuously attempted to ask the French to do so, but without luck. He then suggested that the US would only intervene if there was a request from the Indochinese states and “some kind of regional and collective action” should therefore be added as a precondition. The memorandum by Cutler ends with unclear statements:

“I understand that Dulles will decide the extent to which he cares to follow this line with Ambassador Bonnet. This discussion may afford Dulles guidance in replying to [Bedell] Smith’s request about a US alternative to support the Bidault proposal, but there really was no decision as to the US attitude toward the cease-fire proposal itself.”¹¹⁰

According to Burke and Greenstein, the discussion during this meeting implies that “a policy consideration posed in a formal advisory context was resolved in an informal setting”. Hall, on the other hand, has argued that this meeting illustrates Cutler’s role as an essential contributor. The Special Assistant acted, Hall adds, as “an important custodian of the ebb-and-flow of administration decision-making, making effective inputs at the presidential level derived from the ongoing meetings of the Planning Board”. Cutler informed Eisenhower and Dulles of the PB option “in an even-handed way”, Hall goes on. According to Hall, the option was “of substantial importance” and therefore, as British participation was no longer a precondition for the US intervention, Dulles took the option presented by Cutler right away “as a basis for new negotiations with the French”.¹¹¹ The arguments put forward by Burke and Greenstein as well as Hall are all correct. Furthermore, the intervention option, which had all but become an unpopular option, was still entertained by certain NSC principals. The President did not overlook any views advocated by his NSC advisers. This meeting appears to have been a clearance session that clarified the essence of the wide range of recent Council discussions.

Like Cutler, Secretary Dulles also received through Wilson the views of the Chiefs concerning the French armistice proposal. The JCS concluded that the Navarre Plan was no longer viable. In addition, they recommended that the US

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110 Memorandum of meeting between Eisenhower, Dulles and Cutler, May 7, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1497–1498.

111 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 102–103; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 366–367. Prados notes that even though the PB option was discussed at the meeting “it was far too late for Dien Bien Phu”. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 178.

should not “associate itself with any French proposal directed toward a cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory political settlement”. The President had learned from Cutler about the comments and he suggested a revision of the papers. He added that in Korea there had been proof that the Communists would “not be bound militarily by the terms of an armistice”. Furthermore, Eisenhower had added, in order to strengthen the French hand, the US “will continue its program of aid”.¹¹²

Additional Agenda – The May 8 Council Meeting

The Council could at times disengage from its once-a-week routines. As Dien Bien Phu was overrun by the Vietminh on May 7, the NSC convened just two days after its last session to discuss Indochina. At the start, Allen Dulles went through the initial reports about the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the French casualties. The danger had now shifted to the Tonkin Delta area where the FEC forces were waiting in their fixed strong points with little mobility. Eisenhower remarked that if the relations between the French and the indigenous people were alright, the FEC would not be forced to man the positions alone. For the President, “it was heartbreaking that they [native population] showed no inclination to be saved from Communist aggression”.¹¹³

The Council heard Bedell Smith’s summary and the actual text of the proposal by the French for a cease-fire. Media reports had already indicated that the US and Great Britain supported the proposal of the French. The President had revised the action paragraph (7) of the JCS position on the matter. The new paragraph called for the US not to “support any cease-fire in advance of a political settlement and adequate controls”. It also urged the US to carry on aiding the FEC and to continue attempts to form a regional grouping. Secretary Dulles, whose attendance at the NSC meetings of May 6 and 8 had been noted in the press, commented that it was “meaningless” for the US to take that position as a “satisfactory political settlement” or “any kind of coalition government” was unlikely. The stance which the JCS urged would mean, Dulles continued, that the French would be required to do something that the

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112 Wilson’s letter to Secretary Dulles, May 7, 1954, with comments from the JCS as an enclosure (undated, probably May 6 or 7) and Cutler’s memorandum for Secretaries Dulles and Wilson and Radford, May 7, 1954 with a one-page revision by the President of paragraph 7, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, NSC 5405 Memoranda, RG 59, NA. Cutler wrote in his memorandum that “the President indicated to me he felt” the revisions “should be made”. Furthermore, Cutler reminded there was going to be a Special meeting of the Council the following morning in which Eisenhower’s revisions would be considered. *Ibid.*

113 Memorandum of Discussion of the 196th Meeting of the NSC, May 8, 1954. AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1505–1506. According to Tully, the CIA had “frantically warned” of a Vietminh “head-on assault on” the fortress, but “unfortunately CIA’s estimates were disregarded”. Tully, Andrew, CIA: The Inside Story (London: Barker, 1962), p. 204. According to Allen W. Dulles’s biographer, Grose, the CIA Director was able to keep the President and the NSC posted on the developments in the field on a general level, “but he [Allen W. Dulles] admitted he lacked independent insight into the Vietnamese enemy”. Grose, Peter, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton, 1994), p. 410.

Americans had not done with respect to Korea. This would justifiably cause resentment on the part of the French. For Dulles, it would have been more acceptable to demand “no cease-fire in advance of a suitable armistice agreement”. Eisenhower shared Dulles’s view, which complied with his speech of the night before.¹¹⁴

The NSC took a long time to revise the paragraph 7. Cutler, following Dulles’s ideas, was talking about “seeking an armistice with an acceptable international guarantee of controls”. The President wanted it to refer to the Vietnamese and Bao Dai together with the French. He also took the time to summarize to the effect that the US was actually asking the French and the Indochinese to carry on the war “until they had gotten a satisfactory armistice agreement”. The JCS was afraid, Radford told the NSC, that the French proposals would result in a counter-proposal from the Communists for an immediate cease-fire, which the French would “feel obliged” to agree to. Nixon was worried whether the Indochinese would be against an armistice but the French would press for one, with the US backing them. The President did not see any problem with this as the US had reserved the possibility of choosing whom to support in the case of a split between the French and the Indochinese. In any case, Eisenhower concluded, the US would only intervene at the invitation of the Indochinese states.¹¹⁵

The issue of granting complete independence to the Indochinese states – one of the preconditions – was taken up by Cutler. Radford urged that it could be discussed as a question on its own. However, the Admiral said “putting pressure on the French” was to be contemplated in order to hasten the development. At the suggestion of Secretary Dulles, it was agreed that they should wait at that point so as not to irritate the French excessively. Secretary Dulles tied this to the question of the EDC. He pointed out that the current Indochina crisis left the EDC in the shade. When the discussion centered on the preconditions, Secretary Dulles did not want to have them in written form. He added that if the NSC

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114 Memorandum of Discussion of the 196th Meeting of the NSC, May 8, 1954. AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1506–1507. For the views of the JCS, which were submitted through Secretary Wilson, see their report on May 7, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 430–434; New York Times, May 8, 1954. Dulles’s attendance was also noted by Randle. Randle, Geneva 1954, p. 174. The State Department personnel came to the meeting, which commenced already at 8:30 a.m. well prepared. They had various reports, relevant diplomatic correspondence, memoranda (by Cutler and the JCS), NSC record of action of the May 6 Council meeting and NSC Action No. 1104-b on regional grouping. The items for which the documentation was collected for were “Bidault proposal – –, JCS views re end-item delivery (as agreed to by Wilson) – –, Five-Power Eden Proposal – –, and General Discussion: course of action in case of cease-fire”. The cover sheet for background materials, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 77, RG 59, NA.

115 Memorandum of Discussion of the 196th Meeting of the NSC, May 8, 1954, AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1507–1508. Secretary Dulles read cables from Geneva to the Council. Vice Admiral Davis and Bedell Smith commented on the JCS’s points by writing that a “cease-fire unquestionably would be disastrous” as it would be unconditional. According to them, the French should be asked to make an armistice proposal because it would be conditional and it would help “at least gain potentially valuable time”. *Ibid.*, p. 1507, footnote 5.

insisted he would tell the French that whenever they met the preconditions, the US would be prepared to act. Nixon wanted to have the French understand the fact that, instead of negotiating, if they met the conditions and continue fighting there was still a chance of US intervention. The President agreed with the views put forward by Dulles and Nixon. He preferred that Dulles should discuss the intervention issue¹¹⁶ with Ambassador Bonnet, but that Bedell Smith could also take it up at Geneva with the French delegation. The NSC agreed that the US would not accept any cease-fire “in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls”. As negotiations were under way, the FEC and the Indochinese should carry on fighting “with all the means at their disposal”. In order to help the negotiations, the US would in turn continue its assistance and attempt “to organize and promptly activate” a regional grouping to defend Southeast Asia from Communism. Finally, the Council authorized Secretary Dulles to talk with the French about the preconditions in order to internationalize the war.¹¹⁷

Ways of ending military aid to Indochina in the case of a possible cease-fire were also discussed at the May 8 Council meeting. The position of the JCS, which had been agreed upon on April 30 and which was presented by Radford, called for immediate suspension of military assistance in that event. Secretaries Dulles and Wilson had concurred with the JCS, but Dulles also questioned how the existing materiel could be got back. Radford answered that its recapture presented many problems because it legally belonged to the FEC. Eisenhower was not sure about this, but Dulles replied that the French could be told that there were not going to be any new shipments if they do not agree to give the materiel back in the event of a cease-fire. In addition, he thought the US had the right to take it back even though it would be hard to do so. General Ridgway quoted legal advisers to the Department of the Army who shared Secretary Dulles’s view. This kind of policy would possibly have serious effects, Cutler said, on the minds of the French, as the US was simultaneously forming a regional grouping. With an armistice at Geneva, Eisenhower said, the Communists would bring the whole area under their control.¹¹⁸

The Council members voiced concern over the possibility of the Vietminh capturing US materiel. They urged that this be prevented. Eisenhower stated that “if [the] worse came to [the] worst, every effort should be made to destroy” it. Radford said this should have to be prepared for. The Council was unanimous

116 Dulles passed on the message to Bonnet later that same day. Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Bonnet, May 8, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1516.

117 Memorandum of Discussion of the 196th Meeting of the NSC, May 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1507–1509. Prados regards it paradoxical that, even though the NSC papers repeated the need for independence, Eisenhower was not sure whether the Indochinese wanted independence as the Americans did. Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 116.

118 Memorandum of Discussion of the 196th Meeting of the NSC, May 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1509–1510. For the text of the JCS position see Secretary Wilson’s memorandum to Lay, Jr. May 6, 1954 and its annex a memorandum by the JCS to Wilson, April 30, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1493–1494.

that the Pentagon would work out a program to accomplish this objective. The President urged that Bedell Smith could tell the French that there could be meetings of military personnel to discuss the issue. Eisenhower wanted the matters to be handled “quietly” in cooperation with the French. “The destruction of the stores” was most likely be the only way to solve the problem, Radford remarked. Wilson suggested that the statement should not mention even spare parts and maintenance items. Eisenhower agreed. It was also decided that the statement of policy would not be sent to Geneva at that point¹¹⁹. The NSC agreed, and the notion was adopted and approved by the President, with reference to the JCS position on suspending the aid immediately in the event of “a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls”. In addition, the matter of aid would be re-examined. The “military end-items...will be recovered or destroyed to the maximum practicable extent”. Everything was to be done in secrecy.¹²⁰

Spector argues that US policy toward Indochina failed with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. He explains that the “faulty” French military intelligence estimates were accepted by “too many American officials”, and thus the policy-makers (including the NSC members) were not used to receiving negative assessments. Therefore, Spector concludes, they were “unprepared for the crises in March and April 1954”. A similar account by Khong suggests that the US policy-makers “were confronted with ambiguous and conflicting information from all sources”. This is illustrated, Khong asserts, by “differing analyses, stake assessments, predictions, and warnings provided by CIA-SNIE, JCS, and NSC documents”. According to Khong, “uncertainty” makes the policy-makers “look to past for policy guidance” and emphasizes the importance of analogies. Eisenhower’s former Staff Secretary, Goodpaster, also argues that the insufficient quality of information had an influence on policies. The authors of the Pentagon Papers maintain that the outcome of the May 8 meeting meant that the view of the JCS opposing the French proposal, which according to Gibbons enjoyed wide support within the State Department, was accepted as the essence of US policy. The Dien Bien Phu crisis had been in such a flux, Paul A. Anderson writes, that by the time it was up for Council consideration “it was not immediately relevant to the choices Eisenhower faced”. The May 8 meeting represents a “decision-external” decision-making situation, because it indicates

119 For the text see Dulles’ cable to Bedell Smith, May 8, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 731–732; Dulles emphasized that the position “was considered [by the NSC] as minimum one from which US should not recede”. He added that according to the Council a cease-fire in the absence of an “acceptable armistice agreement” would be “such disaster as to require us to dissociate ourselves from it”. The NSC assumed that the armistice would be agreed to by the belligerent allies, and if this was not the case the Council would have to discuss the matter again. *Ibid.*

120 It mentioned “military end-items under US Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) provided under the Agreement for Mutual Defense Assistance in Indochina between the United States of America and Cambodia, France, Laos, and Viet-Nam”. Discussion and a statement of policy adopted at the 196th NSC Meeting, May 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1510–1511; See also *ibid.*, p. 1511, footnote 11.

that the US was under pressure to take some kind of action “in response to the situation in Vietnam and the Geneva negotiations. Anderson adds that there were not many options advocated at NSC meetings on Dien Bien Phu, but there was, instead, “conflict as measured by the frequency of incompatible alternatives”.¹²¹ Paul Anderson’s selection of case study NSC meetings raises questions. Why he did not choose, for example, the January 8 or March 25 meetings? Spector’s, Khong’s and Goodpaster’s arguments seem correct. The policies produced by the NSC machinery – both formal and informal – appear without doubt to have been affected by the quality of information.

It also seems quite clear, however, that Eisenhower’s Council system came through the Dien Bien Phu crisis with high marks, but at the same time took the United States, as Secretary Dulles later said, “to the brink”. This conclusion about the effectiveness is supported by the findings of Herek, Janis and Huth, who have made a case study of Dien Bien Phu. They conclude that the crisis decision-making process used by Eisenhower was particularly effective. Haney has compared the features of the decision-making processes between his own and those of Herek, Janis and Huth. He has shown that there were no malfunctions in the processes and thus he completely agrees with them. Prados has also concluded that the NSC system functioned “smoothly” and “successfully”, and that there were neither communication breakdowns nor coordination problems. The Council mechanism, Prados adds, formulated “deliberate”, implementable policy. Yet Prados has also found from NSC documents on Dien Bien Phu that there was “a wide gap between envisioned policy and the realities in Vietnam”. Therefore, Prados concludes, the policy could not work as “it was not attuned to the realities in Indochina”. Thus Prados shares the conclusion pointed out by Gelb and Betts in their title “The System Worked” (but the policy failed).¹²²

121 Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 211. Nordell, Jr. also argues that the quality of French intelligence was not good, which resulted in the fact that the US was thus misinformed about the situation in the field. Nordell, Jr., John R., *The Undetected Enemy: French and American Miscalculations at Dien Bien Phu, 1953* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), passim; Khong, *Analogies at War*, 1992, p. 165; Goodpaster quoted in Ambrose and Immerman, *Ike’s Spies*, 1981, p. 262; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 118; Gibbons, the U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, 1986, p. 227. For the JCS views see USVNR, Book 9, pp. 430–434 and “The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff”, 1971, pp. 401–401; Anderson, Paul A., “Deciding How to Decide in Foreign Affairs,” in *The Presidency and Public Policy Making*. Ed. Edwards III, Shull and Thomas, 1985, p. 165; Anderson, Paul A., “What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision?,” in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Hermann, Kegley, Jr. and Rosenau, 1991, pp. 301–303.

122 Dulles had said that the US had been on “the brink of war” in Korea, Vietnam and the Taiwanese Strait. The concept of “brinkmanship” was added to the vocabulary of international relations by Dulles’s statements in the *Life* Magazine article “*Three Times at Brink of War! How Dulles Gambled and Won?*” of January 1956; also quoted in Lee, R. Alton, *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Soldier and Statesman* (Chicago: Nelson, 1981), p. 193; Comfort, *Milfred Houghton, John Foster Dulles: Peacemaker* (Minneapolis: Denison, 1960), p. 124. Roberts himself later argued that Dulles would apparently have gone “over the brink”. Roberts, *First Rough Draft*, 1973, p. 116; Herek, Janis and Huth, “Decision Making During International Crises,” 1987, pp. 203–226; Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 1997, pp. 66, 86, 90–93, 106–110, 126–127, 130, 139; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, pp. 201, 203, 206–207.

Even though George, who has studied the Dien Bien Phu crisis from the point of view of the advisory process, did not have access to primary sources, he (in part together with Smoke) has argued that “vigorous multiple advocacy” was applied during the spring of 1954 and that Cutler performed the role of a custodian-manager. Multiple advocacy assisted in controlling, George adds, “the effect of an ideologically reinforced decisional premise”. According to him, Eisenhower’s decision not to intervene was the upshot of multiple advocacy. The NSC system conducted “a realistic cost-benefit judgment of the utility of” the intervention. This meant, George concludes, that Eisenhower was able to “make a reasoned decision” against war. The Council system did not feel compelled to intervene as it had managed to curtail the analysis of “the expected damage to US interests”. In its later stages, the issue was calmly and “soberly calculated”.¹²³

The arguments put forward by George (and Smoke) are supported by Hall’s findings. In George’s evaluation of the merits of his multiple advocacy theory, he stressed the benefits of the competitive advocacy to which Eisenhower had been exposed in the latter stages of the Dien Bien Phu crisis. According to Hall, Eisenhower “adhered...closely to multiple advocacy”. The “Diversity Principle” worked as “Congressmen were meticulously consulted”. According to George, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Matthew B. Ridgway, brought “high-quality analysis”, thus fulfilling the “Competition Principle”. Hall argues that Ridgway’s role was not crucial, but agrees with George “that US decision-making...was highly competitive and exposed the President to a rather diverse set of views on the costs and risks of intervention”. Furthermore, Eisenhower, in the words of Hall, “apparently encouraged or at least tolerated open competition among his routine advisers” which fulfilled the “Competition Principle”. In George’s interpretation, Ridgway, who offered analysis, and the fact that the President “encouraged or at least tolerated open competitions among his routine advisers” are both given credit for fulfilling the “Competition Principle”. Hall showed through his access to the Pentagon Papers that George’s analysis had been based on false premises, because Ridgway’s report, which came out in July, 1954, had not been available during the Indochina crisis. Despite that misinterpretation of Ridgway’s crucial role, Hall has concluded that George had been correct in the sense that the NSC machinery, as “erected” by Cutler, had offered the President “a rather diverse set of views on the costs and risks of intervention”, making the US decision-making “highly competitive”. Hall adds

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123 George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” 1972, pp. 771–772; George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 251–253, 256–257, 262; George, “Adaptation to Stress in Political Decision Making,” in *Coping and Adaptation*. Ed. Coelho, Hamburg and Adams, 1974, p. 220; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 191–206, 124, 229, 236. George notes that most of the decision-making groups are quite small – as in the case of Indochina – and the size of the groups seems even to have been decreasing in crisis situations. This, George and Holsti add, is “a strategy for coping with one source of stress”. George, “Towards a More Soundly Based Foreign Policy,” in Appendix D, Volume 2. *Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy*, 1976, p. 41; Holsti and George, “The Effects of Stress on the Performance of Foreign Policy-Makers,” in *Political Science Annual*, Volume Six – 1975. Ed. Cotter, 1975, p. 288.

that during the Dien Bien Phu crisis different levels of the Council system were, in fact, “utilized more intensely” than during any other time between 1953 and 1961. As his conclusion in his treatment of the 1954 crisis, Hall writes that “the NSC system under Cutler’s management had proved to be an effective mechanism for elevating to the presidential level the diverse interests and perspectives inherent in the executive branch”. According to Hall, Eisenhower allowed Cutler to “orchestrate” the decision process. Furthermore, Hall continues, the decision-making process acted in accordance with the values “upon which the administration’s containment of communism was built”.¹²⁴

Burke and Greenstein, to some extent, also write in favor of multiple advocacy as they have identified a close resemblance between the NSC meetings and the theory, but at the same time they also question the usefulness of the theory because of its “rich context”. Burke and Greenstein agree that “give-and-take” was practised and no malfunctions in the formal advisory arrangements were present; there was, rather, vigorous “debate over significantly different policy options”. They add that Secretary Dulles, Radford and Cutler were the three “crucial individuals” upon whom, within his advisory system, Eisenhower “relied in particular” during the Indochina crisis. Burke and Greenstein proceed to point out that in the absence of documentation, George has incorrectly elevated the April 3 meeting with Congressional leaders to a special position in the multiple advocacy process. They conclude that the advisers of NSC principals “were intensively engaged in distilling the available information, stating options and preparing recommendations” as members of the PB and NSC committees. Still in May, the “ongoing” and “well-devised” NSC process challenged the President to consider and defend his views, thus aiding Eisenhower’s choice-making. In fact, Eisenhower was not willing to dispatch ground forces to Indochina before the Council had debated the matter. Burke and Greenstein give credit to the PB when they maintain that the reason why the NSC deliberations were lively was partly that they mostly took place within an advisory body “whose staff regularly posed it with sharply focused policy alternatives”. None of the options, Burke and Greenstein continue, were “presented in biased ways”, thus precluding taking them as real possibilities. At least two options were left unexplored or were only explored superficially by the NSC system, Burke and Greenstein conclude. The actual air strike was clearly one. In addition, the system failed to consider the possibility that the US had, in fact, “no significant stake” in the region, thus laying the foundation for the later escalation and war. “No amount of animated exchange in and out of the NSC could insure that the discussants”, Burke and Greenstein add, could have predicted the future importance of the later unexplored option.¹²⁵

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124 Hall writes that since the Eisenhower Administration had moved toward an air- and sea-delivered nuclear strategy (massive retaliation) the credibility of the new strategy was tested for the first time in the Indochina crisis. Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 66–67, 359–360, 367, 701.

125 Burke and Greenstein have argued that the multiple advocacy theory is better used when analyzing how it would have influenced the policy decisions of different administrations

In addition to examining the role of Eisenhower's advisory arrangements in the context of the Indochina crisis, Burke and Greenstein have analyzed the impact of the President on the decision-making process. According to them, the record of the 1954 NSC policy discussions on Indochina show that Eisenhower had "impressive capacity to test political realities" even without dependence upon staff support. He was both shrewd and intelligent as well as bringing "powerful emotional resources" to his role, thus impressing his associates. The President was reformulating questions and broadening "potential courses of action by considering factors, opportunities, trade-offs", as well as making new unmentioned points. This interpretation is consistent with recollections of Bowie and Gardner's point about Eisenhower testing his ideas and thus using the Council "in a special way". With reference to Eisenhower's contemplation of an air strike by planes without insignia, thus abandoning the possibility of denying responsibility, Burke and Greenstein argue that he was also able "to think out loud, musing about diverse options at the consideration stage". At the end of the Council debates "Eisenhower regularly pulled the diverse strands of argument together or cut through them and enunciated what he viewed to be the underlying issues". On the other hand, Burke and Greenstein argue that Eisenhower can be criticized "for showing a lack of information, skill and determination depending upon about one's premises about what policies were in order". The President did not listen to Stassen's advice and failed to "consult systematically on the desirability of a surgical air strike".¹²⁶

Despite the obvious merits of their interpretation, Burke and Greenstein have elevated Cutler to the level of NSC principals, even though he was not expected

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 "rather than searching for specific effects of the vigorous policy debate that occurred in 1954". Greenstein and Burke, "The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing," 1989-1990, pp. 569-570; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* 1991, pp. 59-60, 257-258, 273, 275-276, 279, 286-288, 293. Earlier Greenstein noted that the process of handling the crisis - in which the President intimately participated in - had been "so fluid that even the term 'informal organization' is stretched". Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, pp. 136-137.

126 Burke and Greenstein add that Eisenhower aimed at posing himself as "nonpolitical". As the 1954 crisis continued, "Eisenhower's leeway for maneuver increased". The President and his associates, Burke and Greenstein argue, "created a political environment that was conducive to American intervention in Indochina by binding themselves to act multilaterally and agreeing to insist on a guarantee of independence for the people of Indochina". Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 261-262, 267, 269-270, 273, 292. Bowie told an interviewer that Eisenhower normally did not directly "lay out his thinking" in the midst of an NSC debate, "but by his questions" he indicated "the sort of things he was not clear on, or would like further light on, or probe the views expressed by others, and he frequently would make comments". Robert R. Bowie Oral History Transcript, COHP; Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 199-200. Billings-Yun maintains that Eisenhower had doubts about the intervention and therefore he allowed Congress to require tough conditions which would be difficult if not impossible to meet. Burke and Greenstein argue that the President's constant interest in the intervention illustrate that the conclusion of Billings-Yun is incorrect. Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, 1988, p. xii; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, p. 111, footnote 17. See also Khong, *Analogies at War*, 1992, pp. 77-78. According to Ambrose, Eisenhower was a master at "managing crises", one of them being Dien Bien Phu. See Ambrose, *Eisenhower: the President*, Volume Two, 1984, p. 626. Draper points out that the decision made by Eisenhower was "a compromise between extremes" (intervention and abstention). Draper, *Theodore, Abuse of Power: US Foreign Policy from Cuba to Vietnam* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 44.

to speak up on substantive issues, but simply to manage the process. Cutler, however, seems to have occasionally “stepped over the line”, as at the May 8 Council meeting as he warned about the possible repercussions on the French of US actions upon the French. Moreover, Secretary Dulles’s role may well not have been as important as Burke and Greenstein imply. Furthermore, Humphrey kept monetary constraints at the forefront of Eisenhower’s mind, and Wilson added a voice of caution. The advocacy of the two must have forced the President to reflect his own views against those of his trusted NSC advisers. Likewise, some lower level officials apparently had an influence on policies. Despite fierce debates, there is no sign of open clashes between personalities, but the State-Defense controversy somewhat hindered the workings of the Council. In addition, no adviser was relatively more equal than the rest. Burke and Greenstein are right in contending that the NSC as a Presidential advisory system served Eisenhower well by laying out options, but it did not make decisions for him.

It can also be argued that the NSC machinery had proved its importance during the Indochina crisis; it functioned under Eisenhower in the manner it was supposed to function and thus assisted the President in making his choices. The Council discussions were reflected in Eisenhower’s decisions. The preparatory work was largely based on the NIEs. The JCS views also prevailed on many occasions. Thus his advisory system served its purpose. Sometimes, in the handling of the Indochina crisis of 1954, the machinery adapted to the changing situation by “improvising”. This was done to improve its performance and to tackle with acute questions which could not possibly have been handled through regular NSC procedures. In its functioning, as others have also shown, multiple advocacy was employed.

The Council consideration of Indochina issue had become a standard item for practically every meeting since the beginning of 1954. The subject was not addressed at one meeting in late January, presumably because they were waiting for the newly formed Special Committee to produce a report to be submitted to the Council. Sometimes Indochina was only mentioned in briefings, whereas on other occasions it was the main item under discussion at marathon meetings. From the start of the Dien Bien Phu siege, the subject was considered 17 times in four months (at meetings between January 8 and May 8).

■ The National Security Council and US Policy at the Geneva Conference of 1954 (May–July 1954)

The Conference Commences – Negotiations as an Option

The preparations for a peace conference had gotten under way a half year before the actual conference opened. The leaders of the United States, Great Britain and France had met on the Island of Bermuda in December 1953. They decided to accept the Soviet proposal of a “Big Four” summit to be held in Berlin early the following year. At the insistence of Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the summit was changed to a foreign secretary conference, which was to deal with the divisions of Germany and Austria, and also the Far East, including Indochina. The French suggested at the Bermuda meeting a Five-Power conference – including the People’s Republic of China – on various Far East questions. The initial US attitude of the US towards the idea was negative, since it did not want to recognize Mao’s China as a sovereign nation. Pressure from the British and the French made the Americans agree to the conference. The French military position in Indochina had become increasingly worse and worse throughout the spring of 1954. The isolated, besieged fortress at Dien Bien Phu had become the symbol of French power in Indochina. The Vietminh prepared for negotiations, and hence they wanted to make Dien Bien Phu the decisive battle in order to improve their bargaining position at the upcoming peace talks.¹

The Council had to consider the US position or at least be briefed on it. In conjunction with reporting on his talks with the four foreign ministers Secretary Dulles told at the NSC on February 26, 1954 that the single most difficult issue in Asia was Indochina. The French, who believed “it was politically indispensable for them to secure some reference to the possibility of a truce”, were trying to exclude the representatives of the three Indochinese states in order to curtail the participation of Ho Chi Minh. The French and the US were, Dulles added, approaching the conference “with considerable equanimity”. He did not believe

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1 Ho Chi Minh had given an interview to the Swedish newspaper Expressen on November 29, 1953. In the interview, Ho revealed that he was willing to consider all French proposals for negotiating a settlement. The Vietminh had not done so since 1950. The French official reaction was indifferent. Devillers and Lacouture, *End of a War*, 1969, pp. 45–46, 48; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 342; Secretary Dulles’s cable to acting Secretary of State Bedell Smith, December 12, 1953. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 901–902; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 168–169; Hammer, Ellen J., *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940–1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 328.

that the French would push too hard for a negotiated settlement unless they suffered real military setbacks before the fighting season came to an end in May. The composition and form of the discussions on Indochina at Geneva was still wide open, Dulles added.²

An intelligence estimate issued in late March 1954 had predicted that the French would attempt to secure concessions for China from the Western allies in order to halt China's assistance to the Vietminh. The estimate did not believe that the French would agree to any military or political settlement that would mean a Communist take-over of Indochina. The French will to continue fighting would be diminished if the forthcoming conference ended in failure. However, the French would, the estimate went on continue the war for a year if their forces were not needed at home to balance the West German rearmament, if their casualties were replaced by Vietnamese troops, and the Indochinese states would remain within the French Union and if the US continued to pay "the greater part of the French military effort's cost".³

In Secretary Dulles's thinking, Geneva represented "a holding action", which gave France time to ratify the EDC and also allowed time for military preparations and the implementation of the Navarre Plan. The US chose to follow its own courses of action with respect to the preparations for the forthcoming conference and exclude the British and the French from it. However, the Erskine Subcommittee of the Special Committee of the OCB had also considered the US position on Geneva on the basis of the JCS report, which had denied the possibility of a cessation of hostilities. The Subcommittee concluded that a military victory in the war was the only acceptable solution for the US and that this should be the guiding principle from then on throughout the conference. In addition, the Subcommittee recommended that the NSC should make sure that the Western position would be discussed and settled prior to the opening of the conference.⁴

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2 Nixon had been absent from the NSC meeting of February 26, 1954. He requested to see a memorandum of it. Gleason sent the Vice-President a memorandum of the discussion, which he asked Nixon to return for destruction as Dulles had "not cleared this report for accuracy" and because Eisenhower was "generally opposed to the preparation of detailed accounts of the discussion at Council meetings". Gleason's memorandum to Nixon, March 1, 1954 with Memorandum of Discussion of the 186th Meeting of the NSC, February 26, 1954, as an enclosure, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 1, pp. 1079-1081. Dulles said that in general the French had been divided into two groups. Those who want to withdraw from Indochina, but were in favor of the EDC, whereas others supported the war efforts and colonial power, but opposed the ratification of the EDC. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

3 Intelligence Estimate Number 63, "Probable French Position on Indochina at Geneva," March 26, 1954, Records of the JCS, 092 Asia (6-25-48), Box 4, section 6, Geneva, RG 218, NA.

4 Deputy Director of the State Department's Executive Secretariat Jeffrey C. Kitchen's memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr., March 1, 1954, including a memorandum of the State Department Staff meeting, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XVI, pp. 427-428; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 207; Bedell Smith's memorandum for Eisenhower with the OCB memorandum of March 2 from General Erskine as an enclosure, March 11, 1954. Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/3-1154, RG 59, NA; JCS memorandum for Wilson, March 12, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XVI, pp. 472-475.

The Geneva Conference got under way on April 26. The first item on the agenda was Korea. The Indochina phase commenced on May 8. Under Secretary of State Bedell Smith was chosen to lead the US delegation at the conference. At the May 6 Council meeting it had been agreed that Secretaries Dulles and Wilson, as well as Radford, would brief and advise the President on a temporary basis to secure rapid procedures. The NSC touched on the subject at its May 6 and 8 meetings as a side product of the discussions on the Dien Bien Phu crisis and intervention as a part of United Action. In Bedell Smith's words, the American representatives at Geneva were merely observers with no obligations. Thus he turned down Bidault's suggestion that all of the delegations would guarantee a settlement in advance. Bedell Smith had also persuaded Eden to uphold Western unity even if a solution was not achieved. He had predicted already in early March that the US would be confronted with "irresistible French pressure for some type of negotiated settlement".⁵ Bedell Smith's actions show that Washington considered that the outcome of the conference had been pre-determined. This is revealed in the memoranda of discussions at the NSC meetings during the late spring of 1954.

The NSC's stand on Geneva was clear by early May, but it had evolved only gradually. The Pentagon had, for example, considered its views on the Geneva negotiations in early March. They had apparently regarded the upcoming conference to be an important event, as Secretary Wilson informed Bedell Smith that there had been several discussions on the preparations for Geneva "and the organization necessary for the expeditious development of position papers and other arrangements" for the conference. Wilson offered help to the State Department in the form of informal views issued by the Pentagon and "necessary military information". He also suggested the establishment of two Working Groups to prepare papers for a steering committee. The JCS concluded that it was unlikely that a negotiated settlement consistent with NSC 5405 could be achieved unless the military situation of the FEC improved substantially. This was in line with the NIE of June 4, 1953. Hence, they recommended the continuation of fighting. Political stalemate would result from the acceptance of a cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory settlement. If the settlements in any of the three Indochinese countries would be based on coalition governments, the Chiefs argued, the Communists would eventually seize control. They concluded that the partition of any of the three countries would mean "at least a partial victory for the Viet

5 Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 1978, p. 48; Eden's diary entry, May 5, 1954. Shuckburgh, Evelyn, *Descent to Suez: Diaries, 1951-1956*. Ed. John Charmley (London: Weidenfeld, 1986), p. 192; NSC Special Staff's T. B. Koons's memorandum for Lay, Jr., March 4, 1954. WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, SEA, DDEL. For the discussion at the May 6 and 8 Council meetings see the end of the previous chapter and Memoranda of Discussion of the 195th and 196th Meetings of the NSC, May 6 and 8, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1481-1493, 1505-1511. Despite the fact that Bedell Smith, Gardner argues, had often been an interventionist at the Council meetings (during the first half of 1954), "Eisenhower may possibly have assigned him a special role at Geneva". Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, p. 263. For more about Bedell Smith's role at Geneva see Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors*, 1988, chapter 4.

The role of the State Department in the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) was great. The Under Secretary of State, for example, was the Chairman of the Board. The State representatives chaired most of the Committees and Working Groups of the OCB. Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith was a former General and Eisenhower's Chief of Staff during World War II. He had also served as US Ambassador to Moscow and as the Director of the CIA. "Beetle" was capable of turning down ideas and of thinking on a large scale. His method of operating was similar to that of Eisenhower. He was a confidant of both the President and the Secretary of State. At the Council meetings Bedell Smith was a stand-in for

Minh". The Erskine Subcommittee had received instructions from the Pentagon via the PB Assistants to consider alternative solutions at Geneva such as a coalition government, free elections, armistice and status, partition and a cease-fire. They submitted their recommendations on March 17. According to these, the US delegation should go to Geneva with the position that the only acceptable solution would be victory. Brigadier Bonesteel III, a military representative on the PB, warned the NSC by estimating that the situation at hand demanded goal-directed action. According to Bonesteel III, a compromise at Geneva would accelerate the subversive Communist activity. If the US was planning to intervene later, then the growing Soviet nuclear capability would impose limitations on intervention and the whole of Asia could be lost.⁶

The emergency arrangement to provide the President with information was already utilized on May 10. The assigned NSC principals and their advisers⁷ met with the President to discuss the French inquiry about intervention. In preparation, the French had asked that an American General be at once sent to

6 Bonesteel III's memorandum to Wilson, May 9, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, p. 442; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 506; Wilson's letter to Acting Secretary of State Bedell Smith, March 5, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, Box 7, SEA, DDEL. In his reply Bedell Smith agreed that the availability of informal Defense views to the State would make preparations most effective. He also wrote that Douglas MacArthur II had been designated by Secretary Dulles as the Coordinator of the Geneva Conference. Furthermore, Kenneth T. Young had been assigned as Chairman of the Working Group on Korea and the Director of State's Office of Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs Phillip W. Bonsal to head the Working Group on Indochina. Bedell Smith's letter to Wilson, March 9, 1954, *ibid.*. For NIE-91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through mid-1954," June 4, 1953. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 592-602; NSC Special Staff's T. B. Koons's memorandum for Lay, Jr., March 9, 1954. WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, SEA, DDEL, p. 1; Erskine's memorandum for the NSC Special Committee, March 17, 1954 with "Military Implications of the U.S Position on Indochina in Geneva" (undated) as an enclosure, *ibid.*; JCS's memorandum to Wilson, March 12, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central File series, Box 37, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 9, pp. 266-270.

7 Also present were Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert B. Anderson and Bowie and MacArthur II from the State Department.

Secretary Dulles, reporting to the NSC as well as participating in the discussions. In the midst of the Council debate on US intervention to Dien Bien Phu, he sided with Stassen, Nixon and Radford as a hard-line advocate of military action. Bedell Smith also chaired the OCB's ad hoc Special Committee on Indochina in early 1954. Later during the spring he was appointed head of the US delegation at the Geneva Conference of 1954. Bedell Smith was assigned to report to the President through a special NSC briefing mechanism that consisted of Secretaries Dulles and Wilson as well as Admiral Radford. He resigned in October 1954 because of poor health. Here he (on the left) is taking a break during the Geneva Conference with the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, and his British colleague, Sir Anthony Eden. (UPI-National Archives)

Paris to confer with the French. The participants thought Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnell (Chief MAAG until April 1954) would be the most suitable. The consultations could begin, it was agreed, if the National Assembly supported Laniel's views. Secretary Wilson warned that Trapnell's presence could "imply US obligations or responsibilities". Therefore, they decided to give Trapnell precise instructions to prevent such an outcome. The NSC principals then touched the issue of the basic conditions for an intervention, which Dulles had written down on the basis of a telephone call with the President. United Action was the cornerstone, and Eisenhower stressed that he would not act under any other circumstances. The participation of the Indo-chinese states, together with Thailand and the Philippines, and possibly Australia and New Zealand, was needed, and later, Britain. Dulles pointed out that it was of great importance to emphasize to the Asiatic peoples that no intervention would be conducted to support colonialism. However, he added, the Indochinese states were not ready for complete independence. In that event, "it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions". In consequence, the three states should remain in the French Union for a certain number of years, Dulles said. The President hinted that if the intervention materialized it would be essential for him to ask Congress for wartime powers. To that effect, he ordered the State Department to start drafting a message which would state that the action would be taken "on the direct and formal invitation" of the belligerents and that the UN was not forgotten. So far, Dulles concluded, all they had was a personal request from Laniel with no guarantees of broader support.⁸

Paradoxically, the intervention option had not been ruled out. Secretary Dulles conferred with the President over lunch on May 11. The two talked about intervention without the British. The points for discussion had been prepared by the State Department's Planning Director and the NSC PB member Robert B. Bowie. They suggest that the possibility of Chinese counteraction should be taken into account and that there was a risk of at least 50 percent of such a

8 Radford thought that Trapnell was on leave and thus it would take a couple of days to summon him to Washington in order to receive instructions. MacArthur II's memorandum of conversation, May 10, 1954 (dated 11), FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1526-1528. Laniel had in fact requested "that a U.S. General officer, fully familiar with the terrain and conditions in Indochina be sent to Paris immediately" to consult with the French. Dillon's cable to Secretary Dulles, May 10, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1522-1525. Dulles and Radford had discussed Laniel's request on the telephone immediately prior to the meeting. The Secretary was anxious to discuss intervention, but Radford wished the request would have come two months before. Dulles wondered whether the US should go in without the British. As Dulles mentioned, he would ask the President the following day, the JCS Chairman proposed that it should be talked over right away (Radford made his recommendation at 4:22 p.m. and the meeting took place at 4:30 p.m. Memoranda of telephone conversation between Dulles and Radford (3) and Eisenhower (1), *ibid.*, pp. 1526-1527, footnote 3, Dillon's cable to Dulles, May 10, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1522-1525. The French Ambassador in Washington, Henri Bonnet, had in fact signalled to Dulles that Paris would probably be asking for intervention. Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Bonnet, May 8, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1526. The French opposed Secretary Dulles's plans of bringing the issue of Indochina before the UN. Dulles's letter to US Representative to the UN Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., May 10, 1954, AWF, Administration series, Box 24, Henry Cabot Lodge, DDEL.

development. If there were an expansion of a war into China, the NATO allies, especially the British, might be split over the issue of using their bases for operations. Operations would require ground troops, a majority of whom would be from France, with only “some US ground forces”. The intervention could not be conducted “cheaply by air and naval forces” and the use of atomic weapons would be problematic opinion-wise for the allies of the US and the people of Asia. Eisenhower fully agreed with the points and added that the US forces would be “principally air and sea”.⁹ They had had the latest poll findings on the attitudes of the American people towards the intervention.¹⁰ Later, Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff Adams wrote that the President never ruled out the possibility of a limited intervention without ground troops. He favored United Action.¹¹ An Australian scholar, Gregory Pemberton, concludes that Dulles relinquished the idea of United Action only after Australia had stepped aside from the plan.¹²

The public was, however, told a different version of the story, in which United Action was the only viable option. Secretary Dulles commented on May 11 to journalists that not all of the countries in Southeast Asia would perhaps be lost even if Indochina was a “falling domino”. A collective defense coalition would be an instrument to prevent it.¹³ Dulles had completed the conditions for the intervention to be given to the French. After receiving the President’s approval, Dulles cabled it on to Dillon. The Secretary emphasized that approval would not be given in written form because rapid changes in situation could make intervention impossible or pointless. The prerequisites called for official requests to the United States and to countries involved in the planned United Action from France and the Associated States. The National Assembly should accept the conditions. All requests would be answered positively and Great Britain was likely to have favorable attitude towards the intervention. The UN should be somehow involved. France would have to grant full independence to the Associated States and the right to withdraw from the French Union. The French

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Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles (by Dulles), May 11, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1532–1533. Instructions to Dillon were based on the meetings of NSC principals on May 10 and the luncheon meeting with Eisenhower and Dulles the following day. Dulles’s cable to Dillon, May 11, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1534–1536. “Principally air and sea”, as Dulles explained to Dillon, did not “exclude anti-aircraft artillery, and limited US ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by US naval and air forces”. Dulles’s cable to Dillon, May 15, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1569–1571.

10 The State Department had ordered a private survey of the opinions held by the American people. According to the poll of the last week of April by the National Opinion Research Center, almost 40 percent of the Americans thought the US was giving the right amount of aid to Indochina, while half of the people preferred a truce. If a Communist takeover of Indochina was likely, 40 percent said US troops should be sent in (61 percent said the USAir Force be sent in). Furthermore, altogether 52 percent thought it likely that US combat troops were going to be sent to Indochina by the spring of 1955. Robinson McIlvaine’s memorandum to Press Secretary James C. Hagerty with the polling results, both dated May 11, 1954, White House Central Files, Confidential File, Subject Series, Box 69, State Department – May 1954, DDEL.

11 Adams, Firsthand Report, 1961, p. 123–124.

12 Pemberton, Gregory, “Australia, the United States, and the Indochina Crisis of 1954,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 13 (Winter 1989), pp. 61–66.

13 Dulles’s press conference, May 11, 1954, DSB, May 24, 1954, pp. 781–782.

forces should remain in Indochina, since United Action had been developed to supplement and not replace them. In addition, the training of the local armies and the command order of United Action would be agreed on beforehand. Eisenhower later pointed out that the conditions would have been fulfilled and then he would have asked Congress to grant permission for naval and aerial intervention.¹⁴

Evidently, in part due to the large sums being discussed in connection with US policy toward Indochina, Eisenhower directed that the recommendations by the NSC should have “information as to the costs of the programs necessary to carry out such policy”. All policy statements arriving for Council consideration needed to include a Financial Appendix. There were exceptions in the case of those proposals with no or minor cost implications and those programs “of a particularly sensitive nature for which special arrangements” had been made.¹⁵

The mode of expression for the accepted policy consisted of the guidelines to Geneva. Eisenhower had also approved instructions drafted by Dulles. According to the paper, Bedell Smith had to avoid being directly in contact with the Chinese, because the US had not recognized the People’s Republic of China. The role of the US, Dulles wrote, was to be “an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation”. The US delegation was obliged to work together with the French to help to make decisions which did not threaten the territorial integrity or political independence of the Associated States. The US delegation, therefore, should not support any kind of understanding or agreement which was not in harmony with the above-mentioned points. Any potential solution should not endanger the position of the legal governments of the Associated States or the FEC. If it seemed that the US principles were not going to be followed in Geneva, Bedell Smith was immediately to inform the US Government and recommend that the delegation be withdrawn from the Conference or that its status be changed to that of observer.¹⁶ There is reason to believe that the US aimed at having freedom of action. Council discussions during the spring of 1954 also indicate that the U.S. policy-makers were worried about the eventuality in which US prestige was completely tied to the fate of Indochina.

The OCB had made preparations for the Geneva Conference since early March 1954. Already on March 10 they discussed alternative draft statements concerning the forthcoming conference. Two weeks later the FOA noted that

14 Dulles’s cable to Dillon, May 11, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1534–1536; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 358–359. The conditions were orally conveyed to the French. See Dillon’s cable to Dulles, May 14, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1566–1568.

15 The directive, which was approved by the President on May 11, 1954, had been prepared by the NSC Staff and concurred in by the PB. Memorandum for the NSC, May 11, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 95, Box 105, NSC-Administration 1950–54, RG 59, NA.

16 Dulles specified that the US “is not prepared to give its express or implied approval to any cease-fire, armistice, or any other settlement”. Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, May 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 778–778; USVNR, Book 9, pp. 457–459.

the planning for the conference should include East-West trade considerations as well as economic deliberations on various Far Eastern countries. By mid-April, with the conference approaching, the OCB had appointed a Geneva Conference Working Group. The Chairman of the Working Group Joseph B. Phillips briefed the Board members on the latest developments in planning on April 21. In their following week's session, the OCB had discussed how to make the best use of several studies of Communist behavior prepared by the Working Group. The Board also noted a request by the Secretary of the Navy Robert B. Anderson for authorization to use Working Group material on Geneva in a speech to be given on Armed Services Day on May 14. The OCB agreed that the Pentagon should coordinate with the State Department "to avoid conflict or overlapping" with the speech Under Secretary Bedell Smith was going to make at Geneva. On May 12, the OCB noted only a correction of the status report that one paper of the Working Group had "been released for non-attributable use".¹⁷

Sometimes the NSC meetings were merely briefing sessions. The May 13 Council meeting was such. Allen Dulles told the participants that the military situation in the Tonkin Delta was unchanged, but that there was "enhanced infiltration by the Vietminh". The French still had enough strength there and they needed to hold on to the airfields. The Secretary of State then informed the Council that the establishment of the regional grouping was like "carrying on an operation with lots of scenery but not very much substance". The British were slow in replying to the proposals, but diplomatic negotiations with the other nations continued. The Filipinos wrongly believed, Dulles continued, that they had been left out of the Five-Power arrangement, but Secretary Wilson's current trip to Manila would hopefully clarify the matter. Secretary Dulles complained about recent press reports on US diplomatic setbacks. The Laniel Government was hanging by a thread and was likely to be succeeded by one even "further to the left". The French were contemplating the Vietminh peace offers, which were equal, according to Dulles, to "a thinly disguised French surrender". However, the French could contact the Americans to talk over the conditions for intervention. In the event of a change in government, Dulles feared, it "would mean a capitulation on Indochina" and a hostile attitude towards the EDC.¹⁸

The press was looking for interesting stories. The New York Herald Tribune reported on May 13 about secret Franco-American negotiations. In Geneva, Eden raised the issue with Bedell Smith without telling him that he had heard about the matter from the French. Bedell Smith got angry and accused Washington of being unable to keep secrets. For mutual reasons of trust it would, Bedell

17 The point of contact for the Working Group on the Geneva Conference was the USIA representative on the Geneva delegation. OCB Minutes, March 10 and 24, April 14 and 22 (held on April 21), May 12, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes I, RG 59, NA.

18 Memorandum of Discussion of the 197th Meeting of the NSC, May 13, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1547-1549.

Smith argued, have been correct in informing the British. He and Eden decided to minimize the harm in order not to weaken the Western unity further.¹⁹

The “additional briefing arm” of the NSC functioned at frequent intervals. A breakfast meeting on May 14 between Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Radford and MacArthur II resulted in a cable to Hanoi. It requested the representatives to convey to the Vietnamese that, contrary to the recent speculations, the US had not “written off” Indochina”. The US was continuing the weapons shipments, the air-lifting of additional FEC troops and “defending at Geneva [the] peoples and territories of [the] Associated States”.²⁰

Back in France, Laniel generally accepted Dulles’s conditions for the intervention. However, one prerequisite was unacceptable to the French. They did not want to let the Associated States to leave the French Union. By mid-May, Eisenhower and Dulles had completed a draft Congressional resolution, which would have authorized the President to use naval and air forces to help friendly Asian governments.²¹

Eisenhower’s insistence upon Congressional consent for intervention can be understood by looking at the general mood in the Senate. Democratic Senator Mike Mansfield, who was a staunch friend of Vietnam, thought that a military victory in Indochina could not be achieved unless the political conditions were favorable. Mansfield’s colleague, Lyndon B. Johnson considered Dien Bien Phu one of the worst setbacks in history. He was joined by Theodore F. Green and Herbert H. Lehman, who saw the situation in Indochina as a diplomatic disaster, which was an insult to the US allies and friends. Mansfield and Knowland reported on May 16 on television that sending troops to Indochina would be a mistake. Senator Alexander Wiley demanded United Action to save the whole of Southeast Asia. Homer Ferguson stated that Ho Chi Minh could only offer colonialism disguised as Communism. Secretary Dulles, who was speaking to the Senate, used the same theme and told the Senators what they wished to hear. A few days later the Red Scare Senator Joseph R. McCarthy predicted that with Dien Bien Phu fallen the whole Asia – including Japan and the Philippines – could be lost and the Pacific Ocean would become a Red Sea.²²

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- 19 The New York Herald Tribune, May 13, 1954; Eden, Full Circle, 1960, pp. 119–120. Dulles guessed that the leak came from France’s Embassy in Washington. According to him, the French wanted to strengthen their negotiating position and not even ask for intervention. Dulles’ cable to Dillon, May 15, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1571.
 - 20 Dulles’s cable to the Consulate at Hanoi, May 14, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1568–1569. No record of the breakfast meeting has been found, but it is referred to in a memorandum from MacArthur II to Bowie, May 15, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1569, footnote 1.
 - 21 Dillon’s cable to Dulles, May 14, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1566–1568. Dillon was instructed to continue negotiations on the issue. Dulles’s cable to Dillon, May 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1569–1571; Drafting of the resolution cited in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 235.
 - 22 Consul Paul J. Sturm’s memorandum of a conversation between himself and Mansfield, May 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1538–1540; Johnson, Green, and Lehman quoted in Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 227; CR, May 17 and 19, 1954, pp. 6623–6624, 6669–6670, 6817. Another friend of Vietnam, John F. Kennedy had given a speech in Senate in early April. He had demanded that the US should not intervene before France grants independence to the Associated States. Other Senators voiced the concern over the crisis in Indochina. Kennedy’s speech and the following discussion, April 6, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 4672–4681.

Additional light is shed on NSC policies on Vietnam in Secretary Dulles's two cables to Dillon. In the first, Dulles clarified the question of granting full independence to Vietnam. He wrote about granting some degree of independence similar to that of Indonesia, India and Pakistan. This required that there had to be agreements that Vietnam remained a member of the French Union. The actual independence would follow "after a strong national army has been created and after the bulk, if not all" of the FEC had left. The US would assume the "primary responsibility for the training and equipping" of the Vietnamese armed forces. In the second message, Dulles mentioned that the French were possibly only using the intervention as a card at Geneva, and that the negotiations were expected to drag on. He pointed out, however, that "the practicability of US intervention" was being considered "in the light of day to day developments". There also lay a danger with the fact that the French could hold the Americans responsible for a loss in Indochina as the preconditions for intervention were "so rigorous that they were obviously unacceptable".²³

The basics of the US policy on Indochina were formulated in the discussions at the NSC and they were spelled out in the list of conditions. They were so complex and calculated that it could have been predicted that the French could not have accepted them as such. This leads us to suspect that the moment for the intervention in Indochina had passed. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Secretary Dulles had said to the SFRC on May 12 that the conditions for intervention had become more difficult. He also repeated a message which he had told a journalist the day before.²⁴ Eisenhower had given a speech on that same day. He had said that the US and its allies should not "write off" Indochina but they should view its future with optimism and determination. Greenstein and Immerman refer to the redefining of the domino metaphor in answer to the situation after the fall of Dien Bien Phu. According to them, Eisenhower called for a strengthening of the Southeast Asian countries so that they would be prepared for "the fall of one".²⁵

The NSC machinery was looking beyond simply day-to-day developments. The PB discussed at its meeting of May 17, 1954 the question of a regional grouping for Southeast Asia. The State Department representatives, as usual, had laid the groundwork. The State paper did not discuss the pros and cons of the intervention issue. Furthermore, it did not take into consideration any international body that could be formed to observe and ensure the implementation of a negotiated settlement in Indochina. The objectives of the overall policy were drawn from NSC 5405. If Geneva failed and the conflict dragged on, the

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23 Dulles's cables (2) to Dillon, May 17, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volumen XIII, Part 2, pp. 1574-1575, 1575-1576.

24 Dulles's testimony before the SFRC, SFRC His. Ser, Volume VI, pp. 274-275, 639-640.

25 Eisenhower's news conference, May 12, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, p. 473; Greenstein and Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina?," 1992, p. 579.

intervention by the regional grouping was to be conducted either to defeat the Vietminh or to prevent it from taking the whole of Indochina.²⁶

Eisenhower continued to receive the views of his Secretary of State. The collective defense organization of Southeast Asia was discussed by Eisenhower and Dulles, for example, on May 19. The President pointed out that “he would not necessarily exclude sending some Marines²⁷ [to Indochina] if we went in”. He, however, added that there had to be a regional grouping of some kind and that the US would not “go in alone”. Dulles reminded Eisenhower that this position had been spelled out in the basic conditions forwarded to Dillon. He continued that the British role was not “a necessary condition” and the President agreed but stressed that the other proposed participants would be “indispensable”. They agreed that British delaying tactics were harmful. Eisenhower believed that he could change Churchill’s mind by taking up analogies from history as the Premier was very cautious of “his record, by which history would judge him”. The two envisioned that the situation could develop to such a point that the Chinese could not be stopped. The Secretary of State had brought with him a draft Congressional resolution which would have given him authority “to assist friendly governments of Asia” until June 30, 1955. As Dulles had told Senator Knowland about this, the Senators had vigorously opposed the wording as it would have given Eisenhower “a blank check to commit the country to war”. The President came up with the idea that the area of operation should be defined in a redraft “more closely as being in and about the island and coastal areas of the Western Pacific”.²⁸

One of the NSC’s key military advisers, a member of the JCS, General Ridgway, who had access to the relevant intelligence, was determined to prevent the intervention. He argued that the circumstances for a military operation were not good. In the Vietnamese countryside it would be almost impossible to recognize friends and foes, supplying would be difficult, and the operation would require considerable ground forces.²⁹

The last item – the sixth – on the agenda of the Council for its meeting on May 20 was the regional grouping in Southeast Asia. Cutler reported on Indochina on the basis of the interim report and the discussion in the PB. The briefing on the military situation in Indochina was held by an unknown US

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- 26 “Informal Briefing Paper on Regional Grouping for Southeast Asia,” revised State Draft discussed at PB meeting, May 17, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. Bonesteel III had prepared another memorandum titled “A Concept for Action with Regard to Indochina” and it was circulated among the PB members on May 13, 1954. Bonesteel III’s memorandum to the members of the PB, May 13, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 460–461.
 - 27 The following day, Secretary Dulles talked called Counselor MacArthur II and said “we need more NSC consideration re the Marines”. Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and MacArthur II, May 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1593.
 - 28 Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, May 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1583–1586; Draft Congressional Resolution (as an annex to the memorandum), May 17, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1585.
 - 29 Secretary of the Army Robert S. Stevens’s memorandum to Wilson, May 19, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 508–509.

Army intelligence officer (the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, US Army). The President tested his ideas by stating that the assignment of USAF mechanics, discussed and decided in the NSC meetings on March 25 and April 6, would be continued beyond the June 15 termination date only in order to capture American materiel “or to take other action in the interest of the United States”. Nixon’s account offers more on the issue. According to the former Vice-President, Eisenhower had “dismissed the idea” as the French were not going to keep on fighting and the matter would complicate relations with Congress as he had solemnly sworn that the technicians would be withdrawn on time.³⁰

In addition, the Council members learned that the French were considering the conditions for an intervention. Secretary Dulles told the participants that Major General Trapnell had been sent to Paris but General Ely had flown to Indochina. Dulles said the talks on preconditions would “form the cornerstone of a regional grouping”. He thought the French had come to no decisions and they merely wished to use the negotiations as a card at Geneva. If Laniel agreed, it would not mean that the Chamber of Deputies would follow. Of course, Dulles added, the French could eventually request intervention on the terms presented by the US. According to him, the independence issue could have been “exaggerated” in the conditions as the Indochinese states already enjoyed “a very high degree of independence”. The position of Australia and New Zealand was connected to that of the British on a “sentimental tie” level. The Secretary informed the Council that he had accelerated the French acceptance of the conditions by emphasizing that the offer would not stand indefinitely. In reply to Cutler’s question about the formal request by the French, Dulles answered there had only been “two informal French suggestions for ‘one-shot’ air strikes”.³¹

Dulles told the Council he had emphasized to Dillon that the French would not be able to accuse the US of any possible loss of Indochina. Vice-President Nixon was curious to know whether Dillon was simply reading the list of conditions to the French or whether he was pressuring them in any way. The talks, Dulles replied, were conducted “on an oral basis”. He responded to Nixon’s follow-up question about authorization by replying that Laniel needed to consult the Chamber of Deputies because his Government “was so shaky”. The Communists were also, Dulles believed and was supported by his brother Allen, applying delaying tactics at Geneva in order to wait for a military collapse of the FEC. The CIA Director quoted intelligence reports to the effect that the Vietminh were actually going to attack in the Tonkin Delta. Nixon summed up the developments that “The British and the French were dragging their feet until such time as the possibility for a settlement by the Geneva Conference appeared clearly hopeless”. The opponents knew this and they were

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30 The interim report of the PB were to be circulated to the members in advance. The action was subsequently transmitted to Secretary Wilson. Memorandum of Discussion of the 198th Meeting of the NSC, May 20, 1954, AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1586–1590; Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 155.

31 Memorandum of Discussion of the 198th Meeting of the NSC, May 20, 1954, AFW, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1587–1589.

using it to their advantage, he added. Secretary Dulles confirmed Nixon's point and said that "the only ray of hope" at Geneva was the potential intervention, which could persuade "the Communists to moderate their demands". The position on the Congressional resolution was to be discussed at a later date.³² According to Gibbons, the Secretary of State was in favor of modifying the position on independence as a result of advice from the field – i.e. Dillon. "The only ray of hope" comment, Gibbons adds, illustrates "the trend of thinking" of the Secretary of State, Radford and the other NSC members since they were facing an ever-changing serious situation. Burke and Greenstein have argued that Eisenhower and his NSC advisers continuously focused on the acute problems, such as bolstering the French at Geneva. From then on, they continue, the US "went into a holding pattern, awaiting further developments".³³ There is a possibility that, since Nixon was not in fact a part of the inner circle of the NSC, he was not briefed on everything. His question indicates that he thought intervention was still a viable option.

At the request of Secretary Wilson, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had argued that victory in Indochina could be achieved by creating a strong national army, and the responsibility for training it should be assumed by the Americans. With reference to the intervention, the JCS suggested only an air and naval operation. The Chiefs concluded by expressing their opinion concerning the Far East, that "Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token US armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited US capabilities". Spector has argued that the JCS views reflected the thinking of Ridgway, who had thus "made some headway".³⁴

The intelligence community predicted that the Geneva Conference would not produce results in the following month and that the French would not radically change their policy on Indochina during the same period. In addition, the Vietminh were capable of stepping up their operations and launching a major offensive within a month provided they redeployed their major units swiftly. The political stability was also likely to deteriorate, which could have an effect on the negotiations in Geneva. The French position would not collapse immediately, the intelligence analysts suggested, unless they suffered a total military loss.³⁵

32 Memorandum of Discussion of the 198th Meeting of the NSC, May 20, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1589–1590. For the text of Cutler's paper see parts of the minute FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XII, Part 1, pp. 498–499. For Dulles's warning to Dillon see Dulles's cable to Dillon, May 17, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1575–1576.

33 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 233–234; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 92, 100.

34 JCS memorandum to Secretary of Defense Wilson, May 20, 1954. USVNR, Book 9, pp. 477–479; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1590–1592. Bowie also commented on the JCS paper and raised the question of the efficacy of the training mission. He argued that the Vietnamese were used to French models, which meant "we would either have to continue to teach in the French manner through French intermediaries or revise the system in mid-campaign to fit the practices of an American army which, under the JCS plan, would not be present in the theater". Bowie's memorandum to Secretary Dulles, May 27, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1624–1626; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 213.

35 NIE-63-3-54, "Probable Military and Political Developments in Indochina Over the Next 30 Days," May 21, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1595–1598.

The planning for contingencies was more like a precaution, since it did not always reflect the current trend of NSC thinking. On May 24, the OCB completed its studies intended to supplement the plans for intervention even though this was no longer considered viable. This time the Board examined the contingency “to facilitate the achievement of the objectives set forth in basic military and political plans after” the US intervention in Indochina as a part of United Action. The OCB prepared plans to gain maximum support from the Indochinese and other “free-world countries”. Political warfare against the Vietminh was emphasized as an integral part of the intervention and as a means of keeping China out of the conflict. Again, the plans were developed to cover the contingencies under which the Chinese would intervene or stay out. The studies, as Staats pointed out to Lay, Jr. in his memorandum, were not based on basic papers which had not been available owing to the concurrent preparation of papers. In consequence, Staats added, the OCB studies would have to be modified.³⁶

The JCS did not consider the intervention to be serving the purpose for the US if it had to send considerable infantry units to Indochina as was done in the case of Korea. The JCS – with Ridgway expressing a dissenting opinion – favored the use of a carrier group and USAF units, which could operate from bases in the allied countries. Atomic weapons could have been used if the US could gain anything from this.³⁷ State Department officials questioned the JCS recommendations of a limited intervention. They could not see how the US could achieve its goals through such a restricted commitment. Some of them did not see any justification for intervention.³⁸

Cutler seems to have been a precise actor and custodian-manager of the NSC process. He made sure that the Council had a full Agenda but also that it did not consider issues in vain. When he received a copy of JCS memorandum on May

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- 36 Staats’s memorandum for Lay, Jr., May 25, 1954 with the OCB 30 pages of “Studies with Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina,” dated May 24, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 37, DDEL. The plan for getting allied support was some three-and-a-half pages long, in contrast to a plan prepared in the State Department was nine-and-a-half pages long. See “US Military Intervention in Indochina: Plan for Gaining Maximum Support of U.S. Allies,” dated May 20, 1954, *ibid.* The draft version of the plan for political warfare against the Vietminh, dated May 20, 1954, has been declassified in 1989 with, like many of the NSC documents, a number of deletions (also in *ibid.*). The finalized paper of May 24 was declassified in 1995. It contains a new paragraph before deletions, which was still classified in 1989. As an example of the type of classified text it reads as follows: “U.S. controlled guerilla warfare organizations in the Associated States would be of limited value in the short term period. While large groups of uncontrolled guerillas of untested reliability could be brought into being quite rapidly, there is considerable risk in arming such potentially unreliable units”. *Ibid.* The OCB studies are also filed with the Records of the NSC, OCB Central Files, Box 1, OCB Miscellaneous # 2, RG 273, NA.
- 37 JCS memorandum to Wilson, May 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1590–1592. See also the JCS memorandum to Wilson, May 26, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 511–515.
- 38 Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Everett F. Drumright’s cable to MacArthur II, May 24, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1606–1607; Planning Advisor of State Department’s Office of Far Eastern Affairs Charlton Ogburn, Jr.’s memorandum to Secretary Dulles, May 26, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1620–1621; Director of State Department’s PPS and a member of NSC PB Robert R. Bowie’s cable to Secretary Dulles, May 27, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1624–1626.

25, though it was dated May 21, through Secretary Wilson, on the defense of Southeast Asia in the event of the loss of Indochina, the Special Assistant reminded the Secretary of Defense that the latter had indicated in his memorandum that the JCS paper dealt with the military defense of the rest of Southeast Asia “against an overt Chinese Communist attack”. Cutler pointed out to Wilson that those specific words were not used at all in the paper. The Chiefs, Cutler added, recommended that instead of a static type defense an offensive was a proper concept for use against China. He reminded Wilson that in accordance with the existing policy stated in NSC 5405 the US would take appropriate military action and not employ a static type of defense. Cutler concluded that the JCS paper did “not appear to involve a new policy issue” and it did not need to be circulated to the Council.³⁹

At an NSC meeting on May 27, Southeast Asia was once again the last item on the agenda (the ninth). Secretary Dulles told that there were no significant issues to be reported from Paris or Geneva. General Ely was the one everyone was waiting for. In reply to Flemming’s question about Eden’s cease-fire proposal, Dulles said it would mean de facto partition of the three Indochinese states and that the Communists would still be able to start infiltration. This, Dulles added, would lead to their control of Indochina. Dulles was truly worried about Bao Dai’s deteriorating position, which might possibly call for “drastic action” if there was no improvement. Allen Dulles informed the Council about Soviet advisers who had been with the Vietminh since April 29. The regrouping, he continued, of the Vietminh forces had been faster than expected. On the other hand, the French were also reinforcing the FEC in the Tonkin Delta area. There was a “near chaotic situation in Saigon” and the stance of the Saigon press was strongly anti-American.⁴⁰

Despite Cutler’s conclusions, Secretary Dulles briefed the President at the Oval Office on the substance of a new JCS paper (dated May 26) on the morning of May 28. The JCS had argued against intervention on the basis that “the allocation of more than token US armed forces in Indochina would be a serious diversion of limited US capabilities”. The JCS had referred to naval and air power in support of allied ground troops. The use of nuclear weapons was not excluded provided that their use would give the US an advantage. Chinese intervention would result in a massive retaliation. Dulles said that he was “inclined to agree with” the Chiefs that a static defense was not enough. If all or some parts of Indochina fell, Dulles concluded, he believed there was still “a reasonable possibility of holding the rest by a policy of collective defense”,

39 Cutler’s memorandum to Wilson, May 26, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. In the liner notes of the copy of the document there is a comment in Cutler’s handwriting. He writes that he had discussed the issue on May 27 with Radford and Deputy Secretary of Defense Anderson. Radford had argued that Southeast Asia “cannot be held” without a direct attack regardless of a Chinese intervention. Ibid.

40 Memorandum of Discussion of the 199th Meeting of the NSC, May 27, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 942–944.

including some static defense, considerable economic assistance and, in the event of overt Chinese aggression, “offensive measures”.⁴¹

The public was informed about United Action by the Administration spokesmen. This was apparently done for propaganda purposes and was to be used as a card at the negotiations in Geneva. Secretary Dulles had held a press conference in which he stated that the US was not defending colonialism. He pointed out that the French had not requested intervention. Paris, according to Dulles, had fulfilled part of the conditions only on paper. He stressed the independence of the Associated States, which would take time. Secretary reiterated that the US was not planning to intervene alone. He admitted that there had been talks about United Action. Emphasis on independence was reflected in Dillon’s new instructions; France would have to sign an agreement on the issue without delay. The French would also have to announce that the French Union would be composed of free and sovereign nations, which would require national governments.⁴²

The briefing arrangements were not enough to discuss matters of principle. On the morning of May 28 a considerable number of NSC members⁴³ met for one hour and forty minutes at the Oval Office to discuss Southeast Asian defense questions. Eisenhower pointed out that, as he wanted his military advisers to be frank in their comments in interdepartmental cooperation, he did not like them expressing their views on the US policy in public or in talks with allies. Furthermore, the President said that “in Indochina there were certain political prerequisites” without which “no purely military victory would prove worth having”. He meant that the US had embarked on a political course, “not determined entirely by military considerations”. Secretary Dulles explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the various US courses of action with respect to the forthcoming Five-Power Staff talks. He then raised the issue of the validity of a static type of defense as recorded by the JCS on May 21. The Secretary of State argued that, if he entered the meeting with that position, there would be deadlock from the start and thus the political factors would have to be considered. As the discussion shifted to the use of token US forces, Eisenhower said the US should not want “to lose to the free world side the 300,000–400,000 French Union forces” which were in Indochina. Radford, who said he did not really disagree with Secretary Dulles, alluded to past NSC decisions on UN retaliatory attacks against the Chinese in Korea in the event of armistice violations. The JCS Chairman explained that the paper of May 21 was, in fact, an answer to Thai requests for building airfields and the defense of Southeast Asia.

41 Dulles’s memorandum for Eisenhower, May 28, 1954. WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. For the JCS views see their memoranda for Wilson, May 20 and 26, 1954, USVNR, Book 9, pp. 477–479, 487–493; JCS paper of May 26 is also quoted in Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 187. Prados argues that the content of the papers originated to Radford. *Ibid.* See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 213.

42 Quoted in Randle, *Geneva 1954*, 1969, pp. 240, 243.

43 In addition to the President, Secretary Dulles, Deputy Secretary of Defense Anderson, the whole JCS, Cutler, Bowie and MacArthur II were present.

Radford said that a plan to attack airfields in South China in retaliation to Chinese intervention in Indochina was being prepared by the CINCPAC. If there were targets in various parts of China, the new weapons would be “more effective and much cheaper” to use, Radford continued. The President added that if United Action worked the US could send in a marine division on a temporary basis. When Admiral Carney, who was to represent the US in the Five-Power talks, asked for guidance, Eisenhower replied that “he would have ‘to play it by ear’” and keep in daily contact with the State Department. The President continuously reiterated his desire to keep the French fighting in Indochina. When Dulles referred to sending South Korean division to Indochina, Radford “immediately agreed”, regarding it as a good idea. Eisenhower said he wanted to “save whatever strength exists now in Southeast Asia” and base the defense on indigenous forces. Radford did not share Dulles’s view of the British reluctance to participate in the Five-Power talks as they feared being caught up in the fighting in Indochina. The Secretary of State added that the Franco-American discussions on the preconditions for intervention should take place in Paris and not as a part of the Five-Power talks.⁴⁴ Eisenhower reveals in his memoirs that on May 28 he gave permission for thorough contingency planning in response to overt aggression on the part of China.⁴⁵ The US had accepted a dualistic stance. As the planning for intervention was intensified, its conditions would be tightened.

The special “additional briefing arm” set up for the duration of the Geneva Conference was still at the center. Secretary Dulles and Radford appear to have stolen the show, as was the case at many of the formal NSC meetings. The two continued to disagree and debate, leaving Eisenhower in the background. John S. D. Eisenhower, who occasionally acted as an observer at Council meetings, recalls that sometimes his father had to remind the participants of his presence.⁴⁶ There was an equilibrium between the State and Defense Departments. Apparently, the President did not regard the questions as so pressing that he needed to convene the whole Council only a one day after its last meeting, or then he did not want too large an attendance so as to avoid leaks. This “improvised” meeting, however, resembled ordinary Council meeting in its procedures.

The working relationship between the President and the Special Assistant – the magistrate and the custodian-manager – was close and productive in the clarification of issues. The two met on the first day of June. After Cutler went through the substance of recent cables between Dillon and the State Depart-

44 In reply to Dulles’s question about whether the FEC could hold the Tonkin Delta by redeployment, Radford answered in the affirmative but continued that to take it there would have to be “competent Vietnamese forces”. Conference in President’s Office (between NSC members and advisers), May 28, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. At the meeting, policy decisions were arrived at on the basis of Dulles’s comments on the JCS paper. Dulles’s comments (as a memorandum for Eisenhower) were therefore filed together with the conference memorandum. Ibid..

45 Eisenhower referred to an offensive or an attack on an island position, such as Hainan, to create “another Formosa”. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 361.

46 John S. D. Eisenhower interview with Author, June 26, 2000.

ment, it became apparent, according to Cutler, that the French leadership had in fact misunderstood the US intervention policy; they believed the US would immediately retaliate alone if the Chinese attacked. The President, who reacted strongly, said that United Action would be the only way the US was going to take action. "Going in alone", he added, would mean supporting colonialism and afterwards the US "would be expected to intervene alone in other parts of the world". Only if a "Congressional resolution ordered him to do so" would he act unilaterally. However, he shared the view of Secretary Dulles that Chinese overt aggression could result in a situation "that might not be limited to that area". He concluded by demanding that in order to prevent misinterpretation on the part of the French, the US position should be explained to them in detail. When he forwarded the memorandum of the briefing session to the State Department Cutler concluded that in his opinion the positions of the State and the President were "in entire consonance" on the issue.⁴⁷ The President was clearly pursuing a cautious line.

The contingency planning by the NSC-OCB machinery was thorough. Eisenhower had ordered eight departments and agencies – within the NSC framework – to draw up surveys which would serve as a background material for possible intervention. The President would consider going to Congress for authorization if his conditions were met. The basic assumptions were that China would not (contingency A) or would (contingency B) interfere. NSC 5421 consisted of the previous eight studies setting forth the kind of action the US might find "necessary or desirable to undertake in the vent of a decision to intervene". The studies consisted of enemy capabilities and probable courses of action, US military, political, economic and budgetary actions, and US mobilization and the form and effects of Congressional authorization. All-inclusive plans for interventions had been completed. The OCB had had the responsibility for studying how to win support for US action from the Indochinese peoples and other countries. The Board had also considered potential political warfare against the Vietminh. The papers were not used in policy-making, but they were distributed to all members of the NSC.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the intelligence agencies

47 Cutler pointed out that Eisenhower relied on Cutler's summarizing and "he did not read any part of them himself and accordingly some of the refinements of Dillon's position did not reach him". The Special Assistant wrote to Murphy that owing to the strength of Eisenhower's reaction to his briefing and to the cables between Secretary Dulles and Dillon Cutler had decided to meet with Murphy and give him a copy of the memorandum of the conversation. Cutler wondered whether the US position was in fact clear to Dillon, who was under pressure. Therefore, Radford could be sent a copy of the document, Cutler suggested. There is a hand-written note on the Secretary of State's copy that Secretary Dulles and also Radford had received copies. Cutler's memorandum to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Murphy, June 1, 1954 (dictated, but not read by Cutler) with a memorandum of the conversation between Cutler and Eisenhower, June 1, 1954 as an enclosure, AWF, Dulles-Herter series, Box 3, DDEL; also in WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. Both memoranda are also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1647, 1648–1649.

48 The preparation was coordinated by Robert R. Bowie, who was the Director of the Policy Planning Staff and State Department's representative on the PB. NSC 5421, Studies Prepared for the National Security Council, "Studies with Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina," June 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1649–1652.

produced a study of Communist capabilities in the area, which was also circulated as a NIE. In the event of US intervention, the estimate stated, the enemy was capable of conducting guerilla warfare and regular warfare with six divisions. However, as the North Vietnamese had no air force and only a limited number of naval vessels, it would be dependent logistically on the Chinese “volunteers”. The Vietminh would be able to use nationalism for propaganda purposes, the NIE concluded.⁴⁹

The participation of the “almost Council meetings” was not constant. A somewhat smaller group⁵⁰ than that of May 28 met on June 2 at the White House. They discussed the US reaction to possible intervention by the Chinese. It was decided that if it took place in an “overt, unprovoked” manner and if it threatened US security interests or those of its ally states in Southeast Asia, the President would immediately ask Congress to declare war. The retaliation would consist of aerial and naval strikes at military targets inside China, “using as militarily appropriate ‘new weapons’”. Some states were expected to join the action. The response should be based on United Action. According to Griffith, the President remarked on June 2 to his inner circle that the US should have kept “the Pacific an American lake”.⁵¹

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- The FRUS has only the tables of content of the surveys. The document was circulated to the NSC members on June 1 for information, but the Council did not take any formal action in the matter. *Ibid.*, p. 1649, footnote 1. The State Department, for example, had been assigned, “under the highest security safeguards”, the task of preparing a draft statement of the President’s message, the task of studying economic warfare actions to keep China out of any war, to reduce the capabilities of the Vietminh and to establish an “economic warfare organization as integral part of intervention”. In addition, they were to consult the UN about possible action and relation to United Action. The State Department was also to review the position of Vietnam in the French Union. Lay, Jr’s memorandum to Secretary Dulles, May 18, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1581–1582. For a 20-page summary of the studies see “Summary of Studies with Respect to Possible US Action Regarding Indochina (NSC 5421),” June 10, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Presidential subseries, Box 2, President’s papers 1954 (1), DDEL. See also “Check List of Questions for Immediate Decision in Event of a Decision to Intervene in Indochina,” (based on NSC 5421) President’s copy no. 1 (via Cutler), June 10, 1954, *ibid.* For summaries of the studies and comments on them by the Pentagon officials and the JCS see USVNR, Book 9, pp. 514–529 and JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, May 28, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 487–493.
- 49 NIE-10-3-54, “Communist Capabilities in Indochina,” June 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1652–1657. Another element in the CIA’s contribution to NSC 5421 was a report on Communist reactions to certain US courses of action, which became a SNIE-10-4-54, “Communist Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action With Respect to Indochina,” June 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1702–1709. The studies with respect to possible US action regarding Indochina prepared by the OCB for the PB and NSC consideration had been completed in late May. According to Walter A. Radius the drafts included difficult issues. One of them was the relationship between an ambassador and a theater commander. See, for example, Walter A. Radius’s memorandum to Bowie, May 27, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2, RG 59, NA.
- 50 Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Deputy Secretary of Defense Anderson, Radford, MacArthur II and Cutler were present.
- 51 Cutler’s memorandum of the meeting, June 2, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 529–531; editorial note, *ibid.*, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1657–1658. Cutler forwarded the summary of the main points taken at the meeting to Secretary Dulles in the course of the same day. For the text see Cutler’s memorandum to Dulles, June 2, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. It was apparently the same memorandum of the conference that Griffith uses to make his point

The frequent small-group meetings assisted in the clarification of problem points. Thus they provided a good basis for the full NSC to convene. In early June, the NSC gathered to discuss Indochina. Admiral Radford told the participants that the French were waiting for a major Vietminh offensive in the Tonkin Delta within the next ten days. In addition, the Admiral reported on the low morale among the FEC. He thought it was time for a change in command of the French forces as the FEC should be able to resist the Vietminh. Radford recommended the use of South Korean troops in Indochina. Cutler asked if Radford wanted the NSC to take action on the matter. But the Admiral preferred that the Pentagon should look into it first. The President stopped the question by stating that it would be reconsidered after the French made an official request in connection with it to Syngman Rhee and after US planes had been asked to transport troops there. The Council agreed that the Defense Department should, however, report back if the US were to take new action on the matter.⁵²

Secretary Wilson was curious to hear what the result would be if the FEC lost in the Tonkin Delta. According to Radford, this would lead to the rapid loss of the rest of the area of Indochina. "The Communists want all of Southeast Asia", Radford continued, "and seem to be in a fair way to get it". Allen Dulles supported Radford's point and called for special actions to prevent the Delta from falling into enemy hands. In reply to Nixon's question about the French concluding an acceptable settlement at Geneva, Bowie, who had taken Secretary Dulles's place, answered that the French were likely to go for partition, which would not satisfy the US. The Vice-President also wished to hear what the US would do. Bowie said that at first, theoretically, the US would disassociate itself from the agreement. However, he added, later on, "from a practical point of view we would have to recognize the boundaries" in order to save the rest of the area. Radford suggested that the French would have to carry on fighting because if they lost the Delta they would have to evacuate a great number of civilians from the north.⁵³

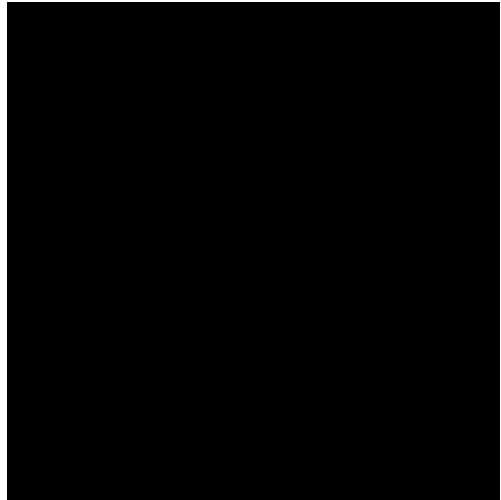
Eisenhower writes in his memoirs about the meeting of June 3. He does not say whether it was a Council meeting, but apparently it was. He adds that he had wished at that specific meeting that there should be a comprehensive consensus of opinion over the issue of Indochina. He had stated that he would not ask for Congressional authorization unless it was United Action, and if the Southeast Asian nations adopted an indifferent attitude towards Indochina the US policy

that "Eisenhower was determined...to draw the line in Southeast Asia". Eisenhower's "American lake" comment is quoted in Griffith, Robert, "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," *American Historical Review*, Volume 87 (February 1982), p. 119. According to Griffith, the document is in the Eisenhower Papers, Administration series, Box 11, DDEL. See *ibid.*, p. 119, footnote 77. For further discussion on the power of business in the 1950s see Koistinen, Paul A.C., *The Military-Industrial Complex: A Historical Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

52 Memorandum of Discussion of the 200th Meeting of the NSC, June 3, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1660-1661.

53 Memorandum of Discussion of the 200th Meeting of the NSC, June 3, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1661-1662.

Even though Arthur S. Flemming, the Director of Defense Mobilization, was a statutory member of the NSC, his contribution “on top of policy hill” seems to have mainly consisted – at least in the handling of the Vietnam issue – of asking questions. He rarely participated in the substance of Council deliberations. Eisenhower had chosen Flemming because he held a Ph.D. and was experienced in the function and organization of government. In August 1958, Flemming was appointed Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. (Newsweek)



would have to be reappraised.⁵⁴ Eisenhower’s point is not consistent with his system. In a strange way, he wrote that he had hoped for a consensus to be developed.

In practice, there was no consensus. Cutler summarized the recent and forthcoming developments after the June 3 meeting of the NSC. Nixon had thought that a special meeting of the NSC should be convened to deal with “all possible alternatives” of the courses of action open to the US with respect to Indochina. The Vice-President had fears about the outcome of the Geneva Conference. He believed a negotiated settlement would be unacceptable. Other principals agreed with Nixon’s view of the need for thorough discussion on the topic. The President, who had not seen an OCB memorandum nor heard a presentation at the Cabinet session, had been disappointed at “the apparent failure of the mechanism set up to operate the Refugee Act of 1953”. In his talks with Nixon, Bowie and Flemming, Cutler had gained the impression that some of the studies, particularly those on the military and mobilization, contained in NSC 5421 “were more important than others [like on economic warfare] as to which basic issues should be extracted and brought up for discussion if there was a conflict between them”. Furthermore, the Special Assistant wrote for the record, Wilson had asked for a chance to make a report on his trip to Indochina at the June 10 NSC meeting.⁵⁵

The State Department also received outside advice. Already on May 25 John D. Rockefeller III sent his memorandum on Indochina to Secretary Dulles. In replying to Rockefeller III, Dulles admitted that he thought that some of the points raised by the memorandum had “made a real contribution to Bob

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54 Memorandum of Discussion of the 200th Meeting of the NSC, June 3, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1660–1662; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, 362.

55 Cutler attempted to arrange a special meeting on Wednesday, June 9 as Secretary Dulles was going away. Cutler’s memorandum for the record, June 3, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL.

Bowie's and my own thinking".⁵⁶ It seems clear that Bowie's role in Indochina-related planning was crucial within the State Department. Furthermore, he often accompanied Dulles to NSC meetings and was the State Department's representative on the PB.

A good view of Eisenhower's thinking is offered by his personal letter to Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Alfred M. Gruenther. The President expressed his amazement and bitterness at French statements that it would be the fault of the US if the Tonkin Delta fell. He wrote that the US had tried to take initiatives and had "offered help of a kind that would tend to keep our participation in the background, but nevertheless be very effective". The President complained that recently "the French government has begun to speak out of the other side of its mouth, and has been demanding help of various kinds". But everything had happened on the terms of the French without any sign that they would be fulfilling the US conditions. The French, according to Eisenhower, were ungrateful and the Americans were "forebearing and understanding".⁵⁷

The deteriorating situation called for re-evaluation on the part of the US. New policy changes were spelled out to the public by Secretary Dulles on June 8. He stated that the main responsibility for the peace negotiations lay with the French. According to Dulles, the Communists had started applying delaying tactics in Geneva. Unilateral intervention, Dulles revealed, was out of the question, although he said the US was concerned about Chinese aggression. The Eisenhower Administration was not going to ask Congress to approve intervention in Indochina because the US allies had not agreed to United Action. As the situation in Indochina had degenerated, the aims of United Action had changed continuously. President Eisenhower confirmed the policy two days later.⁵⁸

In late May and in early June, the Pentagon flooded the Council apparatus with recommendations on Indochina. On June 8, Cutler felt that he had to correct the Deputy Secretary of Defense Anderson. The latter had sent the Special Assistant memoranda on May 25 and June 5 with the JCS views on Indochina as attachments and asked them to be circulated. Since the informal meeting of the NSC had already discussed the issue on May 28 on the basis of Secretary Dulles's comments on the earlier views held by the Chiefs, and some of the points of the JCS were already covered in the Pentagon's contribution to NSC 5421, Cutler wrote that the Pentagon memoranda could not be circulated through the Council machinery as it would result in confusion.⁵⁹

56 Dulles's letter to John D. Rockefeller III, June 5, 1954, John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 8, DDEL

57 Eisenhower's letter to Gruenther, June 8, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1667-1669.

58 Dulles's press conference, June 8, 1954, DSB, June 21, 1954, pp. 947-949; Eisenhower's press conference, June 10, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 545-554.

59 Cutler concluded that he would merely file the Pentagon memoranda with the NSC. Cutler's memorandum for Secretary Anderson, June 8, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL.

The Council did not really discuss Indochina at its meeting on June 9, but some discussion took place around the CIA Director's presentation. Allen Dulles told the participants that the Vietminh forces, which had been redeployed after Dien Bien Phu, had been attacking rail lines between Hanoi and Haiphong. They were preparing for a major offensive. The CIA Director recommended that in order to avoid siege of Hanoi, the FEC troops should be withdrawn near Haiphong. When Eisenhower wondered why the French could not protect their communication lines in the Tonkin Delta, Radford explained that the key would be to ensure the loyalty of the Vietnamese forces so that the French Groupes Mobiles could operate effectively. Allen Dulles was disappointed as the EDC had just come to a vote in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber of Deputies and lost. The Socialist Party Congress, Secretary Dulles pointed out, had voted in favor of the plan, which meant that "the prospects for ratification of EDC were currently more favorable than they had been in a long time. Elsewhere, Molotov had given a speech at Geneva in which he spoke about a political settlement in connection with a cease-fire, thus making the situation more complicated, Allen Dulles continued.⁶⁰

Secretary Dulles continued his policy speeches on June 10. He warned that the US would never fight for colonialism. The next day he confirmed that the unilateral US intervention in Indochina was possible only if there was overt Chinese aggression. In this case, the US would consider it as provocation against the US, and act accordingly. Dulles mentioned the use of the UN as in Korea.⁶¹

The policy decisions were known to Congress. On June 12, Senator John C. Stennis spoke after hearing that 200 USAF mechanics stationed in Vietnam had been replaced by volunteers. This could lead to a situation, Stennis warned, in which the US would have to intervene or pull out without honor. Senator Knowland demanded the next day that the Geneva Conference should be terminated due to Communist delaying tactics. Eisenhower remembers that he had observed that deliberate action.⁶² Eisenhower had made up his mind not to intervene unilaterally, although according to one Gallup poll 72 percent of the American people favored the use of US ground troops in Indochina.⁶³

Some standard diplomatic reports were briefed to the highest level within the NSC framework. Dillon had cabled from Paris that the French feared that the US had no intention of intervening and, therefore, they were willing to make peace with the Vietminh. He warned that the French people would put the blame

60 The vote in the Foreign Affairs Committee in Paris had gone 24 to 18 against French participation in EDC. Memorandum of Discussion of the 201st Meeting of the NSC, June 9, 1954 (drafted by Gleason on June 10), AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL.

61 Dulles's speech at the Annual Rotary International Convention in Seattle, June 10, 1954, DSB, June 21, 1954, pp. 935-939. See also Dulles's speech, June 11, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 791-793; also printed in PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 129.

62 Randle, Geneva 1954, 1969, p. 264; Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 358.

63 The poll was released on June 13; quoted in Cable, Sir James, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina*. (London: Basingstoke Macmillan, 1986), p. 79. The Americans had a chance to read that the so-called "Radford Plan" was still alive. See "Intervention in Indo-China: Radford Knows What He Wants, but Will His Policy Work?," *New Republic*, June 14, 1954, pp. 3-6.

for the loss of Indochina on Washington. The Ambassador recommended that it would be appropriate for Eisenhower to publicly announce that he was no longer ready to ask Congress for authorization to intervene. Secretary Dulles answered Dillon by saying that the French actions were irresponsible. They had used the intervention card as a weapon at the negotiation table. Dulles considered the French bitterness to be unreasonable.⁶⁴ Cutler showed Eisenhower only on June 14 a paragraph of Dillon's cable, dated June 11, in which Dillon indicated that if the Geneva Conference failed the French Government would "ask the US to intervene".⁶⁵

Secretary Dulles made no solo performances, but forwarded Eisenhower's views to the US representatives. He reminded the American delegation in Geneva that the French still wanted intervention. Time was running out, which, according to Dulles, would lead the US to pursue its own course of action. He hoped the British would accept United Action. Dulles wrote that the Geneva negotiations were coming to a halt, which suited the US purposes, provided that the French did not feel themselves abandoned.⁶⁶

The grave situation in Indochina threatened the security of the United States and its allies. For Secretary Dulles, the results of the Geneva Conference were difficult to foresee because the Communists acted unpredictably. The paper-producing effort by the Council apparatus was continuous. On June 14, for example, the State Department prepared a study for the Council, NSC 5422, "Guidelines Under NSC 162/2". The paper noted that the US policy in Southeast Asia was to advance "strength and stability" to counter the growing threat of China. Any kind of overt Chinese aggression would result in US military retaliation.⁶⁷

Secretary Dulles's ideas were sometimes challenged by his own advisers. In mid-June, Bowie alarmed his superior Dulles, by saying that the United States would help a Communist victory in Indochina if they decided to leave the Geneva talks and refused to help the French. This, Bowie added, would have a universal effect.⁶⁸

64 Dillon's cable to Secretary Dulles, June 14, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 522–523; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1687–1689; Dulles's cable to Dillon, June 14, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 524. Dulles had already suspected the French behavior on May 17. *Ibid.*

65 Cutler's memorandum for the record, June 14, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary's Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL.

66 Dulles's cable to Bedell Smith, June 14, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 522–523; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1146–1147. Eden remembered that Bedell Smith had shown him a cable from Washington. Presumably it is the same telegram, because in it Bedell Smith had received orders to do his utmost to end the Conference because of the Communist delaying. See Eden, *Full Circle*, 1960, p. 128.

67 Dulles's statement on Pacific security. DSB, June 14, 1954, pp. 971–973; Lay, Jr's memorandum to the NSC, June 14, 1954 with a State Department Study and "Free World Political Outlook and Problems through FY 1956–59," (undated) as ANNEX 1 to agency studies prepared for the NSC (Annexes to NSC 5422 "Guidelines Under NSC 162/2"), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 667–671.

68 Minute of Secretary Dulles's Staff meeting, June 15, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1692–1695.

The intelligence community envisioned what the Communists would do in the event that the US carried out a limited intervention. Intelligence sources estimated that the loss of Dien Bien Phu and the developments in Geneva would have an impact on the belligerents. The morale of the FEC was perceived to be declining. The Vietminh were going to speed up their operations, but the French strength was sufficient to hold on to Hanoi during the following month. The Vietnamese political situation was going to deteriorate further. According to the NIE, the Chinese would carefully consider whether to retaliate in the event of US intervention. The Soviets, intelligence analysts argued, would not join in the war but they would still play a supportive role.⁶⁹

The NSC's waiting attitude was reflected in Secretary Dulles's public statements. Dulles confessed at his press conference on June 15 that he had not expected positive results from the Geneva Conference. It seemed, Dulles continued, that the Conference would end, go into recess, or be left to officials. The problems, according to the Secretary of State, were caused by Eden's decision to end his mediator role, the failure of the Korea phase, and the change of Government in France.⁷⁰

The Eisenhower Administration had commissioned inquiries into public opinion. The American people apparently had high hopes for the peace conference, for the Korean phase in particular. At the height of the Dien Bien Phu crisis on April 12 almost 60 percent of Americans thought it had been a good idea to go to Geneva and 25 percent argued that it had been a mistake. On June 16, another poll was made public. Selected Americans were asked what the US would gain by undertaking military intervention in Indochina. Almost half (48 percent) answered nothing, but 14 percent replied: stopping Communism. The latter figure had been 18 percent on May 19.⁷¹ Eisenhower carefully took into consideration what the public thought of him and his policies. Now Congress and the American people had also dropped the idea of intervention.

The period of misunderstanding between the Americans and the French came to an end on June 16. Secretary Dulles met Ambassador Bonnet to inform the French Government that intervention was impossible. The reason, Dulles added, was that the situation had deteriorated to the point that intervention was no longer possible. It would have required much larger forces. Dulles also suspected that the new French Government would not even request intervention

69 NIE-63-4-54, "Probable Military and Political Developments in Indochina Over the Next 30 Days (15 June-15 July)," June 15, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1698-1702; SNIE-10-4-54, "Communist Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action," June 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1702-1709.

70 Dulles's statement quoted in Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 233. Laniel's Government had fallen on June 12. It was succeeded by a government led by Pierre Mendès-France, who had promised to bring about a respectable solution by July 20 or he would resign. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

71 In addition, on May 17 only 22 percent of Americans favored sending ground troops to Indochina and 36 percent approved the dispatch of naval and air forces. Gallup, George H., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*. Volume Two: 1949-1958 (New York: Random, 1972), pp. 1226, 1235-1236, 1243.

any more.⁷² President Eisenhower confirmed the same message by sending a note to his counterpart in Paris. Eisenhower wrote that “the US was ready for intervening only with United Action”.⁷³

In reality, intervention, as we have noted, had not been a realistic option for a month already. Thus, Eisenhower’s letter has to be considered as a some sort of a courtesy message, which was meant to maintain and improve the bilateral relations between the United States and France. It might have aimed at enlisting the French behind the EDC. It is likely that Eisenhower took Ambassador Dillon’s recommendations seriously when they were forwarded to him.

“Rebuild from the Foundations”

The Council was briefed on June 17 to discuss the developments in Geneva. A JCS member Admiral Carney gave an oral report to the Council on the Five-Power military talks. Carney revealed that the participants were not unanimous in their opinions of the possible Soviet actions in the event of United Action. The British and the French believed that the Soviet Union would join forces with the Chinese and World War III would ensue, whereas the US regarded the Soviet attitude as “problematic rather than probable”. The participants in the talks had, however, agreed that losing the Tonkin Delta – the key to the defense of Southeast Asia – would in a serious way complicate the defense of Indochina. The Chinese would, Carney went on, be checked close to their border. Problems following the cease-fire were considered academic in nature. Carney said there was a consensus that the FEC in the Delta area would be targeted as early as in June, and by September the Vietminh would commence a major offensive in the area. There was an agreement that three new divisions, which the French hoped would be American, would be needed in order to stabilize the situation in the Delta area. In the event of a retreat, a defense line was to be established “at the narrow waist of Annam”.⁷⁴

Eisenhower commented on the evident pessimism among the French and wondered why a Vietminh attack without Chinese assistance would prove decisive in the Tonkin Delta. Carney answered that the French were modifying their position. Cutler then took up the question of sending South Korean forces to Indochina. The French had opposed the idea, Carney explained. Secretary

72 Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Bonnet (by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Livingston T. Merchant), June 16, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1710–1713.

73 Eisenhower’s letter to President René Coty, June 16, 1954 (delivered June 18), Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 583–584; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1720, footnote 1. Secretary Dulles revealed to his own staff that the President was sending the letter at his request in order to “reaffirm our confidence in France while gently lifting the erratic French locomotive back on the rails”. Memorandum for the record of Secretary Dulles’s Staff meeting, June 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1692–1695.

74 Memorandum of Discussion of the 202nd Meeting of the NSC, June 17, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1713–1716.

Dulles thought the French were insulted by the plan. The FEC morale, Allen Dulles told, was on the decline. According to Carney, the decline had accelerated after Dien Bien Phu, which had also affected the native forces psychologically. Eisenhower concluded that the Indochinese “regarded this whole business as a colonial war”. Secretary Dulles shared the view, and said he had occasionally “thought it best to let the French get out of Indochina entirely and then to try to rebuild from the foundations”. The President added that intervention was out of the question until the Indochinese understood the political cause to fight for.⁷⁵

The future of the US materiel worried Secretary Wilson. In addition, Stassen was curious to hear whether the new defensive position could hold. Carney did not believe it could, and Secretary Dulles said that frontal attacks were not as likely as subversive methods, especially if the United Action forces manned the line. The existence of a defensive line would, Stassen argued, prevent overt aggression on the part of the Chinese. According to Eisenhower, the Annam line left the flank represented by Thailand and Burma open to attack. Carney agreed. Stassen said the coalition would offer security guarantees to the two, and, furthermore, they were among the top nations in Southeast Asia to be able to resist subversion. Secretary Dulles concurred and continued that the US, along with its allies, would not engage in fighting in the Delta at that moment, since the French were not going to request it. The French “are desperately anxious to get themselves out of Indochina”, he added, and perhaps “it was probably best to let them quit”. At this point, Eisenhower wished to move on to other items on the Agenda.⁷⁶

Washington heard from Geneva that France was going to accept partition. The Conference was to go into recess, and the military representatives were to complete their reports in three weeks. Then it would be decided, whether the leaders of the delegations should return to Geneva.⁷⁷ Bedell Smith had just received instructions that he should be independent of the rest from then on. President Eisenhower wanted to lower the level of US representation at Geneva. He thought that his Ambassador in Switzerland, U. Alexis Johnson, would be sufficient. The new French Premier, Pierre Mendès-France, appealed to Eisenhower. According to the Premier, Bedell Smith’s presence would promote both the solution and its prestige. When Bedell Smith was about to return to Washington, the situation clarified. The Soviets accepted international control commission in which the Communists were a minority and the Chinese hinted that they and the Vietminh could accept partition. They did not ask the US to make concessions. The sudden change in the viewpoints of the Communist parties led Bedell Smith to believe that it was some kind of plot.⁷⁸

75 Memorandum of Discussion of the 202nd Meeting of the NSC, June 17, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1716.

76 Memorandum of Discussion of the 202nd Meeting of the NSC, June 17, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1717–1718.

77 Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, June 17, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 531.

78 Bedell Smith’s cable to Secretary Dulles, June 18, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 532–533; Eden, Full Circle, 1960, p. 129; Randle, Geneva 1954, 1969, pp. 286, 289. For Johnson’s own thinking see his memoirs, Johnson, U. Alexis with Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power: The Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Englewood Cliffs Prentice, 1984).

Bedell Smith pessimistically wrote to Secretary Dulles that any kind of settlement would indicate an “inability of our side” (meaning France, Vietnam and the US) to achieve “an acceptable basis” for carrying on the struggle “to hold on to the Tonkin Delta”. Bedell Smith concluded his message by stating that if the US disassociated itself “from the harsh reality” it would work to the Communists’ advantage, and “decrease the prestige of the US as a realistic, responsible, and reliable ally in the long period of struggle ahead, and thus possibly discredit or weaken our capacity to conduct US foreign policy”.⁷⁹

The Congressional attitude was not forgotten when the NSC’s top three – Eisenhower, Dulles, and Nixon – joined Bedell Smith to inform thirty Congressional leaders about Indochina. Bedell Smith said that the role of the US at Geneva was “not a belligerent or a principal, and therefore had to remain aloof and be somewhat restrained”, not having “the power to determine the decision”. The US had been forced, the Under Secretary went on, to re-examine its position owing to the low morale and poor performance of the Vietnamese troops and the fall of the Lanier Government. Originally, Vietnam was considered to be in a state of civil war and the neighboring countries had subsequently invaded it. The US demanded impartial supervision. The Indochina phase was complicated by Eden’s hope for a compromise, and also by the French direct talks and the change in government in France, Bedell Smith said. He envisioned that the settlement could not be accepted by the US, Secretary Dulles continued, and added that many nations, after some “educating”, now understood the importance of the regional grouping. The new French Government, Dulles continued, was “responsive to the people”. He commented that the US “had never wanted to support” the “confused and unpopular” French position until “it became purified”. He believed “that it should soon be possible to salvage something from Southeast Asia, free of the taint of French colonialism”. For this purpose, Dulles hoped the US would be able to rely on the support of other Asian states, especially Burma, and even India. The loss of the Tonkin Delta would not be disastrous and so “the US had not lost assets valuable to her” since, Dulles went on, the rice for Japan came from the southern part and not from the Delta. The Secretary regarded subversion to be the worst problem and for that reason it was imperative to “build up indigenous forces, and to give some economic aid”. Dulles asked the Congressmen for flexibility in the use of 800 million dollars allocated for Indochina. Bedell Smith explained that the goals of the Navarre Plan would be pursued within the framework of the regional grouping.⁸⁰

79 Bedell Smith’s cable to Secretary Dulles, June 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1733–1734.

80 Cutler’s memorandum to Eisenhower on the meeting with the Bipartisan Congressional Group, June 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1730–1733. On June 23, the French and the Chinese held a secret meeting in Bern. China promised to recognize the governments of both Vietnams, if the final political solution was agreed to in direct negotiations between the French and the Chinese. Thus the military and political elements of the solution could be separated and dealt with later. A truce was a priority. When Secretary Dulles heard about the talks “behind our backs”, he got angry and considered pulling the whole

When Stassen, who was a forceful policy advocate in Vietnam deliberations, argued at the NSC that the US had failed to carry out its policies, the President said that the US was trying to form a coalition in order to prevent the fall of Indochina, but others had been unwilling to collaborate. In reply, Stassen said that this was partly the case. The policy also meant, he continued, that the area was to be saved from Communism. The softer British line had not worked, but it had prevented the fulfillment of US policy objectives. According to Secretary Dulles, the British regarded their policy as “a glowing success”. Stassen predicted that the US would probably “have to face up to the issue in Indochina”, especially if Mendès-France was unable to obtain results in Geneva.⁸¹

Contributions to this process were continually being made by lower-level officials. Policy Planning Director Bowie wrote, for example, to Secretary Dulles about alternative US policy options. If the US, Bowie asserted, decided to do nothing with respect to Indochina and “washed its hands” in Geneva, it would lead to a temporary cease-fire or calculated and unacceptable demands from the Communists. Eventually, Indochina would then fall into their hands. Bowie referred to the threats posed by the Domino analogy, and the willingness and ability of other Asian states, including Japan, to prevent Communist domination. US inaction would also have serious effects on the relations between the US and its allies. Hence, Bowie stated, the US could not afford to stand aside and it should be prepared to intervene, possibly alone. According to Bowie, the possibilities included an immediate intervention in the Tonkin Delta, threatening to do so in order to secure a settlement acceptable to the US, or sending troops to the southern part of Vietnam. Bowie concluded that any course of action “involves serious risks for US security” and went on to recommend that the US should decide to use all possible means to defend the southern part of Vietnam and let the French know that the US would support an armistice which took US demands into account. If the French were going for something less at Geneva, the US should reserve the right to take action by inducing the Indochinese states, in collaboration with the US, to withdraw from

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American delegation out of Geneva. He was not aware of the French goals. Dulles cabled to Paris that “the French government could accept a settlement, which would make the Communist victory possible in few months in Laos, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam”. Karnow, Stanley, *Vietnam. A History* (Harrisonburg: Penguin, 1984), p. 202; Dulles’s cable to Dillon, June 24, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 537–538. The same day, Eisenhower had commented on the French reliability on a general level. The President had told his Press Secretary that a typical French promise was just a basis for discussion. Diary entry, June 23, 1954, *The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Midcourse, 1954–1955*. Ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 74.

81 Memorandum of Discussion of the 203rd Meeting of the NSC, June 24, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, p. 696. Owing to a lack of confidence, Secretary Dulles ordered Ambassador Johnson home as the British number two, Lord Reading, had also done. The new head of the US delegation, which was supposed to be only an observer group from then on, was the chief of the State Department’s Office for Southeast Asian Affairs Philip W. Bonsal. The members of the remaining American delegation were given instructions not to take part in committee work which could result in decisions that the US would have to deny in public. Dulles’s cable to Johnson, June 24, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 538–539. Bonsal had served as a Special Assistant to the US delegation.

Geneva. The US, Bowie suggested, should “provide such assistance to the Associated States, including US armed forces, as may be necessary to hold and develop a stable position” in the southern part of the country. For the above-mentioned actions, the US should gather support from other nations, conduct the actions in accordance with the UN Charter, and commence “vigorous aid” and military training programs and “other appropriate measures” to strengthen the governments of the three states, Bowie added. He concluded that partition should be viewed, as in Korea and Germany, as a temporary situation and that the French should be pressured to give “complete political and economic independence to the Indochinese states.”⁸²

The Western position was to be coordinated according to the way which the Special Committee had urged on the NSC. This materialized when Churchill and Eden arrived in Washington on June 25. Eden tried to get the US to support granting international guarantees for the outcome of Geneva Conference. He had sketched a mutual defense arrangement. His Locarno-like plan had been designed to persuade the US to allow the French to achieve a negotiated settlement at Geneva. Secretary Dulles agreed with the British Premier that a limited ground operation could not restore the situation in Indochina. According to Eden, Dulles seemed to accept the partition of Vietnam.⁸³ The French aim was to secure as large an area as possible for the southern half of Vietnam. They argued that they could not foresee the results of the Conference because the Vietminh were not really making concessions. The French Government asked the US to include a statement in the upcoming communiqué to the effect that serious consequences would ensue for international relations unless the Geneva Conference could produce a reasonable solution. Because an indefinite partition would attract violent and thoughtless reactions from the Vietnamese patriots, Mendès-France hoped that the US would not do anything to encourage such developments.⁸⁴

The substance of the discussions with the British is revealed in Secretary Dulles’s remarks to Congress. Dulles told the Senators about his talks with the British. He reminded them that he would not speak explicitly about intervention or say whether the US was going to intervene. If he were to do so, Dulles told the Senators, the military leadership would lose the element of surprise.⁸⁵

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82 Bowie wrote that any US action should “include one essential ingredient – demonstrated willingness by the US to use US armed forces either to secure a US objective or to guarantee a settlement”. Bowie’s memorandum to Dulles, June 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1748–1751.

83 Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, pp. 233–234; Eden, *Full Circle*, 1960, pp. 131–132, 147, 150. Guhin argues that Secretary Dulles had “not challenged but accepted” the idea of partition as it had emerged. Guhin, *John Foster Dulles*, 1972, p. 250. Gardner suggests that Dulles raised the possibility of partition at the start of the Geneva Conference in his discussion with Molotov. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 256–257.

84 Translation of an aide-mémoire, June 26, 1954 (as an annex to Secretary Dulles’s cable to Dillon, June 28), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1755–1758. The aide-mémoire was handed to Dulles and Eden by Ambassador Bonnet.

85 Dulles’s testimony in the Senate, June 28, 1954, CR, June 28, 1954, pp. 9046–9047. In Congress, Eden’s actions were seen as a sell-out of the free world. In the House of the Representatives many regarded security guarantees as unacceptable, because they would have

Dulles informed the Congressional Leaders of a separate meeting that a Geneva settlement was probable. Speaking about the defense of the remainder of South-east Asia, he said it was developing and insisted that the local population had to be willing to cooperate, as the US “cannot be expected to rush in singlehandedly”. Eisenhower wanted to stress that the US would not be “bogged down from the start” in supporting any people unless it was specifically asked and met certain preconditions. There would not, he added, be any guarantees similar to those offered in the Locarno Pact. In reply to Senator Knowland’s question about the French position, Dulles said that there was not a good chance that the French would be unable to hold on to the enclave in the Tonkin Delta and that they were not telling the Americans about all of their discussions in Geneva. Knowland was worried about the fate of the supplies provided by the US in the north and asked about their capture. Both Eisenhower and Dulles commented that some time was still available and that the Pentagon had been assigned to prepare for repossession.⁸⁶

Despite the obvious differences, the Washington talks produced a communiqué consisting of seven points on June 29. This stated that both countries wanted to respect the armistice agreement which restored the sovereignty and integrity of Cambodia and Laos, and saved the southern part of Vietnam. The communiqué stated that to prevent Communism the treaty should not place restrictions on those countries by getting aid – i.e. importing arms and deploying military advisors – from outside. Furthermore, it did not want to rule out the possibility of peaceful reunification, which should be an option in the future. In addition, the United States and Great Britain called for international supervision and a chance for a voluntary move from one part of Vietnam to another.⁸⁷ According to Hoopes, Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles accepted the inevitability of partition as a part of the settlement. Spector adds that, despite the fact that a negotiated settlement “appeared at that point [late June] inevitable”, some US policy-makers were anxious to find ways to rescue Indochina.⁸⁸

The NSC machinery made preparations for initiating the training of South Vietnamese troops by American military advisors. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina had followed a MAAG request to send additional materiel for the Vietnamese troops. The Working Group did not believe that it would to

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led to de facto recognition of partition and thus the Americans would have to trust the word of the Chinese. Several Congressmen suggested an amendment to the MDAP. The wording of the amendment would have meant the freezing of funds if a particular country guaranteed Communist gains in Asia. Some Representatives regarded the Indochinese situation as unclear and unstable. Senator Knowland called the Geneva Conference a Far Eastern Munich with a policy of appeasement. CR, June 24 and 29, 1954, pp. 8892, 9203; Knowland quoted in Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors*, 1988, p. 90.

86 Memorandum by Assistant Staff Secretary L. Arthur Minnich to Eisenhower on his meeting with Congressional leaders, June 28, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1754–1755.

87 Joint American and British communiqué (as an annex to Secretary Dulles’s cable to Dillon, June 28, 1954). FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1757–1758.

88 Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 235; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 214.

be adhered to by the JCS, because the French were not going to send additional troops for training before July 20, nor had they agreed to the five-point program. Secretary Dulles had already given the US Embassy permission (without informing the MAAG) to continue discussions with the French on the training issue.⁸⁹

Thus, on July 1st, the NSC members were still waiting for news from Geneva. They were not really considering the issue of Indochina but were instead briefed on developments in the area. The CIA Director informed them that the French were evacuating the southern part of the Tonkin Delta, which was difficult because the region was predominantly Catholic and pro-French. Furthermore, Allen Dulles continued, the FEC had suffered serious defeat in southern Vietnam, which indicated future problems associated with holding the south of Vietnam if northern Vietnam were to fall. On a positive note Secretary Dulles said that the US and the British had at last managed to formulate a joint position on a potential settlement in Indochina. The position included the kind of prerequisites for a settlement which could be “respected” by the US. Approximately half of Vietnam (along the 18th parallel), the Secretary of State added, would remain non-Communist, while Laos and Cambodia would be left free and independent.⁹⁰

The State Department’s PB representative Bowie continued his recommendations. In early July, Bowie wrote within the State Department that the US should forget the conditions given to the French and instead seriously threaten to intervene unilaterally. According to him, this would be the only way to help the French and save the southern part of Vietnam.⁹¹ This time Secretary Dulles did not listen to his Planning Director. He cabled to Paris, that the US did not want to be associated with a settlement which consisted of less than the points in the communiqué of June 29. It seemed evident that the British were not going to adhere to the communiqué. Dulles considered it to be “digging the earth under our feet”. Although the French had recently apologized for not informing Washington about the real military situation in northern Vietnam, Dulles warned that the French and the Communists were heading toward serious problems if they worked on the assumption that the US would join any kind of treaty.⁹²

89 An airlift to fly the wounded from Indochina was considered as well as a MAAG request to conduct a survey of material and equipment in the Tonkin Delta area for further contingency planning. OCB Status Report, June 29, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 6, RG 59, NA; Dulles’s cable to Heath, June 26, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1752–1754.

90 Secretary Dulles also said that Prime Minister Eden seemed finally to realize that there was no alternative to the EDC. Memorandum of Discussion of the 204th Meeting of the NSC, July 1, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL. The Council members had also recently received information on the expansion of USIA informational programs in Southeast Asia. See “Report to the NSC: Status of U.S. Programs for National Security as of June 30,” 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 2, p. 1781.

91 Bowie’s draft memorandum to Secretary Dulles, July 2, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1774–1776.

92 Dulles’ cable to Dillon, July 3, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume I, pp. 542–543; Dillon’s cable to Dulles, July 2, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 541–542; Ambassador Heath’s cable to Special Assistant Bonsal, July 4, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1280–1282.

Like Bowie, several other lower US officials associated with the NSC work did not necessarily share the views of their principals, and thus they were attempting to make a difference. Ambassador Heath wrote to a Special Adviser to the US delegation at Geneva “that all the people below the Secretary and Under Secretary are unanimous that we should intervene or rather make up our mind to intervene now with or without the French”. The President had confided to Heath that he did not understand why he had failed to persuade the French to internationalize the war even though he had tried to do so since 1950. Aerial intervention would have saved Dien Bien Phu and afterwards the US planes could have been withdrawn, said Radford, who was sorry about the decision-makers’ “conventional” approach. Heath’s description of the atmosphere in Washington was that “at least on the high levels the attitude was one of pessimism and not knowing what to do”.⁹³

According to Immerman, unverified intelligence suggested that the Chinese were uncertain of the US actions and hence they were asking for Soviet support. As Molotov had stated that the Soviet Union would only retaliate in the event the US using nuclear weapons in its intervention, but in other cases it would offer technical and material assistance. Immerman argues that the documents do not show how far the considerations went since there was no way of determining the accuracy of this intelligence about Sino-Soviet tension. In any event, Immerman, who agrees with Kinnard, Burke and Greenstein as well as Destler, concludes that, “operational decisions of this kind were more likely to have been discussed informally in the Oval Office than before the formal NSC”.⁹⁴

The question of US representation at Geneva was a complicated one. Hagerty told to Eisenhower in a private conversation that if there was no high-level representative at Geneva “America would look like a little boy sulking in his tent”. The Americans would be made the scapegoats for any failures. According to Eisenhower, the French tried to induce the Americans to support the agreement. The representation issue called for serious thinking as the President regarded it as being “a tough one to decide”. On that same day Eisenhower had written a letter to Churchill which clearly shows why the US proceeded as it did in its Geneva policy. Eisenhower reminded Churchill that he had been calling for the “internationalization of the Indo-China conflict” since he had taken office. The Americans, the President explained, were truly concerned about the possibility of the kind of armistice agreement which could have been “used as an excuse for raising the issue of Red China’s entrance into” the UN. On July 10, Eisenhower and his Secretary of State had a long discussion. Dulles was determined to get his way and he argued that the time was not right to retreat. The President answered that he would like to comply with Mendès-France’s request and restore their high-level attendance in Geneva if this was not against US policy and if it did not mean that the US would have “to disassociate...from

93 Heath’s letter to Bonsal, July 4, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1280–1282.

94 Immerman, Richard H., “The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954: A New Look,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 14 (Winter 1990), pp. 61–62.

our allies". After Dulles explained his views, the two came to the conclusion that Dulles would draft a message to the French stating that before full American diplomatic participation the Western powers should form a "united front" and then, after answers from the French and the British, Dulles or Bedell Smith could lead the US delegation in Geneva. The President wrote in his diary that the issue was not worth weakening the Western union. Eisenhower had considered sending Bedell Smith back. In his memoirs, Eisenhower clarifies that the US avoided high-level representation because the US could not approve the results of the Conference, which were obvious. Vice-President Nixon would have preferred that Dulles should have gone back to the Geneva Conference to safeguard American interests.⁹⁵

The Western countries had not succeeded in achieving the NSC objective of coordinating their positions. This meant that the moment for United Action had passed. Secretary Dulles felt that the actions of the US allies would minimize the chances of accomplishing the minimum goals of the Washington communiqué.⁹⁶ A natural result of Dulles's thoughts was the statement that he made through his Congressional Liaison. According to this, the US did not know whether a settlement at Geneva was possible. It was unclear whether a possible solution was acceptable to the US. Settlements based on appeasement were out of the question. The US would, the statement carried on, not under any circumstances officially recognize the legitimacy of Communist control in any part of Southeast Asia.⁹⁷

The Council was not used for rapid decisions. This would have been against the terms of its original mission. Dillon flew from Paris to Geneva with a note from Eisenhower to be handed to Mendès-France. Eisenhower explained that the reason why the US was avoiding full diplomatic representation in Geneva was that the US could not possibly accept the outcome of the Conference because they would not fulfil the seven-point communiqué. For the French, the US actions were "a stab in the back" since they weakened the French negotiating position. Paris interpreted the US absence from Geneva as a return to isolationism.⁹⁸ An additional account of the representation question is provided

95 Diary entry, July 8, 1954. Hagerty Diary, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1797; Eisenhower's letter to Churchill, July 8, 1954. The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1953–1955. Ed. Boyle, 1990, pp. 156–157; Eisenhower's diary entry, July 10, 1954, The Eisenhower Diaries. Ed. Ferrell, 1981, p. 283. See also Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, pp. 365–366, 369; Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, July 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1807, footnote 1. For the text of the explanatory letter to Mendès-France see Dulles's cable to Dillon, July 10, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1807–1810. Dillon was to deliver the letter to Mendès-France personally and then give a copy of it to Eden. Dulles's cable to Dillon, July 10, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1810. The meeting between Eisenhower and Dulles took place at 11:00 a.m. Dulles read the draft to the President on the telephone at about 6:30 p.m. and send it in a cable at 10:25 p.m.

96 Dulles's cable to Dillon, July 10, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 550–551.

97 A Statement by Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, July 11, 1954, DSB, July 26, 1954, p. 121.

98 Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 369; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 236; Randle, *Geneva 1954, 1969*, p. 316; Dillon's cable to Secretary Dulles, July 11, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 552–553; Lacouture, Jean, *Pierre Mendès-France* (New York: Holmes, 1984), p. 227.

by the Hagerty Diary. The Press Secretary had met the President on the morning of July 11. Eisenhower had been thinking about the matter carefully and was coming to the conclusion that he should send Secretary Dulles to Paris to discuss it with the French and the British. Eisenhower admitted that even though it was a “tough situation”, Hagerty was “dead right” when suggesting that the US should have a high-level representative at Geneva. Without Bedell Smith in Geneva, the Communists could otherwise use the US absence to their advantage and the French “will then blame us for everything that goes wrong”.⁹⁹ Eisenhower made a concession to the French by sending Dulles to Paris. The Secretary of State claimed that a middle-level representation at Geneva was keeping the Communists in suspense about US intentions. Mendès-France defended the French position and asked Dulles to restore a US high-level representation at the Conference. The French demands puzzled Dulles because they wanted the demarcation line to be drawn further north than he did. Dulles said that the US did not want a new Yalta. He added that the US was not going to intervene because the situation had deteriorated too much. Mendès-France promised that he could achieve even more than stated in the Washington communiqué if the US sent Dulles or Bedell Smith to Geneva.¹⁰⁰ Hess concludes that if Eisenhower had decided to send Dulles to Paris, which seems likely, in order to pressure him into accepting the US participation in the Geneva Conference, the trip fulfilled the President’s goal.¹⁰¹ Eisenhower had confessed to his Press Secretary that by sending Dulles to Paris, he had for the first time overruled Dulles’s views and acted against them.¹⁰²

Allen Dulles was doing his homework by preparing for his presentation to the Council on July 14. The CIA Director had asked the INR at the meeting of the IAC to comment on the CIA briefing paper about the developments threatening the southern part of Vietnam. Fisher Howe and the INR Staff gave their comments and recommended that the NSC should be notified that the US could “undertake responsibilities previously within the French sphere”. This, they continued, would require “a vastly increased US military and economic aid program”. Commenting on the impossibility of conducting administrative reforms “under the present leadership of Bao Dai and his entourage”, the INR added the NSC should be told about the implications of the change in the government. They went on to suggest that the Council should be informed that

99 Diary entry, July 11, 1954, Hagerty Diary, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1812–1813.

100 Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 236; Eden, *Full Circle*, 1960, pp. 138–139; Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès-France*, 1984, p. 227; memorandum of conversation between Dulles, Mendès-France, and Eden, July 13, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1348–1355. Eisenhower’s decision to send Dulles to Paris dated back two days. Diary entry, July 11, 1954, Hagerty Diary, *ibid.*, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1812–1813.

101 Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 137.

102 Diary entry, July 8–9, 1954. Hagerty Diary. *The Diary of James C. Hagerty*, Ferrell (ed.), 1983, pp. 86–87; Herring, Geroge C., “‘A Good Stout Effort’: John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954–1955,” in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. Ed. Immerman, 1990, p. 224.

the good objective to establish a viable South Vietnam would certainly mean practical difficulties and that it was not easy to maintain internal security. The INR reminded the CIA Director that military considerations should be given priority.¹⁰³ There is no record of Allen Dulles's reaction to INR suggestions. Judging by the outcome, one can guess that he did not take them into consideration, but instead presented the original, somewhat optimistic and rather simplified views, prepared by the CIA and included some material from the NIE.

The Council was still waiting for the closing of the Geneva Conference, but some change is evident as the NSC returned to "normal" procedures at its meeting of July 15. It was more than just informational in nature. Secretary Dulles reported from his talks in Paris to the NSC. He told about a dilemma faced by the US in the question of representation at Geneva. The US was afraid to get into a situation in which it would have to guarantee a settlement. The US would have to say no, because, as Dulles put it, "we couldn't get ourselves into the 'Yalta business' of guaranteeing Soviet conquests". Refusal would be viewed as a betrayal by the French. "The other horn of the dilemma" was that high-level US participation at Geneva could make the French accept no kind of solution and then request the US to come to fight alongside them. In any case, Dulles said, the relations between the US and France could be damaged. Hence, the US should stay away from the Indochina phase of the Conference "inconspicuously", but this had turned out to be difficult. The French were requesting high-level American representation at Geneva. Mendès-France and Dulles had discussed and put in written form their government's positions (basically the same as six of the seven points). Dulles informed the Council that the independence and integrity of the Indochinese states was provided in the papers. Furthermore, he said the US was not going to guarantee settlements but would refrain from changing it by force. Dulles had also managed to prevent a dilemma and ensure that the US would not be held responsible for the outcome of the Conference¹⁰⁴. Bedell Smith should fly to Geneva even though it was risky. This decision would work towards fulfilling the US aims. The question of the level of US participation showed, Dulles concluded, "that when it really comes down to something important, the United States is the key nation".¹⁰⁵

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103 INR's Sherman Kent's memorandum "Critical Factors Underlying the Viability of a South Vietnam State" to Allen Dulles, July 12, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Subject Files of INR 1945-1960, Lot 58 D 116, Box 11, RG 59, NA; Howe's memorandum for the record including a draft memorandum of the INR comments as an attachment, July 13, 1954, *ibid.*; Howe's memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. with a copy of the INR comments to Allen Dulles as an attachment, July 14, 1954, *ibid.*

104 The fact that the US would not, despite the level of representation, be blamed for the settlement was jointly written in a letter which included a promise by Mendès-France that he would address the French people about this intention. For the text see Mendès-France's letter to Secretary Dulles, July 14, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1832-1833.

105 Concerning Bedell Smith's return, Dulles told the NSC that the US "will be going back with an agreed position with France, as well as with a clear position with respect to our responsibility or lack of responsibility for the final outcome of the negotiations". Memorandum of Discussion of the 206th Meeting of the NSC, July 15, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1834-1838. Secretary Dulles had confined to Press Secretary Hagerty on the morning of July 15. Dulles said that he

President Eisenhower may have been improperly briefed for the July 15 Council meeting. At least his partial ignorance is indicated by his question to the Secretary of State about whether the French knew that, whatever the end result, the execution depended on the Indochinese and their confidence. Dulles reminded that this was one of the seven points. He continued that he had had a hard time persuading Mendès-France to accept that the US could take up the question at the UN if the Conference ended in deadlock. The French regarded the situation as a civil war. The Premier had offered to resign if there was no settlement at Geneva by July 20. Secretary Humphrey said Dulles had placed Mendès-France “under obligation” to the US. Touching on the issue of Congressional support, Vice-President Nixon said it would be up the way the press handled it and the way certain Republicans acted in the matter. Nixon suggested the former be put on the spot and asked if they had any better answers. The news should be broken “in very simple terms”, he added. It should also be prepared, Nixon went on, to “sell it” [the settlement] to the public by pointing out its good parts. Secretary Dulles replied he did not think it was wise to describe the settlement as appearing to be a “good bargain”.¹⁰⁶ The recommendations of the Vice-President were practical and feasible. He seems to have favored the same kind of action that had occurred in connection with his speech of April 17.

The Defense Department was concerned about the fate of US property. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Anderson reiterated Wilson’s continuous concern when he inquired whether there were plans to evacuate US munitions and materiel. Dulles answered in the negative but added that he believed the French had the intention of using the port of Haiphong for that purpose as long as they held the city. Radford doubted whether the Vietnamese would be satisfied with the settlement. Dulles did not know. He continued that there was perhaps a need to move some people south from the Tonkin Delta as “the most virile elements of the Vietnamese population” were there. The Vietnamese could express discontent towards the French because of the settlement, Radford commented, and added that close to 50 percent of the local troops were from the Delta area. According to Allen Dulles, this could lead to uprisings. Secretary Dulles said at the end of the meeting that the French were preparing to send two

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had explained to the French that the US did not especially favor the division of Vietnam but would accept it if the French would help in establishing the regional grouping swiftly. The Secretary of State admitted that sending back the Under Secretary of State “was probably the best thing” because otherwise the US “would lose a forum for world opinion”. Diary entry, July 15, Hagerty Diary, *ibid.*, p. 1834, footnote 1. Hess sees Dulles’s appearance at the July 15 meeting as “buoyant”. Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 138. Secretary Dulles had also connected Indochina and the EDC. He told the SFRC that the relations would suffer if Bedell Smith did not return to Geneva. Dulles’s report to the NSC, July 15, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 558–559; Dulles’s testimony before the SFRC, July 16, 1954, SFRC, His. Ser., Volume VI, pp. 633–658. Mendès-France had said already on July 13 to Dulles that the French National Assembly would not ratify the EDC treaty in its present form. Dulles got angry, but agreed that the EDC would be excluded from the final communiqué. PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 155.

106 Memorandum of Discussion of the 206th Meeting of the NSC, July 15, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1838–1839.

divisions from NATO to Indochina by the end of September if there was no settlement at Geneva and that they would most likely lose the northern ports to the Vietminh without US aerial and naval assistance.¹⁰⁷

The pursuit of the interests of the US and the Council were secured when Bedell Smith returned to Geneva on July 17, just in time for the last phase of the Conference. It was the “lesser of the two evils”. Dulles had instructed him, which were approved by Eisenhower, that is, to act passively. France and the Indochinese states were to be allowed to “negotiate a settlement without any coercion or pressure from the United States”. Dulles wrote that Bedell Smith’s “role at the conference will be that of the representative of a nation friendly to the non-Communist states primarily interested”. The Under Secretary of State could give assistance if requested but not “go beyond this role”. Bedell Smith had the authority to present a unilateral statement pertaining to US support if the settlement followed the seven points. The statement should not include mention of the US as a guarantor nor should the US sign any declaration with the Communists. Dulles ended his message by pointing out that there had been no change in the intervention question, and referred to Eisenhower’s letter to Coty.¹⁰⁸ According to Immerman, Bedell Smith understood his instructions to the effect that he had to avoid contacts with all of the Communists.¹⁰⁹ The Council was to depend largely upon Bedell Smith’s reports. Luckily, the Under Secretary was particularly familiar with the workings of the NSC-OCB machinery.

The Council and the Final Act at Geneva

A tangled skein started to unwind as the Chinese gave out a press release on July 18. In it they hoped the US would guarantee the partition plan. In addition, Peking was hopeful about the possibility of a cease-fire, which, according to the Chinese, was not impossible even if the US refused to accept it.¹¹⁰ The feelings of the Eisenhower Administration were captured by Press Secretary Hagerty, who wrote on the same day in his diary: “Commies never let the free world to succeed in time. Mendès-France should have known it.”¹¹¹

Policy was made among a few members of the inner circle. Secretary Dulles was worried about the fact that the British, together with the French, were seeking a solution which would fall prior to the Washington communiqué. Bedell Smith cabled Dulles to say that he would announce – if asked – that the independence of the Associated States would depend on the outcome of the Geneva Conference. Dulles informed Eisenhower that an armistice would be

107 Memorandum of Discussion of the 206th Meeting of the NSC, July 15, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1839–1840.

108 Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, July 16, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1389–1391; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp., 152, 155.

109 Immerman, “The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954,” 1990, p. 63.

110 Bedell Smith’s cable to Secretary Dulles, July 18, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 561–563.

111 Diary entry, July 18, 1954, *The Diary of James C. Hagerty*. Ed. Ferrell, 1983, pp. 93–94.

declared. He recommended that the President could, in the event of a deadlock at Geneva, prepare to deliver an address to the American public in serious tones which could “buck up” the French position and cause their opponents to “make some concessions”. Eisenhower was ready to speak to Congress but Dulles did not think this would be a good idea. The President called Hagerty to reserve a time for it and asked Dulles to inform the French about it through Bedell Smith. Dulles telephoned Bedell Smith to ask if there was a need for a leak about the possible speech. The latter did not think it advisable as there were promising prospects of an agreement being reached. Eisenhower agreed. Hagerty recorded the phone calls from Dulles in his diary. According to the Press Secretary, Dulles had spoken about two possibilities: either Eisenhower would ask Congress immediately for wartime powers or he would speak to the American people and tell them that the Indochina matter would be taken to the UN. The Secretary of State preferred the latter. Dulles later phoned Bedell Smith to ask whether a contemplated leak about the fact that Eisenhower was going to make a serious speech would help the situation in Geneva. Bedell Smith did not favor such an action because settlement was so close. The Under Secretary of State made clear to the French that the US could not – under any circumstances – be associated with the final declaration of the Geneva Conference. He asked Washington for more authority because he felt that his hands were tied. Bedell Smith suggested he would be allowed to expand the planned US declaration.¹¹²

Secretary Dulles’s role as a key adviser and actor grew temporarily during his practical handling of the Geneva Conference. Dulles preferred UN-controlled elections over international control commission. He complained to Bedell Smith that “the ink has barely dried” on the Washington communiqué and, therefore, “our concurrence would be quite embarrassing”. Dulles did not object to the expansion of unilateral declaration proposed by Bedell Smith, but he was concerned about hints of a multilateral agreement. According to Dulles, this was not in harmony with the US approach. On July 20, Bedell Smith called Secretary Dulles to say that “Vietnam looks pretty good – the line is [the] 17th parallel”. The country, he added, could not join in any treaties, but it could have its own defense forces. Dulles accepted a draft statement which was read to him over the telephone by Bedell Smith. Almost immediately after the call, Dulles phoned Senator H. Alexander Wiley to inform him about the settlement which was about to be signed in a short while. There were, however, some cross-

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112 Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, July 18, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 563; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1429–1430; Bedell Smith’s cables (2) to Dulles, July 18, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 563–565, 566; memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, July 19 (held on July 18), 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1851–1853; Diary entry, July 18, 1954, Hagerty Diary, *ibid.*, footnote 2, p. 1852; memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and Bedell Smith, July 18, 1954, *ibid.*, p. 1853, footnote 4. About Dulles informing Bedell Smith on the possible speech see Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, July 18, 1954, *ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 1436; memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, July 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1851–1853; *ibid.*, Volume XVI, p. 1436, footnote 3. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 255; Bedell Smith’s cable to Secretary Dulles, July 19, 1954, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 567–568.

references which bothered the Legal Adviser Herman Phleger and the Secretary as they had not heard enough about them. In any case, Dulles told Wiley that the US was not going to sign any document but that it was still open until the following day “whether or not we totally disassociate ourselves from it or take notice”.¹¹³

The final session of the Geneva Conference commenced on July 21. The final declaration ended the hostilities, placed limitations on the Indochinese states, divided Vietnam temporarily into two zones, and announced that elections for the unification of Vietnam would be held in two years’ time (at the latest in July 1956). An International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) was to be set up to monitor the implementation of the Accords. The Conference plainly “noted” or “called for” the items.¹¹⁴ The French issued two short declarations in which they recognized the independence of the Indochinese states and promised to withdraw from their territories at the request of their governments.¹¹⁵

The US had not changed its policy even though new information had continued to reach Washington. The US policy-makers obviously did not believe that in the long run the Vietminh would actually comply with the terms of the Geneva Agreements. The unchanged policy is illustrated in Bedell Smith’s statement. He stated, as he had warned three days earlier, that the US was not ready to join the final declaration as such. In consequence, he presented an unilateral declaration in which the US noted the understanding reached and promised to respect the cease-fire agreements and the final declaration. In the words of Bedell Smith, the US was going to “refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb” the agreements. Any renewal of hostilities, he went on, would be viewed “with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security”. He also referred to the possibility of a reunification of Vietnam “through free elections supervised by the” UN.¹¹⁶ The Pentagon prepared

113 Memoranda of telephone conversations between Secretary Dulles and Bedell Smith and Wiley, July 20, 1954 (at 6:20 p.m. and 6:43 p.m.), FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, editorial note, pp. 1478–1479.

114 The cease-fire agreement between the French and the Vietminh had 47 articles altogether. “Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam,” July 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1505–1521. For Laos and Cambodia see *ibid.*, pp. 1521–1530, 1531–1539. See also Council on Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1954* (New York: Harper, 1955), pp. 283–307 and Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., ed., *The Dynamics of World Power: A Documentary History of United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1973*. Volume IV, Part 2: The Far East. (New York: Chelsea, 1983), pp. 455–471. According to US observers at Geneva, the cease-fire agreements with the remaining Vietnam and Laos were signed at 3:30 a.m. and for Cambodia – after a long debate – at 11 a.m. Editorial comment, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1478–1479.

115 Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, pp. 22–23.

116 Unilateral declaration of the US by Bedell Smith, July 21, 1954. Cole, Allan B., ed., *Conflict in Indo-China and International Repercussions: A Documentary History, 1945–1955*. (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 175–176; Branyan, Robert L. and Lawrence H. Larsen, eds, *The Eisenhower Administration: A Documentary History 1953–1961, Volume II*. (New York: Random, 1971), pp. 354–355; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1500–1501. Molotov and China’s Chou En-Lai led Eden to believe, that they could act as guarantors of the settlement. The US refusal to sign the Final Declaration led to a chain reaction, writes Hoopes. In the end, none of the statesmen put his signature to the document. They simply promised orally to respect the Declaration. Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, pp. 47–48.

for the partitioning of Vietnam by stopping all materiel shipments – also those en route – intended for Indochina. The OCB was also charged with considering the matter of future shipments.¹¹⁷ The Board had already discussed the issue at its meetings during the past month.¹¹⁸

There are several interpretations of the Geneva Conference in the literature. Kolko argues that at Geneva the basic question for the United States, especially for Secretary Dulles, was over what things of economic value could be saved from the Communists.¹¹⁹ Herring maintains that, in order to preserve its freedom of action, the Eisenhower Administration did not sign the final declaration of the Geneva Conference because it wanted to protect itself from domestic criticism, mainly from Congress.¹²⁰ Close to Herring's basic interpretation is Brands, Jr., who argues that by refusing to sign the final declaration the President avoided handing over hostages – in the form of millions of Vietnamese – and thus weapons to his own conservatives critics. "Eisenhower was about to guarantee the partition of Vietnam", claims Brands, Jr. Bedell Smith understood the Eisenhower Administration's domestic concerns, but he still strongly objected to the rejection of the Geneva Accords.¹²¹ The temporary nature of the Geneva Agreements is also emphasized by Gardner. According to him, the Communist and capitalist diplomatic corps and practices at Geneva were not all that different after all. Neither one of the ideologies would be able to control all the forces of revolutionary nationalism for too long, concludes Gardner.¹²² Secretary Dulles had guessed what the outcome of the Geneva Conference would be, writes Kahin. Therefore, he adds, Dulles had, in consultation with Eisenhower, started sketching their post-Geneva policy well before the end of the Conference. Kahin regards this as the reason for their avoidance of the elements of the Geneva Agreements.¹²³ According to Hess, the US regarded the Geneva Agreements as a defeat for Western diplomacy. For Dulles, the British and the French had devised compromises connected with the seven points (Washington communiqué). The US unilateral declaration, Hess asserts, was a calculated ambiguity which reflected Washington's ambivalence regarding Geneva. On the one hand, they made a conditional promise to respect the Agreements, while on the other they wanted to maintain their freedom of action.¹²⁴ Immerman has

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117 Secretary Dulles's cable to Dillon, July 21, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1866.

118 In late June, the OCB had considered how to move the materiel to the neighboring states. OCB Minutes, June 30, July 14 and 21, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59 NA. On July 28, the Board noted that the French had agreed to give priority to the evacuation of MDAP materiel from North Vietnam. OCB Minutes, July 28, 1954, *ibid*.

119 Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 1985, p. 82.

120 Herring, *America's Longest War*, 1986, p. 41.

121 Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors*, 1988, pp. 91–92.

122 Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 313–314.

123 Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 65.

124 Hess, "Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 139; Hess, *Vietnam and the United States*, 1990, p. 49.

discovered that the Americans viewed the Geneva Conference as an opportunity to promote their national interest. The Americans, Immerman adds, acted in Geneva in an “obstructionist manner”. They failed to take advantage of the disunity of the Communist world. The US representatives at Geneva did not achieve success because they worked against the beliefs they held in common. They chose to play it safe, Immerman concludes. The US projected the image that they were not a nation prepared to make or accept compromises, even to accomplish a peaceful settlement. The US was more interested in war. In Washington, the partition of Vietnam was viewed as a delay to Communist victory in the whole of Indochina. At the beginning of the Geneva Conference Bedell Smith tried to influence the other Communists through Molotov. When this did not develop in a way which the US would have preferred, the Americans left the Conference, even though the international situation would have needed a calculated and constructive strategy. The same spirit led to the Suez crisis two years later. For Immerman the settlement was a partial surrender, not a sell-out. The US attempts to sabotage the peaceful settlement confused the Western alliance, Immerman writes. For the US, diplomacy and international law were no substitutes for power. Thus, the US became the victim of its own logic. Immerman claims that at Dien Bien Phu Eisenhower avoided any strategy, but in Geneva he laid the basis for a new one.¹²⁵ According to Hess, the US policy-makers did not pay much attention to “the shortcomings and dangers of holding-action diplomacy”. Their policy at the Geneva and Manila Conferences, Hess adds, was determined by “the imperatives of the moment”. Herring argues that the shift in US policy was the result of Communist concessions at Geneva, a change of Premier in France, and the decision of the British to continue to participate in collective security deliberations only after Geneva. Actually, as Herring adds, “these dramatic events forced a change in US policy”. The US leadership did not believe Geneva was going to end in deadlock but they did realize that there was going to be some kind of a compromise settlement. Thus, “serious talk” of intervention came to an end, Herring concludes. On the other hand, Bundy maintains that the atomic weapons were “still a force in the process by which a temporary settlement is reached” in Geneva.¹²⁶

Several scholars have hinted that the Geneva Agreements were clearly a temporary solution and hence it could not serve as a foundation for lasting peace in Indochina. Bedell Smith did, however, safeguarded – at a distance – US interests at the Geneva Conference. He acted as a “determined keeper of the moral”. The real decisions were made by Eisenhower and, in some cases, by Secretary Dulles. Geneva represented a victory for the policy of the Eisenhower Administration since the war had ended without any US intervention and the US

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125 Immerman, “The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954,” 1990, pp. 44, 46, 55–59, 64–66.

126 Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 144; Herring, ““A Good Stout Effort,”” in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. Ed. Immerman, 1990, p. 223; Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 1988, p. 273.

had not had to recognize the Vietminh. This policy, which had been approved to some extent on the basis of NSC discussions during the Geneva Conference or possibly even before it, was to guide the Eisenhower Administration's actions in the years to come.

Burke and Greenstein have traced the advisory patterns and conclude that those patterns which had been evident in early 1954 in relation to Indochina question were "continued, with variations" from the beginning of April through the end of July. The main adviser was, Burke and Greenstein correctly assert, Secretary Dulles, who kept the President posted alone or with Radford, as well as "other principal [NSC] members of the foreign policy advisory group", such as Cutler, Wilson (or Kyes) and Allen Dulles. In addition, Burke and Greenstein argue that the fact that Eisenhower accepted advice from Hagerty concerning US representation at Geneva indicates his ability to draw "on quite different advisers" whenever necessary.¹²⁷

US Reactions

The Eisenhower Administration's initial reactions clearly suggest that the US was finding ways to get around the Geneva Accords. Eisenhower held a press conference on July 21 to comment on the outcome of the Geneva Agreements. He said he was happy because the settlement had ended the bloodshed in Indochina. The President stressed that the US had not been a belligerent and that the US role at Geneva had been assisting the French and the Associated States to achieve a "just and honorable settlement". Furthermore, he added, the US "has not itself been party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference". Eisenhower emphasized that the settlement included some features which were not preferable to the US, but a lot depended on their implementation. He pointed out their unilateral statement and that the US, in compliance with the UN Charter, "will not use force to disturb" the Accords. Nevertheless, any further action on the part of the Communists would be checked. For Eisenhower, Saigon was the capital of both Vietnams. Finally, the President talked about the collective defense organization to be formed for Southeast Asia.¹²⁸

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127 Burke and Greenstein add that one aspect of Eisenhower's leadership style until the Geneva settlement "was his readiness to rally his subordinates and support them even when they spoke out of turn or otherwise proved an embarrassment". As for Eisenhower's political skills, Burke and Greenstein argue that he actually managed to "allow partition of Vietnam [and therefore a Communist advance in Asia] without political retribution". Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 101–102, 104, 268.

128 Eisenhower's press conference, July 21, 1954, DSB, August 2, 1954, pp. 163–164; Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, p. 642; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, p. 1503. A statement delivered by the President was prepared in the Department of State. On the morning of July 21, Dulles and Hagerty discussed it twice on the telephone. Eisenhower made some changes to the wording of the statement. Editorial note, *ibid.*, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1864–1865. In his memoirs the President wrote that the reason for the French defeat had been the "weak and confused" internal political situation in Vietnam. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 372.

Greenstein and Immerman argue that the pattern of Eisenhower's deliberations about intervention from the January 8 Council meeting through the end of the Geneva conference illustrates both "complexity and ambiguity". The President had publicly stated in "vivid" language, also at the NSC, that Indochina was not to be lost. Eisenhower, Greenstein and Immerman continue, had "weighed the costs and benefits of intervention against other possibilities, stipulated preconditions that he would insist on before acting, and otherwise hedged his bets". In his NSC discussions Eisenhower acted "reservedly and cautiously", Greenstein and Immerman add. However, in debates during 1954 he had been "thinking out loud in the presence of his associates".¹²⁹

The US unilateral declaration was of interest since Secretary Dulles testified before the HFAC. Speaking to the Congressmen, Dulles regarded the results of Geneva as somewhat satisfactory. He complained that the Geneva Agreements placed restrictions on the consideration of Indochinese membership in the collective defense grouping. The Secretary of State agreed to talk about the matter only off the record.¹³⁰ Dulles asked his Legal Adviser Phleger about the restrictions of the cease-fire agreements imposed on the Indochinese states, especially with regard to how the US could protect Indochina against external or internal threats through a possible defense pact. Dulles wanted to know whether it would be possible to take the Indochinese states both militarily and economically into the defense coalition.¹³¹

The Geneva Accords were an issue of great magnitude, so much so that it was put on the agenda of the Council for its meeting on July 22, 1954. At first, the Council agreed, on the recommendation of the JCS, not to change its present policies on the use of South Korean troops in Indochina. The NSC members were then briefed by Secretary Wilson about the actions taken to prevent US materiel from falling into the hands of the Vietminh. The answer was that it would be either returned or diverted to other Far Eastern countries. The future of the south worried Allen Dulles, as he reported on the results of Geneva. The French were in trouble, he added, because the southerners hated them as a result of the partition. Admiral Radford pointed out that the Vietnamese could ask the FEC to leave. The CIA Director did not believe this. The JCS Chairman inquired whether the US would have to withdraw the MAAGs from the Indochinese states. He had, however, been asked by General Ely whether the

129 Greenstein and Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina?", 1992, p. 579. Greenstein and Immerman add that Nixon's observations show the essence of Eisenhower's pattern of deliberation. *Ibid.*, pp. 579–580. For Nixon's appraisal see Nixon, Richard M., *Six Crises* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), pp. 158–159.

130 Dulles's testimony before the HFAC, July 21, 1954, Selected Executive Session Hearings of the HFAC 1951–1956, Volume XVIII: US Policy in the Far East, Part 2. Hist. Ser. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1980), pp. 164–165.

131 Dulles's letter to his Legal Adviser Phleger, July 21, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, p. 1503–1504. Phleger answered two weeks later that Cambodia and Laos were easy to take into the defense pact, but Southern Vietnam was a difficult case. This was because of the military restrictions. See Phleger's memorandum to Dulles, July 27, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1552–1562.

Americans had any plans to carry on training the local troops. Ely referred to ways of getting around the armistice agreements. Allen Dulles answered that the MAAGs in Laos and Cambodia had to be pulled out, but there were in fact some chances with respect to Vietnam.¹³²

Secretary Dulles reminded the Council members that the Communist gains had so far been relatively minor as they probably believed they would be achieving their goals in due course and that they were afraid that excessively harsh demands could lead to a Western reaction and thus mean a major war. They should at that point concentrate, Dulles continued, on salvaging “what the Communists had ostensibly left out of their grasp”. To this end, the State Department had already started negotiations with the British. According to Dulles, internal threats were much worse for the countries in the area than any external aggression. Hence, he “would almost rather see the French get completely out of the rest of Indochina and thus permit the United States to work directly with the native leadership in these states”. In reply to a question put by Cutler about the French willingness to leave, Dulles answered that he did not know, but Mendès-France was not an eager colonialist.¹³³ Despite the relative length of the planning period the NSC seems to have been uncertain about how to react to a new situation. It is every evident that they aimed at establishing the Southeast Asian regional defense grouping as some kind of broadened framework based on United Action.

The attitude of the Congressional leaders presented a problem. After Geneva, Congress was going to reduce its Indochina appropriations even though there had been an understanding about the “flexible handling of this money”, explained Secretary Dulles. He did not know how much money would be needed, but he pleaded that the NSC members should strongly support this view. Eisenhower ordered the members of the Council to do so or else they “should stay away from Capitol Hill”. Stassen said that by uniting their forces in the matter, the unexpended funds for Indochina could be used in other countries in the region. Cutler recommended that it would be wise to bring some Asian nations into the regional grouping so that it would not appear to be “another white man’s group”. Secretary Dulles said that initially the grouping could be a military organization and have only a few Asian member states, but later it could grow larger, including economic features and accepting other Asian states as members. He was supported by the President. The Council tasked its PB to review US policies in the Far East in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference.¹³⁴

More public statements were needed. On July 23, Dulles confirmed the points made by Eisenhower two days earlier. Dulles added that the French people had not wished to prolong the war. Instead of worrying about the past,

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132 Memorandum of Discussion of the 207th Meeting of the NSC, July 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1867–1869.

133 Memorandum of Discussion of the 207th Meeting of the NSC, July 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1869–1870.

134 Memorandum of Discussion of the 207th Meeting of the NSC, July 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1870–1871.

the Secretary repeated the threats of the Domino analogy for Southeast Asia and the Southern Pacific – as the NSC had also done at its meeting. More damage, Dulles continued, had to be prevented from happening. He stressed that the US favored the principle of self-determination. He also referred to the lessons of the past and the shift from colonialism to independence in the Indochinese states. This, Dulles said, would lead to an increase in the loyalty of the people, which was vital in fighting Communist colonialism and in safeguarding independence.¹³⁵ Bedell Smith also spoke to the press along the lines used by Eisenhower. According to him, the Geneva settlement reflected the local military situation so it was not completely satisfactory. But the settlement was, Bedell Smith argued, the best which was to be achieved in the prevailing conditions. He mentioned his return and commented that it was “wise and effective, both as to timing and tactics”.¹³⁶

Randle asserts that the Americans were not satisfied with the Geneva Agreements, mainly because the remaining part of Vietnam was neutralized and Vietminh-led Vietnam could easily smuggle arms from China. According to Randle, in the leading circles, the interventionists were Nixon, Radford, and the Assistant Secretary of State Robertson. Secretary Wilson agreed with Bedell Smith when he talked about prevailing conditions. Wilson and Secretary Dulles viewed economic development as important in order to get the Southeast Asian states to join the anti-Communist front.¹³⁷

The President and his advisers did not agree too readily on the problem, but they appeared to have agreed that it was time to wait, as Burke and Greenstein have also noted. Thus, the NSC neglected the consideration of various options. Intervention, for example, was not buried completely but appears not to have been a realistic option after the beginning of June. There is evidence that policy of retaining freedom of action for the US and guaranteeing independence for the Indochinese states had already been fixed and so there was no need to engage in normal Council procedures, since the system was not designed to handle acute crises. No consensus was achieved. Eisenhower, however, did not have to be alerted by his advisers even though he occasionally was not properly briefed. Information came from multiple sources, but the NSC machinery relied upon the NIEs, which did not apply to the period after the Geneva Conference. In a way, the period during the Conference could be characterized as a time of

135 Dulles's press conference, July 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1550–1551. According to a former Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Carl McCardle, Secretary Dulles was indeed “undaunted” even though his plans were received as a setback when Vietnam was partitioned. Dulles immediately turned his attention, McCardle added, towards the creation of a collective security grouping. He explained that Eisenhower and Dulles were “easily daunted”. Carl W. McCardle Oral History Transcript, DDEL. On the other hand, Hughes cites Dulles as having said: “Although half of Vietnam has been lost, we have there now a clean base without a trace of colonialism. Dien Bien Phu was in fact a blessing in disguise. Hughes, Emmet J., *The Ordeal of Power. A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years* (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 208.

136 Bedell Smith's statement, July 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1551–1552; DSB, August 2, 1954, pp. 192–193.

137 Randle, *Geneva 1954, 1969*, pp. 350, 353, 369, 532–534, 555–556; Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 155.

uncertainty. The contingency planning continued, but the whole Council machinery was waiting for the outcome of the Conference before it returned to its normal procedures immediately prior to the final session of the Conference after mid-July. In addition, some “new faces”, such as Admiral Carney, were seen at the Council meetings as specialists. In addition, initiatives from persons such as Bowie were included in the process. Multiple advocacy could not be observed for the duration of the Geneva Conference, but it was in place without severe breakdowns at the times that can be verified. Cutler, however, served as a custodian-manager. At times it almost appears that the State Department was in control; Secretary Dulles appears to have been more influential, since the Conference was predominantly about diplomacy. The NSC machinery had been slowed down, and so it did not function in the normal way. Instead, the President was mainly kept posted and advised through special briefing arrangements. The small-group meetings of the Council participants were not constant. The meetings, which were held at irregular intervals, augmented the process. We cannot, however, conclude on the basis of one case that the informal side of the Council was more important, as Destler has argued, than the formal NSC. The NSC did not consider the issue of Vietnam with the same degree of intensity during the Geneva Conference as it had done during the spring, but it was still discussed at most of the meetings of the Council held during the course of the Geneva Conference. Furthermore, there is some additional indication of State-Defense disagreement between the participants in the NSC-OCB machinery.

■ The New Protector – The United States Takes over in South Vietnam (July 1954–March 1955)

The Initial Impasse over Ngo Dinh Diem and the French Control

The Emergence of Ngo Dinh Diem

“Diem was a fanatic much like [South Korea’s] Syngman Rhee...the Vietnam representatives would undoubtedly place great weight on any advice they might get from the United States.”¹

Ngo Dinh Diem was a Catholic nationalist politician who had acted for a few months as the Minister of Interior during the French rule in 1933. In the early 1950s, Diem traveled to Western Europe and the United States, where he made the acquaintance of several influential people such as Cardinal Francis Spellman, Senators John F. Kennedy and Mike Mansfield, the newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst, Jr., and the Publisher of Time and Life magazines, Henry R. Luce.²

The US policy-makers were not certain how Vietnam should be governed. Despite the fact that they had accepted the Bao Dai solution, the US policy was under review and in a state of flux. Secretary Dulles emphasized the need for new leaders in South Vietnam. Speaking to the HFAC in May 1954, Dulles stated that the time for the old dynasties and other taints of colonialism was over. In mid-May, Chargé d’Affaires Robert McClintock suggested – even though Ambassador Heath objected – that Bao Dai’s incompetent regime be replaced by regents. Behind the scenes, McClintock wrote, the US specialists

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- 1 Mendès-France’s cable to Dillon, June 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1726–1727. Still five months later, the new Special Envoy General J. Lawton Collins observed that “Diem is a small, shy, diffident man with almost no personal magnetism. He evidently lacks confidence in himself and appears to have an inherent distaste for decisive action.” Chargé d’Affaires Randolph A. Kidder’s cable to Dulles, November 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2250.
- 2 Diem visited the US for the first time in 1950. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 89–91, 93; Turley, William S., *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954–1975* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), p. 27; Gibson, *The Perfect War*, 1986, p. 69; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 6, 11–12; Kattenburg, Paul M., *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945–1975* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), pp. 52–53. See also Bouscaren, Anthony T., *The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965) and Warner, Denis, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, Southeast Asia and the West* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

could draw up a constitution for South Vietnam and help the nation's economy to recover from the war.³

Meanwhile, Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Luyen, who represented the Emperor Bao Dai at the Geneva Conference, had met at Bao Dai's suggestion Bedell Smith to discuss the possible Premiership of Diem. The Vietnamese wanted to hear the US viewpoint, because the French objected to the appointment of Diem. Luyen told Bedell Smith that Bao Dai had decided to appoint Diem if the US gave its support. Secretary Dulles had taken advice from both Heath and McClintock and thus wrote to Geneva and gave instructions that the US delegates should discuss with the delegation authorized by Bao Dai. He added that if the US had to participate in a war in Indochina there would be a need for an authentic and nationalist Vietnamese government. In addition, with the support of the US and the French a national assembly should be formed. It would sketch a constitution as its first assignment. The US was to stick with Bao Dai, Dulles concluded, because there were no other acceptable leaders in sight. The Head of the State Department's Office of the Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs Bonsal had informed the French – at the insistence of Bedell Smith – of the Diem talks with Luyen in Geneva. Bonsal recommended that Ambassador Dillon should take up the matter with Diem, who was then in Paris. Secretary Dulles did not want to harm the relations between the US and the French. Despite this, the discussion between the US and Diem took place in Paris a couple of days later on Bonsal's suggestion. The US diplomats asked Diem about his willingness to become premier. The staff of the American Embassy in Paris questioned the chances of this “Yogi-bear-like” little man. Diem told the Americans that he was available for a political position. Dillon wrote to Washington that there were no real alternatives to Diem, but that he was narrow-minded in many ways.⁴ Anderson has discovered that “most American officials took a wait-and-see approach” with Diem.⁵

Despite the attitude of the US officials, Emperor Bao Dai appointed Ngo Dinh Diem on July 7, 1954 as the Premier of South Vietnam. In public, the newly-appointed Premier used language that suited US purposes. He spoke, for example, about the Geneva Agreements as surrender agreements and accused the French of having abandoned South Vietnam cold-bloodedly.⁶

3 Dulles's testimony before the HFAC, May 11, 1954, HFAC His. Ser., Volume XVIII, Part 2, p. 146; McClintock's cable to Secretary Dulles, May 17, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1576–1577; Bedell Smith's cable to Secretary Dulles, May 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, p. 857.

4 Memorandum of conversation between Bedell Smith and Luyen, May 18, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 843–846; Dulles's cable (drafted by US Consul to Hanoi Paul J. Sturm and a member of State Department's Policy Planning Staff Edmund A. Gullion, May 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 892–894; Bonsal's cable to Dulles, May 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 894–895; Dulles's cable to Bedell Smith, May 23, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 892–894; Dillon's cables to Dulles (2), May 24 and 26, 1954, *ibid.*, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1608–1609, 1616–1618.

5 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 56.

6 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 204; quoted by Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 138. According to published research, Diem's arrival date in Saigon was either June 25 or June 26.

The difficulties caused by the position adopted by Diem became a relatively important issue, which needed to be raised at the NSC. This was done by the CIA Director Dulles on July 22. He had told the Council members that Diem did not know what he wanted and therefore he might resign. In the course of the same day Allen Dulles called his brother at the State Department, urging him to act rapidly in order to prevent Diem's resignation. The CIA Director said that he would send a couple of new people to take care of the business covertly. He suggested the establishment of a high-level working group to deal with practical problems. The Secretary of State concurred and decided that such an organ be formed in two days.⁷ Gibbons has pointed out that Secretary Dulles informed neither the Council members nor Congress that "the US had already begun actively working with the 'native leadership'". According to Gibbons, this had been initiated "at least as early as January 1954".⁸

The Preparations Made by the Council Machinery to Replace France

The Council machinery was not a static structure. Another special type of arrangement to cope with the new situation in South Vietnam was utilized in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. This time it was almost an NSC meeting on Southeast Asia that was convened under Vice-President Nixon. Secretary Dulles opened the meeting by saying that he thought the US "should now move quickly" to finalize the regional grouping with those nations interested in it. The objective of the defense pact would be to "draw a line". In reply to Wilson's question about defending Indochina, Secretary Dulles said the remaining part of Indochina would be behind the line. Stassen wondered whether the British would agree. When Allen Dulles expressed his concern about recovering the materiel in North Vietnam, Bedell Smith replied that it was possible for the French to evacuate it under the terms of the armistice agreement. Nixon did not know whether nations could associate themselves with only part of the treaty, and the Secretary of State answered in the negative. Nor did he believe in the association of the Colombo Powers. Bedell Smith argued that they could join one by one. The Vice-President then started to direct the discussion toward military aspects of the forthcoming treaty organization, but Secretary Dulles reminded him that Eisenhower and Churchill had already agreed on a draft treaty text. Nixon then asked and was supported by Dulles about whether it was time for economic considerations. Stassen promised to have his subordinates take the matter up with the representatives at the State Department. When Dulles inquired Radford for JCS views, the Admiral remarked that a NATO type of treaty would lead to too large a commitment of US resources and manpower and also to requests for military assistance which the US could not afford and which could not be as important for the national security of the US. The JCS

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7 Memorandum of Discussion of the 207th Meeting of the NSC, July 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1867-1871; the telephone call quoted in Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 64. The group was to have members from the State and Defense Departments, the CIA, and the FOA. *Ibid.*

8 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 259.

Chairman was interrupted by Stassen, who praised the activities of the MAAGs. Secretary Dulles went on to say that this was still being contemplated and that the Geneva Agreements would decide whether the MAAG would stay in South Vietnam. The participants at the meeting concurred in the Saigon US Embassy's recommendation to transfer 100 USAF technicians to MAAG roles. It was the feeling of the meeting that an attempt would be made to keep the US Consulate in Hanoi functioning and that the difficult question of cutting off trade with North Vietnam would be studied.⁹

This meeting resembled the workings of a standard Council meeting. The summary of this informal meeting, however, reveals one big difference: there is no record of Cutler's active participation, even though documents confirm that he was present. Instead, Secretary Dulles appears to have played in the leading role. He basically briefed the others and answered their questions as he often did in his testimonies before Congressional committees. Nixon had apparently been misinformed as he had obvious problems chairing the meeting.

The US "take-over" from the French could not have been an easy task. Herring, Hess, and Immerman, for example, conclude that, following the Geneva Conference, the worst problems in Franco-American relations were on the one hand, the changes in aid procedures and, on the other, the status of Diem.¹⁰ In order to block further gains being made by the Vietminh the US regarded the military training of the South Vietnamese forces as a key issue. This is illustrated by the fact that the question had been discussed with great interest at the almost Council meeting of July 24. In the field, General O'Daniel of MAAG was not satisfied with the performance of the FEC. He continued to suggest that the US should assume the responsibility for training the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) because the country could be used as a battle test-ground. There was a need for training in the kind of guerilla warfare practised by the Communists around the world, O'Daniel wrote.¹¹ Nevertheless, the OCB took note of a State Department report that the French had agreed to give priority to the evacuation of US materiel from North Vietnam as the NSC had desired.¹²

The NSC was to receive its answers when the third draft of the Progress Report on NSC 5405 was completed on July 30 for the consideration of the OCB on August 4. The report viewed the Geneva Accords as having been a success for the Communists, since they made the rest of Indochina vulnerable to their take-over. The Accords were "a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC

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9 Summary of meeting, July 24, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 8, DDEL. See also Cutler's memorandum of conference at State Department, July 24, 1954, *ibid.* In the latter memorandum, Cutler goes deeper into the trade issue by specifying that it was "generally felt...the US...should not embargo as yet civilian shipments to North Vietnam". *Ibid.*

10 Herring, George C., Gary R. Hess and Richard H. Immerman, "Passage of Empire: The United States, France, and South Vietnam, 1954-55," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 174.

11 O'Daniel's memorandum to Secretary of the Army Robert T. Stevens, July 27, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1883-1885.

12 OCB Minutes, July 28, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA.

5405”, with world-wide psychological and political repercussions. The US actions since mid-January were, in general, concentrated firstly on the Navarre Plan, secondly on United Action, and finally on “saving all that could be saved at Geneva”. France was portrayed as the scapegoat. The United Action line was initiated with Dulles’s March 29 speech, but its goals had, since the British and the French had decided to wait for the outcome of Geneva, been transformed into gaining “some form of regional defense for Southeast Asia”. Mendès-France’s promise to settle the war by July 20 led to the third phase of US action. The OCB had endorsed an expanded program of educational and technical exchange for the Far East, but it had not been approved by the BOB. In light of the situation, the Progress Report noted that NSC 5405 required “extensive revisions”. The Progress Report also identified emerging problems and future actions. The French would still have to be taken into consideration as long as they remained in Indochina. South Vietnam had been seriously infiltrated by the Communists. US policies and actions towards Indochinese states in the near future might prevent further gains on the part of the Communists after Geneva or give the West “a new opportunity” to check Communism in Southeast Asia. The summary of the secret Annex “B” of the Progress Report stated that the weak point in the First Indochina War since January 1954 had been the local armies, which “could have been trained better and faster” and reorganized to make them more efficient. The unpopularity of the war in France had dictated its direction.¹³

The Council machinery was provided with additional construction materials when the intelligence community finally submitted a new NIE, and the JCS commented on the training issue in early August. The NIE estimated that the Communists were still trying to achieve their goal, which was to take Indochina under their own control. The Communists, the intelligence sources reported, did not wish directly to violate the Geneva Accords. In consequence, they would act politically, psychologically, and paramilitarily. Although France might – with the assistance of the US – establish a strong regime in southern Vietnam, the intelligence community predicted that the chances were in the long run very small, and that the situation would weaken considerably in the course of the following year. The unification elections scheduled to be held in July 1956 would be won by the Vietminh. The JCS was not happy with the present role of MAAG. The Chiefs predicted that MAAG would fail in its duties unless the Government of South Vietnam carried out administrative actions that would

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13 The previous drafts, which have been destroyed in accordance with the security regulations of specific agencies, were dated July 14 and 24. The third draft had been considered and revised by the Board Assistants on July 30. Staats’s memorandum for the OCB, August 2, 1954 with the third draft of Progress Report on NSC 5405: January 16 – July 21, 1954 (dated July 30) including secret annexes “A” and “B” as attachments, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 79, Southeast Asia, DDEL. The Progress Report also noted that the emerging fundamental problems were “the appropriate subjects of a basic policy review rather than of the present report”. Furthermore, despite the new policies, the makers of the report argued, “several types of problem or opportunity are already visible on the operating level”. Ibid.; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 269.

facilitate the creation and maintenance of armed forces. As the preconditions for this, the JCS regarded as necessary a strong civilian government, an official request, and the arrangements with the French on their withdrawal and on the granting of independence to South Vietnam. The whole matter depended on the needs of the South Vietnamese, and, of course, on US interests, the JCS concluded.¹⁴

In order to augment the information channels and to get matters functioning swiftly, Cutler wrote on August 3, as he had already done in late March, to the Chairman of the OCB, Bedell Smith, and recommended that the Board should appoint a Special Working Group on Indochina. This had also been recommended by Allen Dulles on July 22. The Working Group was, in any case, established on August 4 with the task of assisting “all addressees in rapid decisions required in adjustments existing programs and redeployment resources in respect Indochina”. The Working Group, which was chaired by Robert McClintock from the State Department, was to pay special attention to the evacuation of refugees from the north and their resettlement. At the meeting of the OCB on August 4 and in connection with consideration of the Progress Report in NSC 5405, the new Working Group was instructed “immediately to prepare an offer to be made in Saigon” to that effect. Informing the US representatives in Saigon about the new Working Group, Secretary Dulles ordered them to come up with a plan “for most effective use” of American economic and military assistance.¹⁵ Even though the Special Working Group operated under

14 NIE-63-5-54, “Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina,” August 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1905–1914; JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, August 4, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 701–702.

15 Cutler referred to the urgency and importance of the Indochina decisions. He suggested that the members of the Special Working Group should “temporarily work full time on Indochina problems”. They should therefore be, Cutler added, “knowledgeable ranking officers with direct access to OCB members”. Cutler ended his memorandum with a postscript in which he noted that Staats, Radius and himself appeared “to be thinking along the same lines”. Cutler’s memorandum to Bedell Smith, August 3, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2, RG 59, NA; WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1924, footnote 2; Dulles’s cable to Ambassador Heath, August 7, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1924–1925. For the reply of Ambassador Heath on August 22 see *ibid.*, pp. 1966–1972. The Group was “to deal with the day-to-day developments in Indochina, particularly in regard to necessary readjustments in US programs in light of the termination of hostilities”. The members came from the Departments of State (Chairman) and Defense, the CIA, the FOA, the USIA and the OCB. In addition, a representative from the BOB had been invited to attend as well. OCB Staff Representative on the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina John E. MacDonald’s memorandum to the members of the Working Group (containing terms of reference), August 4, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2, RG 59, NA. See also Staats’s memorandum to the Board Assistants, August 5, 1954, *ibid.* The editors of FRUS maintain that the Treasury was represented on the Working Group. See also FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 15, footnote 1. In the OCB Minutes it was written that the new Working Group was “to coordinate current actions directed at assisting the Associated States of Indochina to strengthen their position toward the Viet Minh”. Furthermore, the Working Group was assigned the responsibility for “coordinating and reporting to their respective Board members matters relating” to the evacuation of people and military materiel from North Vietnam as well as assistance to the three Indochinese countries. OCB Minutes, August 4, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA.

the OCB, which was responsible for overseeing the implementation of policies, it may also well have been intended to augment the planning process of the NSC. It was definitely meant to monitor the implementation and to report and, thus to offer, additional views on the use of the NSC-OCB machinery, as the Erskine Subcommittee of the Special Committee had done earlier.

Bromley Smith, an NSC staffer, considered the terms of reference of the Special Working Group from the point of view of a recent NIE dated August 3. According to Smith, some portions of the NIE threatened to make the assignment of the Working Group “a serious undertaking”. The intelligence community did not believe that the Geneva Accords would have such a profound effect on future developments in Indochina as capabilities and actions of the nations of the area and those “of interested outside powers”. The NIE pointed out, as also noted by Smith, that it was imperative for the US to stiffen its policies toward Indochina or otherwise Indochina would fall under Communist domination.¹⁶

The selection of members for the new Group was apparently successful as it was able to submit its first report only two days after it had been set up. The Special Working Group on Indochina reported to the OCB, which approved the reports, which were then submitted to the NSC. The Working Group wrote that because the French were still in Indochina the US should adjust to the situation. This would, the Working Group continued, pose problems in the near future. The Communist subversion was a serious threat to security, especially in Vietnam. According to the Working Group, the US was in a key position to prevent the Communist gains. In addition, the Western countries would object to Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. For the OCB Working Group support of the Asian states was necessary to secure a strong base and to help the Asian states to understand the situation from the Western point of view. In addition, the Working Group urged US foreign aid and military assistance officials to familiarize themselves with the French programs in Indochina. The views of the Special Working Group to some extent reflected thinking among the leading US field operatives in South Vietnam. On August 8, the Chief MAAG General O’Daniel suggested that the US should take on a significant role in cooperation with the French and the South Vietnamese in order to create a strong, democratic, Western-oriented nation. This work would require, O’Daniel continued, US advisors at every echelon of Vietnamese society. Every agency should have one or more American specialist to provide guidance. Ambassador Heath had basically agreed, but he had questioned whether the US should get involved so thoroughly. Heath thought that the military training was enough. O’Daniel ended his cable by commenting that Vietnam was still a country at war, a factor which had to be taken into consideration when granting assistance.¹⁷

16 Bromley K. Smith’s memorandum for the record, August 5, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL; NIE-63-5-54, “Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina,” August 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1908–1909.

17 OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, August 6, 1954, Documents of the National Security Council 1947–1977, First Supplement, Microfilm Reel II; O’Daniel’s cable to Secretary of the Army Robert T. Stevens, August 8, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp.

The National Security Council and the Replacement of the French

NSC 5429 – The Question of Direct Aid at the Council

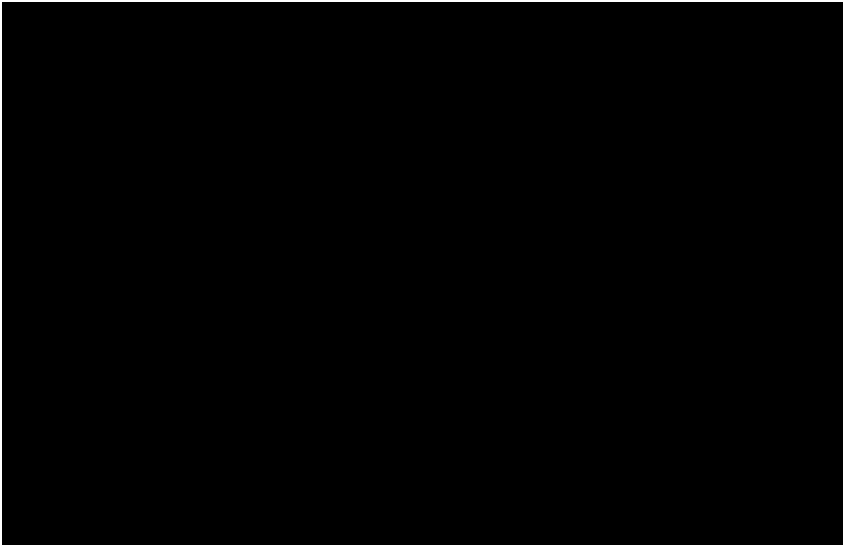
The NSC machinery had continued its paper-producing duties and completed a draft of a new Policy Paper. The PB came up with its comments on the validity of NSC 5429 in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. The members of the PB had agreed, Robertson informed Secretary Dulles, that the Policy Paper met US requirements by calling for an organization for Asian economic development, regional security treaty and necessary courses of action to strengthen the Indochinese states against the Communists. After going through several proposed amendments to the text, Robertson recommended that Dulles should approve “the adoption of NSC 5429 as a provisional directive pending opportunity for an adequate review of the changed situation in the Far East and of the policies required to meet it”.¹⁸

The Council received what it desired from the OCB’s Special Working Group. The Group had completed its program for Indochina. On August 11, the Chairman of the Working Group McClintock reported to the OCB on the findings of the Group. The Group recommended that the US – the President and the NSC – “should furnish direct, adequate economic, financial and military assistance to the three countries of Indochina”. The aid should, however, be conditional “upon performance” of the Indochinese nations in making reforms and implementing them. A Southeast Asia military treaty should, the Working Group recommended, lend protection to the three countries.¹⁹ The idea of a

18 1925–1927. The Geneva Agreements stipulated that there could be 342 military advisors in South Vietnam. They should be in place by August 11, 1954 at the latest. The current number of US military advisors in early August was 200, including 100 USAF mechanics, in the three Indochinese states, but most of them were stationed in South Vietnam. Lee, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1981, p. 194. According to the figures quoted by Prados, by April 1954 there had already been 399 US Personnel in Vietnam and the number grew to 462 American technicians (including two civilians) in late May. Prados, John, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Dee, 1995), p. 8.

18 In late July, 1954, the PB had commenced its review of US policies in the Far East by discussing State and Defense reference drafts. It prepared a tentative draft report at its meeting on August 2 (dated and distributed on August 3). The tentative draft statement of policy was amended on August 4, 1954. Records of meetings of the PB, July 28 and 29 and August 2 and 4, 1954, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1954, RG 273, NA. The State reference draft contained three alternative approaches of the objectives of China and of US policy. Reference Draft “Essential Policy Decisions – US Policy Toward Asia,” July 29, 1954. Records of the Policy Planning Staff Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 61 D 167, Box 4, Asia – NSC 48 Series, RG 59, NA; Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles, August 10, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA. A week later Robertson recommended changes to the text of NSC 5429/1 on Thailand. See Robertson’s memorandum for Dulles, August 17, 1954, *ibid.*

19 The OCB noted that a draft State Department cable to the French government was to be commented on by the JCS by the following day “to permit final clearance” by Secretary Dulles on Friday. OCB Minutes, August 11, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. The Chairman of the OCB’s Special Working Group on Indochina Robert McClintock’s memorandum to Bedell Smith, August 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1937–1938. See also



Much of the NSC work was done in the various departments and agencies, especially in the State Department. For this, the regional bureaus provided the Council machinery with relevant background information. The Assistant Secretary of State, Walter S. Robertson (center), sometimes accompanied Secretary Dulles to the NSC meetings. He was one of the officials whose thinking made a difference. (National Archives)

program intended to give aid to South Vietnam had, however, already been formed within the State Department during the latter part of June.²⁰

Even though one would easily guess that the military would favor the training, Secretary of Defense Wilson objected to the expansion of the training by the US military advisors, as did the JCS, who considered that the proposals made by the State Department did not satisfy certain preconditions, which included a strong and stable civil government, a request from the Indochinese states, full independence for them, and local force levels to be dictated by local requirements. Wilson also based his opposition on the fact that the cease-fire agreement made at the Geneva Conference imposed limitations on the matter. Secretary Dulles replied that according to his State Department there was “a limitation on the degree to which” the ARVN could be enlarged, but the Secretary wrote that he felt the Geneva Accords did not ban the MAAG at its present size and that by rotation new personnel could be sent in. Furthermore, the Chiefs argued that NSC 5429 lacked any mentions of the Far East “as a whole” and nor were broad courses of action suggested for achieving objectives such as the development of a position of military strength in the area.²¹

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memoranda of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meetings, August 9 and 10, 1954 (held on August 6 and 9), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

20 The Director of the State Department’s PPS, Bowie, had recommended on June 25 to Secretary Dulles that “the US should immediately initiate a vigorous aid program, a troop training program, and other appropriate measures to promote a stronger Southern Vietnam...” Bowie’s memorandum to Dulles, June 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1750. The document had been drafted by Charles C. Stelle of the PPS and it included ideas put forward by Edmund A. Gullion. The paper had actually been seen by Secretary Dulles. *Ibid.*, p. 1748, footnote 1.

21 Wilson’s letter to Secretary Dulles, August 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1938–1939; Dulles’s reply to Wilson, August 18, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1954–1956. About the restrictions placed upon by the Geneva Agreements see FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 1505–1520; JCS memorandum for Wilson, August 11, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL. The views of the JCS in August of 1954 can also be found in Records of the US Army, General Decimal Files 1954, Box 37, 6–3 091 Indochina,

Allen Dulles, who as a member of the OCB was aware of the suggestions of the Special Working Group, reported to the Council on August 12, 1954. He told the NSC members “that a difficult problem was taking shape in South Vietnam”. This was due to the fact that Communist infiltration were “far advanced”. The CIA Director argued that the country could turn Communist without warning and “without a fight”, if the FEC were to withdraw. As a remedy, Director Dulles suggested that the FEC should be persuaded to stay until the Vietnamese forces, which should be permitted to “build up” under the Americans, would be strong enough to take control. Furthermore, he said, in order to form a truly national government Bao Dai would most likely “have to be eliminated”. Eisenhower then asked why the French could not issue a statement that FEC would remain for the time being. In reply, Secretary Dulles mentioned that he had considered sending a cable to that effect, but that he did not wish “to be too tough on the French”. The President corrected himself to say that he meant only a suggestion. There was a dilemma, the Secretary of State added, because, on the one hand, the FEC was needed to maintain order, but if the French military presence continued, “some local feeling of independence was destroyed”. Vietnam was just one of the five issues discussed at that meeting in the light of an oral briefing by Allen Dulles. No options were considered. In addition, the Council approved the amended policy paper NSC 5429 as NSC 5429/1.²²

According to Anderson, the Council discussions of August 12 are revealing. Even though the emphasis was on the regional grouping and assistance to South Vietnam, Anderson continues, it is noteworthy that the NSC was incapable of agreeing on the wording of paragraph 8 of NSC 5429, which referred to local subversion and internal security matters. This suggests that “America’s top policy makers were at a loss to deal with any situation outside of overt Soviet or Chinese action”, Anderson writes. Hinting at the mentions to the French withdrawal, he adds that “the cloud of European concerns” had an effect on all of the NSC discussions.²³

The Eisenhower Administration faced pressures from Congress. In mid-August, the young Democrat Senator Kennedy strongly defended South Vietnam. Kennedy asked why the US could not give military assistance to the

Section V, RG 319, NA. Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Major General James M. Gavin wrote on July 17, 1954, that if the US assumed the responsibility for training the forces of the Indochinese States 1,425 MAAG personnel would be required. Gavin added that there was a risk “of embroiling US in the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time” if the U.S. committed its troops in Indochina. Gavin’s memorandum to General Ridgway, July 17, 1954, *ibid.*, Section VI.

22 Memorandum of Discussion of the 210th Meeting of the NSC, August 12, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 5, DDEL; NSC 5429/1, “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East,” August 12, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL. The PB had submitted the report to Council members on August 4, 1954. The revised report recommended negotiating a Southeast Asia defense treaty (including South Vietnam). *Ibid.*

23 Anderson points out that it has often been noted in the research that the Eisenhower Administration disregarded Third World nationalism. According to Anderson, the problem was deeper as the US did not positively respond to “social, cultural, economic, and historical factors in the Third World”. Therefore, Anderson concludes, the US applied “stopgap measures...with little relevance”. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 68–69.

newly-created nation. He suggested that most of the material given to the FEC would be given to Bao Dai's army. Representative Thomas J. Lane talked about the Geneva Agreements as an apparent *fait accompli*. Lane urged the Administration – as the OCB had also recently done – to send foreign service officials, military advisors, and economic specialists to Indochina in order to prevent further Communist action. Congress, Lane added, was waiting for able national leaders to emerge to push back the Communist advantage. Not only liberal Democrats such as Kennedy and Mansfield but also Republicans, such as Knowland, strongly recommended that the Administration should grant economic aid to South Vietnam.²⁴

The obvious became apparent when the President agreed on August 17, at the suggestion of his Secretary of State, that the US should be “switching aid in Indochina directly” to the Indochinese states, “rather than via France”. Dulles was worried that the Southeast Asian defense pact meant that the US had to “commit the prestige...in an area we had little control and where the situation was by no means promising”. The Secretary thought, however, that the US had to act as it could not stand idle and abandon the area. He pointed out that the inclusion of the Indochinese states in the treaty was “the lesser of two evils, but it would involve a real risk” of a blow against the prestige of the US in the region. Eisenhower decided – this time without consulting the NSC – to continue working with the plan. The decision, however, is in harmony with the recommendations of the OCB Special Working Group.²⁵ Eisenhower recalls having made the decision of direct aid to the Indochinese states on August 17.²⁶

The Presidential decision, however, called for some clarification of details. It needed, therefore, to be discussed by the NSC on August 18. According to Secretary Dulles, most of the French would be hostile concerning the matter, but at that moment the US had the initiative because France had had its own. This was in line with the conclusions of the NIE on August 3. The Council was unanimous that the French should not be replaced, but cooperation had to be continued. Paragraph 8 of NSC 5429 was also discussed on the basis of Dulles's revision, which was approved. It facilitated freedom of action without making “a fixed or automatic commitment”. The President argued that the Chinese involvement was needed to persuade the US to take action in the case of local subversion. If there were Soviet-motivated subversion, Eisenhower said, it would lead to all-out war. Vice-President Nixon argued that Ho Chi Minh was, in fact, working for the Soviet Union rather than for China and that Moscow supported local subversion or rebellion.²⁷

24 CR, August 14, 1954, pp. 14500–14501, 14517.

25 Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles (by Dulles), August 17, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 1953.

26 Eisenhower had access to his Presidential papers when writing his memoirs. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 1963, p. 371.

27 Memorandum of Discussion of the 211th Meeting of the NSC, August 18, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XII, Part 1, pp. 745–746; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 69. Allen Dulles had proposed additional action in

The French had to be informed of the policy shift. Secretary Dulles explained to the French Premier Mendès-France the essence of US policy toward South Vietnam. Dulles wrote that he believed in Diem's chances "of rallying and holding nationalist sentiment" over those of the rest of the Vietnamese politicians. The US was standing behind South Vietnam and Eisenhower was going to write to Diem in order to tell him about the support. As his second main point, the Secretary told about the decision concerning direct aid. He clarified that this would be the best course to take because of the independence of the Indochinese states. Furthermore, Dulles added, it was easier to take the matter to Congress. He referred to the willingness of the Vietnamese to carry out the requested reforms as a prerequisite for the US aid, just as the OCB's Special Working Group had recommended on August 12. He also used the suggestions made by the JCS regarding the US training of the indigenous forces of Indochina to support his case. Dulles explained that the final US decision was conditioned by the preconditions presented by the Chiefs. They included strong governments, formal requests issued by the governments, and arrangements with the French on the full independence of the Indochinese states and on the phased withdrawal of the FEC. Dulles asked Wilson to commence preparations for the expansion of the military training of the ARVN by the Americans in South Vietnam. The most effective way, Dulles wrote, to help the Government of South Vietnam to strengthen its position was to reorganize and train the ARVN.²⁸

The NSC-OCB machinery required adequate and up-to-date information. The OCB also followed the developments. The Board heard a report from the

the event of local subversion and if a request came from a legitimate local government no means should be forgotten. The CIA Director's revision contained the sentence "in addition to giving all possible covert and overt support short of military intervention to a program of containment and nullification". Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

- 28 The message was in fact drafted by McClintock. The draft was approved by the OCB a week earlier. OCB Minutes, August 11, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA; Dulles's cable to Ambassador Dillon, August 18, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1957-1959. The President also received a copy of the draft. *Ibid.*, p. 1957, footnote 1. For the JCS recommendations (submitted on August 4) see Secretary Wilson's letter to Dulles, August 12, and Dulles's reply to Wilson, August 18, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 1938-1939, 1954-1956. In his accompanying note to Dillon Dulles wrote "we do not wish make it appear [that] Ngo Dinh Diem [is] our protégé or that we are irrevocably committed to him". *Ibid.*, p. 1957; Dulles's letter to Wilson, August 18, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1954-1956. According to Anderson, the arguments presented in the exchange of letters between Dulles and Wilson started a debate among American policy-makers which ended only with the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 70. Anderson's conclusion is not, however, the only one of its kind. Schlesinger, Jr., for example, had asserted much earlier that after Eisenhower rejected intervention he "set in motion the policy of support of Saigon" resulting in intervention in 1965. Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy* (Tornbridge: Deutsch, 1967), p. 38. Herring argues that the only thing that saved Eisenhower's policies from failing in South Vietnam was the end of his second term. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 1986, p. 72. Likewise, Immerman writes that despite the fact that Eisenhower "predicted the consequences" he after all "Americanize[d]" the area and committed US prestige behind Diem. He left the following Presidents, Immerman adds, the task of facing the consequences of his decisions. Immerman, "Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable," in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson and Mayers, 1987, pp. 145-146. Arnold also refers to continuity in US policies since Truman. Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, *passim*.

State Department about the “increasingly critical situation” of the evacuees from North Vietnam and discussed ways to resolve the problem under the restrictions imposed by the Geneva Accords. The Board “noted its view” that action had to be taken immediately to change the situation. McClintock’s Special Working Group and US representatives in the field were then urged by the OCB “to develop necessary actions” regarding Indochina.²⁹

The formulation of Policy Papers normally had various phases. The consideration of NSC 5429 at the various levels of the NSC machinery had taken some three weeks. Finally, on August 20, Eisenhower approved the new Policy Paper for Southeast Asia, which was entitled “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East”. The introduction of the Paper dealt with the repercussions of the Geneva Conference. The Paper asserted that the Communists possessed a strong foothold in Indochina, especially in Vietnam, and that they had the ability to spread their ideology. The US had suffered a prestige loss as a supporter of the French and Bao Dai. Therefore, the Paper said, the US will and ability to resist Communist expansion in Asia would be questioned and the US prestige would be tied to the later development of Southeast Asia. The Communists, who had succeeded in increasing their military and political influence in Asia, would exploit their moderate actions at Geneva by taking the honor for the cessation of hostilities in Indochina. According to the Paper, the Communist propaganda aimed at alienating the US from its allies. Furthermore, they would promote their cause by taking advantage of the political and economical instability in the Asian countries without armed struggle. The NSC Staff feared that the loss of Southeast Asia would endanger the future of Japan and the whole off-shore island chain. The courses of action for Southeast Asia paragraph of the Policy Paper stated generally that the US would have to protect its position and restore its prestige by taking initiatives in Southeast Asia, where the situation should be stabilized as soon as possible. This would, the Paper added, prevent the Communists from accomplishing additional gains through crawling expansion and subversion or overt aggression.³⁰

Even though NSC 5429/2 was a regional paper, it had a special part for Indochina. The US aim was to stop Communism in the Indochinese states by directly supporting friendly non-Communists governments, and, in Vietnam, to prevent a Communist victory in the unification elections. The Paper called for action without violating the Geneva Agreements. In addition, the French should

29 The Board especially monitored the sea-lift evacuation operation by the US Navy. At the meeting of August 18, the Board members also heard a report on the subject. OCB Minutes, August 18, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. See also memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, August 12, 1954 (held on the same day), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

30 NSC 5429/2, “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East,” August 20, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, pp. 731–741. The off-shore island chain included Japan, the Ryukyu Islands (especially Okinawa), and Formosa (especially Quemoy and Matsu Islands). In some cases, the Philippines are listed as being part of the chain.

be persuaded to recognize the sovereignty of the Indochinese states. Cooperation with the French should be limited to cases in which it would be absolutely necessary. Economic measures were to be taken to make South Vietnam attractive in comparison to North Vietnam, to aid the refugees from the North, and to prevent North Vietnam from joining the Soviet-led bloc. The covert operations³¹ were accepted as instruments of policy implementation.³²

Department of Defense scholars have argued that at its August 1954 meetings the NSC discussed the policy guidelines with respect to South Vietnam. According to the NSC, Diem had to broaden the base of his government, sketch a constitution, and replace Bao Dai. After Geneva, the NSC, Short writes, “engaged in two massive debates in August 1954 as part of its general review of Far Eastern policy”. The debates “were in an aggressive mood”. China was blamed for the “Vietnamese disaster”. According to Anderson, Wilson acted at the August 1954 Council meetings as “the voice of caution”, as he had done earlier.³³ In spite of the importance of the issue, there was nothing unusual about the way in which the NSC operated when it considered the new Policy Paper. It would even be erroneous to assume that any foreign policy-related issue would actually have affected the NSC process in any significant way.

Herring asserts that the approval of the Policy Paper meant taking a “new initiative” and at the same time South Vietnam was “the key” and “shored up [the] United States position in Southeast Asia”. Divine argues that the essence of NSC 5429 meant that the US was to write off North Vietnam and replace “France as the principal protector of Southeast Asia”, thus resolving the Indochina crisis. Likewise, Prados considers that the President approved the Policy Paper as he “had had enough of the French”. For Dawson, it is debatable whether the policy was in fact new, because it bore a resemblance to Truman’s

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- 31 Covert or secret operations were authorized by NSC 5412 “National Security Council Directive on Covert Operations”. The document was approved by Eisenhower on March 15, 1954. Gibbons points out that during the Truman Administration there had been some secret operations in Indochina. The operations were not stopped when Eisenhower took office, but, as Gibbons maintains, NSC 5412 “marked the official recognition and sanctioning of a much larger program of anti-Communist covert activities in Indochina” and elsewhere. The operations were coordinated by the so-called NSC 5412 Committee, which consisted of the Deputy Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of State, the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and the CIA Director. From 1957, the JCS Chairman was invited to join the committee. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 308–310. See also Rositzke, Harry, *The CIA’s Secret Operations* (New York: Reader’s Digest, 1977), p. 180; Cook, Blanche Wiesen, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 182–183. According to Johnson, CIA’s annual budget dedicated to covert action was on the rise from 1954 to 1960. Johnson, Loch K., “Covert Action and Accountability: Decision-Making for America’s Secret Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 33 (March 1989), p. 87 and Johnson, Loch K., *America’s Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 103.
 - 32 NSC 5429/2, “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East,” August 20, 1954. In early August, the draft of NSC 5429 included another alternative, according to which North Vietnam would have been considered as a member of the Soviet bloc. NSC 5429, “Review of U.S. Policy toward Far East,” August 4, 1954. WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL.
 - 33 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 204; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, pp. 191–192; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 71.

policies. He concludes that the US did not “purposefully seek to eliminate the French”. Richardson agrees with Dawson and writes that Truman had “decided to draw the line”. NSC 5429 had portions, Gibbons argues, which “presaged President Johnson’s Gulf of Tonkin Resolution” with its promise of US assistance in countering Communist aggression. Short adds that the emphasis of the Policy Paper was on China and that South Vietnam was only mentioned in it once. According to Herring, Hess and Immerman, NSC 5429/2 meant that the policy-makers in Washington were determined to check Communism in Indochina because it would threaten US interests. The wording of the Policy Paper hinted, Herring, Hess and Immerman argue, at “a unique Communist opportunity for expansion”. A collective security treaty was the method of achieving their objective. According to Anderson, the Policy Paper “provided the initial guide” to keeping South Vietnam free. Finally, for Greene NSC 5429/2 “actually projected no more than continued ‘limited military assistance and training missions’ for regional governments”.³⁴ The Policy Paper clearly indicates that the US was ready to place its own prestige behind South Vietnam and to assume a new and active role as its economic supporter and as guarantor of its security, in the hope that they would not repeat the mistakes made by the French.

The implementation of the new policy required substantial funds. For the fiscal year of 1955, Congress gave 322.4 million dollars in foreign aid for South Vietnam, although the USOM had suggested that 240 million dollars would be enough. Approximately 87 percent of the total sum was channeled through the biggest economic aid program, the Commercial Import Program or Commodity Import Program (CIP), which had been designed to prevent the inflationary effects of US aid on the economy of South Vietnam. According to the head of the USOM, Leland Barrows, the initial aim of the CIP was to offer South Vietnamese middle-class goods, which they wanted. Barrows believed that certain goods, such as clothes, would buy Diem loyalty from the officers, civil servants, and businessmen.³⁵

Naturally, the Eisenhower Administration aimed at keeping most of their policy discussions and contingency plans secret. The State Department, for example, had prepared a “white paper” on Indochina. When the President had been asked in his news conferences about requests for and offers of the US military intervention, he had answered that he was thinking about publicizing

34 Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, pp. 44–45; Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, 1981, p. 53; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 194; Dawson, “The 1954 Geneva Conference”, 1985, p. 234–235; Pach, Jr. and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1991, p. 93; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 286; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 192; Herring, Hess and Immerman, “Passage of Empire,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*, Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 172; Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, p. 129; Greene, Daniel P. O’C., “John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 16 (Fall 1992), p. 553.

35 Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, pp. 85–86; Heath’s report to Dulles, August 22, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1966–1972; Scigliano, Robert G., *South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress* (Boston: Houghton, 1963), pp. 112–113.

the details “when this was compatible with the public interest”. Secretary Dulles forwarded a statement to Eisenhower on August 24, but recommended – after having received the French and British views – that it should not be published at all or not before early September. Dulles argued that the publication would “artificially stimulate controversy” since public interest had already waned.³⁶

The practical implementation of NSC 5429 was carefully monitored by the OCB. A large portion of the funds was used for Passage to Freedom, which was a massive sea-lift operation by the US Navy to help mainly Catholic refugees flee from Vietminh-held areas to the south. Even though many Western nations and non-governmental organizations were involved, the US covered some 97 percent of the costs of the operation. Separate State and FOA reports on the reception and care of the refugees from North Vietnam to south were presented to the OCB members on August 25, 1954. Both reports indicated there had been some progress, but that the issue “is still an urgent problem”. The Board also discussed the Pentagon suggestion that the French be asked to release some troops to be at the disposal of MAAG’s General O’Daniel in order to make the best use “of facilities and equipment made available by the US”. McClintock’s Working Group was assigned the task of complying with the suggestion. The OCB also agreed that a special report on the evacuation and resettlement of refugees should be made and submitted to the President. The following day the Board Assistants received a memorandum in which they were informed that seven Working Groups on Asia, including that on NSC 5405, had been assigned the responsibility of coordinating the necessary actions in support of NSC policies since the OCB had been designated as the coordinating agency for sections in NSC 5429/2. All appropriate executive departments and agencies were directed by the President to use those sections “as a general guide in the implementation of pertinent policies toward the Far East”.³⁷

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- 36 Dulles’s memorandum to Eisenhower, August 24, 1954, AWF, International series, Box 31, DDEL; also in John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 9, Ibid.
- 37 DSB, August 23, 1954, p. 265; Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 130; Sheehan, Neil A., *The Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random, 1988), p. 137; Montgomery, John D., *The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 47 From August 1954 to May 1955 about 310,000 people moved south. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 226–227. United States Operations Mission (USOM), which role was pivotal, directed 55 million dollars to the operation in 1954, and the next year an additional 35 million. DSB, May 11, 1959, pp. 674, 677; Scigliano, Robert and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 2; Eisenhower’s seventh MSP semi-annual report to Congress, March 14, 1955, DSB, May 2, 1955, p. 720. For a detailed account of the first weeks of the Passage to Freedom see “Exodus: A Report on the Voluntary Mass Movement to Freedom,” in *ibid.*, February 7, 1955, pp. 222–229; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, August 25, 1954 (held on August 24), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL; OCB Minutes, August 25, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. The Working Group on NSC 5405 was assigned the responsibility for applying sections on Indochina, the off-shore island chain and Southeast Asia, excluding Indonesia, for which there was a separate Working Group. In September, Staats assumed that those portions of NSC 5429/2 pertaining to Indochina would supersede those of NSC 5405. Therefore, he added, “no further revisions are necessary in NSC 5405”. The terms of reference for the Working Groups were approved by the Board Assistants

Anxiousness to have some influence on the policy-making process was evident among some of the lower-level State Department officials associated with Southeast Asia and the NSC-OCB machinery. Those individuals, such as Bonsal, Robertson and Kenneth T. Young, were eager to see efficient implementation of NSC policies on South Vietnam. Walter Robertson, for example, praised the work of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina. According to Robertson, the Special Working Group had managed “to produce a considerable body of useful work from its subcommittees”. One of the reports on aid funds had recommended that the JCS would study and recommend the overall force goals for the Indochinese states. The Special Working Group concurred in the recommendation and added that the FOA should determine what kind of conditional economic assistance be furnished. The Chairman of the Group Ambassador-designate, Robert McClintock, thought that aid, particularly to South Vietnam, “should be couched in moderate terms until it is possible” to predict the viability of Diem’s Government and its chances of success. The Piaster currency supplies, the Working Group suggested, were to be kept to a minimum in the areas which were going to be taken over by the Vietminh. In conclusion, Robertson informed the Acting Secretary of State that Kenneth T. Young would serve as the Acting Chairman of the Special Working Group for the period of two weeks, pending McClintock’s return “to wind up the activities” of the Group before leaving again at the end of September. Young adopted a new policy for the Working Group. On August 31, Young wrote to the OCB Executive Officer Staats in reference to the funding of the refugee evacuation operation that “the immediate decisions required in respect to Indochina are within the operational responsibilities of the several agencies”. The new Chairman also informed the Executive Officer of the Board that the Working Group was submitting recommendations as soon as possible to the OCB as it was “assembling the requisite data and estimates on which it was going to base recommendations for a longer range concept of US operations in the area”, including the timing of direct assistance and priorities among programs in Southeast Asia with budgetary implications. The recommendations of the Special Working Group took into consideration the fact that the French would turn over the local government administration and armed forces to the Vietnamese quite soon. The Board members received the views of Robertson and Young as background information on August 31.³⁸

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in behalf of their principals on September 10, 1954. Staat’s Memorandum for the Board Assistants, August 26, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 18, Far East, RG 59, NA; Staat’s memorandum for the OCB, September 14, 1954 with subject paper and terms of reference for Working Groups on coordination of NSC 5429/2 (both dated September 10, 1954) as attachments, *ibid.* The instructions and terms of reference were cleared with the appropriate Working Group Chairmen. See Operation Coordinator Radius’s memorandum to Robertson’s Staff Assistant Harold N. Waddell, August 30, 1954, *ibid.* See also Executive Assistant Charles E. Johnson’s draft memorandum to the Board Assistants, September 2, 1954, *ibid.*

38 The aid was to be dependent on “engagements by those governments to maintain a standard of performance which would further U.S. policy interests in those countries”. Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles (drafted by McClintock), August 27, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2, RG 59,

The regular work of the NSC-OCB machinery was generally deemed important. If the principals were unable to attend they were represented by their high-level alternates. This was evident at all levels of the Council system. At the Board meeting, for example, from which the Directors of the CIA and USIA were absent and represented by their alternates, they noted two memoranda through the Executive Officer and dated August 31, from the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina. These were to be used as background information for a Special Status Report by the same Group. In connection with Laos and South Vietnam, the FOA had suggested that “the US should plan to divest itself of the liability of association with the French by operating insofar as possible directly with the national governments”.³⁹

Classification has sometimes obstructed the conduct of this study. Given that, and the vague note-taking of Allen Dulles’s oral briefings, we do not know for sure what the CIA Director told the NSC members. Luckily, some documentation has been saved and declassified, thus allowing us to reconstruct the past. At an NSC meeting on September 2, 1954, for example, the first parts of the memorandum of discussion, which clearly refer to some kind of reports from the field on the difficulties for Diem, have been deleted. The following part begins: “Other reports suggest that the position of Diem may not be so shaky after all.” It is likely that the deleted portions refer, as is so often the case, to the activities of CIA missions and informants. Diem was reported to have gained the support of Bao Dai. The Vietminh was trying to take advantage of the situation by “seeking to discredit Diem” and to disrupt the evacuation program.⁴⁰

There seems to have been no breakdowns in the implementation of the approved NSC policies. The decision concerning direct aid is clearly reflected in the OCB activities. The Board machinery often concentrated on a number of major developments. In the case of Indochina in early September it was the Exodus sea-lift operation. On September 8 the OCB noted the developments in the sea-lift evacuation operation and the plans to limit it to one ship per day. The Board agreed that the Pentagon would ask O’Daniel “to take preliminary steps to establish a training program” for the Vietnamese troops “in cooperation with the Free Vietnamese Government”. The State and Defense Departments were to finalize instructions for Chief MAAG, whereas the State would offer diplomatic support in order to get the French to agree. The participation of the French, the Board also agreed, “should be restricted to the minimum required for legal and face-saving purposes, the real initiative to be retained by the US” In addition, the OCB members noted the need for trained assistants for General O’Daniel.

NA; Young’s memorandum to Staats, August 30, 1954, *ibid.* Young was invited to attend the next OCB meeting. Staats’s memorandum for the members of the OCB with both Robertson’s and Young’s memoranda as attachments, August 31, 1954, *ibid.*

39 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, August 30, 1954 (held on August 27), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL; OCB Minutes, September 1, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA.

40 Memorandum of Discussion of the 212nd Meeting of the NSC, September 2, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina was assigned the task of finding ways to get the French to provide O'Daniel with FEC troops, as had already been agreed on August 25.⁴¹

The Council continued to receive information from numerous sources. The supply was systematically requested. Bedell Smith, as had been suggested by the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, asked the JCS to submit their views as soon as possible on “the overall force which should be retained or developed” in South Vietnam. The study would have to take internal security into consideration as well as overt aggression.⁴²

Military Guarantees to South Vietnam – The Establishment of the Southeast Asian Defense Coalition

The EDC scheme was not ratified by the French National Assembly. Secretary Dulles regarded it as a “striking blow” against US policy objectives. Partly for that reason, the establishment of the Southeast Asia defense pact was seriously taken up. On September 6, Secretary Dulles gave a speech at the opening session of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in Manila. He stated that the free states could not match the broad ground forces of international Communism. Hence, he added, the member states of SEATO should depend upon the mobile strike capability of the US and its strategically stationed reserves. According to Dulles, the US had no intention of sending its armed forces to the endangered areas of Southeast Asia. The achievements of international Communism, Dulles warned, acted as a bridgehead for its expansion. The objective of the treaty was to check any possible Chinese aggression. At Dulles’s insistence, the Indochinese states were taken under SEATO’s security umbrella and economic cooperation under the auspices of a special protocol of Article III and IV of the Treaty.⁴³

The Eisenhower Administration did not conclude treaties without bringing the issues before the Council. SEATO was on the NSC Agenda on September 12.

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- 41 OCB Minutes, September 8, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. See also the memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, September 3, 1954 (held on September 2), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.
 - 42 Acting Secretary of State Bedell Smith’s memorandum to Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert B. Anderson, September 7, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central File series, Box 38, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2011–2012.
 - 43 Randle, Geneva 1954, 1969, p. 375; Rotter, Andrew J., *The Path to Vietnam. Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 218; Dulles’s addresses on SEATO, September 6 and 8, 1954, DSB, September 20, 1954, pp. 391–392, 393. Secretary Dulles was in Manila September 3–9. US Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Travels of the Secretaries of State 1866–1990* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Historian, Department of State, November 1990), p. 15. For the SEATO Treaty and its protocol, both on September 8, 1954. See Williams, William Appleman, Thomas McCormick, Lloyd Gardner and Walter LaFeber, eds, *America in Vietnam: A Documentary History* (Garden City: Anchor/ Doubleday, 1985), pp. 174–178. For the protocol see also Cameron, Allan W., ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1940–1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 346; Tuchman, Barbara W., *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (London: Joseph, 1984), p. 271. See also Fifield, Russell H., *Southeast Asia in United States Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 114.

At that informative meeting Eisenhower and Dulles agreed that subversion had to be checked in Southeast Asia without direct American military participation. Although the situation appeared to be weak in their eyes, they were not ready to give up the region without a struggle. SEATO protocol laid the basis for United Action and gave South Vietnam the status of an independent state. Dulles told the Council that there had been talks in Manila about a form of “Marshall Aid” for Asia. According to the Secretary of State, the US should consider solving the economic problems of Southeast Asia, but should not get involved in such activity right away. The participation of other Far Eastern nations would be necessary. Dulles meant especially Japan, which he had recently encouraged to look for markets in Southeast Asia.⁴⁴

Dissenting voices were also heard. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Vice Admiral Arthur C. Davis, concluded that SEATO did not protect Southeast Asia from Communist aggression any better than before. For Davis, who was a member of the US delegation at Manila, SEATO was a counterbalance to the Geneva Agreements because the Communist had achieved military, political, and psychological victories at the Conference.⁴⁵

The OCB structure established numerous Committees and Working Groups. This also happened in connection with the revision work done on NSC 5429/2. On September 10, 1954, the Board Assistants approved on behalf of their principals that the working groups should be assigned the responsibility for coordinating the necessary actions in support of the NSC policies. Another special working group was formed to coordinate the paragraphs dealing with the general political and economic measures in the Far East. The responsibility of the Indochina Working Group for interagency coordination and reporting under NSC 5429/2 was the information and cultural programs. In addition, the Working Group on Southeast Asia was still empowered to consider some of the sections of NSC 5405.⁴⁶

Congressional opinion mattered. The President informed Congress about the objectives of SEATO. He stated that it was aimed at promoting peace in the Southeast Asia and Southwestern Pacific and at preventing Communist and other aggression – overt attack and internal subversion – in that region. Eisenhower added that only Communist armed intervention would be viewed as a deed against the security of the US. The President stressed, just as Secretary

44 Memorandum of Discussion of the 214th Meeting of the NSC, September 12, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954. Volume XII, Part 1, pp. 903–908.

45 Davis’s report to Secretary Wilson, September 14, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 746–750.

46 The information and cultural programs with respect to Indochina were in Section III, paragraph 6, and Section IV, paragraph 10. Staats’s memorandum for the OCB, September 14, 1954 and OCB subject paper “OCB Coordination of NSC 5429/2,” (dated September 10, 1954) and the terms of reference for the Working Group on Coordination of Section II of NSC 5429/2 (dated September 10, 1954) as attachments, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 18, Far East, RG 59, NA; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, September 10, 1954 (held on September 9), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

Dulles had done at the NSC, the economical dimension to strengthening the free countries of Southeast Asia both socially and economically.⁴⁷

The United States Replaces France

Diem's position was far from stable. This is revealed in a SNIE which came out in mid-September. The intelligence community reported that Diem had encountered general inefficiency, incoherence and corruption. According to the intelligence sources, the conspiring ARVN Chief of Staff General Nguyen Van Hinh posed a threat to the future of Diem. The SNIE went on to praise the way in which Diem still retained "considerable unorganized popular support", especially among the Catholics.⁴⁸

The OCB monitored the situation by taking a broad view and trying to solve the multi-faceted practical problems associated with the implementation of the NSC policies. In mid-September the Board discussed the special supplementary status report on Indochina in the light of a short high-light briefing by the new Ambassador McClintock and an oral presentation on the present status made by Young. The Board noted the conclusions, especially the ten interim steps necessary for the introduction of military and economic aid, but their main emphasis was, as earlier, on the evacuation operation. Since the State and Defense Departments had instructed their field operatives that the evacuation operation should not be slowed down, but the US Navy had announced its plans to greatly reduce the flow of refugees, and the OCB requested the Pentagon to certify the report as genuine. O'Daniel had been asked to personally request the loan of FEC personnel. FOA reported that three land experts were being made available to assist Diem's Government with land reform, the key to the resettlement problem. The Board also noted that the State Department would take steps to increase the amount of its assistance to South Vietnam through private agencies. The evacuation, the OCB members concurred, should be publicized. In consequence, USIA was also asked to submit a summary report of their coverage of the evacuation for the information of the OCB and Secretary Dulles, and the Pentagon was asked to go public with the operation in a well-known American magazine. The Board was not satisfied with the rate of evacuation of materiel from North Vietnam and agreed that "a vigorous effort is required", and therefore a high-level logistics expert was to be sent to Saigon and additional US military personnel to Haiphong in order to assist O'Daniel in the removal operation. The State and Defense Departments were asked to find a location for the materiel

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47 Eisenhower's statement to Congress on SEATO, November 10, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 1041-1042. According to Anderson, the Eisenhower Administration considered that SEATO would be enough then, but that it "was only the beginning of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam". Anderson, Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam, 1989, p. 117.

48 SNIE-63-6-54, "Current Trends in South Vietnam," September 15, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume III, Part 2, pp. 2028-2030; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 751-752.

where it could be properly stored and maintained and possibly recaptured or disposed of later. This would also have to be discussed with the French, who had agreed to give priority to the evacuation of MDAP items in late July. The Board requested an additional special status report on Indochina for September 22.⁴⁹

The apparently bilateral and separate regular State-JCS meetings could also be considered an augmentation of the NSC-OCB machinery because the participants often discussed NSC-related issues and the meetings also helped, in part, to overcome any possible information breakdowns and coordination problems within the Council machinery. The JCS and State Department officials met, for example, on September 17, 1954, to discuss the status of Policy Papers with respect to Indochina. At times there was some confusion and a lack of information within the OCB. Radford mentioned a decision of the Board on September 16, when Secretary Anderson had agreed to a constabulary program for Indochina. Anderson had apparently believed, Admiral Davis explained, that the Pentagon had already approved such a program and had therefore voted for it. In reality, the issue was still being considered at the Defense Department. Davis said the Pentagon would straighten the matter out with the OCB. In reply to Admiral Donald B. Duncan's inquiry about the status of the Presidential letters to Indochina, Young said that they "were being processed" at the State Department but that the situation in South Vietnam was complicated since the politics were in a "chaotic condition" there. MacArthur II pointed out that the French Minister for the Associated States, Guy LaChambre, and Ely were scheduled to visit Washington in a week's time. Admirals Radford and Davis thought this would be too soon. The visit would be useful, MacArthur II continued, as the US could discover the intentions of the French and inform them of the views of the Americans.⁵⁰

Some of the policy decisions, such as the direct aid and NSC 5429, were not easy to implement. When the Board started its consideration of another Supplementary Status Report it noted a presentation on the subject by Young. This suggested that the Sub-Group of the Working Group had been producing position papers for the talks with the French. The Working Group proposed that the talks should not go into specifics but that another meeting should be arranged with a full agenda. The OCB noted that Presidential letters to the three

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49 OCB Minutes, September 15, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. For details of the evacuation, arrangements for direct aid and the reprogramming of military and economic assistance see Annex "A" of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina's Supplementary Status Report as of September 13, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina - 1954, RG 59, NA. As the evacuation operation was high on the priority list for the OCB, the USIA had exploited the evacuation in its informational campaigns. See, for example, the USIA official William S. Peterson's memorandum to Young, September 20, 1954, *ibid.*

50 Gleason normally represented the NSC at the meetings. Records of the Department of State, Substance of Discussions of State-JCS Meeting, September 17, 1954. Miscellaneous Lot Files, Lot 61 D 147, Box 51, Meeting Summaries and Project Files, 1951-1959, State-JCS Meetings, Substance of Discussion, Volume VI, Box 51, (2), RG 59, NA.

Indochinese countries were “being cleared for form with the President”. The timing of the dispatch to Diem had not been decided upon because of the forthcoming talks with the French. The FOA’s suggestion to the State that it should expedite negotiations with the French also stated that the US aid “should be suspended pending the reaching of agreements with respect to South Vietnam”. In addition, the Board noted that the CIA would provide intelligence on the 100,000 Vietnamese in the FEC. The CINCPAC was planning not to leave any materiel for the Vietminh and the State Department was considering whether to subsidize the military activities of the religious sects⁵¹ formerly assisted by the French.⁵²

As the situation worsened, the President and the Council began to be alarmed. The CIA Director Allen Dulles told the Council on September 24, 1955 that the struggle between Diem and Hinh “had reached a crisis stage”. Bao Dai had already urged Diem to resign. The result depended on the control of the ARVN, Allen Dulles added. In terms of policy, the CIA Director said, it was all about whether the US and France “can get together and back a good Vietnamese leader”. Radford wondered why the French could not “call Hinh off”. The CIA Director answered that they could but that they were secretly supporting him. After having read the conclusions of the latest NIE, Cutler asked Secretary Dulles if it was true that Ambassador Heath was to be changed. The Secretary replied that Heath “was too close to the French” and therefore he ought to go. He said the key issue was whether the French were indeed, as the intelligence reports portrayed, collaborating with the Vietminh. The CIA Director went on to say that the Americans and the French should stand behind one leader. Secretary Wilson continued his line of arguments by saying that the US should “get completely out of the area” and that it was extremely difficult to “save any part of Southeast Asia”. Other points were apparently raised, but the rest of the memorandum of the discussion remains classified.⁵³

51 The sects, which were called the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and the Binh Xuyen, were politico-religious groups. Although they were anti-Communist, they believed in a feudalistic system. The sects maintained private armies. The most notable sects were Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen. The last was a gangster group which operated in the Saigon area. The heterogenous sects had approximately three million anti-Vietminh supporters. The armies of the three biggest sects numbered 30,000–40,000 men. The areas controlled by the sects were like “states within states”, which were led by warlords, who called themselves generals. Fall, Bernard B., “The Political-Religious Sects of Vietnam,” *Pacific Affairs*, Volume XXVIII (September 1955, pp. 235–253; Fall, Bernard B., *Viet-Nam Witness*, 1953–66 (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 142–143, 158–159; Scigliano, *South Vietnam*, 1964, p. 20, footnote 31; FitzGerald, Frances, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 105–106; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 206, 229–230.

52 CINCPAC planned to complete the evacuation of materiel by mid-November, OCB Minutes, September 22, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, September 17, 1954 (held on September 16), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. See also Staat’s memorandum to the Board Assistants on NSC 5405, September 24, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 25, Southeast Asia. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina had based its consideration of the political situation in South Vietnam on the SNIE of September 15. For Young’s report see the Supplementary Status Report of September 21, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2.

53 Memorandum of Discussion of the 215th Meeting of the NSC, September 27, 1954 (held on September 24), AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2058–2059.

The President did not need to be involved in an official NSC setting if the issues had to be cleared first by his advisers. On September 25, Secretary Dulles revealed at an informal meeting with the Council members that the US was supporting Diem “who is not perfect but is at least a strong nationalist”. Dulles was reluctant to involve the US in Vietnam before they knew what kind of government there was. He said it was imperative to agree with the French about the implementation of the US direct aid program. Bedell Smith suggested the US should be careful in the negotiations and to “be a little cool but not too cool”. Dulles then asked Stassen if it would be easy to discontinue the dollar aid to the French. The former replied immediately and specified to Bedell Smith that the French had exceeded the payments for the FEC, but they still had funds for the South Vietnamese troops. Turning to the military aspects, Admiral Carney commented that the US should make sure it retrieved its military equipment from Indochina. The Admiral said the US should delay the introduction of the military training program until political matters had become clear.⁵⁴ Harold Stassen was, therefore, to inform the French about the delays in economic aid. Bedell Smith, in turn, informed Paris that “channeling the aid” would be handled directly to the newly independent Indochinese states. The goal of the US, Bedell Smith emphasized, was to strengthen the prestige of those states, and not to replace the French fully.⁵⁵ Anderson argues that, even though NSC 5429 emphasized the strengthening the Diem Government, Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles “devoted less of their personal attention to the inscrutable politics of Vietnam” after the Manila Conference.⁵⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff appear not to have always agreed with the general trend of thinking among the NSC. They would often submit their comments to the NSC principals without even asking. In late September, the Chiefs, for example, reiterated in late September their opposition to the training issue. The JCS members insisted that due to the “unstable political situation” in Vietnam, “this is not a propitious time to further indicate United States intentions with respect to the support and training of either the Vietnamese regular or police forces”. Furthermore, the Chiefs considered the ramifications of the Geneva Agreements and the latest NSC policies in Southeast Asia. They argued that before reaching a decision to support the ARVN, “a definite agreement” should be obtained from the French on their “programmed phased withdrawal”.⁵⁷

The NSC policies were not intended to harm relations between the US and its Western allies. In late September, Franco-American talks centering on the

54 Minute of a meeting at the State Department, September 25, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2066–2070. Stassen reminded the participants that the aid for the French to wage the First Indochina War had been “the largest flow of dollar aid to any country in the world” during 1954. *Ibid.*, p. 2067.

55 Bedell Smith’s cable to Dillon, September 29, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2095–2097.

56 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 74.

57 JCS’s memoranda (2) to Secretary Wilson, September 22, as enclosures to Wilson’s letter to Secretary Dulles, September 29, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2088–2091.

future of South Vietnam were held in Washington. At first, the French opposed US efforts to grant direct assistance to the Indochinese states, but finally both parties reached a compromise. They promised to fulfil the rights of SEATO members and to respect the independence of the Indochinese states. The United States and France pledged to continue their support to those states in their attempts to safeguard freedom and independence and in promoting the well-being of their citizens. In the case of South Vietnam, the French and the Americans promised to help in resettling refugees fleeing from the north. France stated that it would maintain the FEC indefinitely, while bearing in mind the limitations of the Geneva Accords. The US would consider economic aid to the FEC and to the armies of the Indochinese states. In addition, the Americans announced that they would negotiate directly with the governments and officials of the Indochinese countries regarding economic and military aid.⁵⁸ The OCB, in connection with consideration of the Supplementary Status Report on Indochina, was briefed by Chairman Young on the highlights of the Franco-American talks of September 27–29, 1954. The Working Group concluded that the acceptance of several sect representatives into the South Vietnamese Cabinet did not resolve the crisis between Diem and Hinh and Binh Xuyen. USIA was trying to have some influence through the “playing of hard news stories only”.⁵⁹

The implementation of the NSC policies required actions on the part of numerous field operatives. Ambassador Heath, for example, received instructions to fly to Paris in early October. While in France he was to urge Emperor Bao Dai to discontinue his support to General Hinh in order to give Diem a chance to form a government without any interference. At Cannes on October 3, Bao Dai promised Heath that he would back Diem and that he would order Hinh and other high officers to do the same. In addition, the members of the US mission had told Hinh that US aid would probably be terminated if an attempt were made to overthrow Diem. The Chief MAAG O’Daniel had initially persuaded Hinh to cease planning a coup d’état, but later in the fall Ambassador Heath and General Ely succeeded in changing Hinh’s mind. Lansdale, who had warm relations to both Diem and Hinh, triggered off the situation by explaining to Hinh that the US aid was at stake. Lansdale, who had headed a CIA covert operation, the Saigon Military Mission (SMM)⁶⁰, since June 1954, persuaded

58 “Direct aid to the Indochinese states,” the final communiqué of the Franco-American talks, September 29, 1954, DSB, October 11, 1954, p. 534; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2097–2098. See also Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 252.

59 OCB Minutes, September 29, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. The Special Working Group on Indochina carefully monitored the evacuation from the Tonkin Delta. For Young’s report, see Supplementary Status Report as of September 27, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2. See also the Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, September 22, 1954 (held on September 21), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

60 The planning work for the SMM had probably started on the initiative of the Dulles brothers, at the latest by January 1954. Secretary of State Dulles did not tell the NSC, not to mention Congress, about the plans. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 259. Lansdale received direct orders from Secretary Dulles. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, p. 126; Maclear, Michael, *The Ten Thousand Day War. Vietnam: 1945–1975* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981), p. 49.

Hinh and his lieutenants to fly to the Philippines to learn about anti-guerilla activities, since Lansdale had successfully operated there to defeat the Hukbalahap guerillas.⁶¹

Elsewhere, meanwhile the US persuaded the French to allow Diem to demonstrate his competence and produce considerable reforms over a two-month test period, and then, if he failed, the French would demand his overthrow. Mendès-France, who supported Prince Buu Hoi, told Secretary Dulles that France would “give Diem a good try” even though he lacked the “necessary qualities”.⁶²

The discussions for removing obstacles required thorough background work. The OCB Special Working Group had, therefore, prepared a list of principal operational problems resulting from the discussions with the French. The problems included the handling of Diem’s opposition, the development of an internal, anti-Communist program by his Government, US training of the Vietnamese troops, and the direct aid to Indochina. The US and France had agreed to support the independence of the three Indochinese states, to oppose further gains by the Vietminh, and to support Diem. Ambassador Heath had been informed to that effect. If Diem failed, Bao Dai was to be urged to appoint Buu Loc as “a delegate general”. The US had not taken action on many of the objectives, although they were “under consideration”.⁶³

Even though planning and implementation were in progress, the issues were not discussed in detail at the Council. On October 6, for example, Vietnam was merely a secondary issue for information only at the NSC. Allen Dulles briefed the Council that as a concrete outcome of the recent Franco-American negotia-

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- 61 Acting Secretary of State Bedell Smith’s cables (2) to Heath, October 1, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2109–2110, 2110–2111; Bedell Smith’s Bao Dai’s and Heath’s meeting quoted in Herring, Hess and Immerman, “Passage of Empire,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 175–176; “Report on the Activities of SMM between June 1954 and April 1955,” PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 580ff; Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, p. 175; Marchetti and Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, 1974, p. 28; Ambrose and Immerman, *Ike’s Spies*, 1981, p. 247; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 232–235; Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 82. About the friendship and working relation between Lansdale and Diem see Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, pp. 103–104; Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, pp. 126, 154–159; Charlton, Michael and Moncrieff, Anthony, *Many Reasons Why. The American Involvement in Vietnam* (New York: Hill, 1978), pp. 55–56; Currey, Edward Lansdale, 1988, pp. 219–221. Lansdale gave an oral report of his successful activities to Young’s Special Working Group on Vietnam in early November 1955. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Vietnam meeting, November 8, 1955 by Kenneth P. Landon (held on November 8), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. The minutes are also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 572–576. See also Prados, John, *Presidents’ Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations since World War II* (New York: Morrow, 1986), p. 118.
- 62 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 225; memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Mendès-France, October 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2115. The French resented the US pro-Diem sentiment. See, for example, Devillers and Lacouture, *End of a War*, 1969, pp. 337, 363; Ely, *Mémoires*, 1964, pp. 290–300.
- 63 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 1, 1954 (held on September 30), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL; OCB Special Working Group on Indochina’s Supplementary Status Report as of October 4, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2, RG 59, NA.

tions it had been “decided to combine in support of the Diem cabinet”. The CIA Director reminded the participants that there was opposition in Vietnam and that he could not say how stable the position of Diem’s Government was. Secretary Wilson made a brief comment and stated that “he didn’t like what was going on in Vietnam”.⁶⁴

On October 6, Vietnam was still receiving special treatment from the OCB. The Board continued to monitor carefully the evacuation operations, as it had been doing earlier. With the Counselor of the US Embassy at Saigon, Randolph A. Kidder present for the item, Young “presented a further amplified” Supplementary Status Report. Young was quoting MAAG reports which indicated that the evacuation operations were proceeding “satisfactorily”. Young also informed the Board members that the resettlement operation was advancing unsatisfactorily, a fact which had caused the refugees dissatisfaction. The State Department was, therefore, going to look into the matter and alert the Embassy to the possibility that the Vietminh might use the resettlement for infiltration. The Special Working Group on Indochina requested an appraisal of operating assets and liabilities, in particular in Vietnam. In connection with taking note of this request, the Board heard that a CIA-coordinated NIE was going to be made on the probable Vietminh actions and capabilities, as well as of those of the anti-Communist elements. The OCB instructed the Working Group to prepare a program of economic and military aid to Indochina which should take into account the relevant data and the tentative force goals set forth by the JCS, which was not represented on the OCB. The program would be “including both direct aid and aid to be granted in coordination with the French”. It was also noted that the State Department had held discussions with the Burmese, Indonesians and Japanese in order to gain their support for the Indochinese. At an informal meeting Cutler had briefed the OCB members that a high-level committee had been appointed by the Council to make recommendations to implement paragraph III of NSC 5429/2 regarding the general Asian economic grouping.⁶⁵

The State Department officials sometimes suffered from a shortage of information, even though they dominated the Working Groups of the OCB and appear to have coordinated their positions. At a meeting of Secretary Dulles and his own advisers, Young informed the participants that the Franco-American

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64 Memorandum of Discussion of the 216th Meeting of the NSC, October 6, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

65 The Board directed that the aid programs “should be expressed in the form of terms of reference and instructions [to be submitted to the OCB for clearance] to the country teams of Indochina”. OCB Minutes, October 6, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, OCB Minutes II, RG 59, NA. As Under Secretary Herbert Hoover, Jr., the Chairman of the OCB, was checking the minutes of the October 6 OCB meeting he corrected the original text, which had referred to the aid programs prepared by the Working Group. Hoover, Jr. had thought that if the economic and military aid programs were to be based on JCS conclusions, it would be “too limiting”. Therefore he had requested “other relevant data” to be added to the minutes. Operations Coordinator RADIUS’s memorandum for the Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr., October 13, 1954, *ibid.* See also the memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 6, 1954 (held on October 5), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

talks on supporting Diem had produced an understanding of the principle. The situation in Saigon was, Young told, still unclear. When the discussion turned to US assistance, Young said that the OCB had given the Working Group the task of producing suggestions and guidelines “on the size of the proposed economic and military aid programs, the machinery and methods for their implementation”. In reply to Robertson’s question about SEATO’s protection to Vietnam, Secretary Dulles said that, if the Vietminh decided to attack, the US would bomb the Tonkin Delta area, which would then lead to a war against China. In this kind of war, he added, the US would use atomic weapons instead of dispatching ground troops. According to Dulles, the ARVN should primarily maintain internal security.⁶⁶

Despite the fact that Eisenhower’s advisory system favored dissenting views, at times the continuous opposition to NSC papers annoyed the President and the Secretary of State. Secretary Dulles met the President to discuss the situation in South Vietnam on October 11, 1954. As the JSC had recommended, the ARVN should be aimed against both external and internal threats. Dulles trusted the power of SEATO and its ability to defend the integrity of South Vietnam against external aggression. For Dulles, the priority of the ARVN could be the activities against subversion. Both men agreed that US policy should be based on NSC 5429/2.⁶⁷ Dulles reiterated this last point in his letter to Secretary Wilson, who had written that the Defense Department objected to US participation in the training of the ARVN. Dulles replied that the objectives of NSC 5429/2 would be fulfilled if there were “adequately trained and equipped” armed forces to assure the internal security and stability. The Secretary of State called for a firm position.⁶⁸

The handling of specific questions by the OCB often meant the establishment of additional subcommittees. The OCB Working Group on Indochina, for example, had delegated its Economic Subcommittee the task of reviewing and recommending the sums of US dollar aid for Indochina in FY 1955. The Subcommittee was to produce figures which could be used a basis for planning economic assistance, military budget support of the Indochinese armies and

66 Minute of a meeting of the State Department Staff, October 8, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2122–2126.

67 Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, October 11, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2142.

68 In commenting on the purpose and timing of the training question Secretary Dulles referred to NSC 5429/2 three times. Dulles’s letter to Wilson, October 11, 1954 (drafted by Young). Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Records Relating to International Conferences, Talks, and Meetings, 1951–1955, Lot 58 D 207, Box 1, General Collins’ Mission to Viet-Nam, November 1954–May 1955 (Miscellaneous), RG 59, NA. Wilson had written two weeks earlier that even though the JCS were against the training mission, the Pentagon would adhere to it “if it is considered that political considerations are overriding”. In the event of a decision to assume the training of the ARVN, he added, there should not be any limitations placed on the number of MAAG personnel. Wilson’s letter to Dulles, September 28, 1954, *ibid.* Goodpaster recalled in the mid-1970s that “the initial view of our government was that there was nothing that could be salvaged out of the situation in Vietnam” which meant that the country was considered lost. Yet, according to Goodpaster, it had been Secretary Dulles who “had come to think that there might be a chance to save South Vietnam”. Andrew J. Goodpaster Oral History Transcript, DDEL.

FEC support. The Subcommittee was unable to reach any general agreements. They did not approve the Pentagon Staff study for planning purposes, which envisaged 325 million dollars for FY 1955 (650 for the calendar year 1955) for Indochinese military budget support, until the JCS submitted specific requirements to the OCB for Laos and until the Pentagon produced an analysis of the total requirements for each country. The State Department representatives pointed out that “the latest relevant NSC directive appears to limit the US objective” to the assurance of internal security only. The FOA members added that the JCS cost estimate called for sizeable armed forces which could not be accommodated because of “low administrative capacity in government bureaus and in the economies generally”. The Subcommittee members agreed, however, that since the force goals in the cost estimate were, in the words of one Pentagon representative, Lieutenant Colonel V. Alden of Pentagon, to provide internal security and to “discourage and resist Communism”, the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina should clarify whether the purpose of the local armies should include both functions.⁶⁹

In line with the procedures of the Council, the NSC members were only cursorily briefed on South Vietnam on October 15. Allen Dulles said vaguely that the situation “was somewhat better”. Even though the cabinet crisis has not been solved, the CIA Director added, Hinh, whose prestige had been diminished, had been unable to launch a coup d’état against Diem.⁷⁰

The NSC could not have left Senator Mansfield’s fact-finding mission to Indochina unnoticed. In mid-October, Mansfield issued a report on South Vietnam, where he concluded that US foreign policy had suffered a setback as the supporter of the side that had lost the war. Mansfield added that the loss did not depend on insufficient armed support but on the absence of a political structure, which was vital for securing the effective delivery of military aid. South Vietnam was open to a coup d’état, the Senator asserted, if the current trends were not reversed. Diem was the only true nationalist candidate, he wrote, who was able to lead the nation, root out corruption, and take care of the welfare of the people of South Vietnam: “If Diem fell, all aid – excluding humanitarian aid – to South Vietnam and FEC should be terminated”.⁷¹ Next, a State Department

69 JCS figures were 268 million for FY 1955 (and 536 million for the calendar year, CY, 1955). Economics Sub-Committee of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina’s chairman Frederick H. Bunting’s memorandum to Young on the meeting of the Subcommittee, October 11, 1954 (held on October 7), Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina – 1954, RG 59, NA. The Subcommittee report was also discussed by the Working Group. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meetings, October 12, 1954 (held on October 11 and 12) with Bunting’s memorandum as an annex to the first. WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

70 Memorandum of Discussion of the 217th Meeting of the NSC, October 15, 1954 (held on October 14), AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

71 US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report on Indochina: Senator Mike Mansfield on a Study Mission to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, October 15, 1954, 83d Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1954), passim; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 222–223; quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 283–284. Also Representatives James P. Richards and John M. Vorys had travelled in the fall of 1954 to South Vietnam.

official and the OCB Special Working Group Chairman Young revealed a decade later that the Eisenhower Administration had deliberately used Senator Mansfield to achieve its goal. And as they had decided, Young continued, to proceed subtly with the French, they cabled Mansfield in Saigon to ask his opinion about Diem. The Senator's reply, which was predictable, convinced the French, Young recalled.⁷²

Some of the NSC members were persistent in their convictions. Defense Secretary Wilson, for example, argued after mid-October in that it would be necessary to abandon Indochina. At a small-group meeting with the top NSC principals he argued that it would mean wasting money. Secretary Dulles said the proposed aid package of 500 million dollars was foolishness, but 100 million would be adequate to create forces for internal security.⁷³

The OCB coped with the implementation in spite of the opposition of the Pentagon. At their meeting of October 13, the Board had agreed "as a matter of urgency" that Young and William H. Godel would prepare instructions for the field on the training of the South Vietnamese troops to be discussed on October 20. Once again Young had a chance to present and elaborate rally on the subject of action requirements by the Working Group. Young listed them, starting with general support items such as the appropriate application of SEATO with respect to Indochina, the improvement of relations between the three Indochinese states, and maintaining relations with Canada and India within the ICSC. The French and the South Vietnamese opposition should be pressured into backing Diem, and the position of the US Consulate in Hanoi would have to be monitored. Furthermore, he continued, force and military advisor goals should be determined and the economic arrangements set for the funding of the Vietnamese troops. A trade embargo⁷⁴ should be imposed on North Vietnam, and other nations should be forced to contribute to the economic programs in

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Their conclusions were identical to Mansfield's. *Ibid.*, footnote 7, p. 283; Mansfield's report attracted various comments. Dillon viewed it with prejudice. He favored other candidates. Ambassador Heath and the US Embassy in Saigon also doubted Diem's capabilities. On the other hand, the Acting Secretary of State, Under Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. regarded the arguments of Mansfield Report to be relevant, especially in those parts, where the Senator called for the termination of aid if Diem were replaced. In addition, he thought it was worth examining. Dillon's cable to Dulles, October 16, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2141-2142; Heath's cable to Hoover, Jr., October 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2151-2153; Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr's cable (drafted by Kenneth T. Young) to Dulles, October 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2160.

72 Mansfield quoted in Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, p. 118. For Mansfield's points in support of Diem see his cable to Dulles, September 24, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2055-2056. For Mansfield as an Asia and Indochina expert, see Olson, Gregory Allen, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), pp. 7-85.

73 Cutler's memorandum of a conversation between Eisenhower, Dulles, and Wilson, October 19, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, Executive Secretary's Subject File series, Box 17, DDEL; WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2142.

74 The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina also had the help of a Sub-Group which dealt with Indochina trade controls. Sub-Group on Financial and Monetary Controls's memorandum to Young, January 6, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

Indochina. In the informational field, both overt and covert programs were to be intensified. Many of the actions were still being prepared by the action agencies or awaiting further negotiations with the French, a US decision on aid programs, or the views of the JCS. The State and Defense Departments and the FOA were to be responsible for some 80 percent of the 25 action items. Young regarded the training of the internal security forces as being the most pressing issue. Erskine, from the Pentagon, was also present. The Board members all agreed with Erskine when he stated that “the political considerations were overriding”, and that the training should be initiated right away with about 1,500 men expansion to MAAG. Erskine suggested that the State Department would have to obtain political support for such action from the French and the South Vietnamese (coordination through the Embassy). This was supported unanimously. The Pentagon representatives were considering large forces for internal security, which would have required a large increase in MAAG, whereas the rest thought that a minimum number would be sufficient. Nevertheless, they came to the conclusion that the final size could be determined later, but that O’Daniel should be given permission to proceed with the present resources and manpower. Even though the State and Defense Departments had been unable to agree upon the training issue, the OCB tried to find a compromise based on a draft record of action. The Board, however, directed Staats, with the representatives of agencies that disagreed, and the FOA to redraft the paper as instructions to the field, which, after clearance with the OCB members, were to be transmitted as a joint State-Defense message by the following afternoon. Secretary Hoover, Jr. was going to present an oral report at the NSC two days later. The OCB members noted that, if there was still difficulties which would arise in the course of securing of Pentagon agreement to the OCB position, the matter could be sorted out at the Council.⁷⁵

The NSC Staff was capable of mediating between the State and Defense Departments. Cutler wrote that, since the State had declared it necessary to

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75 The OCB decided that the ICA Deputy Director for Programs and Planning, John H. Ohly, and the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Mutual Security Affairs, Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., were to be included in the discussions “to insure coordination with the reprogramming of military assistance” to South Vietnam. OCB Minutes, October 13, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. The Board Assistants had revised and approved NSC 5405 for OCB consideration at the beginning of October. Record of Action of the Board Assistant’s meeting, October 1, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 12, Board Assistants – Record of Actions 1954–1957. When the Board members were going through the minutes of the two previous meetings, they amended the sentence concerning the instructions to the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina to include “a midterm political, economic and military program for the free states of Indochina”. The Board members also received in paper format the reports by Young and Erskine. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of October 20, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I; OCB Minutes, October 20, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes II. Working Group’s outline was intended for use in reporting subsequent actions to the OCB. The paper included a brief report on the status of each item. Staats’s memorandum for the members of the OCB, October 19, 1954 with the OCB Special Working Group’s Summary of Action Requirements for OCB, October 19, 1954 as attachment, *ibid.*, Box 28, Southeast Asia 2; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 18, 1954 (held on the same day). WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

commence training and reorganization without delay “in order to have some [underlined in original document] troops to bolster up the legal government of Diem”, the Pentagon agreed to direct the Chief MAAG to start by using the resources already at his disposal. The Defense Department needed the State to “clear decks with French”.⁷⁶ Hall has examined the preparation for the October 22 Council meeting against the background of George’s hypothesis, according to which Cutler’s “sense of responsibility for policy enforcement” affected the timely re-evaluation of decisions. Even though Hall admitted that his material prevented him from making a general evaluation, he uses a memorandum which indicates that “Cutler himself helped close off the debate over whether or not the U.S. should now throw its political and military weight behind” South Vietnam. It also showed, Hall adds, the standing of Cutler between the State and Defense. Hall argued that “the NSC staff backup prepared for him makes no attempt to weigh the pluses and minuses of this new military commitment but instead mirrors Cutler’s desire to put the program on track”. The NIE of August 3, Hall concludes, also contributed “to this image of negligent performance”. According to Hall, despite the fact that the custodian and enforcer roles of the Special Assistant “are occasionally incompatible”, he did not share the view that the type of “role conflict was a constant source of Cutler’s performance shortfall”.⁷⁷

The National Security Council and its Crucial Meetings in Late October

The Council and the Eisenhower Letter to Diem

Outside factors, such as the internal situation in South Vietnam, had an influence upon the implementation of NSC policies. On October 22, Walter Robertson sent the Acting Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover, Jr., a Progress Report on Indochina for the NSC meeting to be held later that same day. The paper referred to NSC 5429/2 and commented that the continuing political crisis in South Vietnam “severely hampers our ability to attain US objectives”, Robertson argued. A crash program was initiated in an attempt to resolve the crisis. The program included measures to strengthen the position of the Diem Government, to support the resettlement of the refugees, land reform, the establishment of a national assembly, the training of civil servants, and the revitalization of the ARVN. According to Robertson, the OCB had “decided that as the first stage a limited training mission should be undertaken immediately as a crash program” to provide support for the Diem Government. To determine the force levels for South Vietnam as called for by the existing policy paper would be the next

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76 Cutler’s memorandum to Eisenhower (Staats’s copy), October 20, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

77 Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 393–394.

stage, Robertson wrote. He also offered statistics on the execution of the exodus.⁷⁸

Even on such a significant question, thorough Council consideration appears not to have happened on a weekly basis. This was also true in relation to the issue of Vietnam. This had last been carefully addressed at the NSC some two months earlier, on August 18. At first, the conclusions of the latest SNIE of September 15 were read to the principals. The Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. then went through the OCB program “as the first stage of US action”. Points related to the training and force levels of the ARVN had been priorities on the agenda of the OCB. Immediate, “limited training mission”, Hoover, Jr. said, equal to the proposed crash program, with objectives to consolidate Diem’s power and to ensure the internal security of South Vietnam. In due course, as part of the longer term program, the force levels for the ARVN would be determined. Secretary Hoover, Jr. also touched the issue of the evacuation of people and materiel from North Vietnam.⁷⁹

The President was eager to hear whether the State Department and the Pentagon had already agreed on the coordination of the crash program. Hoover, Jr., not offering a direct answer, stated that the program was intended to make the ARVN loyal to Diem instead of Hinh. Special Assistant Cutler commented that the OCB “had been in the process of drafting” instructions to the US representatives in the field concerning the crash program, but that the military had not yet “wholly agreed” to it. Eisenhower, who believed the French Government should give its “consent” to the program, asked what would happen if the French would not concur. Assistant Secretary Robertson replied that “we would be completely stymied”, since Hinh had French citizenship, and the French would probably not support Diem. In reply to Eisenhower’s question about the limitations of the Geneva Accords on increasing the size of MAAG, Robertson pointed out that Legal Adviser Phleger from the State Department thought it was legally out of the question, whereas the Pentagon lawyers concluded that there would be no problem if some of the FEC officers training the Vietnamese could be replaced by Americans.⁸⁰

The Chiefs had to defend their dissenting views. Admiral Radford explained that the JCS did not support the crash program as such as “it would be most difficult to do a satisfactory job” with the training mission “in the absence of a

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78 Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles, October 22, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Records Relating to International Conferences, Talks, and Meetings, 1951–1955, Lot 58 D 207, Box 1, General Collins’ Mission to Viet-Nam, November 1954–May 1955 (Miscellaneous), RG 59, NA.

79 Memorandum of Discussion of the 218th Meeting of the NSC, October 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2153–2155; SNIE-63-6-54, “Current Trends in South Vietnam,” September 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2028–2030. About decisions regarding the crash program see The Outline Minutes of the OCB, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes II, RG 59, NA. See also “Summaries of Action Requirements for OCB Special Working Group on Indochina,” *ibid.*, Southeast Asia 1–2.

80 Memorandum of Discussion of the 218th Meeting of the NSC, October 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2155–2156.

stable government in South Vietnam". The State Department representatives had not shared the views of the Chiefs as there could not be political stability without a strong military. The Chairman of the JCS stated that if "political considerations were overriding" they would adhere to the agreement. Radford then turned to the topic of the funds needed for the training operation on top of the sums for the FEC. Admiral Radford and General Ridgway proposed there could be a smaller program. Eisenhower said he wanted an army to back Diem and for that reason, he went on, "let's get busy and get one, but certainly not at a cost of \$400 million a year" as Radford had envisioned. The President called for fast action. Admiral Radford said that MAAG was unable to carry out a large-scale training program, but that a constabulary under Diem's direct command could be created. Robertson reminded the participants that, without Hinh, Diem would have no problems with the ARVN. The President asked rhetorically why the US did not solve the question by putting pressure on the French.⁸¹

Secretary Hoover, Jr. and Allen Dulles both believed that General O'Daniel could restore the loyalty of the ARVN to Diem. Eisenhower replied by commenting "that the obvious thing to do was simply to authorize General O'Daniel to use up to X millions of dollars – say, five, six or seven – to produce the maximum number of Vietnamese units" to support Diem. Radford urged that fast action be taken "and that the OCB could redraft the proposed instructions along the lines just suggested by the President". In conclusion, Eisenhower mentioned that the French had agreed to the US policy and that they should be told that the continuation would follow after Hinh had been ousted. The NSC noted the President's directive to give O'Daniel orders to initiate the crash program "to improve the loyalty and effectiveness" of the Vietnamese armed forces to Diem. The implementation of this directive was given to Secretary Dulles.⁸²

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- 81 Memorandum of Discussion of the 218th Meeting of the NSC, October 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2156–2157. Secretary Dulles had asked for the views of the Department of Defense on the training question on October 11. The internal security considerations were a priority. He emphasized that the US training effort "would help fulfill the objectives of NSC 5429/2". As a matter of fact, the Secretary referred three times to NCS policy. Dulles's letter to Wilson (drafted by Young), October 11, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2132–2134. For the views of the JCS see the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs A. C. Davis's letter to Dulles, October 20, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2146–2147. See also JCS memorandum to the Secretary of Defense Wilson (titled "Development and Training of Indigenous Forces in Indochina"), October 19, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 771–774.
- 82 NSC Action No. 1250 read "...that the Secretary of State, with the cooperation of the Secretary of Defense, the Director, Foreign Operations Administration, and the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, take immediate steps necessary to authorize the Chief, USMAAG, Saigon, in coordination with the US Ambassador at Saigon, to undertake an urgent program to improve the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese forces, in order to assure the prompt availability of Free Vietnamese forces on which Premier Diem can depend to assist him in establishing and sustaining a broadly-based government in Free Vietnam; utilizing funds up to an amount to be determined by the President on the recommendation of the Secretary of State". Memorandum of Discussion of the 218th Meeting of the NSC, October 22, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; Action 1250 is in *ibid.*, Box 1; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2157–2158; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 1986, pp. 249–251.

Gibbons writes that Dulles's position won since the proposals of the State Department were approved regardless of Wilson's reservations and the opposition of the JCS. The State Department's relief can be felt in Hoover, Jr's cable, which was drafted by Young, to Secretary Dulles in Paris. According to Hoover, Jr., the instructions to Saigon on the initiation of a "limited MAAG program represents intensive week of work and debate in OCB finally culminating in Defense and JCS acceptance". The Under Secretary regarded it as a "significant step". He referred to the NSC meeting and wrote that the President had not heard about the feud before because "the whole matter [had been] presented to [the] President this morning at NSC". Hoover, Jr. added that the course of action "carries risk but without some move we would remain on dead center". In his next cable drafted by Young, Hoover, Jr. summarized the essence of the meeting and informed Dulles that Eisenhower and the NSC members had noted the South Vietnamese military opposition to Diem's Government, the French reluctance to support Diem, and the need for rapid US action. Hoover, Jr. understood from the Council discussion and from Eisenhower that the Secretary of State should let the French know that the best way to "further free world objectives in Vietnam" would be to support Diem and that the US was ready to commence its own course of action with the delivery of Eisenhower's letter to Diem and with the initiation of the crash program. If Diem failed to form a "government of national union" or if failed to attract the backing of the ARVN or certain individuals, or if Diem was surpassed, "the US will have to reconsider its aid", as Senator Mansfield had envisioned. There were no other choices at that point regarding US aid or "forthcoming Congressional support". When Hoover, Jr. sent instructions to Saigon about the crash program he pointed out that it was linked to the implementation of NSC 5429/2.⁸³

According to Hall, "instead of paying heed to the warnings of" the Pentagon and the intelligence community, the Council decided to go along with the crash program. In contrast, as Ranelagh has noted concerning the implementation of NSC 5429, Eisenhower "was completely supported in his views by the CIA". Herring, Hess, and Immerman assert that the Eisenhower Administration made the decision to support South Vietnam, although it had only minor backing from the military and the French. At the meeting of October 22, the President "himself took the initiative". Combs views the NSC meeting of October 22 as "pivotal" as, after a debate for several weeks, the President had "finally dragged his reluctant defense staff aboard".⁸⁴

83 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 285; Hoover, Jr's cables (2) to Dulles, October 22, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2159, pp. 2159-2160; Hoover, Jr's cable to Heath and O'Daniel, October 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2161-2162.

84 Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947-1980", 1982, p. 394; Ranelagh, John, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA*. Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Simon, 1987), p. 431; Herring, Hess and Immerman, "Passage of Empire," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 177-178; Combs, Arthur, "The Path Not Taken: The British Alternative to U.S. Policy in Vietnam, 1954-1956," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 19 (Winter 1995), pp. 42-43.

The meeting of October 22 is interesting from the perspective of the advisory arrangements. The nature of the problem was not agreed upon too readily by Eisenhower and his NSC advisers. The option of withdrawal as advocated by Wilson on several occasions was no longer considered because NSC 5429/2 had been approved. It is striking that the Council meeting really appears to have been, as Hoover, Jr. implies, the forum at which Eisenhower was briefed on the disagreements between the State and Defense Departments. Eisenhower's questions – after he had been informed of the coordination problems – clearly indicate that he was curious to hear about the possible malfunctions in his advisory system. Furthermore, the use of the SNIE of September 15 raises serious questions about the validity of such information since the situation in South Vietnam was anything but stable. The State needed reinforcements to offer argumentation in the spirit of the existing policy paper. In the absence of Secretary Dulles, Assistant Secretary of State Robertson, who was both an anxious actor and an expert, was called to the meeting. The President did not value the advice of the State representatives over others, but he had already made up his mind earlier. The discussion was, in fact, all about practical matters related to implementation rather than on basic policy questions. There is, however, no evidence of any real breakdown in the multiple advocacy proceedings.

The role of the Presidential advisers was to advise the Chief Executive while he was making his choices and decisions. They were not to question the decisions, because the disagreements could postpone the implementation of policies indefinitely. This is illustrated by the fact that, when Eisenhower was approving the Record of Action on the morning of October 23, he had asked Cutler to request the JCS to rapidly prepare “a concrete longer-range program” for the consideration of the OCB. The program should include the reorganization and training of the minimum number of South Vietnamese forces necessary for internal security. When Eisenhower had agreed that the programs in South Vietnam were urgent, he directed that the program proposed by the Chiefs “should take fully into account his observations” at the Council meeting the previous day “especially with reference to minimizing the use of American funds and of additional American personnel”.⁸⁵

The Presidential message, which had gone through the NSC machinery and been approved on October 22, was finally received by Diem the following day. The letter reflected the language recommended by the OCB Special Working Group on August 11. In it, the US promised humanitarian aid to the refugees fleeing from the north. The objective, according to Eisenhower, was “to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means”. In addition, Eisenhower gave a promise of assistance to strengthen the

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85 Cutler wrote that as the Board (“and, if necessary, the NSC”) would be able to “judge its adequacy and feasibility for carrying out approved U.S. policy for Indochina”. Cutler's memorandum for Wilson, October 23, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

position of the Diem Government in return for its carrying out reforms. According to Eisenhower, South Vietnam was to receive military aid to deter external and internal aggression. Eisenhower revealed that he had followed the developments in South Vietnam keenly, especially in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. The distribution of the aid was to be negotiated by Diem and the US Ambassador. The purpose of the aid, Eisenhower wrote, was “to develop and maintain [a] strong and viable state, which would be able to deter militarily subversion and overt aggression”.⁸⁶

The feeling among the high-level State Department officials was spelt out in Hoover, Jr’s estimate of the initiation of military training in South Vietnam. The Secretary revealed the OCB had approved the crash military program on October 20 and that the instructions to Saigon were being made. “We hope this step”, he continued, “together with delivery of the President’s letter to Diem, will strengthen Diem in his relations both with the French and the Vietnamese”.⁸⁷

President Kennedy’s adviser Schlesinger, Jr. was a critic of the Vietnam War. He wrote in the mid-1960s that SEATO and the Eisenhower letter were not only justifications for commitment but also basic premises which demanded that the US should take all the necessary steps with respect to South Vietnam. The commitment deepened, Schlesinger, Jr. adds, because of Dulles’s worldview. Eisenhower drew the artificial line at the demarcation line, which later had to be defended.⁸⁸ Despite Schlesinger, Jr’s later views, Kennedy did not, back in 1961, regard SEATO as the starting-point of the US commitment. Instead, Bedell Smith’s unilateral declaration at Geneva included the sentence: “it [the US] would view any renewal of the aggression...with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security”, which, to Kennedy’s mind, was a clear announcement of the future actions of the US.⁸⁹ President Lyndon B. Johnson, the maker of the escalation decisions, referred continuously to the Eisenhower letter as the beginning of the US commitment in South Vietnam.⁹⁰ Ambrose explains that the enlargement of SEATO and the Eisenhower letter to Diem violated the Geneva Agreements in two ways. Firstly, the

86 Eisenhower’s letter to Diem, October 23, 1954 (dated October 1), DSB November 15, 1954, pp. 735–736; Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1954, pp. 948–949; American Foreign Policy, 1950–1955: Basic Documents, II (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), pp. 2401–2402; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 609; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2166–2167; Gettleman, Marvin E., Franklin, Jane, Young, Marilyn and Franklin, H. Bruce, Vietnam and America: A Documented History (New York: Grove, 1985), pp. 116–117. Ambassador Heath had recommended in July that Eisenhower should send a letter to Diem. Heath’s cable to Secretary Dulles, July 23, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1872–1874. Heath was instructed to deliver the letter to Diem and “to indicate to Diem your readiness to follow up with preliminary talks on aid programs with Vietnamese officials”. The Ambassador was also given orders to inform the Vietnamese and the French representatives of the policy adopted by the US. Hoover, Jr’s cable to Dillon and Heath, October 22, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2159–2160. The OCB approved the initiation of the military training program to be undertaken swiftly. *Ibid.*, p. 2151.

87 The Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr’s cable to Dulles (in Paris), October 21, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2149–2151.

88 Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage*, 1967, pp. 18–22.

89 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 162.

90 Sullivan, *France’s Vietnam Policy*, 1978, p. 51.

Indochinese states could not be associated with any defense pacts. On the other hand, Ambrose concludes, the United States raised the status of South Vietnam from that of a divided country to that of a sovereign nation.⁹¹ According to LaFeber, SEATO was in fact irrelevant, because the Americans simply used it to justify unilateral commitment in South Vietnam.⁹²

There is no record of the fact that the Eisenhower Administration had discussed the Eisenhower letter with the Members of Congress, concludes Gibbons. This is not strange, he continues, because almost complete unanimity on the US policy toward South Vietnam prevailed between the Executive and Legislative Branches. Gibbons concludes that especially the support of Senator Mansfield was important for the Eisenhower Administration. When the Eisenhower letter became public on October 25, no comments were heard from Congress. Gibbons does not exclude the possibility that the SFRC and the HFAC had received an early announcement of the letter. The absence of dissenting voices could be partly attributed to the fact that Congress was in recess, asserts Gibbons.⁹³

It is useful to notice that in the Eisenhower letter it is not mentioned what reforms the Diem Government would have to make in order to secure the continuation of US aid. In addition, the information given in the letter did not present a clear picture of the extent of the aid. Between the lines it can be read that the options for the future were open. The letter cannot be regarded as the starting point of US involvement in Vietnam because the Roosevelt Administration had already started to support the Vietnamese. The NSC-approved letter, however, represents a major policy decision. It started a new phase in American-South Vietnamese relations. The letter could be considered to be one further step in the process of involvement embodied in NSC 5429/2.

At this stage, President Eisenhower confided in his good boyhood friend Edward E. "Swede" Hazlett. In his letter, Eisenhower reveals some of the secrets behind his thinking on Indochina, especially with respect to intervention. He wrote that he wanted:

“...to get established in that region [Indochina] the conditions under which I felt the United States could properly intervene to protect its own interests. A proper political foundation for any military action was essential. Since we could not bring it about (though we prodded and argued for almost two years), I gave not even a tentative approval to any plan for massive intervention.”⁹⁴

91 Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume Two, 1984, p. 209.

92 LaFeber, Walter, *The American Age. United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750* (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 524.

93 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 287.

94 Eisenhower's letter to Captain Edward E. Hazlett, Jr., October 23, 1954, AWF, Name series, Box 18, DDEL; also quoted in *FRUS 1952-1954*, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2167-2168.

Implementing the New Policy – Collins’s Mission at the Council

The principals had to be briefed for all eventualities. On October 26, Robertson sent the Secretary of State the action requirements resulting from the NSC crash program action four days earlier. He informed his superior that the first political steps had been taken in Paris to inform the French, and in Saigon to deliver the Eisenhower letter. Robertson added that Ambassador Heath and Chief MAAG O’Daniel had not told all the individuals concerned about the decision and received assurances of cooperation, coordination and assistance from the South Vietnamese and the French authorities. The French, who were not pleased, Robertson concluded, would continue to look for a replacement for Diem.⁹⁵

The points raised for briefing purposes by Robertson were in fact discussed at the NSC. Secretary Hoover, Jr. reported on the implementation of the crash military program in South Vietnam. He said that the French had strongly protested, stating it would violate the Franco-American Agreements as well as the Geneva Accords. Secretary Dulles believed, though he was then absent, there had been secret deals between the French and the Vietminh. Hoover, Jr. said the US actions were not against the Geneva agreements and that the situation had improved as the US was “going ahead with our plans vis-à-vis Diem and Hinh”. In reply to Eisenhower’s question on the factors behind the French irritation, Hoover, Jr. referred to the possible deal between the French and the Vietminh in which the British might also be participating. This angered the President, who urged that the matter be clarified. The British had also, for some odd reason, opposed the use of MAAG for Cambodia, Admiral Radford pointed out.⁹⁶

Secretary Humphrey thought that “the French were trying to reconvert what was left of free Indochina into a French colony”. They were obviously trying to preserve Cochin China as such, Allen Dulles suggested. When the discussion turned to the sums involved in the US assistance to the Navarre Plan, Eisenhower remarked that the money was intended for waging war and not for “a colonization project”. The Chief Executive demanded that in any case he should be kept posted about the developments in Indochina. Secretary Wilson recommended that it would be wise “to get out of Indochina completely and as soon as possible”, and added that “these people should be left to stew in their own juice” as the situation was “utterly hopeless”. His arguments were based on the fact that the US did not have any control in Indochina. Eisenhower answered that the US acted for its “own purposes” and that their departure would endanger the

95 Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles, October 26, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Records Relating to International Conferences, Talks, and Meetings, 1951–1955, Lot 58 D 207, Box 1, General Collins’ Mission to Viet-Nam, November 1954–May 1955 (Miscellaneous), RG 59, NA. It is obvious that a classified memorandum from Cutler to Wilson, dated October 23, 1954, conceals NSC-related details about the implementation of the crash program. The document has been removed from Chairs’s File (Radford), f:041 Indochina, Box 10, July–December 1954, RG 218, NA.

96 Memorandum of Discussion of the 219th Meeting of the NSC, October 26, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2183–2185.

national security of the US. Hence, he supported Radford's idea of ousting the French from the area. When Cutler inquired if Wilson would move to revise NSC's Action taken five days earlier, Wilson replied in the negative. The Secretary of Defense added that US policy had been adopted on the assumption that the French and the British would back it up, but this seemed not to be the case.⁹⁷

Anderson, who observed the behavior of the President at the Council meeting of October 26, argues that "Eisenhower was more determined than ever to get tough". For Combs, the NSC discussion on October 26 indicates that the US policy-makers were "mystified about their allies' aims" and that they "remained split over general policy on Vietnam". Geneva, Combs adds, was not viewed "as a disaster" by everybody in Washington. The debate at that meeting marks an end, he adds, to "serious internal dissent over the Eisenhower Administration's commitment to Indochina".⁹⁸ The NSC system supported by Eisenhower allowed dissenting voices to be presented even though policy had already been determined. In some cases this led to prolonged consideration of certain issues at the highest level of the US Government. Thus, the President was forced to defend his own decisions.

To oversee the implementation of the major actions taken by the Council in October, the OCB met on October 27. The Board requested the Special Working Group on Indochina to prepare urgently a proposed public statement to be issued by Eisenhower or some other high-level official which would commend the private and Governmental agencies for their help in the evacuation and resettlement operations in Vietnam.⁹⁹

Outside initiatives could come from multiple sources. Stassen received a letter from Raymond T. Moyer about the U.S military and economic programs in the Far East. Moyer, who was being far-sighted, recommended that the US should consider limited objectives in its military assistance for South Vietnam. He mentioned aid and training to develop internal security forces to check internal subversion. Assistance of this kind would also be consistent with the Geneva Agreements. To expand the economic programs, Moyer suggested, the South Vietnamese administrative competence would have to be built up, and they should listen to the opinions of the South Vietnamese, develop their economic potential and enhance the resettlement program.¹⁰⁰

97 Memorandum of Discussion of the 219th Meeting of the NSC, October 26, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2185-2186. About the reactions to the Eisenhower letter in Paris see Devillers and Lacouture, *End of a War*, 1969, p. 295.

98 According to Anderson, the President used "resolute rhetoric". Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 86-87; Combs, "The Path Not Taken," 1995, pp. 37, 41, 45.

99 The statement was to be completed by the possible termination of the sea-lift by US Navy around November 1. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of October 27, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, October 27, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes II.

100 Moyer's letter to Stassen, October 27, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 18, Far East, RG 59, NA.

Serious consideration of a single subject could not normally continue for several consecutive weeks. After the busy meetings of October 22 and 28 the Council returned to its normal procedures. On October 28, the NSC members heard good news about Vietnam for a change. Allen Dulles reported that the situation had “somewhat improved”. Hinh, for example, was ready to “reluctantly ‘play ball’ with Diem”. In the absence of South Vietnamese troops in Saigon and with 13,000 FEC troops there the French possessed total control of the city. Allen Dulles added that the Communist authorities in Hanoi would no longer permit the existence of the US Consulate there. Another pressing Far Eastern issue, Formosa, left the the question of Vietnam undiscussed at that meeting.¹⁰¹

The NSC-OCB machinery kept track of the ever-changing situation. Cutler, for example, had urged the OCB Working Groups to follow the developments and experience in the implementation of the NSC policies relating to the Far East, just as Moyer had suggested to Stassen. The Groups were, therefore, to revise the Far East country papers in accordance with NSC 5429/2. The PB was already reviewing the actual Policy Papers, but the Working Groups had not managed to submit the materials to the PB on time. Staats therefore proposed to the Board Assistants “that the various working group members make this information available to their representative Planning Board representatives on an informal basis for such use as it may serve in connection with current discussions in the Planning Board”. The OCB subject paper assumed during late October that the portions of NSC 5429/2 pertaining to Indochina would supersede those of NSC 5405, which would need no further revisions as a result. By early November, the OCB was preoccupied with reviewing economic and financial programs for Indochina. The Board was to deal with the delivery of 40 million dollars for evacuation and refugee resettlement (Operation Exodus) and 17.75 million dollars for economic and technical aid programs. The sums had been made available by the BOB and the FOA. Other aspects of the Working Group report were covered by Young in his oral briefing at the OCB on November 3.¹⁰²

The President or the Special Assistant could at times improvise at the NSC. Cutler did so at the Council meeting on November 2, 1954. He may have considered that the situation was not clear enough and that, in consequence, even though Vietnam was not on the Agenda, he should inquire of Secretary Dulles whether there was anything new to report. The Secretary of State

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101 Memorandum of Discussion of the 220th Meeting of the NSC, October 28, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

102 The country papers were due to be submitted to the OCB Executive Officer by October 12, 1954. Staats’s memorandum to the Board Assistants, October 28, 1954 with a subject paper as an attachment (dated October 28, 1954), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 18, Far East, RG 59, NA; Staats’s memorandum to the OCB, November 3, 1954 including a FOA representative report on economic and financial programs for Indochina, which was circulated as Annex A to the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina Status Report, November 2, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3; also in WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 3, 1954 (held on November 2), *ibid.*

commented that the situation was deteriorating. Therefore, as a result of a conference between the President “and his colleagues”, they had decided to send General J. Lawton Collins, because it seemed to be “the only possibility of saving the situation”. The NSC noted the appointment of Collins “in charge of all U.S. activities” in South Vietnam.¹⁰³ Secretary Dulles had come up with the idea of sending a competent military officer to confront the confusing situation and to take the place of Ambassador Heath. In briefing Collins, who had been found suitable, Secretary Dulles told him that Diem was the candidate of the US and that the French could be pressured to leave Indochina. Collins understood that he was being asked not to draw too much attention to the US role and that his emphasis was on “building up the status of Diem”. Eisenhower instructed Collins that he should not discuss the “rapid phasing down” of the FEC directly but instead the matter should be brought up at the highest level of political talks. When the discussion turned to the cost of training and maintaining military in South Vietnam, Eisenhower inquired why it was so expensive in that area. Higher pay was cited as one of the reasons.¹⁰⁴ Collins’s instructions reveal that the basic policy of the US toward South Vietnam at the time consisted of the following:

- “1. To maintain and support a friendly and independent non-Communist government in Viet-Nam and to assist it in diminishing and ultimately eradicating Communist subversion and influence.
2. To assist the Government of Viet-Nam to develop and maintain forces necessary for internal security and to foster economic conditions which will strengthen and promote the survival of a Free Viet-Nam.
3. To provide United States assistance directly to the Government of Viet-Nam and to coordinate information and exchange of views on such assistance with Vietnamese and French authorities.
4. To encourage expanding relationships between Free Viet-Nam and its non-Communist neighbors, and support for Free Viet-Nam by the free world.”¹⁰⁵

103 The Council also directed the PB to prepare for early Council consideration of a broad restatement of US policy toward the Far East. In the preceding discussion, Secretary Dulles called Japan the “great prize in the Far East”. Memorandum of Discussion of the 221st Meeting of the NSC, November 2, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

104 Counselor MacArthur II’s memorandum of the conversation between Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles and his close staff, October 30, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2194–2195; Goodpaster’s memorandum of the conference between Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles and Collins, November 3, 1954 (noon), AWF, Ann Whitman Diary series, Box 3, DDEL; briefing sessions to Collins by the highest representatives of State and Defense Departments and by the President Eisenhower, October 31, 1954 and November 3, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2198–2199, 2205. In his instructions, prepared in the State Department and approved by the President, Collins was given “broad authority to direct, utilize and control all the agencies and resources of the United States Government in Viet-Nam” and designated “with personal rank of Ambassador”. Eisenhower’s letter to Collins, November 3, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2205–2207. For recollections of Collins (in 1966) and his assignment see J. Lawton Collins Oral History Transcript, PUL.

105 Eisenhower’s letter to Collins, November 3, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2206.

Collins's task was to assist in the consolidation and strengthening of power by the Diem Government through direct military and economic aid. He was also to negotiate about the future of South Vietnam with the French officials. Secretary Dulles had regarded the determination of the size and scope of the US aid program to be the most important part of Collins's mission. However, Dulles, according to Collins's autobiography, thought that "the chance of success of my mission was only one in ten, but that the importance of checking the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia was worth the effort".¹⁰⁶

Despite the fact that some OCB members had already been briefed at the NSC, Young informed the Board members about the designation of Collins in connection with his oral briefing. He added that the political situation in South Vietnam was "slightly improved". Furthermore, the Working Group had, Young said, responded to Eisenhower's directive by developing a program of immediate action for the field operatives. They had also formed a Sub-Group under the Working Group with the task of reviewing "classified documents on truce violations by the Vietminh". The Board agreed that the end of the sea-lift sometime in mid-November should be publicly announced. It was also concluded by the OCB members that a French request for the formation of a joint French-US-British consultative mechanism for American aid to Indochina was out of the question as any consultations on the distribution of US military assistance would be discussed only with the recipient countries. Under Secretary Hoover, Jr. said that he would forward an extract from the minutes of the talks with the French in Washington to the Deputy Secretary of Defense Anderson. After Young's oral briefing, Secretary Anderson stressed the importance of dealing directly with the Vietnamese "without any arrangements for tripartite or bilateral committees" which could hinder (delay or limit) US freedom of action.¹⁰⁷ The Pentagon and the JCS were apparently unaware of the recent developments in the NSC machinery and, especially, in the State Department.

106 Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower, Collins and Staff Secretary Goodpaster, November 3, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2194-2195; Eisenhower's letter of instructions to Collins (drafted by Assistant Secretary Robertson), November 3, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2205-2207; Quotation from Collins, J. Lawton, *Lightning Joe. An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 379. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 232. Dulles had recommended in late October that Eisenhower should send a general to South Vietnam on a fact-finding trip because the situation was confusing. Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower, Dulles, and the President's closest advisers, October 30, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2194-2195.

107 The Sub-Group under the Working Group was assigned to consideration of the possible declassification and utilization of the classified documents on truce violations. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of November 3, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, November 3, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes II; WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 11, DDEL. For the activities of the Sub-Group on Truce Violations see OCB Staff Representative John E. MacDonald's memorandum to Young, November 26, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina - 1954, RG 59, NA. The State Department later furnished Senator William Knowland with a classified summary of the violations. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, December 3, 1954 (held on November 29), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. For Dulles's letter to Knowland on November 13, 1954 with material on truce violations as an enclosure see John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 10, DDEL.

The Council meetings sometimes featured reports by Ambassadors and Special Envoys. General J. Lawton Collins was sent to Saigon in both capacities in November 1954. "Lightning Joe" Collins worked in cooperation with the French and had wide authority to coordinate all of the American activities in South Vietnam. Collins soon drifted into a conflict with Secretary Dulles when he almost managed to convince Eisenhower to consider the replacement of Diem, but the Dulles brothers, with the assistance from Lansdale in the field, had their way. Collins's mission, which lasted from early November 1954 to mid-May 1955, was intended to implement NSC policies. Collins reported back to the NSC-OCB machinery and he was summoned also to appear at the Council meetings. (National Archives)



The relationship of Collins's Special Envoy assignment to the NSC and OCB did not result in any direct problems. Collins reported to Washington through Secretary Dulles. "Under this arrangement", Walter A. Radius wrote to the Under Secretary Hoover, Jr., "the OCB would come into the picture only in so far as actions in connection with General Collins's activities would be coordinated by the Board in the same way as the Board would deal with problems brought to the attention of the Department or other agencies by any other chief of mission". Radius assumed that the Vietnamese issues which concerned the OCB "would continue to be handled by the Special Working Group on Indochina".¹⁰⁸

After Collins's appointment, Secretary Dulles clarified the adopted NSC policy when determining the financial support for the FEC. Ordering Ambassador Dillon to inform the French leadership about the policy shift, the Secretary pointed out that the US was going to assist the South Vietnamese forces "for [the] purpose [of] internal security and resistance against internal Communist subversion". For that reason, he added, Eisenhower had made up his mind that aid to the FEC "should be minimized". SEATO would "serve as such deterrent" that indigenous troops should not be trained for it, Dulles wrote. The FEC would not receive direct US assistance after the end of 1954. In addition, the US was going to allow only approximately 6,000 French troops to serve "as a cadre" for the ARVN, who would therefore be paid by the Vietnamese budget aided by the Americans.¹⁰⁹

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108 Radius's memorandum for Hoover, Jr., November 3, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

109 Dulles's cable to Dillon, November 5, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2215-2216.

There was certainly continuity in the work of the OCB. The evacuation issue had been the main concern of the Board machinery and they kept control of public utilization of the theme. On November 10, 1954, the OCB noted that the US representatives in Saigon had recommended that there was no need for any further announcements about the end of the sea-lift evacuation. The Board agreed, against the advice, to direct the Working Group to proceed as planned in preparation of an announcement which would especially note the role of the private agencies in assisting Operation Exodus.¹¹⁰

The OCB should have had access to all of the relevant information as it was in charge of interdepartmental coordination. Paradoxically, there were, however, occasional information breakdowns in the OCB machinery like the ones that had annoyed the President at the NSC on October 26. Hoover, Jr. said that the Working Group had not received the Pentagon cables from Indochina. Erskine promised to correct the situation. He continued by requesting, in conformance with the decision taken by the OCB earlier, that the State Department would approve short telegrams indicating that all military aid to Indochina would be given directly and “entirely independent of the French”. Hoover, Jr. then assigned Staats to check that it was followed through.¹¹¹

Concrete recommendations were submitted by the Chiefs and Collins. The JCS thought that it was not enough to forget the external threat and concentrate solely on the internal security issues. The Chiefs called for forces “to deter Viet Minh aggression by a limited defense of the Geneva Armistice demarcation line”. On the other hand, Collins recommended that the French should grant full autonomy to the ARVN by July 1, 1955 and that MAAG should assume responsibility for training the ARVN by the beginning of 1955. In the first phase, Collins added, the French soldiers would join the Americans. According to Collins, the FEC should remain large enough with the aid of the US, because North Vietnam might invade. He continued that the strength of the ARVN should be reduced from 170,000 to 77,000 by July 1955. Collins also recommended that the level of support for the FEC should be determined. Collins’s suggestions apparently pleased Secretary Dulles more as he wrote a memorandum to the President where he stated that it would be “disastrous” to allow the French to

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110 The OCB sent a draft message to the White House. See Staats’s memorandum to Andrew J. Goodpaster, December 6, 1954 with Max W. Bishop’s memorandum including a 4-page “Proposed White House Release on US Navy, FOA, and US Voluntary Agencies’ Roles in Evacuation and Resettlement of Refugees from Northern Viet-Nam,” dated December 1, 1954 as attachments, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. The initiative had come by letter to Eisenhower from Stassen on October 6, 1954. The President answered that he would ask the OCB “to suggest to me an appropriate occasion” for making the announcement. The White House had given the Board the green light on October 11. See a copy of Stassen’s letter, October 6, 1954 and Eisenhower’s reply, on October 11, 1954, *ibid.* See also MacDonald’s memorandum to Young, October 27, 1954, *ibid.*

111 Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of November 10, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, November 10, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes II; WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 11, DDEL; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 9, 1954 (held on November 8), *ibid.*, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

pull out of the FEC. According to Dulles, the FEC should be given up to 100 million dollars, assistance, although the French had asked for 330 million dollars. The strength of the ARVN should be reduced from 170,000 to 77,000 and the US should assume the responsibility for training.¹¹²

The OCB convened on November 17 to discuss the Collins mission. After Young's oral report which included Collins's latest recommendations, Secretary Anderson urged the Board to decide how far the US was ready to go in supporting the FEC. Anderson was supported when he suggested that Collins should be asked to prepare "as soon as possible an overall evaluation of the probable outcome in Indochina" and whether the US aid program had any chance of success. As the sum for the whole of Indochina for the next year would be between 5 and 6 million dollars, it was agreed that a careful estimate would be desirable. Stassen replied by saying that "sending General Collins out was a decisive decision". Anderson agreed, but added that the US could not "make piece-meal decisions". Collins was to report back in the near future, Young reminded the participants. Stassen took up the issue of "buying time", which could, according to him, be profitable for the US. The British actions interested Allen Dulles, but Young answered that they were not doing anything. However, Hoover, Jr. added, the Australians and New Zealanders were eager to do their share. The former had asked at the Five-Power meeting to be allowed to participate in the programs in Indochina, Stassen elaborated. Cutler asked the Board "to give him [Collins] enough time". The Special Assistant suggested a month and said that the French should be "held off" until Collins had concluded his report. The CIA Director asked whether the US should "do anything about Australia and [the] UK in this thing", Hoover, Jr. stated that he agreed. Young replied that the Australians were taking part in technical assistance, but inquired whether it was wise to ask the British to join. Stassen would have liked to see other Asian countries involved. This had been initiated, Young said in reply. The Board generally agreed with Cutler's suggestion about the exposition of the truce violations and getting the Canadians to raise the matter in the UN.¹¹³

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112 Acting Secretary of Defense Robert B. Anderson's letter to Secretary Dulles, November 12, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2241-2244; Collins's recommendations in Kidder's cable to Dulles, November 15, 1954. FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2250-2256. Secretary Dulles informed the President on the matter. As his last summarization point, the Secretary wrote that General Ely "is agreeable to a slow build-up of our MAAG for training purposes". For details see Dulles's memorandum to Eisenhower, November 17, 1954 with "Recommended Force Levels in Viet-Nam as of July 1955" as an enclosure, AWF, International series, Box 54, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2263-2264. Dulles wrote about six divisions. The task of three divisions would be to defer the North Vietnamese invasion, and the rest would be territorial troops with duties in the field of internal security. Dulles's memorandum to Eisenhower, November 17, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 800-801; FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2263-2264; Herring, Hess and Immerman, "Passage of Empire," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 179.

113 Cutler described Collins as a "fine fellow, a man of high competence, good head on shoulders". If Collins does not understand his role, Cutler added, "I should think he ought to be wised up to it...We have got to depend on him". Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of November 17, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62

Having obviously realized the problems involved in getting NSC 5429/2 implemented rapidly, Secretary Dulles sent another cable to Collins, where he warned that the US did not want take full responsibility for the developments in South Vietnam. For Dulles, the future prospects for the newly independent nation were “very dubious”. The saving of South Vietnam would demand – at least in the beginning – broad cooperation with the French, wrote Dulles. According to him, the US was not going to make France leave South Vietnam. The French would not be even willing to do so. US pressure could, Dulles continued, put strains on Franco-American relations. The Secretary concluded that, if the French left soon, the US would have to bear the whole burden.¹¹⁴

The NSC machinery received the long-awaited information when the intelligence community reported on November 23 about the “deteriorating situation” in South Vietnam since Geneva. The authority of the Diem Government was threatened because of the present power struggle and the lack of French support. However, the intelligence sources estimated, the French policy had not been finalized. The report did not suggest a replacement for Diem. In contrast, the Vietminh were consolidating their power in the North and aimed to fulfil their ultimate objectives of control of the whole of Vietnam “without initiating large-scale warfare”.¹¹⁵

The State-Defense controversy evidently had an effect on the NSC system. At an NSC meeting Secretary Dulles argued that the failure in Indochina had stemmed from actions which the French taken in the past “over which we had no control and which we could not change”. Dulles referred to stopping Soviet nuclear power from expanding. He said the US was not capable of doing so in Indochina and likewise in China itself. The views of the JCS, he continued, “don’t suggest any way of stopping it”. Radford said he had been informed by the French that they would be taking their troops out of Indochina as the situation in North Africa was “becoming critical”. At one point Stassen questioned whether a 20-division program for Korea was wise. He suggested that it be scaled down and said that “the same solution might well result from” Collins’s recommendations on South Vietnam. He argued that as the economic implications would be tremendous, it was imperative “to establish balance between economic and military requirements”. During the course of the

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D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; Notes on OCB Meetings, November 17, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA. See also Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 17, 1954 (held on November 15), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

114 Dulles’s cable to Collins, November 19, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2271. When discussing the matter with the Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert B. Anderson, Secretary Dulles wondered why the JCS did not trust the French and urged that the FEC should leave at once. Dulles pointed out that up to that point “we have been able to say the losses in that area have been French failures”. If the U.S took on training responsibility alone, he went on, the possible failures would be “a terrible blow to our prestige” there. Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and Anderson, November 19, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2270–2271.

115 NIE-3-7-54, “Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia through July 1956,” November 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2286–2301.

meeting, Cutler performed his task of Special Assistant and thus attempted to summarize the policy differences between Secretary Dulles and Radford, but failed to do so, according to the former. This is consistent with the recollections of an eyewitness. John S. D. Eisenhower, the son of the President, who occasionally attended the NCS meetings, remembers that his father sometimes had to remind Dulles and Radford of his presence as the two had become carried away debating policy issues.¹¹⁶

In order to avoid information breakdowns and operational problems, Stassen urged at the OCB on November 24, 1954 that Collins should be thoroughly briefed on the talks with the French, possibly by sending an official to Saigon. Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy answered that Collins would be receiving the reports. The JCS, Secretary Anderson said, had submitted the minimum levels for security troops needed for South Vietnam on November 17. The Board agreed that the State (Young) and Defense (Godel) Departments would prioritize the funds for equipment for the internal security forces. Cutler asked the State representative if Collins had already requested an overall estimate of the chances of success, as had been agreed at the November 17 meeting. The Board members thought that there were indications that the French would be concentrating on North Africa and thus letting “Indochina go down the drain”. They also agreed that taking over the training effort from the French was “a very large question”. Murphy, however, said that Secretary Dulles had urged that “every reasonable effort” to avoid further setbacks in Indochina should be made.¹¹⁷ As the Eisenhower Administration was considering the total cost-effectiveness of its programs in Vietnam, Collins received a request for his views on the matter. The “desirability of basic estimate has been raised in OCB and discussed at high levels of interested agencies”, Saltzman wrote to Saigon.¹¹⁸

The NSC quite often requested the JCS to submit its views on certain issues. The Pentagon’s position on the ARVN force levels arrived, for example, in late November. For the maintenance of internal security, the JCS recommended, with Collins’s suggestions in mind, that the minimum strength should be 89,085. This could be accomplished in phases. The Chiefs believed that the MAAG consisting of 342 military personnel could do the job if “a maximum portion” of it were “devoted to training” and if the French would assist. External aggression was, the JCS reiterated, another vital question to be discussed as

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116 Memorandum of Discussion of the 225th Meeting of the NSC, November 24, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 794–795, 797; John S. D. Eisenhower interview with Author, June 26, 2000.

117 Cutler questioned “Is this really worth the price?” and “Is there a reasonable chance of success?”. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of November 24, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 23, 1954 (held on November 22). WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

118 Acting Secretary of State Charles E. Saltzman’s (Under Secretary of State for Administration) cable (drafted by Young) to Collins, November 26, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2309.

SEATO did not have any forces “committed to mutual defense”. The Chiefs were basically content with draft of NSC 5429/3 which was up for Council consideration on December 1. They recommended, however, deletion of a reference to the Chinese. The JCS members argued that it was “unrealistic to expect” that the Chinese would give up their subversion in South Vietnam.¹¹⁹ Senator Mansfield had written in his report that the US aid to FEC would depend on the success of Diem.

By December 1954 General Collins and his staff had drafted a program to supplement the NSC’s crash program, which was approved on October 22. Dulles and Mendès-France had decided in Washington in November that Generals Collins and Ely could make the arrangements for transferring the training responsibility of the ARVN from the French to the Americans. These two authorized General O’Daniel to choose officers for the Franco-American coordination board which would be in charge during the transition period.¹²⁰

Specific policies sometimes emerged as the side-products of a broader policy. In the NSC consideration of US national security policies, one possible course of action was to give the Soviet Union an ultimatum that the US would regard as a “casus belli” any attempt to occupy free nations such as South Vietnam or Finland. Secretary Dulles said he was not optimistic about the future of South Vietnam. He thought that the US policies “were in the main adequate to protect our national security” or at least he did not know of any alternative policies other than those in Indonesia, the Middle East and South Vietnam. Humphrey commented that the US should not engage in fighting for Quemoy and Indochina, or, for that matter, on the Asian continent altogether. At the end of the meeting, Cutler said that, from his point of view, the general discussion had been useful, but that he wished to receive guidance on specific issues.¹²¹

The splits and recommended language did not always please the NSC principals and thus the wordings had to be reconciled. On December 1, when the Council was discussing increasing material assistance to South and Southeast Asia Cutler said that both the Treasury Department and BOB were not in favor of such references in NSC papers as they would prejudge the workings of a high-level committee¹²² to offer recommendations on an economic grouping of the free Asian states. Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles agreed to delete such references. The Special Assistant reiterated, when the NSC moved on to discuss China, that the Department of Commerce had called for a package deal in which the US would allow seating for both Chinas in the UN, recognize them both, and

119 Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA H. Struve Hensel’s memorandum to Dulles, November 26, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2309–2311; Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, November 29, 1954, with JCS views in a JCS memorandum for Wilson, dated November 26, 1954, as an enclosure, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

120 First it was called Military Support Mission and soon Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM). Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 237–240.

121 Memorandum of Discussion at the 226th Meeting of the NSC, December 1, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 834–837, 842.

open trade with China. In return, the Chinese would make several concessions in Asia, including the abandonment their subversive pressure in South Vietnam. Cutler added that the FOA also proposed that the Council should consider these big questions. Stassen explained that the FOA had found “the process by which these issues were brought up to the Council through the mechanism of” the PB had been “desirable and useful”. The FOA, Stassen continued, was not going to do anything if the State Department was not in favor of doing so.¹²³

Implementation of the latest version of NSC 5429 was carried out with the objective of not tying the hands of the US. Young briefed the OCB members on the situation in Indochina. He mentioned that MAAG would be under Ely as its Commander-in-Chief. On December 7, in the brief status report submitted to the Board members, it was noted that the Pentagon had complied with Collins’s requests for personnel required to commence the training of the Vietnamese armed forces on January 1, 1955. The FOA was in the process of making preparations for commencing direct aid on that target date, but they anticipated difficulties, since some details were still unresolved with the French. The OCB requested its Special Working Group on Indochina to produce a brief basic policy review paper “to be available for consideration” by the Council meeting scheduled for December 21 in accordance with discussion at the Board luncheon.¹²⁴

As we have seen, the NIEs and SNIEs were not always accurate enough or up-to-date. This was also noted by Young, who doubted the appraisal of the

122 The high-level committee was established in early October. In his initiation letter, Cutler wrote that “because of the magnitude of this policy (NSC 5429/2), the need for expert qualifications, and conflicting views at [a] high level as to how this general statement of policy should be carried out, I suggest a high level committee, be appointed by the Council”. The members were the State (Chairman), Treasury, Defense and Commerce Departments as well as the FOA, the ODM and the CIA acting as intelligence adviser. The committee was to prepare recommendations and submit them through the PB “to prepare comments thereon and to use in briefing their principals” in advance of the NSC meeting. The follow-up was routine: after Eisenhower’s approval it would be referred to the OCB for coordination. Cutler hurried the NSC members in the matter and reminded that the PB had stressed the development of the overall Asian economic grouping to be like SEATO. Cutler’s briefing note for NSC meeting of October 6, 1954 (Dated October 6, 1954), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 122, NSC Miscellaneous Memos – 1954, RG 59, NA.

123 Allen Dulles told the Council members that Bao Dai dismissed Hinh, which had ‘sharpened a bit’ the situation in South Vietnam. Director Dulles also said that Hinh, who was probably going to be used as “a rallying point” by French politicians in opposition, was likely to cause difficulties for Diem from France. The CIA Director did not praise Diem at all as he commented that the situation in South Vietnam had not improved much. According to Allen Dulles, Diem “was still exhibiting his well known lack of determination”. There was, however, the CIA Director said, “some encouraging news” of popular disillusionment in North Vietnam which had been the result of harsh measures taken by the new Vietnam government. Memorandum of Discussion of the 226th NSC meeting, December 1, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

124 Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, December 1, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; *ibid.*, Preliminary Notes I; OCB Minutes, December 7, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III. See also OCB Status Report, December 7, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 7, Status Reports III; and Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group meeting, December 7, 1954 (held on the same day). WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

situation produced by the intelligence community (under CIA coordination), which had been, in his words, “very pessimistic”. Young did not, however, wish to make a fuss about it. In order to correct the problem, on December 8 he submitted to the OCB his own basic estimate of the situation in Vietnam. Collins’s suggestions had been that 400 million dollars would be needed and that there was “a fair chance of success”. Collins, however, would assess the situation again in mid-January. The Chairman of the Working Group on Indochina that quoted Collins’s seven-point program in part overlapped with the crash program. The points included the reorganization of the South Vietnamese army, strengthening of the Diem Government, resettlement of refugees, land reform, the establishment of a national assembly, and the completion of arrangements for direct aid and budgetary support, which the FOA was already working on. The clash between Hinh and Diem, according to Young, had been “at least temporarily solved”, as Bao Dai had removed Hinh.¹²⁵

Finally, on December 13, Collins and Ely agreed on the terms of direct US military aid to South Vietnam. The new force structure, which meant a reduction in the size of the ARVN, would be attained by the beginning of July 1955. The French also promised to give full autonomy to the ARVN by the same date. All French military personnel would be under Chief MAAG O’Daniel. Collins wrote that the US had to decide whether to stick with Diem, to find a replacement or to “gradually withdraw support”. He did not believe that Diem would be successful, but he still recommended that they should wait until early 1955. Collins also took up the possibility of the return of Bao Dai. The General favored delaying and a complete re-evaluation of the situation. He recommended that the US should give assistance to the FEC because it would protect US materiel in South Vietnam.¹²⁶

In the wake of the Collins-Ely agreement and in order to obtain ideas to implement NSC 5429. On December 15, the OCB discussed the situation in Indochina on the basis of the Special Status Report on Indochina. The action agencies were “developing more of an area approach to strengthen mainland Southeast Asia” and therefore the OCB Working Group on Southeast Asia was preparing a paper promoting regional solidarity. They also heard from Young how the country teams had been requested to study and find ways and means to improve relations between the Indochinese states and SEATO as well as between Thailand and Indochina through special projects led by US engineering firms. The Special Working Group on Indochina was conducting a study of ways in which the situation in South Vietnam affected US programs in Cambodia,

125 Young’s memorandum for Hoover, Jr, December 8, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA.

126 Collins-Ely agreement in Kidder’s cable to Dulles, December 13, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2366–2368; Collins’s messages to Dulles in Kidder’s cables (2), December 13 and 15, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2362–2366, 2375–2379; Collins’s message to Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. in Kidder’s cable, December 16, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2379–2382. Congress was informed of the military aid situation. See Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Hensel’s report to Chairman of the SFRC Senator Alexander Wiley, December 14, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 818–819.

Laos and Thailand. The collaboration between the French and the Americans, the Special Status Report stated, “was progressing smoothly”. The rest of the report was based on Collins’s findings. In addition, the Board members heard about the FOA programs in the form of a Supplemental Statement which was made part of the Status Report. As the Working Group had requested a review paper at the Board meeting of December 8, the OCB agreed that it should be “deferred pending further comments and views from” Collins. These were expected to arrive in about the middle of January 1955. The Status Report mentioned the problem of the 50,000 Vietnamese in northeast Thailand. The US was going to ask the Thai officials to discuss their return with the Vietminh.¹²⁷ A review of US policies and operations in the three Indochinese states was being planned for the OCB and the NSC. The Council’s deliberation was to take place on January 21, which was to be prepared for by the Embassies. Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. admitted that “some concern [has been] felt in Washington agencies over [the] US taking on direct aid and other responsibilities on or about January 1 before basic appraisal [is] available for OCB and NSC consideration”.¹²⁸

One of those who was suspicious was Ambassador Heath. He commented on Collins’s recommendations on December 17. He felt the General did not take into account the fact “that we would assist a Communist takeover by a withholding of our aid”. He referred to Diem’s Government as being “less than perfect”. The Ambassador suggested that aid to Diem be continued for the time being as there were no possible successors in sight. Money and national prestige could be lost “in a gamble”, Heath concluded, but to freeze the aid “would almost inevitably have [a] far worse effect”.¹²⁹

The OCB also had a chance to be informed of Collins’s preliminary recommendation. As was now his custom, Young briefed the OCB members

127 The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina Chairman Young’s memorandum to the Chairman of the OCB Hoover, Jr. with the Special Status Report on Indochina as an enclosure, both dated December 14, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, December 8 and 15, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, December 15, 1954, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 11, DDEL. The revised version of the Special Status Report, dated December 14, with tentative cost estimates of programs in Indochina for FY 1955 and 1956, was circulated to the Board Assistants on December 16, 1954. See Executive Assistant Charles E. Johnson’s memorandum to the OCB Assistants, December 16, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, OCB Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Status Report, December 14, 1954, *ibid.*, Box 7, Status Reports III; William H. Godel’s memorandum to the staff of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, December 20, 1954 with Johnson’s memorandum the revised Special Status Report as enclosures, Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Radford), f: 041 Indo-China, Box 10, July–December 1954, RG 218, NA. The memorandum with the Special Status Report as an enclosure is also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2369–2375.

128 General Collins had been given mid-January target dates because of the upcoming NSC meeting. Hoover, Jr.’s cable (drafted by Young) to Heath, December 17, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2392–2393.

129 Heath’s memorandum to Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Robertson, December 17, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 824–825; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2391–2392.

orally placing special emphasis on Collins's preliminary recommendations for the levels of Vietnamese troops, the future of the FEC in Vietnam, and the preliminary sums of required assistance – both military and economic – to South Vietnam. The Board agreed to avoid premature decisions before Collins had submitted his complete recommendations and “an over-all appraisal” regarding “the prospects for achieving US objectives with respect to Indo-China”. When the OCB members considered how to work together with the Canadians in moving more refugees south, they suggested that the Canadians, as members of the ICSC, could expose the truce violations by the Vietminh in the UN, as Cutler had suggested.¹³⁰

The foreign ministers of the United States, Britain and France met in Paris to discuss the support of Diem. According to Dulles, he was still the best available candidate. Mendès-France proposed that Bao Dai be allowed to rule again, but he was supported by neither Dulles nor Eden. The three agreed, however, to continue their support to Diem indefinitely. Collins and Ely were authorized to study possible alternatives and to draw up a timetable for the alternatives. Secretary Dulles then said that if the US did not find alternatives to Diem, the whole aid to South Vietnam would be reconsidered. Some Congressional committees were interested in South Vietnam, he added, and would therefore be consulted.¹³¹

The members of the JCS had been requested by Secretary Wilson to submit their views on the draft statement of policy NSC 5429/4, which was to be considered by the Council on December 21. The Chiefs repeated their comments of November 26 on China and focused on those paragraphs which had not yet been agreed on by the NSC members.¹³² The confusing situation in Vietnam caused Eisenhower to tell the Foreign Minister of the Republic of China, George K.C. Yeh, that the situation “was very difficult but not hopeless”. The President referred to the policies in NSC 5429 by saying that there were “some possibilities open to us”.¹³³

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130 The cooperation with the Canadian Government was concerned with evacuating some 50,000 additional refugees. The OCB noted that the time limit agreed at Geneva for the departure of the refugees had not expired, but the Vietminh were preventing the evacuees from leaving. OCB Minutes, December 17, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA. At his own request, the OCB Chairman received information on the truce violations to be used at the Board meetings. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William J. Sebald's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., December 8, 1954 with Department of State Policy Information Statement for USIA, “Communist Violations of the Geneva Agreements with regard to Indochina, December 3, 1954 as an attachment, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

131 PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 227–229; Dillon's cable to Hoover, Jr., December 19, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2400–2405.

132 Lay, Jr's memorandum for the NSC, December 20, 1954, with JCS views in JCS memorandum for Wilson, December 17, 1954, as an enclosure, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

133 Goodpaster's memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Yeh, December 20, 1954. FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIV, Part 1: China and Japan (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1985), pp. 1040–1041.

Occasionally, items were discussed at the NSC in other contexts accidentally. When the Council was discussing the protection offered by the Manila Pact to Indonesia, the “great defensive arc in the Pacific”, which was also, in the words of Secretary Dulles, very important to Japan, he added “that he was not at all optimistic about the future” of South Vietnam. The Secretary of State concluded his report by stating that he considered the US policies sufficient to protect US national security, except in Indonesia, the Middle East and Vietnam. He told the NSC members that the US should strengthen itself “from an organizational as opposed to a policy point of view”, such as coping with the Communist subversion. Eisenhower replied that the reason why he objected to “the concept of line-drawing” was that when a policy of drawing a defensive line was decided upon “you automatically give the initiative to the enemy” to take the rest. In the course of the discussion, Secretary Humphrey stated that “Quemoy and Indochina were certainly not among the areas for which we would fight”. Humphrey questioned whether the US should engage in fighting anywhere in mainland Southeast Asia. Talking about giving assistance to countries threatened by the Communists, Secretary Dulles argued that the situation in Vietnam “was not a typical case but a special case” which could not be used for making generalizations since the French “had messed up the situation so thoroughly”. Humphrey commented that the US should not get itself again “into such a situation as we found ourselves” there; it should, rather, leave the region as soon as possible.¹³⁴

Information was also received direct from outside sources to circumvent the typical NIE-based flow of information. The Special Working Group on Indochina obtained additional information by meeting with Ambassador Heath, who emphasized the training program and the agrarian reform. The proposal made by the CIA about the exposure of truce violations was referred to a Special Sub-Group for consideration. The Working Group had realized that it was time to prepare background material on, for example, the evacuation of US materiel from Indochina, to be used in presentations to Congressional leaders and committees. The USIA had also asked the US representatives in Saigon to inform Washington if a proposed international exhibit was going to be held there in the spring of 1955.¹³⁵

From the point of view of the State Department, Collins’s actions had become counterproductive. Young, in the capacity of the Director of the State Depart-

134 Memorandum of Discussion of the 229th Meeting of the NSC, December 21, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

135 OCB Status Report, December 21, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. Sub-Group on Truce Violations consisted of representatives of State and Defense departments, CIA and USIA. See, for example, OCB Staff Representative John E. MacDonald’s memorandum to Young, November 26, 1954. Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina – 1954, RG 59, NA. The instructions to the Sub-Group were considered by the Working Group on December 20, 1954 with an assignment to report back to the Working Group on December 27. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, December 21, 1954 (held on December 20), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

ment's Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, was worried about the recommendations presented by Collins. According to Young, Secretary Dulles would have to decide the fundamental approach to the Indochinese states. Collins's points against Diem and favoring the acceptance of the Bai Dai solution caused Young to recommend that Secretary Dulles should oppose the deadline concept, and also any references to US disengagement from South Vietnam or the Bao Dai solution as a substitute for Diem. Young also wanted to hasten the implementation of the Collins-Ely agreement on training. This was intended to first deal with the French and then with the Indochinese states.¹³⁶ Despite the decision over direct aid, payments to the South Vietnamese were continuing to be made through the French after the target date of January 1, 1955. Hoover, Jr. was advised to inform the OCB about the delay in implementing the decision. Regarding the "take-over" from the French by the Americans in Indochina, Robertson felt "that it would be disastrous for information to leak out that we might be questioning the wisdom of supporting the Associated States financially and militarily".¹³⁷

Evidently, as a result of the Pentagon's concern, the recovery of the US equipment in Indochina was at the top of the priority list at the OCB meeting of December 22, 1954. The Board agreed to establish a special ad hoc group made up of representatives of the State and Defense Departments as well as the FOA to make recommendations. The matter was taken up in particular, because the FEC evacuation in mid-January 1955 required action. In late 1954 there had been only 30,000 French troops in Vietnam. Collins's conclusions would be too late. The Special Working Group had prepared a draft press release for the White House commending the assistance of the various government agencies and private organizations in the evacuation operation. Staats was to suggest to the White House that it should go public with the announcement at a convenient time. The OCB members wished to amend the release to include the role of the voluntary groups in general in this type of operations. The Executive Officer Staats also gave Special Report prepared by the State Department – as part of the Status Report – on the rice situation in Asia.¹³⁸

Two months after the crash program, the NSC approved an edited version of NSC 5429. This Policy Paper, NSC 5429/5, dealt with China and Korea, but it also contained a list of the US objectives in Indochina. Compared to NSC 5429 of August 20, it had the objective of exposing the violations of the Geneva

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136 Young's memorandum to Robertson, December 22, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2411–2412.

137 The information on Robertson's views had come from Young. State Department's NSC Staff Coordinator Max W. Bishop's memoranda (2) to Hoover, Jr. both dated December 22, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

138 OCB Minutes, December 23, 1954 (held on December 22), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, December 23, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL.

cease-fire agreements by the Communists.¹³⁹ It opened with the statement that they should “make every possible effort, not openly inconsistent with the US position as to the armistice agreements, to defeat Communist subversion and influence, to maintain and support friendly non-Communist governments in Cambodia and Laos, to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam, and to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections”. The Paper also referred to direct aid and cooperation with the French “only insofar as necessary”. In addition, propaganda methods and secret operations were added to the list of objectives set forth by the NSC. It is noteworthy that North Vietnam was not considered to be a member of the Soviet bloc. Gelb and Betts argue that Geneva created a new paradox. The NSC staffers “moderated the consequences of losing Indochina”. Instead of emphasizing the potential worldwide repercussions, Gelb and Betts add, there “were fears for Asia in its own right”. They continue that the representatives of the intelligence community, especially CIA analysts, in Working Groups formulating the NSC papers, “propagated the domino theory or posed no objections to it”.¹⁴⁰

By Christmas 1954 Dulles had succeeded in completing the guidelines for US policy in Indochina. According to these, the US was to create circumstances in which the Vietminh could succeed only by internal violence. The US, Dulles added, should invest in South Vietnam to buy time and continue its support to Diem, because there were no other possibilities; certainly not the return of Bao Dai, was an answer. Dulles also called for the revitalization of the ARVN in order to improve the internal security of South Vietnam. He believed Diem could be “influenced along [the] right lines”.¹⁴¹

Bits and pieces of the “take-over” seemed to have been falling into places in late 1954. The OCB members received several attachments to the OCB Status Report (dated December 28) on December 29. Recent discussions had concentrated on Vietnam. On December 23, the FOA had approved the use of 45

139 NSC 5429/5, “Current U.S. Policy toward the Far East,” December 22, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, p. 835; Objectives in Indochina, editorial note, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2412–2413; NSC 5429–NSC 5429/2 were titled “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East,” whereas NSC 5429/3–NSC 5429/5 were titled “Current U.S. Policy in the Far East”. The PB discussed the revision of NSC 5429 for the first time in early November 1954. The PB then started consideration of NSC 5429/2 on the basis of the initial State draft of November 12. On November 18 it tentatively agreed on a draft statement of objectives and courses of action. The following day the PB approved submission of the amended draft for NSC consideration. The PB considered and further amended the draft revisions of NSC 5429, dated December 2, 8 and 9, at its three meetings between December 9 and 11, 1954. Records of meetings of the PB, November 2, 4, 12, 18 and 19 and December 9, 10, 11, 1954. Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1954, RG 273, NA. When NSC 5429/5 had been approved, amendments to supersede four pages of the policy paper were transmitted to the Council members with the request that superseded pages be destroyed by burning. Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, January 6, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

140 Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, pp. 183, 228.

141 Dulles’s cable to Collins, December 24, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 853–855; FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2419–2420. About Dulles’s views on the Bao Dai solution see for example Dulles’s cable to Heath, December 29, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2435–2436.

million dollars for direct forces support for South Vietnam. In addition, the USIA report of December 27 noted the expansion of informational activities in the Indochinese states. As proposed by the CIA some weeks before, a Sub-Group of the Special Working Group consisting of State and Defense Department representatives was collecting and transmitting from primarily Vietnam material which indicated truce violations by the Vietminh. The Board also heard a report by the Pentagon that by January 15, 1955 the evacuation of materiel would be completed. It had, however, proved impossible to ship the equipment to other locations as the cargoes were mixed in character. The Board also noted that as a result of the Collins-Ely discussions surplus military equipment would be returned to US control and evacuated from South Vietnam in due time. The levels of the South Vietnamese troops were still open and the FEC had not finished its inventory, and so Collins had been unable to provide estimates of the surplus equipment needed. The Pentagon had asked Collins whether it would be possible to start the evacuation at once, and if he was not opposed, they would begin the process. In addition, the Board noticed "the overseas information problem posed by speculations which might arise from the evacuation of US military equipment". When the Board was discussed military aid to Laos, which could include the use of French channels, Secretary Anderson repeated his conviction that doing it "through a third country would be setting an exceedingly bad precedent".¹⁴²

The preparations for direct aid had presumably been almost finalized in the various departments and agencies, but in the State Department discussions were still taking place between the officials in charge. Secretary Dulles met with Robertson and Young to discuss the initiation of the direct aid. The Secretary of State argued that the US should go ahead as planned from the beginning of 1955. Robertson replied that their prestige would be committed and that departure would be more difficult. The US would get "more leverage, put our missions on a direct footing", Young added. He also said that Stassen had come up with a new assistance procedure which would enable the US to easily and rapidly fluctuate, and even discontinue, the level of aid depending on the prevailing circumstances. No sums would be announced or told to the recipients yet, Robertson said. Dulles approved the various points. In his message to Collins, Dulles used the expression "pull the plug on the French" in connection with speaking about the direct aid to South Vietnam as of January 1.¹⁴³

142 The Working Group considered action on the work of its Sub-Group "a matter of urgency". OCB status report, December 28, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. The Pentagon regarded the use of the French as middlemen in the distribution of MDAP equipment in Cambodia and Laos as a "doubtful and questionable policy". Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, December 29, 1954, *ibid.*, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, December 30, 1954 (held on December 29), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III. See also Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, December 28, 1954 (held on December 27), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

143 Young's memorandum of conversation between Dulles, Robertson and Young, December 29, 1954, FRUS 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2436-2437; Dulles's cable to Collins, December 29, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 2435-2436.

Contingency planning was not forgotten even though policy had been decided upon. On January 5, the Secretary of Defense Wilson had requested the JCS to come up with an assessment of the possible US contingencies with respect to South Vietnam. He had asked the Chiefs to consider the impacts of the loss of South Vietnam, of reduced assistance, and the possibility of a mean course. The JCS wrote on January 21 “that the suggested possibilities were incomplete”. They concluded that the US had four possible courses of action: to continue aid in cooperation with the French, to start a unilateral advisory program, and, in case neither of the two were sufficient, to intervene either alone or with SEATO with “self-sustaining US forces” or to leave South Vietnam and place US emphasis on saving the rest of Southeast Asia. The Chiefs declined to recommend any of the four alternatives, since a necessary “firm decision at national level [NSC] as to implementation of US policy in Southeast Asia” had not been made. However, the JCS concluded, offensive methods should be adopted rather than merely a passive, “static defense”.¹⁴⁴ It is evident that the views of the JCS had listeners inside the national security machinery. The Chiefs were principal military advisers to the President and the NSC. The reference to the absence of approval for the execution of US policies in the Far East was obviously meant to catch the attention of the high-level policy-makers. It was also perhaps intended to directly urge the NSC to take swifter action in the matter.

The OCB also received information from separate contributors in the intelligence community. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina received its information from military intelligence (G-2). In January, the Chairman of the Group Young informed the Under Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. about the G-2 briefing. Young reported that the Vietminh military capabilities had increased considerably, especially in terms of their fire power. There were still 125,000 FEC troops in Vietnam but the ARVN had lost almost 100,000 soldiers since Geneva as a result of desertion and demobilization. In addition, the G-2 had estimated that the morale of the South Vietnamese forces as well as their combat and logistic capabilities were at a low level. Furthermore, Young wrote, the military intelligence believed that the ARVN only controlled the Saigon area and a few other areas around its division headquarters. The rest of South Vietnam was under the authority of the private armies of the sects or of Vietminh sympathizers. “The Viet Minh retains a capability for guerilla warfare” since they had stores of weapons and munitions concealed in hidden deposits in the South, Young concluded. Young also briefed the Board members on the G-2 information. The OCB noted the Pentagon view that there was a pressing need to conclude special arrangements on training activities, including “a firm decision” on the phasing out of the FEC. The matter – as the Chiefs had urged – would be taken up after the arrival of Radford and Collins. The Pentagon also urging the finalization of all of the other details with the French.¹⁴⁵

144 Wilson’s letter to the JCS, January 5, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 860–861; JCS’s memorandum to Wilson, January 21, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 862–863.

145 Chairman of the Special OCB Working Group on Indochina Young’s memorandum to Hoover, Jr., January 4, 1955. FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 15–17; Memorandum of the

In addition to the military considerations, attention was also paid to the economic issues. The OCB's Sub-Group on Financial and Monetary Controls reported to the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina on January 6, 1955. The Sub-Group recommended that the Indochinese states "should be treated similarly to other areas of the free world" on the question of export controls. The strategic materials should be prevented from being transshipped or re-exported via Saigon to Haiphong.¹⁴⁶

The NSC-OCB machinery also occasionally requested information from US field operatives. This was done if the situation was deemed critical, as it was in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1955. The US Chiefs of Missions in the Indochinese states responded to the request and met on January 7 to produce a general review of the situation in the three countries "in view of forthcoming NSC and OCB review of US policies and operations" with respect to Indochina. The three, Collins, McClintock and Minister Charles W. Yost did not want to offer a strategic estimate as this was the task of the JCS, which possessed background information and staff assistance, and could consider the question "in broader framework". However, the three Envoys recommended a strong aid policy. They had weighed the need for the creation of the native armies, whether the local governments would accept the aid programs, the inflationary effects of the dollar aid, and the general cost-effectiveness. South Vietnam's share of the proposed aid package for the fiscal year 1956 was 325 million dollars, whereas Cambodia would receive 55 million and Laos 58–63 million. The Ambassadors suggested that a total of 239 of the 325 million would be used during the calendar year 1955. They concluded that their "minimal" estimates were "justified" to maintain the integrity of the Indochinese states.¹⁴⁷

In addition to passing on the joint recommendations of the three Envoys, the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina made preparations for clearing up matters related to the direct aid. They also considered the State Department

OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, January 6, 1955 (held on January 3), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. In early January, the Working Group also discussed the Pentagon's position opposing the provision of liaison aircraft to the French for ICSC use. It also had a Sub-Group charged with reporting on financial and monetary agreements recently signed by the French-Indochinese states and the current status of trade controls with North Vietnam in light of French policy. OCB Status Report, January 4, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 59, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, January 10, 1955 (held on January 5), *ibid.*, Minutes III. At luncheon the Board also touched NSC Action 1290-d as well as publication of conditions in North Vietnam. Luncheon items for January 5, 1955 OCB meeting, *ibid.*, Box 10.

146 Sub-Group office memorandum to Young, January 6, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

147 Of the 325 million dollars, the ARVN would receive 225, the FEC 50, economy and refugees 80 and the local government contribution would be 30 million dollars Collins's, McClintock's and Yost's cable to Secretary Dulles, January 8, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 25–29. On January 14, Admiral Stump (CINCPAC) endorsed the recommendations of the three Ambassadors. *Ibid.*, p. 25, footnote 1. See also Young's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., January 11, 1955 with the summary of the joint recommendations and the attached Supplement to OCB Status Report, January 11, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA.

proposal to increase the USIA information activity and publication of an English language periodical by the government of South Vietnam. Secretary Anderson asked Hoover, Jr. whether Collins should come to Washington, but Hoover, Jr. said it was up to him to decide. Cutler interrupted to state that Collins was tentatively scheduled to appear before the NSC on January 27. The magnitude of the program called for the presence of Collins, Anderson added. Allen Dulles then said that the US diplomatic representatives in Hanoi were almost completely confined to the Consulate grounds. He did not, however, suggest that they should be called home. The Board noted the French request for a tripartite meeting between the French, the British and the Americans on Indochina sometime in late January. Diem had also improved his performance and gathered more supporters while he had travelled around in South Vietnam. The Board members were also informed that the Special Working Group had agreed to send a Colonel Ekvall to Indochina to find material on truce violations. The OCB went through a summary of the three Ambassador's report on January 12 and noted that it was good that Collins had been called to Washington in about a week's time to prepare for the NSC meeting on January 27, in which a general review of US policy on Indochina would take place. In approving of the minutes of its previous meeting (January 5), the Board corrected two items: one agenda and one report item dealing with aid procedures to Indochina after agreements with the French. Thereafter, the OCB had made arrangements with the FOA, the Pentagon and with some other agencies to have them lift the suspension of reimbursements to the FEC under the FY 1954 Indochina program. This included construction in France and associated procurement activities. After having been told about the OCB's suggestion, Secretary Dulles raised the question with the President the next morning. Eisenhower approved the return of Collins. When Dulles informed Collins about the invitation to travel, he revealed that the State Department was, while making no predictions about the outcome, "preparing separate instructions intended toward [the] solution [of the] French omission commitment on autonomy Vietnam army". The Secretary referred to Collins's reports on the difficulties with the talks undertaken with the French, and wrote that "we believe Diem [is] beginning [to] make steady if undramatic progress", and that there were no alternatives to him. Dulles remarked that Eisenhower had asked Collins to complete a report for NSC consideration.¹⁴⁸

148 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, January 11, 1955 (held on January 10), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central File series, Box 38, DDEL; Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, January 12, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA. Colonel Ekvall's information was subject to approval by Collins. OCB Minutes, January 14, 1955 (held on January 12), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III. The Special Working Group discussed the ways of handling French revisions of the Collins-Ely minute of understanding on training and legal problems related to US-SouthVietnamese bilateral agreements, which were being studied by the State and Defense departments. Furthermore, they noted that the Embassies had been requested on February 19 to send their views on the assignment of an officer on truce violations. The reply, which came in early March, was negative. OCB Status Reports, January 11 and March 1 and 8, 1955, *ibid.*, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. The USIA was already completing programming arrangements for intensified information activities in

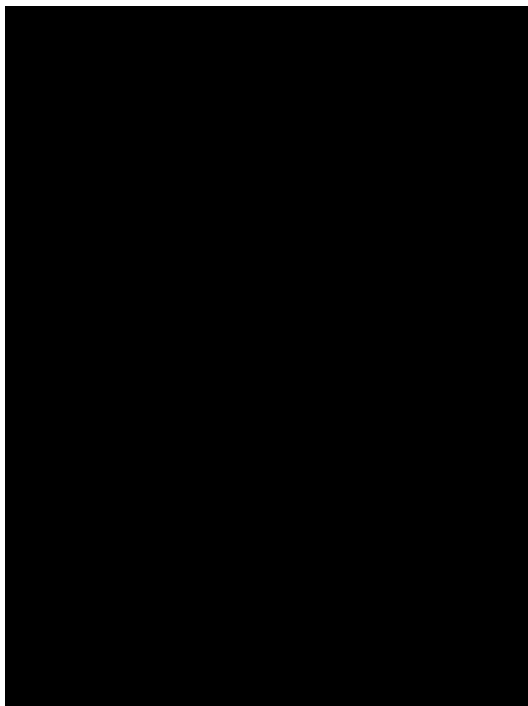
In the light of recent developments the PB discussed paragraph 5-c of NSC 5429/5 on January 12. The following day, Admiral Radford reported to the NSC on his recent trip to Vietnam. He reported only briefly on his impressions. The following day, however, the JCS Chairman Radford held a briefing to a joint State Department-Pentagon meeting on his recent trip to the Far East. The Admiral commented that Diem “certainly was a nice little man”, though not politically strong. Robertson reminded that Diem’s popular appeal had grown in the recent days. According to Radford, the French were the problem as they supported the opponents of Diem. Robertson agreed. In addition, Radford thought that the French hoped that all of Vietnam to be under Ho Chi Minh and then it could be attached to the French Union.¹⁴⁹

The background work for the OCB consideration was sometimes particularly thorough. This was evident in January 1955. The Board discussed the Special Progress Report presented by the Special Working Group on Indochina on January 19, 1955. In preparation for the visit of Collins and the review of US policy on Indochina on January 27, the Special Working Group on Indochina

South Vietnam before mid-February. OCB Status Report, February 15, 1955, *ibid.*; Dulles’s cable to Collins, January 13, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 33–34. The editors of the FRUS series believe that Young had handwritten a note which accompanied his memorandum to Robertson on that same day. According to the note, Dulles had brought the matter to Eisenhower’s attention and that Radford had urged that Collins should go back to Saigon after presenting his report. The note can be found in the Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/1–1355, RG 59, NA. On the other hand, the editors of FRUS write that according to a marginal notation by Special Assistant to Secretary of State, Roderic L. O’Connor (in Hoover, Jr.’s memorandum dated January 12) on the OCB’s suggestion to summon Collins to Washington to Dulles was not actually shown to the Secretary of State, but instead Hoover, Jr. talked about the issue with Dulles on the night of January 11 and during the following morning. The latter memorandum is in *ibid.* 751G.00/1–1255, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 33–34, footnotes 2 and 4. For the synthesis of the Ambassadors’ report to the OCB see an attachment to Young’s memorandum to the Chairman of the OCB Hoover, January 11, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina had calculated that South Vietnam would receive in FY 1955 74.5 million dollars of defense support (including 40 million for refugee resettlement program), 140 million of direct forces support and 50 million for the FEC, which adds up to 264.5 million. The estimated figure for FY 1956 was 323.1 million, which consisted of the sums of 80, 193.1 and 50 million. The total amount of funds for FY was 700 million, of which the Indochinese countries were to receive more than half, with South Vietnam as the biggest recipient. OCB Progress Report on funds available for Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, January 11, 1955 with Working Group on Indochina statistics (dated December 15, 1954) as an attachment. Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Records Relating to International Conferences, Talks, and Meetings, 1951–1955, Lot 58 D 207, Box 1, Aid to Associated States, RG 59, NA. The Chiefs of Missions estimated the total cost for South Vietnam in the FY for 1956 would be 325 million. Supplement to OCB Status Report, January 11, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA.

149 Record of meeting of the PB, January 12, 1955. Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1955, RG 273, NA. Radford’s trip to the Far East started on December 22, 1954 and ended on January 5, 1955. Memorandum of Discussion of the 232rd Meeting of the NSC, January 13, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; Memorandum of discussion at the joint State-Defense department meeting, January 14, 1955. Records of the Department of State, Miscellaneous Lot Files, Meeting Summaries and Project Files, Lot 61 D 417, State-JCS Meetings, RG 59, NA; editorial note, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 35.

The Chairman of the JCS was the main military adviser to the President and the Council. Eisenhower respected Admiral Radford and urged him to put forward his hard-line views. Radford often spoke in favor of Asian-Pacific issues and aircraft carriers. (National Archives)



had during January been considering several OCB working draft papers intended for producing a brief statement on major operating problems relating to Indochina for the consideration by the NSC along with Collins's report. The Board decided that the Working Group should finalize, "as a matter of urgency", a brief listing of operating decisions required for the US programs in Indochina. The required decisions should include brief background statements to be submitted to the Council by January 24. The Board members also heard through the State Department that Collins now felt that the situation had improved in Indochina.¹⁵⁰

Eisenhower had sent Collins to Saigon, but had also intended that he would be a reporter to the Council. On January 20, General Collins completed his

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150 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, January 18, 1955 (held on January 17), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. Progress Report by the Department of Defense representative of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, undated, *ibid.* OCB Status Report, January 18, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, January 20, 1955 (held on January 19), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III. The implementation of NSC policies by the OCB was quite well noted within the State Department. The above-mentioned minutes, for example, were circulated in 17 copies. Bowie's office received two copies. They had to be signed for and receipts kept. See classified material control sheet filed with the minutes. *Ibid.* Apparently, it was felt in the high levels of the NSC that the machinery was producing too many copies of its papers. Cutler had already urged in September – obviously to avoid leaks – that the Council members should find ways to reduce the number of copies of NSC papers (including Records of Action) and notify the Executive Secretary Lay, Jr. through the PB representatives. See Cutler's memorandum to the NSC members, September 20, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 122, NSC Miscellaneous Memoranda – 1954, RG 59, NA.

report to the NSC in Saigon. The paper indicated that the Vietminh were superior to the ARVN. Collins doubted whether the French were really going to support Diem's Government. In addition, the sects would challenge Diem's rule until the ARVN was strengthened enough to crush the military power of the sects. The loyalty of the ARVN had improved after the dismissal of Hinh and its effectiveness was to be seen. As Collins remarked, it was too early to estimate how well the crash program would succeed. Collins continued that South Vietnam would be "capable of maintaining a viable economy, at modest levels". Diem's position was unclear, even though his support had recently increased, and so Collins saw him as "the best available" Premier. In conclusion, Collins wrote that Diem's Government had "a reasonable prospect of success". He admitted he had been unable to determine the situation in the countryside. With the strong backing of the US and the rapid execution of the crash program, Collins envisioned that "there is at least an even chance that [South] Vietnam can be saved from Communism". He recommended that a total of 327.3 million dollars be allocated to South Vietnam for the calendar year 1955 and an additional 196.6 million for the following year. The military would always receive more than double the amount of the non-military.¹⁵¹

The OCB functioned with precision. Every little detail that could possibly have an effect upon the implementation of the approved NSC policies or the formulation of new ones was reported and passed on to the departments and agencies concerned. The State Department officials, for example, had heard rumors that the US field representatives were having problems with Diem's conduct. The OCB, therefore, forwarded a memorandum for the use of Walter Robertson, in which Edward P. Lilly commented that cables from Saigon, Working Group discussions and Status Reports had repeatedly referred to the difficulties in South Vietnam. Lilly wrote that "American suggestions to this official do not make any major impact on his frame of mind".¹⁵²

The PB and OCB continued their preparation for the January 27 Council meeting. The members of the PB had already decided on January 5 that the

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- 151 Collins's "Report on Vietnam for the National Security Council," January 20, 1955 as Collins's memorandum to Dulles, January 20, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 54-57. According to the editors of the FRUS series, this document, to be known later as the Collins Report, "was the focal point of a reassessment of Indochina policy in Washington culminating in" the NSC consideration on January 27. It was circulated to the Council members on January 24 "with instructions to keep distribution to an absolute 'need to know' basis". *Ibid.*, p. 54, footnote 1. The actual Report had four pages, with two enclosures (1-page enclosure "A" = Proposed Force Basis for Free Viet-Nam CY 1956 and 3-page enclosure "B" = Cost Estimate for US Support of Vietnam) and a 9-page supplement of the situation and status of Collins's mission. Attachment to Lay, Jr's memorandum to the NSC, January 24, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 122, NSC Miscellaneous Memos - 1955, RG 59, NA. About the limited distribution see Director of Executive Secretariat Walter K. Scott's accompanying note, January 24, 1955, *ibid.* For the text of the supplement see USVNR, Book 10, pp. 864-882.
- 152 Lilly added that the US policy was "definitely bungling along" as there was "no real sympathetic cooperation between the young inexperienced Viet Nam government and the U.S. Mission in Saigon". Lilly's memorandum to Bishop, January 21, 1955 with Lilly's memorandum to MacDonald as an attachment, January 21, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

revision of NSC 5405 should take place only after the January 27 NSC meeting and the Special Committee report on Asian Economic Grouping. The PB agreed on January 26 to submit Collins's report to the Council. On the same day, the Board noted the numerical data on estimated expenditures contained in Collins's report and in the attachment to the OCB paper had been "reconciled" and that they were "in substantial agreement", which was to be taken up by Stassen at the actual NSC meeting. It was also noted that, despite the fact that the Council had not specifically amended NSC 5429/5, its record of actions for January 21 still had an effect on the Policy Paper. Hence, the NSC Secretariat was to inform the operating agencies of these policy decisions by memorandum. The Working Group had forwarded a list of questions to be taken up with Collins. They included the prospects for achieving the objectives of NSC 5429/5, the elections question, the French role and anticipated problematic developments in Vietnam in a year's time.¹⁵³

There is clear evidence that oral briefings attracted a better following amongst the Council members than written reports. Since Vice-President Nixon was obliged to miss the NSC meeting on January 27, Collins stepped in, accompanied by the Service Secretaries and the full JCS. He called the attention of the Council members to his much-discussed seven-point program. Collins

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153 Records of meetings of the PB, January 5 and 26, 1955. Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting, RG 273, NA; OCB Minutes, January 31, 1955 (held on January 26), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA. For a general view of proposed US economic aid to Southeast Asia see NSC 5506, "Future U.S. Economic Assistance for Asia," January 21, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 84, RG 59, NA. The Working Group had prepared an agreed statement of problems for the Board in connection with the report of Collins. After clearance at the State the paper was considered by the Board Assistants on January 21. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, January 21, 1955 (held on January 20). WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. See also "List of Problems and Questions Proposed by the OCB for Discussion During the Visit of General Collins" with cost estimates and seven-point program as attachments, January 21, 1955, *ibid.* As the draft list of problems and questions was being prepared it was circulated to the Board Assistants on January 21 in order to receive final concurrence. It was noted by the Deputy Executive Secretary of the OCB Livingston L. Satterthwaite that possible further discussion on the subject could take place at the Board Assistants' meeting on January 24. In any case and "in view of the time element", Satterthwaite concluded, "it is desirable to obtain final telephonic concurrence in this draft before c.o.b. today, if at all possible". Satterthwaite's memorandum for the Board Assistants, January 21, 1955 with Collins's tables (dated January 14 and 19) and seven-point program (dated January 21) as attachments, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA. For transmittal of the finalized documents to the Board for the basis of discussions see Staats's memorandum for the OCB members, January 24, 1955. *Ibid.* The initiative for the list of problems and questions came from Assistant Secretary Anderson and was agreed to by Hoover, Jr. Copies of the draft were sent to Robertson and Young for fast comments and to Staats and Cutler's assistant T. B. Koons, who had been the point of contact for the OCB in the NSC Staff since September 1953, to obtain the Special Assistant's view on the utility of the paper. The Board Assistants continued to consider the paper on January 31 and it was then distributed to the OCB members for their meeting of February 2 and by Cutler to the Council as an OCB document. The draft was cleared with Hoover, Jr. See Max W. Bishop's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., January 21, 1955 with a draft paper as an attachment and Staats's memorandum for the members of the OCB, February 1, 1955 with a final paper as an attachment. Both in *ibid.*

reminded the participants that the program called for the nationalizing of the ARVN and for action to be taken concerning the sect armies. If Hinh stayed away, Collins said, things would begin “to pick up”. According to the program, the ARVN would be reorganized with the help from the Americans and deployed throughout the country. Collins told the NSC that the refugee settlement program in the South was essential as 500,000 refugees had already fled from the north. In connection with the refugee settlement, a land reform would have to be initiated. Diem is willing, Collins added, to “seize land not now under cultivation”, which could be held for the next three years and then tenants could buy it with a loan from a newly-established agrarian bank. The fast creation of a national assembly was also on the list as “Bao Dai was the only existing source of legal power” and the Emperor “could even fire Diem”. Economic issues and fiscal management in South Vietnam called for US expertise even though the French were “very sensitive” about this and cultural matters, Collins said. He praised Stassen’s contract with the Michigan State University to initiate a technical assistance program¹⁵⁴ in public administration, economics, public information and police administration. The last point of the seven was to broaden the base of the government, especially to diminish the representation of the sects. After having reiterated his written points of January 20, Collins showed statistics about aid needs and concluded that he did not want to be “too optimistic”, but that if all the recommendations are fulfilled and the proposed US programs carried out, there would be an even chance of success.¹⁵⁵

The President, who was always very sensitive about the budgetary implications of the proposed programs, wanted to hear from Stassen whether the US had appropriate funds for carrying out the programs outlined by Collins. Stassen replied positively. Eisenhower turned to Collins and inquired what the Vietminh were going to do. According to “a trustworthy” French report, Collins said, the Vietminh were going “to lie low” and abide by the Geneva Accords.

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154 The head of the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) was Dr. Wesley Fishel, who was a personal friend of Diem’s. Fishel visited Saigon in August 1954 as a consultant to Diem’s Government and to USOM. Later it was revealed that MSUG operated on CIA funding. For the work of MSUG see Scigliano’s and Fox’s Technical Assistance in Vietnam, 1965 and Marquis, Jefferson P., “Social, Science and Nation Building in Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 24 (Winter 2000), pp. 79–105. Fishel briefed the OCB Working Group in late October. Memorandum of OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 1, 1954 (held on October 29), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

155 Upon entering Collins asked Cutler how long his oral presentation might be. Cutler replied that there were no limitations. Collins answered that he would need 20 minutes. Memorandum of Discussion of the 234th Meeting of the NSC, January 27, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in *FRUS 1955–1957*, Volume I, pp. 62–66. Collins had, however, requested that his report be circulated in the State Department before the OCB and NSC meetings on the subject. The Director of the Executive Secretariat Scott advised the distribution of the report was to be “kept to an absolute minimum”. Scott’s note to Collins’s report (with supplement) for the NSC (dated January 20, 1955), January 24, 1955, Records of the Department of State, Director, State Department’s Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Records Relating to International Conferences, Talks, and Meetings, 1951–1955, Lot 58 D 207, Box 1, General Collins’ Mission to Viet-Nam, November 1954-May 1955 (Miscellaneous), RG 59, NA.

But if Diem's forces achieved success against the Vietminh in the south, the latter were likely to begin overt aggression, Collins answered.¹⁵⁶

Cutler then quoted six recommendations made by the PB on the basis of Collins's report. The first was reaffirmation by the signatories of SEATO, which the Assistant Secretary of State Robertson thought was "essential for the future of Free Vietnam". The PB also called for pressure to be placed on the French as they were not following the agreements. Secretary Dulles suggested that it would be extremely difficult to get the French to "realize the essential role of the US in saving Vietnam" and therefore the US would simply have "to live with the problem". When Collins recited further examples of the arbitrary French actions, Dulles said he was going to discuss the matter at a SEATO meeting in Bangkok. There were no discussions at the NSC about the recommendations on continued support to Diem and endorsement of Collins's seven-point program. The final suggestion dealt with the approval of US aid programs in Vietnam and their magnitude. Stassen assured them that there were sufficient funds, but he expressed concern over the French plans to cut the size of the FEC from 75,000, if the US would give no more than 100 million dollars to it. Collins indicated that this would be dangerous since the elections were coming up. Secretary Dulles thought, with the support of Collins and Radford, that "the French were bluffing". Stassen replied that the sum would not be increased. In the end, Collins asked for the sums to be taken to Saigon. Stassen replied that he had calculations ready for presentation to the President. In connection with the last suggestion of the PB, the discussion turned to the "validity" of NSC 5429/5. Eisenhower said "that this was a good deal like repeating the Doxology".¹⁵⁷

The Council agreed to get reaffirmation by the signatories of SEATO to take action in case hostilities were renewed in Indochina. Moreover, it was agreed that they would try to obtain French support for Diem as this was viewed as essential. The NSC also pledged its backing of Diem and decided to continue US programs in order to assist the ARVN, agrarian reform, refugee resettlement,

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156 Memorandum of Discussion of the 234th Meeting of the NSC, January 27, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 66.

157 Memorandum of Discussion of the 234th Meeting of the NSC, January 27, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 67-69; PB paper "Possible NSC Action on Report by General Collins," dated January 20, 1955, January 27, 1955 NSC meeting, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL. The PB held a meeting the previous day and came up with recommendations. For the list of the recommendations together with comments by the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs see a memorandum by Young titled "Major points for NSC consideration of General Collins's report on Viet-Nam of January 27, 1955", January 26, 1955. The OCB Special Working Group On Indochina, which was planning to have a meeting with Collins on February 2, had forwarded Cutler several days in advance a list of problems and questions to be discussed during Collins's visit. OCB discussed Collins's appearance at the Council in early February. OCB Status Reports, January 25 and February 1, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. Apparently, Collins did not have time to brief the working group as Lieutenant Colonel John E. Dwan from the Pentagon told the members of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina about the major problems in Collins's mission and about his visit to Washington. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina (31st) meeting, February 8, 1955 (held on February 3), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

fiscal management and the establishment of a national assembly. The State Department was assigned the task of studying the question of elections in two month's time. The Council approved the US military and non-military assistance in principle and reaffirmed paragraph 10-a NSC 5429/5.¹⁵⁸

After thorough preparation at the PB and the OCB, the Council members were exceptionally well informed and briefed for Collins's appearance. The information came from multiple sources. Furthermore, the attendance at the January 27 meeting included the widest possible range of military expertise. The question of South Vietnam was treated as a special issue, as Secretary Dulles had commented earlier. Ironically, it seems as if it was almost believed within the NSC machinery that the problems could be finally resolved.

In spite of developments in January, the issue of insufficient information for the use of the NSC machinery surfaced again. The State Department did not believe that the CIA could provide the Council with all of the relevant information on South Vietnam. Thus, Robertson sent the Acting Secretary of State a discussion paper to be used at the February 3 meeting. Robertson specified that Eisenhower had approved the recommendations of the NSC on January 27 and agreed to allocate funds for US economic and military programs in Indochina. In addition, Eisenhower had authorized Collins to return on the day of the Council meeting. Robertson pointed out that the US was "about to institute direct training" in South Vietnam. There was a possibility, Robertson added, that the developments in Franco-American talks on Cambodia could have a negative effect on the case of South Vietnam.¹⁵⁹

No possible means were forgotten in the implementation. The OCB agreed, for example, that the USIS program in South Vietnam should be intensified for a period of two months to "build up the popularity" of Diem and to show optimism about fighting Communism. The Board reviewed the proposed USIS program for Southeast Asia, which was to be prepared for its consideration on February 9. It noted that the President was expected to sign the allocation of considerable funds on February 3 for the three Indochinese states before Collins would be leaving. The Board also had good reason to ratify the Status Report produced by the Working Group. February 3 marked a special occasion as the Status Report mentioned that it was "possible to proceed with final arrangements for US training activities". This was due to the Franco-American agreement on the US proposals signed on that date, according to which the French would leave on July 1, 1955 and accept the role of the US MAAG.¹⁶⁰

158 NSC Action No. 1316, AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 69-70.

159 Hoover, Jr. had requested a discussion paper. Robertson's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., February 2, 1955 with a memorandum "Points to be Raised in NSC Meeting, Thursday, February 3, under Agenda Item, "Significant World Developments Affecting U.S. Security," (undated) as an enclosure, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 122, NSC Miscellaneous Memos - 1955, RG 59, NA.

160 On February 3 an agreement on the Presidential determination on the use of Section 121 funds to implement Collins's recommendations was signed allocating 509 million dollars of the 700 million dollars remaining. Furthermore, the Pentagon had agreed to give the French helicopters and liaison aircraft for ICSC use. OCB Status Report, February 8, 1955, Records

The transition of power was sealed when on February 11 the new French Socialist Government led by Edgar Faure approved the Collins-Ely agreement of December 13.¹⁶¹ On the same day, the JCS recommended to Wilson that the Eisenhower Administration should consider the implementation of the fourth article of the Manila Pact (SEATO). The article called for deterrence of the overt aggression of China and other Communist nations. Its implementation meant the development of indigenous forces, which would deter Communist attacks alongside the US forces.¹⁶²

The internal security considerations had been a priority in early January 1955. At that point another OCB Working Group had started making out a report on the development of police forces to restore internal security and to root out Communism in those third world countries which were threatened by Communist subversion. The Chairman of the Working Group MacArthur II questioned the whole NSC assignment as set forth by NSC Action 1290-d, because he did not believe that the police forces would be an answer to the challenge to internal security. Instead, he added, an army and security forces would be needed. The threatened countries had few resources to be used for security forces, which was problematic, MacArthur II wrote to the OCB Chairman, Under Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. MacArthur II quoted Collins's view that the ARVN should "serve as a small blocking force" in the event of overt attack, but simultaneously the forces would have the dual tasks of pacification and internal security. In the report of the Working Group South Vietnam was listed as one of those countries¹⁶³ in which police action was inadequate because

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- Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, February 3, 1955 (held on February 2), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III. See also Eisenhower's memorandum for the FOA Director, May 27, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, NSC Registry series, Box 11, DDEL. The Pentagon sent a proposal for the creation of a large civilian labor corps, under military discipline, to begin a broad construction program to build up military infrastructure in South Vietnam. Deputy Assistant to Secretary Wilson William H. Godel's memorandum to Staats, February 3, 1955 with a 22-page Analogue: "An Economic Program for Vietnam", October 21, 1954, *ibid.*, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. The study was briefly discussed by the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina on February 15. Both State and FOA were going to send their comments to the Pentagon on it. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, February 15, 1954 (held on the same day), *ibid.* See also Stassen's letter to the Director of BOB Rowland R. Hughes, February 8, 1955, with copies of Stassen's memoranda (5) pertaining to additional assistance for Indochina, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, NSC Registry series, Box 11, DDEL. On February 8, 1955, Stassen raised at a OCB meeting the question of a Phillippine offer for a relief program to be carried out in South Vietnam by Filipinos at US expense. OCB Luncheon items for February 8, 1955 meeting, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 10, Luncheon Items, RG 59, NA.
- 161 Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 1978, p. 51; Herring, Hess and Immerman. "Passage of Empire," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 181. See also Dillon's cable to Dulles, January 7, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 22-24. About the US reactions towards changes of the agreement see Collins's cable to Dulles, January 9, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 29-32 and Dulles's cable to Dillon, January 24, 1955, *ibid.*, p. 59.
- 162 JCS's memorandum to Wilson, February 11, 1955, USVNR Book 10, pp. 885-887.
- 163 The Working Group regarded the three Indochinese states as such, together with Thailand, Burma and Indonesia. However, the Pentagon argued that only the Indochinese nations should be listed in the more dangerous category. Report of the NSC 1290-d Working Group, February 16, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume X: Foreign Aid and Economic Defense Policy (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989), pp. 5-9, p. 7, footnote 2.

subversion had “reached a stage in which military-type action is immediately or potentially required”. Therefore, the Working Group recommended, the mission of the ARVN should be changed to include action “to deal with internal insurrection”.¹⁶⁴

The implementation reacted to new developments in the field. In late February, for example, the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina noted that all of the departments and agencies were awaiting reports from Secretary Dulles, who was touring the Indochinese countries and Thailand. The Working Group was also considering possible food relief in North Vietnam. For the OCB meeting of March 9, 1955, the FOA forwarded the request from Saigon proposing that the US would consider food relief offer to the Vietminh because of famine conditions which were presently developing. The Board members, however, “expressed [a] preliminary view of the dubious value of the proposal”. The Board approved “the general approach” of the preliminary report by the Working Group on NSC Action 1290-d, thus authorizing the Working Group to write instructions for transmission by the State Department to the field requesting the submission of recommendations and analysis on the subject.¹⁶⁵

New concepts were being developed and studied by using South Vietnam as a test ground. An OCB Ad Hoc Working Group on Military Liberty¹⁶⁶, which had

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164 MacArthur II’s memorandum to Hoover, Jr., January 11, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 1–5; Report of the NSC 1290-d Working Group, February 16, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 5–9. The OCB gave its blessing to the report in its meeting on March 9, 1955. *Ibid.*, p. 9, footnote 4. The Working Group was also called the NSC 1290-d Working Group as a directive of such title called for enhancing the police forces, NSC Action No. 1290-d, was taken at the 229th NSC meeting on December 21, 1954. For the text see AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL. The OCB had agreed on the terms of reference for the Working Group on NSC Action No. 1290-d at its meeting on January 19, 1955. See OCB Minutes, January 20, 1955 (held on January 19), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA.

165 OCB Status Reports, March 1 and 15, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, March 11, 1955 (held on March 9), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III.

166 Militant Liberty had been developed in late 1954. The concept of the Free World Way was also used to refer to the same thing. It was based on the freedom of the individual in a democratic society and intended as ideological warfare against Communism. The Vietnamese were to be furnished “with a dynamic idea and set of goals”. Collins heard about the concept in early December in Saigon. He argued that it could only “be effectively implemented” if it was done simultaneously with MAAG’s “National Action” program. The latter aimed at enhancing internal security by making the Vietnamese patriotic, determined and unified against Communism. “National Action” included pacification program to be assigned for the ARVN. Collins’s memorandum for the record, December 10, 1954. J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 29, DDEL. The CIA opposed the development of Militant Liberty as a covert operation as the plan had called for. CIA memorandum (writer and receiver deleted), December 9, 1954, *ibid.* South Vietnam was selected as a pilot project country. At the OCB’s request the Staff Section of the JCS had prepared “Guidance for Application of Project Action in Free Vietnam”, which had been transmitted to the Board on September 8, 1955. Project Action referred to the classified aspects for implementing Militant Liberty. The Board noted the paper and referred it to the USIA for use in connection with its information programs. The Board had established an ad hoc Working Group on Militant Liberty under the chairmanship of the USIA to give “recommendations on the immediate practical application of the proposal”. Undated annex “OCB Concern with Militant Liberty,” WHO, OSANSA, OCB series, Subject subseries, Box 3, Militant Liberty, DDEL; OCB Minutes, October 4, 1955 (held on September 28), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III; NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 12, DDEL. See also Charles E.

been established at the December 8 meeting of the Board with the task of developing recommendations with practical application of the concept reported to the OCB. According to the Ad Hoc Working Group, the reason that Saigon did not oppose the project merely but suggested some modifications to it, was that the OCB had started to discuss the concept during the first half of February. Psychological Warfare Adviser Nelson A. Rockefeller was called on to look into the project. At the Board meeting of February 9, 1955, Rockefeller stated that Militant Liberty was, in his opinion, a good idea. The following week, after Staats had briefed the Board members about the work of the OCB Working Group on the subject, USIA's Streibert, also a member of the Council, said that the project had something to it, but that it would be difficult to implement. Streibert added that the whole project was similar to operations undertaken by the USIA¹⁶⁷, which could be used as models. Cutler suggested that Rockefeller should take that advice into consideration. In connection with the approval of the minutes of February 9 meeting, the Board also noted that appropriate Working Groups "should keep under continuing review the progress made under new information programs", including one for Vietnam. In addition, they touched upon the desirability of protests being made against truce violations by the Vietminh. At the end of the February 16 meeting the OCB agreed to ask Rockefeller, with assistance from the Pentagon, to make suggestions on the feasibility of the project, which would include specific plans, financial considerations along with the Financial Appendices and the location for its implementation.¹⁶⁸

The OCB appears to have been prepared for all contingencies. Psychological warfare questions, such as truce violations, were not only considered by the

Johnson's memorandum to the Board Assistants, March 18, 1957 with OCB Annual Status Report to the NSC: July 1, 1955 through June 30, 1956 as an attachment, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Status Reports, RG 59, NA. See also the 58-page "Guidance for Appropriate Agencies Participating in the Application of Project Action with Respect to Vietnam," with annexes "A" through "G", undated, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

167 In December 1954, USIA had had separate information programs for all three Indochinese countries as of October 1. The total budget in Indochina for FY 1955 was 1.5 million dollars. The USIS had 24 positions in Vietnam. The activities included the distribution of printed material (press and publications) also in North Vietnam, exploitation of truce violations, local film production, radio broadcasting (Voice of America, VOA) and English teaching. Francis J. McCarthy's memorandum to Young, December 20, 1954, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina - 1954, RG 59, NA. For absolute figures see also the unsigned memorandum to Stassen, February 2, 1955. WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL.

168 Saigon had proposed that the South Vietnamese would be trained in the Philippines and then returned to Vietnam to carry out the program. OCB Minutes, January 14, 1955 (held on January 12), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA. The Defense Department agreed to provide Rockefeller with materials and to conduct a staff study to indicate the specific application of the concept to the Philippines. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meetings, February 9, 16 and 23, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA. The Board noted that there were special reporting requirements as the new 2 million-dollar information program for Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Japan, Hongkong and Indonesia was financed from Section 121 funds. OCB Minutes, February 18, 1955 (held on February 16), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III.

OCB but were also a subject for Allen Dulles's briefing at an NSC meeting of March 3, 1955. According to the CIA Director, the US had not lodged formal charges related to them to the ICSC yet, but the Board had already made preparations "should this be deemed" necessary. Furthermore, Collins had warned that the Vietminh were going to protest against the establishment of SEATO and MAAG's activities in South Vietnam. After mid-March 1955 the OCB discussed, among other things, the proposed rice offer to North Vietnam. When Hoover, Jr. announced that the State Department had been "very cool to this idea", the Board "recorded its tentative decision in opposition" to such food shipments for the time being.¹⁶⁹

After a break following the Geneva Conference, since the second week of August the Council had discussed the Vietnam question at fifteen of its meetings. The topic was discussed at some 70 percent of the meetings held during the last part of 1954. The Council meetings around mid-August and especially in late October could be considered to have been of crucial significance in the same way as the April and early May Council meetings had been.

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169 The sentences referring to the evidence of Vietminh violations of the Geneva Agreements have been deleted from the Memorandum of Discussion. Memorandum of Discussion of the 239rd Meeting of the NSC, March 3, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting of March 16, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, March 18, 1955 (held on March 16, 1955), *ibid.*, Box 1, OCB Minutes III; WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 11, DDEL. See also memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, March 15, 1954 (held on March 14), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. According to Intelligence sources, the rice shortage in North Vietnam might have led to a famine by June 1955. The US Embassy at Saigon had asked for funds for the South Vietnamese to ship rice to prevent the people of North Vietnam from starving. The State Department staff study concluded that the proposal should be turned down at that point, but if the American Embassy submitted a necessary additional justification, the State Department should reconsider the request. Robertson suggested to Hoover, Jr. that he should tell the OCB that this would not be "desirable". Robertson's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., March 14, 1955 with attachments of a Staff Study, "Proposal to Finance Free Viet-Nam Rice Shipments to North Viet-Nam for Propaganda Exploitation," not dated, and an Intelligence Report by the State Department's Office of Intelligence Research, "North Vietnam's Deteriorating Rice Position," March 14, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

■ The Question of an Acceptable Leadership for South Vietnam during the Spring of 1955 (March–May 1955)

The National Security Council and Diem's Crisis with the Sects

Washington Decides to Support Diem

The rapid deterioration in the internal security situation in South Vietnam made the OCB take action. On March 23, the OCB touched on the subject of the Indochina crisis. Allen Dulles, who had sent his personal representative – most probably Lansdale – to talk to Collins¹, thought that it should be noted, among the emerging problems, that Diem was facing a major crisis. Secretary Anderson wanted to know what the US was doing to support Diem's Government. In reply, Hoover, Jr. said that the French were not going to interfere in the hostilities, but that they could “do some policing inside the city of Saigon”. Hoover, Jr. continued that Bao Dai was possibly involved in some way, but in any event it was “a very fluid situation and one which we are watching very carefully”. Commenting on the latest reports by United Press correspondent, Hoover, Jr. said that Collins did not feel the situation was as “black”. Stassen commented that if the correspondent was indeed a Communist he should be exposed, and the reports would be discredited. The Board also concurred, after revisions, in the second Progress Report on NSC 5405 which summarized the major actions that had been taken to implement the policy paper between July 22, 1954 and March 15, 1955. As the previous Progress Report had concentrated mainly on the Indochinese states, the new report placed emphasis on Thailand and Burma. There was a supplement, the “Summary of Developments in Indochina”, which covered the period from August 20 through February 21. Following the recommendations formulated by Collins, the US had “vigorously supported” the Diem Government: it had produced force goals, initiated direct aid, agreed on aid programs and given 314.3 million dollars in aid for FY 1955. In addition, the US had encouraged the South Vietnamese to introduce reforms and it had negotiated an agreement with the French on the training of the ARVN.

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1 In his letter to Collins Allen Dulles was referring to a representative – most probably Lansdale – “who is intimately familiar with the matter [US policy toward Vietnam] and who has my full confidence”. Dulles also promised to Collins the CIA's full assistance in Saigon. Allen Dulles's letter to Collins, February 22, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 27, Allen Dulles, DDEL.

The Progress Report also informed of the 200,000 Vietnamese who had been evacuated by a sea-lift. The USIS had used 1.3 million dollars for informational purposes connected with the refugee operation. The French attitude toward Diem constituted a problem, as did the sects. When examining the differences between the Progress Report and its drafts dated February 23 and March 15 one can note that some lines have been revised. Words and dates have been changed and several paragraphs added. Moreover, the Board noted a CIA paper on truce violations² by the Vietminh while it was considering the Progress Report.³

The NSC principals did not need to rely upon second-hand information. Secretary of State Dulles had visited Saigon in late February. Diem had made a good impression Dulles. The Secretary regarded Diem as exactly the kind of patriot the US needed. According to Dulles, the merits of the Mandarin were far greater than his defects. Diem's Government, Dulles thought, had a fair chance of winning in a difficult situation.⁴ In early March Eisenhower wrote a letter to

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- 2 The OCB discussed the truce violations at its meeting on March 9 and 16. As a result, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Sebald recommended to Secretary Dulles that the US would only "encourage better documentation" of the violations and "continued publicizing of such violations". Sebald's memorandum to Dulles, March 22, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 4, RG 59, NA. The Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Carl W. McCordle suggested that the OCB should review the situation on May 1. McCordle's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., March 22, 1955, *ibid.* See also Staats's memorandum to the OCB members, March 21, 1955, *ibid.* and Herman Phleger's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., March 22, 1955, *ibid.* For the CIA paper "Viet Minh violations of the Geneva Agreements," March 16, 1955, see Staats's memorandum to the OCB members, March 21, 1955 with the CIA paper as an attachment, *ibid.* An earlier 22-page version by the IAC under the same title through December 31, 1954, can be found at WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central File series, Box 38, DDEL.
 - 3 The Board noted that the helicopters for the use of ICSC had been shipped from Japan on March 12. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, March 23, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, March 25, 1955 (held on March 23), *ibid.*, Box 1, Minutes III; Staats's memorandum to Lay, Jr., March 25, 1955, with the OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, dated March 24, 1955 and Supplement to Progress Report on NSC 5405 ("Summary of Developments in Indochina"), dated March 24, 1955, as attachments. The drafts, dated February 21 and 21, of the Progress Reports were considered to be obsolete and therefore "may be destroyed in accordance with the security regulations of your agency". Staats's memorandum to the OCB, April 13, 1955. In the State Department's OCB files there exists, however, a Guides to Differences between These Reports and the Drafts dated February 23 and March 15, 1955, which gives some kind of idea of the contents of the drafts, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA. The draft of March 15 can also be found in WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. The Board had asked the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina for a report on the violations of the Geneva Agreements on March 16. OCB Status Report, March 22, 1955, *ibid.*, Status Reports III, Box 7. Phrases such as "The Christ had moved South" were used to persuade the Catholics in the north to flee. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 130.
 - 4 Beal, John Foster Dulles, 1957, p. 239; Herring, Hess and Immerman, "Passage of Empire," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis in Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 183. Dulles was briefed by using the Progress Report on NSC 5405 dated February 24, 1955. Sebald wrote to Hoover, Jr. that there had been no new developments during the previous four days and that "the supplement is up to date and accurate". Sebald's memorandum to Hoover, Jr., February 28, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA.

Bao Dai, in which he praised Diem's achievements and considered him to be the right choice as Premier of South Vietnam.⁵

After having coped with the Hinh threat, Diem started to eliminate the political-religious sects. At first, Diem secured the support of the sects for his Government, since Lansdale distributed 12 million dollars of CIA-allocated US funds to the sect leaders and Diem appointed some of them as ministers. The French support to the sects' armies had ended in February 1955. The warlords asked Diem to provide their troops with financial support, to integrate them into the ARVN, and to recognize their spheres of influence. Diem merely promised to provide some money during a short transition period, which was not enough for the warlords, who combined their forces and formed a United Front of Nationalist Forces. On March 21 the Front demanded that Diem should form a government which would pursue national unity and carry out reforms. Diem regarded the Front's request as an ultimatum, which he refused to act upon.⁶

The oral briefings of the CIA Director sometimes drew upon the reports of diplomats. At the March 24 meeting of the Council, South Vietnam was only briefly referred to by Allen Dulles. The CIA Director based his information on the reports from Collins noting the difficulties between Diem and the sects. Despite the fact that the NSC discussed the PB report on the review of US policies in the Far East, including NSC 5429/5, they did not revise or amend the paragraphs concerning South Vietnam. At the same meeting the NSC members also noted in the same meeting the status of the NSC projects as of March 1, 1955.⁷

The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina was carefully monitoring the situation in South Vietnam. They noted, for example, in their Status Report that Diem had taken steps to pressure the sects "to comply to his demands", in the first place by taking over the police from one of the groups and by making promises of cabinet posts. However, the OCB Working Group Chairmen and other State Department representatives on the OCB machinery now received new guidelines. They were to include the departmental positions on papers

5 Eisenhower's letter to Bao Dai, March 3, 1955, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1955, pp. 315–316.

6 Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, p. 50; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 1984, p. 222; Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 83; Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 1988, p. 173. The Front had sent an emissary to meet Bao Dai and to ask him to dismiss Diem. The Emperor did not do so. PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 229–230. The political power struggle had led to armed fighting during the final days of March. The forces loyal to Diem attacked the Binh Xuyen fighters who controlled the main police station in Saigon. The fire fights stopped after only two days, when the French mediated a truce. Generals Collins and Ely advised Diem to broaden the base of his government to maintain his support and to avoid a civil war, which would only benefit the Communists. Cao Dai forces – 15,000–20,000 – left the United Front and joined the ARVN on the last day of March. Buttinger, Joseph, A, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, Volume II: *Vietnam at War* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 886; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 250; Ely. *Mémoires*, 1964, pp. 307–308; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 206–207, 230–231.

7 Memorandum of Discussion of the 242nd Meeting of the NSC, March 24, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

coming before the OCB since they had not been developed and coordinated with all of the interested areas of the State Department.⁸

As we have seen, the recommendations of lower-level officials at times made a difference. But it was somewhat easier for highly-placed outsiders, like Collins, to have an influence on the NSC system. On the last day of March, he urged the State Department to “consider possible alternatives” to Diem, who was “operating practically [a] one-man government” and was “almost entirely isolated”.⁹ Collins’s recommendation took Eisenhower and Dulles by surprise. When Dulles told the President on the telephone about the cable, the latter said that the only thing that they could do was to “tell him [Collins] not to give up on Diem” because “we bet on him heavily”. Eisenhower agreed, after some hesitation, to Dulles’s suggestion that he should discuss the matter with Senator Mansfield. When the two discussed that kind of guidance that should be sent to Collins, Eisenhower thought the General should improvise and not act in a “hasty” manner. On the basis of this telephone conversation, Dulles asked Mansfield to come to the State Department to discuss the situation. After having been briefed on Collins’s suggestions, Mansfield made it clear that, in his opinion, all other “alternatives were worse than keeping Diem in office”. The Senator did not oppose using Bao Dai’s influence to improve Diem’s position and to recruit the popular Phan Huy Quat, the former defense minister and a medical doctor from Hanoi, into his Government.¹⁰

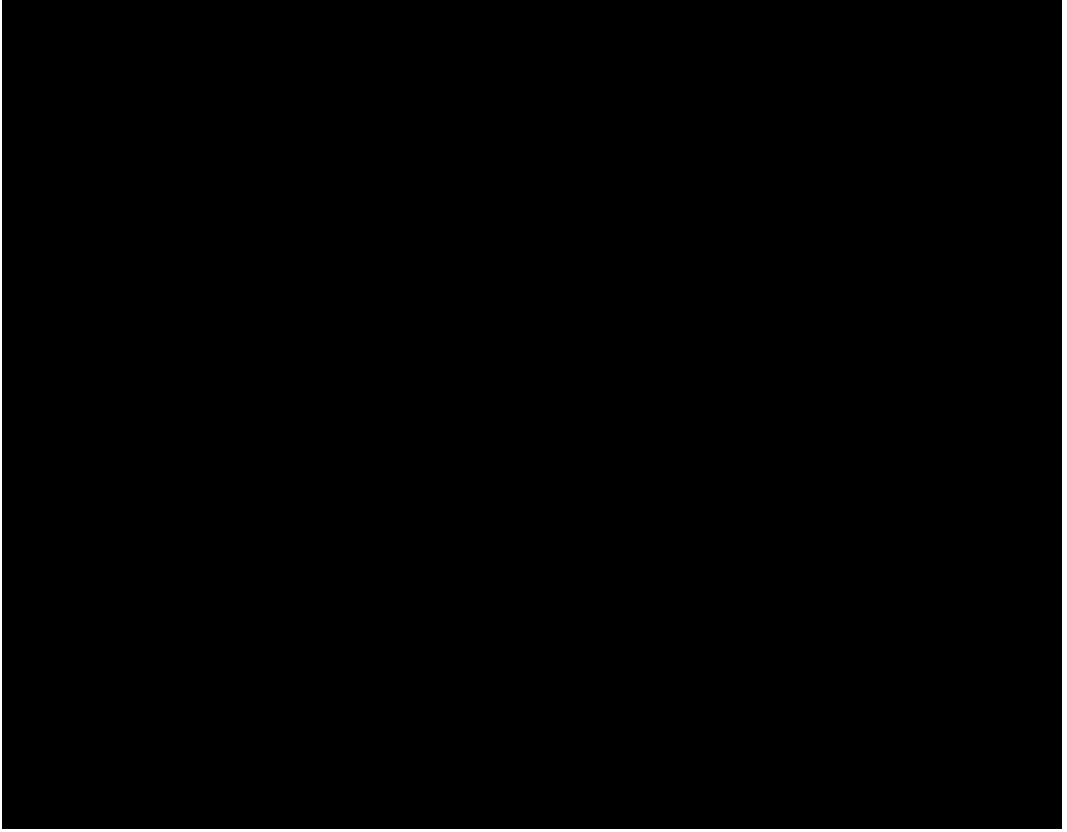
The insufficient information affected the formulation of the NSC policies. For example, the PB discussed Southeast Asia on April 4, paying particular attention to Malaya and South Vietnam. They had received the Progress Report on NSC 5405 (including an Indochina supplement on the developments of March 25) for reference purposes. The PB agreed that it needed more background information in order to properly consider the subject. It was, therefore,

8 OCB Status Report, March 29, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. As an example, Max W. Bishop mentioned that several offices, including “one or more of the geographic bureaus”, would have a definite interest in all of the OCB Progress Reports. Bishop’s memorandum to Young, April 19, 1955, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 4, OCB Working Group on Indochina – 1955, RG 59, NA. Already by April 1956, Secretary Dulles was becoming tired of his staff’s preoccupation with the NSC-OCB machinery. See the sub-section “Advising the President” and Oikarinen, *The Middle East in the American Quest for World Order*, 1999, pp. 19–20.

9 Collins recommended that a new government be formed with Tran Van Do or Quat as President. He also believed that Bao Dai could return to press Diem to broaden the base of his government or the Emperor would assume the presidency, with the retention of Diem as Premier. Collins’s cable to Secretary Dulles, March 31, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 168–171.

10 Memorandum of telephone conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, April 1, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 175–176. Robertson and Young were also present at the meeting. Mansfield’s memorandum of the conversation for the record, April 1, 1955, *ibid.*, Volume I, pp. 176–177. Collins complained on April 4 that the decision process to back up Diem had gone up to a “point of no return”. In other words, Collins asserted, Diem would have to either succeed or the US policy toward South Vietnam would fail. Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, pp. 127–147. The article in question is almost identical to Anderson’s book *Trapped by Success*, chapter 5, “The Collins Mission and Washington’s ‘Point of No Return,’” pp. 91–119; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 46–47.

Colonel (later Brigadier General) Edward G. Lansdale (second from left) was a mysterious anti-guerilla operative who had authorization from the highest level in Washington. He was trusted by the Dulles brothers. Lansdale implemented NSC-approved programs, and had field experience from the Philippines and Vietnam. His suggestions were carefully read by the NSC officials, and in January 1957 he received the Distinguished Service Medal for his achievements in Vietnam. Here Lansdale is seen with CIA Director Allen W. Dulles (first on left), Deputy Director General Charles P. Cabell (second from right) and USAF Chief of Staff General Nathan F. Twining (on the right, in a suit). All three were involved in NSC work. Allen W. Dulles, and Cabell in his absence, delivered “Significant World Events Affecting U.S. Security” briefings at Council meetings reflecting the conclusions of the national intelligence estimates. (National Archives)



directed that State, Pentagon and FOA members would prepare brief reports on the political, military and economic problems of the area.¹¹ This in part answers the question put by Burke and Greenstein.¹² The information may not, however, have been vigorously gathered, but was instead simply acquired from various sources for the use of the NSC machinery.

The change in characters did not affect the basic functioning of the Council. At the April 7 Council meeting, General Charles P. Cabell, who was Allen W. Dulles's alternate, informed the participants that a seven-day extension of the truce between Diem and the sects was now in effect. He added that the French were still reluctant to support Diem. The newly-appointed Special Assistant, Dillon Anderson, then asked Secretary Dulles to elaborate on the situation in Saigon. Dulles referred to it as being "extremely critical". He added that initially the French had even suggested that Bao Dai should call the parties to Cannes for negotiations. This would have been problematic because of the close ties between the Emperor and the Binh Xuyen "gangster group, who controlled the brothels and gambling houses in Saigon", Dulles asserted. The Secretary was

11 Record of meeting of the PB, April 4, 1955, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting, RG 273, NA.

12 Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 59–60.

disappointed that the French had prevented Diem from using the ARVN against the sects to “subdue them”. This was regrettable, Dulles went on, as the principal mission of the ARVN was to maintain internal security. As a result of the present situation, the US would have “to reconsider its whole policy toward Free Vietnam”, he added. “Unfortunately for such reconsideration”, the Secretary concluded, “there were no very good alternative policies in sight”. The nature of the NSC meeting of April 7 was again purely informative.¹³

Indeed, Collins’s suggestions caused Dulles and Eisenhower to consider sending a cable to Collins which would have “authorized [him] to acquiesce in plans for his [Diem’s] replacement” under certain conditions. In discussing the draft telegram, Eisenhower insisted “that these conditions should be stiffened up” with a sentence referring “to the importance of a more clear cut understanding with the French”. The President also emphasized that the notion that the police would be taken over from the Binh Xuyen should be added to the text. Other changes made by Eisenhower were minor in nature. For example, he replaced the words “considered judgement” with a more diplomatic “reiterated conviction” in referring to Collins’s recommendations. However, the President, after making a few corrections to the cables, authorized the Secretary of State to revise the cable further on the basis of the previous discussion.¹⁴ It thus seems that Eisenhower was well in touch with the situation and also in control of it.

The top US leadership used various types of justification for their policies. In explaining the US position on Diem to the French, Secretary Dulles said that there were influential supporters of Diem in Congress. The Secretary referred

13 Memorandum of Discussion of the 244th Meeting of the NSC, April 7, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 212–214; OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, March 25, 1955, Documents of the National Security Council, 1st Supplement, Microfilm reel II. A few days after the street fighting episode in Saigon, Generals Collins and Ely favored the ousting of Diem because he lacked the necessary leadership qualities or creative thinking to be able to defeat the opposing forces. Collins reminded Washington that Diem was not irreplaceable. The US programs could “still be made effective”, Collins concluded, provided there was a “proper native leadership”. Collins’s cable to Dulles, April 7, 1954, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 894–906; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 218–221. See also Collins’s cable to Dulles, April 10, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 231–235. Young met with Mansfield to tell him about Collins’s suggestions. The Senator replied that the US should continue its support to Diem because without him Ho Chi Minh would emerge as the only national leader in the whole of Vietnam. In addition, it would “have a very bad wide-spread effect on United States prestige in Asia”. Furthermore, it would be harmful to South Vietnam at the Bandung Conference later that month. Young’s memorandum of the conversation between himself and Mansfield, April 8, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 221–222. Secretary Dulles and the State Department officials objected to the Bandung conference because they knew that it would have an effect on the pre-eminence of the Western nations in the international system. Fraser, Cary, “Crossing the Color Line in Little Rock: The Eisenhower Administration and the Dilemma of Race for U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 24 (Spring 2000), pp. 242–243. Neither of the two Vietnams participated in the Bandung Conference.

14 Memorandum of discussion between Eisenhower and Dulles, April 11, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda series, Chronological subseries, Box 3, DDEL. Draft cables from Dulles to Collins (2), April 11, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 236–237, *ibid.*, p. 236, footnotes 3–6. About the drafting of the cables and discussion of the matter with Congressmen, see the memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and Robertson, April 11, 1955, *ibid.*, p. 237, footnote 1; John Foster Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversation series, Box 5, DDEL.

specifically to Senator Mansfield, who had “felt strongly” that there was nobody to replace the Premier.¹⁵ Young later revealed that the Eisenhower Administration deliberately used Senator Mansfield’s views to justify their own policy. Gibbons has come to a similar conclusion in his study on the interplay between the Legislative and Executive Branches in the Vietnam question.¹⁶

Secretary Dulles guarded his own position jealously. A feud had developed between Secretary of State Dulles and General Collins. On April 11, Dulles confided to his brother, also an NSC principal, by noting in a disappointing tone on the telephone that “the rug is coming out from under the fellow in Southeast Asia”. He was going to discuss the matter at lunch with the President, but predicted that there would be a substitute for Diem as Collins had suggested. The CIA Director replied that he could “adjust things and will look into it”. The brothers both still wished to “hold on to him [Diem]” and thought that the sects would win. Anderson asserts that Eisenhower listened to both Collins and Dulles, and that he did not prevent the latter from sending instructions to the former. The State Department tried to persuade Collins to change his mind. The President, acting as a referee, wanted to put an end to the struggle by calling Collins to Washington on April 16. Gibbons argues that Eisenhower did indeed agree with Collins.¹⁷

Important issues were publicized by the Eisenhower Administration. On April 17, Secretary Dulles announced that the Diem Government needed to achieve national unity. The difficult situation, Dulles added, was not unprecedented or insoluble. He said there was no need for despair. Young supported Dulles’s views. He was certain of Diem’s capabilities. In addition, in the *New York Times* on April 18 Cyrus L. Sulzberger claimed that Collins had given in to the French pressures and had joined Ely in demanding the ousting of Diem. The

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15 Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and French Ambassador Couve de Murville, April 11, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 238–239.

16 Young quoted in Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, p. 118; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 287.

17 Memorandum of telephone conversation between John Foster and Allen Dulles, April 11, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversations series, Box 3, DDEL; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 235; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 106. On April 11, for example, Dulles asked Collins when the final decision was required and argued that in Washington “it is strongly felt” that there was time to make the decision. In any case, in contrast to Collins’s suggestions, the Secretary suggested that a “transitional arrangement be envisaged which, if possible, would retain Diem in some general capacity” in the new government “to make use of his good qualities and general standing as a Nationalist”. Dulles doubted whether there was as much opposition to Diem in South Vietnam as Collins had indicated. But, if that proved to be the case, Dulles concluded, “then the conditions for change would be less harmful to our position in Asia”. Dulles’s cable to Collins, April 11, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 239–241. Even though Young is referred to as the drafter of the above-mentioned cable, the editors of the FRUS conclude there is evidence that it “was discussed at a much higher level”. The editors point out, however, that Young did not support replacing Diem. Young called Collins’s recommendation a “black-white formula” and wrote that there would be “several intermediary combinations worth exploring”. According to the FRUS editors, there were in fact two draft cables. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240, footnote 1. See also Young’s memorandum to Robertson, April 11, 1955, Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/4–1155, RG 59, NA; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 295–296.

overthrow of Diem, Sulzberger concluded, would harm Franco-American relations and therefore it would be an embarrassment.¹⁸

Consideration of the issue of South Vietnam was conducted by a wide range of officials within the framework of the NSC-OCB machinery. Because of the confusing situation in South Vietnam, Secretary Dulles wrote a letter to Collins commenting that Diem had actually been picked by the French. The Secretary of State explained that the US had backed Diem completely for the simple reason that there were no alternatives in sight and “because no one can survive without wholehearted backing”. He added that the whole Saigon crisis had been a truly interdepartmental affair and consumed a lot of the time of the officials representing the various departments and agencies. Dulles, whose role appears to have been central, wrote that:

“Mr. [Herbert of the OCB] Hoover is fully aware of our thinking and while Walter Robertson is unfortunately also away, others have been sitting in on all the talks. Also, of course, [the] CIA has a big and helpful interest in the situation, as do the Defense people.”¹⁹

According to the recollections of the former Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Anderson, Secretary Dulles was advised by Radford and Robertson to take “a more active role” in South Vietnam.²⁰

During the heated debate on Diem’s future, the Defense Department passed its conclusions on the US policy toward South Vietnam on to the State Department. The Pentagon planners recommended that there should additional military aid programs in Southeast Asia, especially in the neighboring countries of Vietnam, and that they should determine the possible military contingencies within the SEATO framework in case South Vietnam was lost. The French attitude and Bao Dai’s power were interfering with the successful implementation of the US programs. The French should, therefore, be persuaded to change their position and the State Department should immediately deal with the Bao Dai question. The Pentagon planners supported Collins’s views on replacing Diem, but they added that there would have to be a solution on the sects and Binh Xuyen issues. Elections would have to be prevented as South Vietnam could not win.²¹

18 Dulles’s statement on recent developments in foreign relations, April 17, 1955, DSB, May 2, 1955, p. 727; New York Times, April 18, 1955; also quoted in Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administrations’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, pp. 136–137.

19 Dulles’s letter to Collins, April 20, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, Subject series, Box 9, Indochina June 1954–April 1956, DDEL. CIA’s Bissell, Jr. later admitted that “our Agency was very deeply involved at that point in what was going on in the south”. Richard M. Bissell, Jr. Oral History, PUL.

20 Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, DDEL.

21 Pentagon Staff study titled “Programs for the Implementation of U.S. Policy Towards South Viet-Nam,” undated, as an attachment to Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Hensel’s letter to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Robertson, April 22, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 31, DDEL; USVNR, Book 10, p. 923–927; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 277–280. See also USVNR, Book 10, pp. 927–936.

In contrast to the wishes of Secretary Dulles, Collins, who was in Washington, attempted to persuade Eisenhower and Dulles to consider replacing Diem by Quat or Tran Van Do, both of whom were known figures in Vietnamese political life. Collins met the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina and representatives from the State and Defense Departments and the CIA. The General assured Eisenhower that there would be no progress in South Vietnam as long as Diem remained in power. He commented that frequently “Diem had been persuaded at only the last minute not to do some utterly foolish thing”. In reply to Eisenhower’s question about whether Diem’s difficulties had been caused by “French undermining”, Collins answered, to Dillon Anderson’s surprise, in the negative. It seemed apparent that “the President had received inadequate and inaccurate intelligence”, Collins added, and that “he did not wish this repeated outside of the room”. At the close of the meeting, Eisenhower asked Collins for concrete advice about what to do. Collins answered that his suggestions did not guarantee success. However, they decided that the State should study the issues further “and that Mansfield would be asked in”. Dillon Anderson’s memorandum of the conversation (declassified in June 1995) reveals that Collins referred – like so many members of the NSC-OCB machinery – to the poor quality of intelligence. He had commented that he believed “that the majority of our intelligence had come from the Palace [Lansdale], and that either the source or the evaluation of the intelligence had not been good”. Furthermore, Anderson’s memorandum of the informal meeting ends with the sentence: “I would say that the session amounted to a mere reporting to the President of the state of affairs, and that no decisions were made”.²²

The President evidently agreed with Collins. He explained to the Congressional leaders that Collins did not believe in the future of Diem, “the man we had backed to bring order” to South Vietnam, who was losing support. Eisenhower continued that his Administration furnished Collins with “what advice we could” and then left Collins the task of improvising in order to

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22 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 295–296; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 233; Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, p. 145; Collins’s cable to Dulles, April 19, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 918–922; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 268–270; Vice Admiral Davis’s memorandum of conversation to Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Hensel, April 25, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 937–940; Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Collins, April 23, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 280–284; Dillon Anderson’s memorandum for the record, April 22, 1955 (only three copies were made), WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 11, Indochina 1954, DDEL. In an interview in 1969, Dillon Anderson still recalled that Lansdale “was most helpful in getting access to the things we needed to know, other than the ones that were snowed up for us”. Anderson adds that when asked by him Lansdale actually facilitated many things by doing “his behind-the-scenes work”. Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, DDEL. Hoover, Jr. wrote to Dulles about the luncheon attended by Eisenhower and Collins on April 22 that “no decisions were made” and that the whole issue was left for the State Department and the the Secretary of State to consider. Hoover, Jr.’s memorandum to Dulles, April 23, 1955. Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/4-2355, RG 59, NA. For general information about Collins’s visit (April 21–28) to Washington, see Young’s memorandum to Robertson, April 30, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 337–339.

“manage the situation”. Diem was, however, the President pointed out, “a real nationalist”, and recognition of him proved that the US was not associated with colonialism.²³

Even though Collins had been unhappy with a single source of intelligence, the new NIE seemed to support his conclusions. The intelligence estimate of April 26 concluded that almost all factors spoke for the immediate replacement of Diem. The options, according to the intelligence sources, were support for Diem for the time being or his dismissal by Bao Dai. The Premier would obey the Emperor and resign if he heard about the cancellation of US aid, the intelligence community predicted. The State Department also made preparations for the replacement of Diem in cooperation with the French. If the French had joined the Americans in the first place, the Americans would have insisted that the new government in South Vietnam would have to be nationalist in orientation, Binh Xuyen would have to be “brought to line” and removed from his policing functions, Bao Dai would have to support the cabinet and there would have to be an attempt “to find some important and useful role for Diem”.²⁴

The preparations always left the door open for Diem. Despite the French requests, Secretary Dulles systematically refused to consider the overthrow of Diem or put a time limit on it, as he wrote to Collins later. But on April 27, after having met the Republican members of the SFRC, Dulles considered replacing Diem, providing that he could discover the French plans for the future. Dulles dispatched three cables to Saigon in which he ordered preparations to start for the ousting of Diem.²⁵

Meanwhile, in Saigon, Diem had told Lansdale on April 27 that he had virtually stabilized the situation, including taking over control of the national police.²⁶ Consideration of the situation took place on an informal basis via telephone among the NSC principals. Secretary Dulles talked with his brother on the morning of April 28 and said that he had asked Hoover Jr. “to send a cable

23 Assitant Staff Secretary Minnich, Jr’s supplementary notes on the legislative leadership meeting, April 26, 1955, AWF, Legislative Meetings series, Box 1, DDEL.

24 NIE, “Probable Developments in South Vietnam,” April 26, 1955, CIA Research Reports, Microfilm reel III; Dulles’s cables (2) to Dillon (drafted by Young), April 27, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 294–296, 297–298. Two weeks earlier, the State Department had inquired about the French position on a possible new government in Saigon. See Dulles’s cable to Dillon (drafted by Bowie and Young), April 12, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

25 Dulles’s cable to Collins, May 19, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 416–418; Dulles’s cable to Dillon, April 28, May 19, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 312–314. Gibbons has found that the Secretary of State met the members of the SFRC at his house in order to avoid publicity. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 296–297; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 233; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973, p. 259; Dulles’s cables (3) to Dillon, April 27, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 294–296, 297–298, 299; USVNR, Book 10, p. 945. Cables 3828 and 3829 were sent simultaneously to Saigon and Paris. The team drafting them consisted of the Dulles brothers, Collins, Young, Mansfield, and Paul J. Sturim, who had been a Consul in Hanoi until October 1954. Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, p. 138.

26 Kidder’s cable to American Embassy in London, April 27, 1955, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 32, DDEL.

to block the cables” which had been despatched to Saigon and Paris. According to the latest reports of the street-fighting in Saigon, Allen Dulles spoke about the mortar shelling on the Presidential Palace by the Binh Xuyen. The CIA Director said he wished he could “have it pulled together for” the Council meeting. The Secretary replied that the incidents in Saigon would not require that “we should hold up our planning”. Allen Dulles argued that “it takes us off the hook” and added that the replacement for Diem could be needed in order to cope with a potential civil war. Next, the Secretary spoke with Collins, who was to appear before the NSC later that day, and told him about the cable which was to prevent action until there was more information. Secretary Dulles admitted that he was not sure “if Diem is losing control or possibly emerging a hero”. According to the latest reports, Dulles added, the ARVN would be under Diem.²⁷

The CIA Director repeated his information to the full NSC. He reported on the street-fighting in Saigon. Reports of the events, Allen Dulles explained, were conflicting. The CIA Director could not tell who was to blame, but he added that Diem had ordered his troops to take action against the Binh Xuyen. Allen Dulles feared that a civil war could break out and that the French nationals could be threatened by the hostilities in Saigon. In any case, Allen Dulles added, Diem was going to appoint a new government later that same day. After the briefing, Eisenhower asked Collins if Ely and the FEC would take action against the ARVN. Collins did not think they would.²⁸

Dillon Anderson then went through NSC 5429/5 as he wanted to redirect the discussion toward the proposed Council Action, which had been drafted at the

27 Collins was summoned to the NSC at 11 a.m. Secretary Dulles suggested that Collins should talk to Hoover and other State Department officials. The two were to meet later; Dulles said “it might be better to put off the meeting until 12”, after the NSC. Memoranda of telephone conversations between the Dulles brothers and Secretary Dulles and Collins, April 28, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversation series, Box 3, DDEL; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 301, footnote 1. The cable to delay action read that the “Secretary requests addressees take no action whatsoever...until further instructions” and Bao Dai be urged “not to take irrevocable action until we have completed urgent consideration”. The circulation of the information was also ordered to be kept “strictly limited to fewest”. Dulles’s cable to Paris, April 27, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 301.

28 Paul J. Sturm of the State Department accompanied General Collins and Kermit Roosevelt of the CIA accompanied Allen Dulles. All four entered the Cabinet Room as the Council was about to start discussing the latest developments in South Vietnam. Memorandum of Discussion of the 246th Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 307–308. Lansdale had sent cables to Washington arguing that Diem had the best chance of victory. On the evening of April 27, the SMM was requested to produce a more detailed estimate of the events in Saigon to be used at the NSC meeting of the following day. In it, Lansdale wrote that Diem was not in control, because of the French influence. *Ibid.*, editorial note, pp. 301–303; The Secretary of State’s Deputy Special Assistant for Intelligence Fisher Howe quoted Kenneth Young, who believed that the reason for Lansdale’s strong support for Diem was a result of the fact that he did not know of the Bao Dai solution. Lansdale reported the rumors that US support for Diem was being reconsidered and therefore the Colonel had sent on April 27 “a flood of reports and recommendations”. The reports, Howe went on, had resulted in a telephone “circus” between the Dulles brothers, Hoover, Jr., George E. Aurell, Kermit Roosevelt (who was acting for Wisner) and Young and the cable to cancel the cable which gave permission for replace Diem. Howe added that Bao Dai’s actions and Diem’s obedience was another question. Howe’s memorandum to Secretary Dulles, April 28, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 305–306; For Lansdale’s own account see *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, pp. 282–291.

State Department and then handed out by Executive Secretary Lay, Jr. Secretary Dulles explained that the basic difference was that the action of January envisioned Diem's Government as the one which the US should back. He recommended that it be adopted instead of the action three months earlier. The Secretary commented that Diem was very suspicious and was not supported by the French. These two "fundamental limitations" had caused the crisis and had also caused Collins to suggest the replacement. Dulles added that the French had been told that Diem was not the only possible or acceptable Premier as far as the US was concerned. He then talked about the preparations being made to replace Diem and the current pause to see whether Diem would be overthrown or whether he would win. As for Quat or Do as alternatives to Diem, Dulles revealed that he had not been "much impressed" by Do. The Secretary concluded that there was a possibility that Bao Dai could, despite opposition from the US, himself form a new government. This, Dulles said, would mean that the US would have to "work with him and through him to some extent", at least for a while, because the Emperor was, in fact, currently "the only existing source of legitimate power" in Vietnam.²⁹

At the request of Secretary Dulles, Collins began his presentation. He reiterated his views on the future of South Vietnam. After concluding, Collins, who had not forgotten his earlier conviction, stated that he thought Diem would have to go. For Collins, Diem was not "indispensable man". And with Diem gone, Collins, added, the program adopted by the NSC "could and should go forward without interruption". The General pointed out that it would require 40 million dollars' worth of extra funding, but that "this policy and program was a gamble worth taking". The sects question would have to be dealt with, the control of the police would have to be taken away from the Binh Xuyen, and French support for the US policies would have to be secured, Collins concluded in his report.³⁰

Eisenhower emphasized "that it was an absolute sine qua non of success" that the ARVN should crush the Binh Xuyen if any South Vietnamese government was going to stay in power. Collins replied that a political solution would be preferable as the military action against the Binh Xuyen would lead to civil war. In reply to Secretary Humphrey's question on the Vietminh influence behind the unrest in Saigon, Collins said that this was apparent. After Dillon Anderson had gone through the proposed Record of Action, Eisenhower inquired whether anyone objected. As no one spoke up, he remarked that it "sounded

29 In referring to Bao Dai as the head of state, Dulles pointed out that the US would have to cooperate with the Emperor "until we are in a position to devise some alternative source of authority". Memorandum of Discussion of the 246th Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 308-310.

30 Collins reiterated that the future of South Vietnam depended on five major factors. He had presented his views to the Council before going to Saigon. They included a possible attack by the Vietminh, the loyalty of the ARVN to Diem, the sects question, the French attitude and the personality of Diem. Memorandum of Discussion of the 246th Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 310-311.

right to him, and that he could not see what else we could do at this time". At the end of the discussion, the CIA Director said that there had been reports about "considerable difficulties" in North Vietnam.³¹

The Council agreed to continue assisting South Vietnam. The NSC recognized that there could be a new government in the country and that the developments there would have to be carefully monitored. The NSC decided to try to persuade the French "to provide more effective support for" the South Vietnamese government. In addition, US programs would have to be continued "for the time being", but kept under review.³²

Diem had supporters, like Young, within the NSC-OCB machinery. On April 29, Young forwarded a message to Secretary Dulles from the Chief of Vietnamese military intelligence, who had requested it be "transmitted to [the] highest American authorities". Young suggested it could be regarded "as an informal but attempted communication" between the two Governments. The message read that Diem had made a decision to "destroy all rebels supported by the French" and that the Binh Xuyen were "being defeated [as] quickly as possible". Bao Dai had ordered Diem and Chief of Staff Le Van Ty to Cannes for consultations. Diem, the message revealed, had decided to disobey the Emperor and had asked for support for his decision.³³

The truce between Diem's forces and the Binh Xuyen ended simultaneously with the sending of the cables. The first clashes took place in the streets of Saigon. The French blamed the government troops for starting the fighting. Lansdale succeeded in reassuring Secretary Dulles that it was the Binh Xuyen who had violated the cease-fire. Diem, who had heard about Lansdale's cable, summoned Lansdale to the Palace. According to Lansdale's memoirs, Diem had not revealed the source of his information. He also tried to convince the staff of

31 Memorandum of Discussion of the 246th Meeting of the NSC, April 28, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 311.

32 The NSC Action was approved by the President and it superseded NSC Action No. 1316-b. NSC Record of Action No. 1389, April 28, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 1, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 312. The State Department sent instructions about putting pressure on the French to its Embassy in Paris. Young drafted the cable and the Secretary of State cleared it for substance. The cable said that "considerable concern [was] felt in all quarters in Washington and we must re-examine our policies". Dulles's cable to Dillon, April 28, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 312-314.

33 If Bao Dai dismissed Diem, he was ready, according to the message, to begin armed resistance against the Emperor and the French. Young's memorandum to Dulles, April 29, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 314-315. The following day Young reported to Robertson on Collins's visit and the events leading to the idea of replacing Diem. Young complained that neither Hoye nor himself were invited to a long luncheon meeting at which the decision was made. In addition to Collins, Sturm did not listen to propositions by Young and the State Department officer in charge of Indochinese Affairs, Robert E. Hoye, "to keep Diem as head of a coalition government". Senator Mansfield had stated that with Diem gone he would make sure that all except the humanitarian US aid to South Vietnam would be discontinued. There was more support for Diem in Congress. Young described the situation as being "bewildering and fluid". He "believed more strongly than ever" in Diem's future. Young ended his report by quoting the latest information from Saigon that a change of government at that moment "could result in chaos". Young's memorandum to Robertson, April 30, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 945-947; FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 337-339. For Collins's positive appraisal of the performance of Sturm, see Collins's letter to Secretary Dulles, May 14, 1955. John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 99, PUL.

the US Embassy that Diem was defeating the Binh Xuyen. Chief MAAG, General O'Daniel took Lansdale's words seriously: he went out into the streets to boost the morale of the government forces. Lansdale, who was disappointed at the diplomats, sent his own cable to Secretary Dulles. The message was delivered to Dulles during a dinner party. On receiving it, Dulles immediately left to see Eisenhower, who took the decision to support Diem. Anderson points out that Lansdale's role remains mysterious. Chester L. Cooper, who had worked for the CIA, wrote, that the CIA's task was to assist Diem in forming the basis of a government which could have been strong enough to struggle against North Vietnam. According to Cooper, Lansdale was a key figure in consolidating Diem's power.³⁴ Lansdale most likely had some kind of influence on the Dulles brothers and further on the NSC machinery producing the US policy on Diem and South Vietnam. The direct channel worked effectively both ways. Thanks to Secretary Dulles and Director Dulles – and with the help of such officials as Lansdale and Young – Diem's tenure was extended.

David L. Anderson discovered that, unlike the NSC deliberations on Dien Bien Phu, the discussions on the Diem issue “did not directly engage the president”.³⁵ In comparison to the spring of 1954, this is partly true. Eisenhower was sometimes absent, but still he continued to maintain control over the NSC process and asking questions. He also mediated between Secretary Dulles and Collins. Other features of multiple advocacy were also in place. The NSC members were committed even though their analytical resources were clearly reduced by the quality of the information. Hence, they did not advocate a wide range of options. There also appears to have been a trend toward some sort of consensus on the question of Diem. However, a sufficient period of time had been available and more was secured by the postponement of the cable to replace Diem. Collins offered an “outsider's” view and Dillon Anderson appears to have performed the dual tasks of custodian-manager without serious problems.

34 Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, pp. 282–300; Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, pp. 123–124. Lansdale writes about just one cable (April 28), which was to be a counterbalance to the pessimistic appraisals of the situation by the Embassy Staff. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972, p. 289. The Deputy Special Assistant of Intelligence Fisher Howe reveals, that Lansdale had sent a flood of messages at the height of the crisis in Saigon. Howe's memorandum to Dulles, April 28, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 305–306, FRUS includes only a portion of one cable. *Ibid.*, pp. 301–303. According to General Collins, Lansdale was Allen Dulles's personal representative in Saigon, who had direct connections to Washington. Also, then USOM Director Leland Barrows maintains, that Lansdale had secret channels for sending information to the Dulles brothers at the height of the crisis. Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration's ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, pp. 140–141; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 112–113. For accounts of Lansdale's activities during the crisis in Saigon see Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, pp. 122–124; Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 1988, pp. 174–177; Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 129.

35 After the decision to back Diem, the US had to persuade the French to accept it. Anderson, David L., “Dwight D. Eisenhower and Wholehearted Support of Ngo Dinh Diem,” in *Shadow on the White House*. Ed. Anderson, 1993, p. 51. Alexander has paraphrased that the US policy “was to ‘sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem’”. Alexander, Charles C., *Holding the Line: The Eisenhower Era 1952–1961* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 84. See also chapter 4 under the same heading, in Poole, Peter A., *Eight Presidents and Indochina* (Huntington: Krieger, 1978), pp. 37–49.

Because of the multiple advocacy procedures, there seem not to have been major malfunctions of the advisory process.

Covert operations were a standard means of implementing NSC policies. A CIA-contracted SMM, headed by Lansdale, worked under the disguise of MAAG and in close cooperation with the USIA. It had been carrying out paramilitary and psychological warfare operations in Vietnam since June 1954. The SMM operated by training and equipping selected South Vietnamese for sabotage missions against the Vietminh in North Vietnam. The CIA-owned CAT³⁶ had asked the SMM to obtain a contract for it from the French for an airlift to fly refugees from the north. As a counterfavor, CAT offered its services for transporting paramilitary groups to North Vietnam.³⁷ One SMM propaganda leaflet found its way into the hands of the correspondent Joseph Alsop, who believed every word of it and subsequently wrote several sensational articles. The CIA did not attempt to reveal that it had been a scam.³⁸

Collins's views had been carefully studied within the OCB. The representatives of the Board, however, supported the thinking of Secretary Dulles. Young, who was the Acting Head of the State Department's Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian affairs and also the Special Working Group Chairman, wrote at the end of April to Assistant Secretary Robertson that none of the members of the Indochina Working Group favored Collins's views on the new courses of action with respect to South Vietnam. For Young, it was negative that Collins's prestige and confidence had raised the status of his recommendations. In addition, Collins had been summoned to the White House immediately upon his arrival in Washington. Young's Special Working Group scarcely reported on South Vietnam during April as if they were awaiting for a result and thus freezing any implementation.³⁹

When Diem had emerged as a hero and thus restored US confidence, Secretary Dulles cabled to US Embassies in Paris and Saigon that the people of the United States objected to the replacement of Diem at that moment. Encouraged by Diem's military success and aware of the pro-Diem sentiment in Congress,

36 Some CAT pilots were military aviators with the task of getting acquainted with the situation in case the US decided to intervene. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, 1966, p. 241. See also Marchetti and Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, 1975, pp. 137–152 and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 38.

37 "Report of SMM's Activities between June 1954 and April 1955," PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 573ff.

38 Marchetti and Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, 1975, p. 164.

39 Young's memorandum to Robertson, April 30, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 337–339. See also OCB Status Reports, April 5, 12, 19 and 26 and May 3, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. In connection with NSC 5405 the Board monitored, even though this was under the jurisdiction of the OCB Working Group on NSC 5405, the attempts to repatriate Vietnamese refugees from northeastern Thailand to Haiphong area. See OCB Status Reports, April 5 and 19 and May 3, 1955. *Ibid.* The Working Group members assumed that those to be repatriated were "Communists or Communist sympathizers" and therefore they would have to go to North Vietnam. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, April 19, 1955 (held on April 18), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

on May 1 Dulles cancelled the cable of April 27. Dulles saw Diem as a symbol of Vietnamese nationalism, who had fought against French colonialism and against corrupt forces. The Secretary gave Collins instructions to indicate to Diem that the US supported him and that he should “continue [a] policy of restraint and moderation toward [the] French”. The General was also to ask the French not to interfere.⁴⁰

Consolidation of Power

The intelligence community did not confirm the chosen policy. A SNIE, which was issued on May 2, described the situation in South Vietnam as “potentially revolutionary” and “extremely fluid”. The estimate portrayed Diem as having enhanced his popular appeal through of his action against the Binh Xuyen. The Premier had acted in an anti-French manner and challenged Bao Dai. Furthermore, the SNIE continued, Diem’s followers would initiate armed resistance. The intelligence sources assumed that the US would not end its support for Diem and that with French concurrence “the situation will stabilize in Saigon under Diem’s control”. However, Diem would be facing many problems. The Binh Xuyen would shrink to a small group of bandits. The Vietminh would try to take advantage of the situation and agitate it into a state of chaos. The SNIE also anticipated that the Premier would have had a fair chance of stabilizing the situation, but he would no longer resign. The Communists would, however, pose a long-term threat to South Vietnam, the SNIE concluded.⁴¹

More support for Diem came from Congress. Senator Mansfield repeated the conclusions of his report of October 15 by saying that if Diem were pressured into resigning, the US would terminate all aid to South Vietnam except that of a humanitarian nature. According to Mansfield, Diem was definitely worth supporting. If Eisenhower and Dulles wanted to change the direction of the policy, it would be their own responsibility, Mansfield stated. He added that grave consequences would follow from supporting Diem’s opponents. Senator Hubert Humphrey also backed Diem.⁴²

Meanwhile, in Washington, the reporter Joseph Alsop, who had come across the SMM leaflet, criticized the NSC for making wrong decisions in his article

40 Dulles referred to the situation as “fast-moving”. The tone of his cable to Collins was polite. Dulles’s cable to Collins (drafted by Young), May 1, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 344–345; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 297; Anderson, “J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Point of No Return’ in Vietnam,” 1988, p. 142. The Saigon Embassy burnt the first cable after the arrival of its replacement, PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 234.

41 SNIE-63.1-21-55, “The Current Saigon Crisis,” May 2, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 955–958; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 346–350. The estimate had been completed a week earlier. While the Dulles brothers were discussing the SNIE, Allen said that the US could not wait for many weeks as Diem was “losing strength”. Memorandum of telephone conversation between the Dulles brothers, April 25, 1955, *ibid.*, p. 346, footnote 1; John Foster Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversations series, Box 3, DDEL.

42 CR, May 2, 1955, pp. 5288–5291. Young had written to Robertson that the administration would have to take Mansfield’s suggestions into consideration. His own opinion was to stay behind Diem. Young’s memorandum to Robertson, April 30, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 337–339.

“Tokyo Depends on Saigon”. Alsop wrote about a new US policy toward Japan which had been “laid down by the NSC”. According to Alsop, the Japanese-American alliance had been taken for granted by “our highest policymakers”, despite the fact that reports from Tokyo advised that they should adopt another course:

“...the complacency and lack of political realism in present day Washington is such that the National Security Council’s first assumption has only been diluted rather than corrected.”

Alsop argued that the defense strategy of the United States was “in peril”, which meant that Japan or Formosa were not the key issues, and that the indirect threat in Southeast Asia was alarming. The Domino analogy had been “officially frowned upon in Washington”, but, Alsop continued, it was “still correct”, and if the Communist advance was not stopped in Southeast Asia, Tokyo might well soon depend on Saigon.⁴³

In the exchanges of views between Secretary Dulles and Collins it was evident that the US policy maintained freedom of action in the spirit of the Eisenhower letter of October 23, 1954. However, Collins called for cooperation between the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese. If this did not work, Collins continued, the United States should stop wasting its money. Secretary Dulles replied that internal politics should be left to the South Vietnamese. He pointed out that Bao Dai was “truly unpopular” among the Americans. Dulles confessed that he would prefer legitimate methods to be used in forming governments. Nevertheless, he added, “we must keep flexibility and not become publicly committed”. He also emphasized “adjustment” to the evolving situation. The continuance of US support would depend upon the performance of the Vietnamese nationalists, the Secretary wrote.⁴⁴

It had become clear that the US policy had been finalized for the time being and, therefore, on May 5 the NSC did not discuss the situation in South Vietnam. Allen Dulles, however, briefed the Council on the issue. The CIA Director reported about Diem’s success against the Binh Xuyen, which “had largely been driven from Saigon”. Nixon interrupted Allen Dulles to inquire whether the Binh Xuyen were nationalists. Dulles did not rule out Communist influences. The CIA Director could not answer a question put by the President as to whether Diem had attempted to form a coalition government including Quat or Do. There were considerable difficulties in going underground as the “ground was nothing but mud”. Diem, Allen Dulles estimated, would have a hard time extending control over the three nationalistic revolutionary groups.⁴⁵

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43 Alsop’s Matter of Fact column, Washington Post, May 4, 1955.

44 Collins’s cable to Dulles, May 5, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 969–970; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 362–368; Dulles’s cable to Collins (drafted by Young), May 5, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 368–369.

45 Memorandum of Discussion of the 247th Meeting of the NSC, May 5, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, editorial note, p. 369–370.

The potential problems associated with the speed of the take-over from the French in South Vietnam were recognized by the NSC machinery. The military representative on the PB, Bonesteel III, was active again and recommended on May 9 that the US should conclude an agreement with South Vietnam to protect French nationals in order to get the FEC to leave once and for all. This would help to get rid of the taint of colonialism, Bonesteel III wrote. In addition, the departure of the French would eliminate the danger that the French would make a deal with the Vietminh. Bonesteel III warned that

“a tacit assumption by the US of the support of Free Viet Nam might, of course, eventually involve us in a substantial commitment. However, this is by no means certain, and there is a real likelihood training, technical assistance and moderate aid will be all that is required.”

Furthermore, Bonesteel III argued, the US was already committed to the defense of South Vietnam under SEATO. The new initiative would be advantageous for the defense of Militant Liberty.⁴⁶

Following Bonesteel III's reasoning, the JCS suggested that Dulles should be told of Diem's promising prospects as he had succeeded in stabilizing the situation. The Chiefs agreed that in the absence of the FEC the US could not possibly guarantee the security of French nationals in South Vietnam. The decision to back Diem, JCS wrote, was plainly a political one. Hence, it would be decided upon by the President. Furthermore, the Chiefs argued that SEATO could offer South Vietnam the same kind of security as the FEC could. They also recommended that the present crisis in South Vietnam called for cooperation between the South Vietnamese, Americans and the French, a suggestion which had also been taken up by Collins. The talks about French or US withdrawal should only take place after the crisis had been resolved.⁴⁷ The Chiefs, whom Eisenhower trusted as his main military advisers, had agreed, as had the CIA, to support Diem, thus making the decision easy for the President.

When matters had finally fallen into their respective places, it was time for portions of the approved NSC policy to be made public. At his press conference of May 10, Eisenhower said that the US would assume the responsibility for

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46 Bonesteel III's memorandum to Secretary Wilson, May 9, 1955, Records of the JCS, Chair's File (Radford), Box 11, f: 091 Indo-China 1955, RG 218, NA; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, p. 975.

47 JCS's memorandum to Wilson, May 9, 1955 with a "Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee to the JCS on Indochina," dated May 9, 1955, as an enclosure, Records of the JCS, Chair's File (Radford), Box 11, f:091 Indo-China, RG 218, NA; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, pp. 971-973. JCS Hoover, Jr. reminded Dulles that it would take several months to evacuate FEC and that the South Vietnamese government would be able to demand the French should retain some elements of the FEC. Hoover, Jr's cable to Dulles, May 9, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 385-386. Young confided to the new US Ambassador, G. Frederick Reinhardt, that the US "ought to have a somewhat more definite attitude as to what we want the FEC to do, if anything". He favored a "gradual and steady reduction of the FEC" and the rest to be stationed near the border of North Vietnam. Young's letter to Reinhardt, June 2, 1955, *ibid.*, p. 428.

training the ARVN. This would take place, the President added, at the request of the South Vietnamese government and in accordance with the agreement between the US and French Governments.⁴⁸

In early May 1955, the firm stand of the US became known to the Western allies at a foreign ministerial conference held in Paris, whose participants were from France, the United States, and Great Britain. Although the French and the Americans had disagreements on many matters, Faure's Government had stated that France was willing to leave Indochina because the issue was causing problems in Franco-American relations. From Paris, Dulles wrote that Diem was the only means of saving South Vietnam from the revolutionary forces. On May 11, at the end of the meeting, Secretary Dulles said that the question of South Vietnam was not to be decided on in negotiations between the US and France. Instead, Dulles went on, both governments should from then on define their own political goals with respect to South Vietnam and act accordingly. He stressed that the time for a joint policy was over and that the US would work in South Vietnam alone, regardless of France. The reason for this, Dulles explained, was that South Vietnam was an independent and free nation which did not have a puppet regime. According to Dulles, Diem's Government was nationalist and as such it fulfilled the will of the people.⁴⁹

Policy guidance had to be forwarded to the field. Secretary Dulles sent instructions to the new Ambassador, G. Frederick Reinhardt, in Saigon. The Ambassador was to help Diem in strengthening and renewing his government. Dulles urged that those members of the staff of US Embassy should be changed who had had particularly close contacts with the French, such as Heath. The French, Dulles added, were not to be spoken about negatively. They had "renewed their intention to support Diem" but there had been a "general understanding" rather than any formal agreement. As far as Bao Dai was concerned, Dulles added, the Emperor could provide legitimacy.⁵⁰

The whole process had taken place so fast that the developments had to be explained to the Council members. At the Council meeting of May 19, Secretary Dulles predicted that the FEC would be phased out at well below the level of 75,000 men, as had been previously planned. In reply to Treasury Secretary Humphrey's question about Diem's chances of success, Secretary Dulles answered, that in light of the crisis, "it seemed likely at the present time". Diem, Dulles continued, had not stated that he was going to form a coalition government. In any case, the Secretary of State assured the NSC that "in the

48 Eisenhower's press conference, May 10, 1955, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1955, p. 316; also quoted in Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 146.

49 Edgar Faure's Government came to power in February 1955. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 1978, pp. 54–55; USVNR, Book 1, Part IV, A.3., pp. 36–37; Dulles' cable to Ambassador Reinhardt, May 12, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 405; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 183; Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, p. 35.

50 Dulles's cables to Reinhardt (2), May 12 and 19, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 405, pp. 416–418.

Orient” it was better to “work through a single head of government rather than through a coalition”. This had also been said to the French so that they would not pressure Diem into accepting a coalition in order to get “some of their own stooges”. Dulles went on to point out that there was still some bitterness and anti-American feeling in Saigon. Even though the French, who were gradually supporting Diem, had requested the US to have Diem obey the advice of the Americans, Dulles had refused such an action. David L. Anderson has figured out that this was the same argument that he had used with Faure earlier. According to Greene, “Dulles put a different slant on the Paris talks for various audiences in Washington”. Among the Council members, Greene explains, the Secretary of State “was reserved about the reorientation of American relations with Vietnam but expansive about his personal showdown with Faure”.⁵¹

With the decisions to support Diem and to supply direct aid having been made, the NSC machinery declined to consider any further options. Instead, actions in support of Diem’s position were deliberated. In order to assist the USOM in helping the Government of Diem, a group of social scientists from the MSUG were sent to South Vietnam under US Government (CIA) contract. The MSUG started its work on May 20, 1955. Its tasks were in the fields of public administration, legislation, and the economy, and to effect the reorganization and training of the police forces. The MSUG operated by giving material, training, and consultation. The bulk of its work concentrated on the National Institute of Administration (NIA), which was located in Saigon.⁵² The Eisenhower Administration had given its support to Diem. As late as May 23, 1955, however the INR still reported to Secretary Dulles about the whereabouts of Hinh and his contacts with the Hoa Hao generals.⁵³

The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina considered a wide range of questions. On May 23 it centered on mainly economic issues, including funds for the integration of the sect armies into the national army. The Special Working Group noted that Collins was urging the US to approve an additional

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- 51 Dulles explained that the reason for not working through a coalition government was that “various personal interests had to be submerged in a common loyalty”. In rebutting the French pleas to pressure Diem into being obedient, the Secretary of State said that it would be impossible. “If Diem were the kind of man who would do our bidding”, he added, “he would not be the kind of man who could do what was required to save the situation in Vietnam”. Memorandum of Discussion of the 249th Meeting of the NSC, May 19, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 119; Greene, “John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina,” 1992, p. 567.
 - 52 Scigliano and Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam*, 1965, passim; Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, 1953–66, 1966, p. 161; CR, April 21, 1955, pp. 4938–4939. The CIA connection of MSUG was revealed by the *Daily Telegraph* on April 15, 1966; also quoted in Duncanson, Dennis J., *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 280. See also Marchetti and Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, 1974, p. 234 and Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 75, 144–145.
 - 53 State Department’s Special Assistant for Intelligence, W. Park Armstrong, Jr.’s memorandum to Dulles, May 23, 1955, Records of the Department of State, Subject Files of INR 1945–1960, Lot 58 D 116, Box 11, RG 59, NA.

40 million dollars for completing of the integration and complete demobilization, in order to achieve a “resettlement of balance”. The US instructions to Saigon after discussions with the French urged for continued support of Diem and for the strengthening of his government “by inclusion of technically competent elements”. In addition, the development of electoral machinery and “suitable” representative processes was to be encouraged as well as free elections. Finally, the FEC would be withdrawn in stages as the capabilities of the Vietnamese army increased. The Status Report also took note that the resettlement of refugees from the north had been completed by May 18, 1955.⁵⁴

The OCB discussed the topic of cooperation among the nations in Mainland Southeast Asia on the basis of a paper which had been prepared from NSC 5405, NSC 5429/5 and NSC 5506 (“Asian Economic Assistance”). The Special Assistant, Dillon Anderson, called it “an excellent paper” which had been “extremely helpful in spelling out with concrete courses of action the sort of vague statements contained in NSC papers”. Hoover, Jr. replied that the PB could therefore particularize for the Board the ideas they had thought of when they had been as drafting some of the paragraphs. Most of the OCB members praised the paper, but the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew N. Overby, who was present for that item, said the term “regional interdependence” was misleading. Hoover, Jr. answered that he had checked with the Working Group Chairman that they did not envision any integration of the countries nor was there any idea of a supranational state. After Dillon Anderson had confirmed that the paper was totally consistent with NSC policies and that it did not conflict with the functions of the PB, the Board concurred in the paper. The minutes reveal that there was an “understanding that the courses of action mentioned in the paper are illustrative and not mandatory”. The Board also agreed to emphasize that the Western Powers should not take an open lead in Southeast Asia. When the OCB members were presented with the Status Report by Staats, they agreed to send a letter of commendation to the Secretary of the Navy through the Secretary of Defense and the FOA Director, who was present, for “their outstanding performance” in the sea-lift that had been completed on May 18.⁵⁵

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- 54 Collins had requested 40 million dollars for sect integration, but FOA’s Clinton Morrison predicted that if the Country Team believed that the forces could not be phased down as planned “the OCB and NSC may be requested for more than” Collins had estimated. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, May 24, 1955 (held on May 23), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. The reduction in FEC force levels would pause when the minimum level had been reached. OCB Status Reports, May 17 and 24, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA.
- 55 Dillon Anderson used paragraph 11 of NSC 5405 as an example of vague wording. There was also a covert annex to the paper, which was discussed but not filed with the minutes. Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, May 25, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA. The initiative for thanking the US Navy for its role in the evacuation had come from Lieutenant Colonel Hugh F. Queenin, the Pentagon representative on the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina. He also took the matter up at the meeting of the Special Working Group on May

At the end of May, Eisenhower and Dulles spoke on television. They stated that South Vietnam was a free nation which did not have a puppet regime but a functional and nationalist government which followed the will of the people. The Government of South Vietnam did not take orders from Cannes, Paris or even Washington. The US, Eisenhower and Dulles added, could work together with the French. Diem had proved to be worthy of US support, they insisted.⁵⁶

During the spring of 1955, decision-making included several actors, Anderson asserts. These included Eisenhower, the State Department, several members of Congress, the US Embassy in Saigon, the intelligence sources, and certain South Vietnamese and French individuals in Saigon and Paris. The debate over Diem indicates the trap into which the Americans were getting themselves. "The Diem card", Anderson argues, was not an ace, but not a deuce either. According to Anderson, the US attitude toward Diem was based on image rather than reality. Behind the decision to back Diem was Secretary Dulles, who had taken into consideration advice from Young and a few other State Department officials.⁵⁷ Shaplen writes that Diem's strong supporters included the Dulles brothers, and Robertson and Young from the State Department.⁵⁸

Herring asserts that Secretary Dulles was a key figure in nation-building. In implementing this policy, Dulles accomplished considerable short-term success in South Vietnam, writes Herring. Indochina took up most of Dulles's time between March 1954 and the early summer of 1955. Herring concludes in the process that Dulles was a master tactician, a fact which led to the US commitment to South Vietnam. However, the US policy had started as a "high-risk gamble".⁵⁹ Herring, Hess, and Immerman point out that, considering the circumstances in which the US policy developed in 1954–1955, the end result was inevitable. The Eisenhower Administration had decided to draw a border line against Communist expansion. This overriding priority, the three maintain, forced the US to defend South Vietnam.⁶⁰ All in all, Eisenhower Administration's decision to back Diem has attracted various conclusions in scholarship.

23 as a miscellaneous item. On May 30, 1955, OCB Chairman Hoover, Jr. sent a letter of appreciation to Secretary Wilson and the FOA Director Stassen. The Board had noted the matter at its meeting of May 25. See Landon's memorandum for Staats, May 24, 1955, with Queenin's paper "Evacuation Operations in Vietnam," undated, as an attachment, Hoover, Jr.'s letter to Wilson, May 30, 1955 and memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, May 24, 1955 (held on May 23). All in WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. For the Board concurrence in sending letters of commendation see also OCB Minutes, May 27, 1955 (held on May 25), *ibid.*, OCB Secretariat series, Box 12, DDEL.

56 Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 147; See also DSB, May 30, 1955, pp. 872–873.

57 Anderson, "J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration's 'Point of No Return' in Vietnam," 1988, p. 128, 145–147; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 64, 118–119, 201, 203.

58 Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, pp. 121, 128.

59 Herring, "A Good Stout Effort", in John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War. Ed. Immerman, 1990, pp. 213, 233; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 1986, p. 44.

60 Herring, Hess and Immerman, "Passage of Empire," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 189.

The general tendency of the conclusions, by both academic scholars and journalists, is that the decision had an immense long-term significance.⁶¹

Short argues that the PB believed, when it thought that a great effort was not needed, that taking over from the French would be a “quite modest exercise”. This, Short adds, represented “a sort of low-risk, high-return investment” thinking. Short concludes that identification of the need, and the person making the identification, determined whether it was “an open-end commitment”.⁶²

Burke and Greenstein assert that even though the formal advisory process of the Eisenhower Administration “had invested impressive analytic resources in planning its part in the sequence of events that led to partition of Vietnam”, the policy decisions to stick with Diem and support South Vietnam were not “carefully considered”. According to Burke and Greenstein, “the record suggests that little reflection went into the general implications of supporting” Diem’s regime. This is a clear example, Burke and Greenstein assert, of “a shortcoming or at least limitation” of the advisory system. They illustrate their point by using the metaphor of “a dog that did not bark”.⁶³

There really is no evidence that suggests that the NSC machinery did not consider the Diem decision with the same kind of effectiveness as it had done during the spring of 1954. Yet it was not perhaps considered in a similar fashion. The exposure of the issue to the NSC included a lot of informational aspects. Informal meetings were not used in the spring of 1955 to the same extent as they had been in the fall of 1954. Moreover, it could be argued that the utilization of the official structures, namely the OCB machinery, had even intensified. This meant that the utilization of OCB’s Working Group, Sub-Group and Committee work increased. It also indicates that the policy path had been chosen. The emphasis of the Council work had thus been shifted to a different arena. The handling of the Diem question as “a special case” vividly illustrates the workings of an advisory process in a situation in which the outcome had been pre-determined. Against that background, it could also be concluded that the handling of the Vietnam question, indeed, changed the working procedures of the Council machinery. There were some minor potential malfunctions of the advisory process. Information-related problems were noticed several times. This and the confusing situation in Saigon was reflected as a kind of chaos among the national security bureaucrats in Washington. The views of Secretary

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61 See, for example, Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, pp. 119–128; Kahin, George McT. and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: Dial, 1967), pp. 67–72; Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, pp. 137–147; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 1984, pp. 222–223; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, pp. 52–55; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, pp. 83–84.

62 Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 207.

63 Burke and Greenstein conclude that “neither Eisenhower’s personal analytic powers nor the caliber of his advisory process was a guarantee that his Administration would actually employ its analytic skills on a particular matter of policy”. The President and his advisers put their emphasis, as noted earlier, on acute problems. Eisenhower did not “anticipate the liability” of his decisions. Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, p. 565; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 100, 267.

Dulles enjoyed some triumph, which, however, does not imply that the President relied more on Dulles's advice, but that he simply happened to agree with his Secretary of State. Secretary Dulles's guarded position in his relationship with, for example, Collins indicates his jealousy of power. Despite these malfunctions, all the requirements of multiple advocacy appear to have been in place.

Even though consideration of the Vietnam issue had been almost constant from early January 1954 through late January 1955, the frequency of such consideration at times waned, indicating that the issue had already been settled during 1954. The discussions about the fate of Diem and US support were clearly just attempts to cope with practical problems. Despite the crisis in Saigon, the NSC took the matter up only in 40 percent of its meetings held between January 13 and May 19. Two Council meetings need to be elevated above the rest: those of January 27 and April 28. They illustrate how the advisory system considered a pressing question with the basic policy decision having already been made. The former is an example of a magnificently prepared meeting.

It seems obvious that the knowledge possessed by the Eisenhower Administration officials of South Vietnamese affairs was still limited⁶⁴ during the spring of 1955. The US had not defined its policy objectives precisely. Anti-colonialism was a guiding principle for the NSC, and especially for Secretary Dulles. Thus, Diem's sentiment of disgust for the French suited the US policy-makers: Diem worked for US ends. By the spring of 1955, the US had finally and firmly chosen its path: commitment to Diem's South Vietnam, without France. The Vietnam conflict thus became American.

Postpone or Cancel – The National Security Council and the Issue of All-Vietnam Elections (July 1954–July 1956)

The Free Conditions Excuse

The Geneva Accords called for reunification elections to be held, at the latest, by July 1956. The unilateral declaration by the US at Geneva on July 21, 1954 also referred to the possibility of free reunification elections. The JCS had already argued in March 1954 that the elections could lead to serious repercussions since the Vietminh possessed efficient propaganda skills. This was evident, the Chiefs added, if the elections were permitted to be held. Moreover, Secretary Dulles had informed the SFRC immediately before the Geneva Agreements that all-Vietnam elections could be postponed until more favorable conditions for southern Vietnam would prevail. In those circumstances, he went on, the north would perhaps not want elections any longer. Secretary Wilson had wondered at what was virtually a Council meeting whether all-Viet-

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64 In the summer 1954, Lansdale had found no books written in English on Indochina. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 264.

nam elections would mean the fall of South Vietnam. Population distribution, Secretary Dulles had answered, suggesting that this would be the case and that in his opinion the US “would have to take the position in 1956 that conditions were not favorable for the free expression of the will of the population”.⁶⁵

The NSC-OCB machinery did not, however, completely exclude the possibility of such elections. The OCB Progress Report, for example, predicted future developments in late July 1954. One item was the need for political action in order to lay the foundation for a Western orientation in Asian countries. All-Vietnam elections were viewed as a test of such political action and orientation.⁶⁶

The Council was trying to apply methods to prevent the gloomy scenario of a Communist victory from happening. The US should give assistance, the NSC suggested in early August 1954, to the non-Communist forces of South Vietnam in order to guarantee a certain victory for them in the elections to reunify Vietnam. At the Council meeting of August 24, both the President and the Secretary of State had commented on the charge that the elections would be an “honorable obligation”. Secretary Dulles repeated his conviction and told the NSC members, while remarking on a paragraph in a draft Policy Paper on the question of elections, that he did not see how non-Communists could win the elections. He, therefore, moved to avoid their actually taking place. In reply to Wilson’s question about undermining the Geneva Accords, Dulles pointed out that the US had not signed the Agreements. Eisenhower went along with his Secretary of State and directed that the US policy should be to “prevent a Communist victory”.⁶⁷ It is easy to see the reason for the changes in the views of the Secretary of State. He perhaps had realized that the warnings of the Chiefs might indeed materialize.

Secretary Dulles was determined not to have all-Vietnam elections. “When the time came, we would have ample grounds for postponing or declining to hold them in the south”, he remarked to his own staff in early October 1954. This could be done, because there could not be, to his mind, “fair elections in the north”. Dulles added that the problem did not lie so much in the preparations for the elections but in Communist subversion and infiltration in the near future.⁶⁸ There had been other kinds of views among the NSC principals. Secretary of Defense Wilson, for example, had concluded in October 1954 that

65 JCS memorandum to Wilson, March 12, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XVI, pp. 472–475; Dulles’s testimony to the SFRC, July 16, 1954, SFRC His. Ser., Volume VI, pp. 642–643. Dulles added that it would be “extremely unlikely” that the elections results would be favorable to the US Summary of meeting, July 24, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 8, DDEL. A memorandum of the same meeting by Robert Cutler does not mention the exchange between Dulles and Wilson. Memorandum of conference at State Department, July 24, 1954, *ibid*.

66 Staats’s memorandum for the OCB, August 2, 1954 with a third draft of the OCB Progress Report January 16 – July 21, 1954 (dated July 30) as an attachment, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 79, Southeast Asia, DDEL.

67 NSC 5429, “Review of the U.S. Policy toward Far East,” August 4, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL; Memorandum of Discussion of the 212th Meeting of the NSC, August 24, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XII, Part 1, pp. 724–733; Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, p. 318.

68 There had been evidence of truce violations. Minute of a meeting of Dulles’s Staff, October 8, 1954, FRUS 1953–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2123.

the elections could not be allowed as the strategic posture of the US would have suffered as a result. Wilson hoped that the CIA Director would influence his brother, the Secretary of State, in the matter.⁶⁹

The available intelligence forecasts supported the position of the JCS that had also been agreed upon by Secretary Dulles and Eisenhower at the NSC on August 24. A NIE of November 23, 1954 predicted that South Vietnam would “almost certainly...not be able to defeat the Communists in country-wide elections”. Pressures for a coalition government with the Vietminh, the estimate continued, “may well arise in South Vietnam” prior to the elections.⁷⁰ The NSC planners, nevertheless, saw potential dangers in preventing the elections from being held. They believed in mid-December 1954 that neither the Soviet Union nor China would risk war with the US before 1960, but in a footnote to their draft national security Policy Paper they noted that “a further possibility of Communist aggression is a Vietminh attack on South Vietnam in the event the 1956 elections are blocked by Western action”.⁷¹

If the enemy could utilize propaganda, why could the US not do the same? A CIA member of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, Richard M. Bissell, Jr., emphasized on December 20 to the other members that in preparing for their position on elections the truce violations should be “ferreted out, documented with good evidence, and exploited to the maximum”. He, too, saw that “there seems to be a substantial likelihood of a Viet Minh election victory”. NSC 5429/5 also stated that one objective of the US was “to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections”. The elections issue was the type of significant matter which had to be incorporated into policy formulation and implementation. The Defense representatives of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina reviewed the operational considerations bearing on US policy toward Vietnam in January 1955, and they concluded in their working draft paper for the use of the OCB that, as the first point of the Pentagon, the success of any US assistance program for South Vietnam should be considered “in the light of the proposed elections”.⁷²

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69 Wilson’s draft memorandum to Allen Dulles, October 20, 1954. USVNR, Book 10, pp. 776–779.

70 NIE-3-7-54, “Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia through July 1956,” November 23, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2286. The report stated that the French had not indicated whether postponement of the elections would serve their interests. *Ibid.*, p. 2287.

71 “Draft Statement on Basic National Security Policy Prepared by the PB,” December 14, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume II, Part 1, pp. 808–822.

72 Bissell, Jr.’s memorandum to the members of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, December 20, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 2407. Young had remarked to the members of the Special Working Group on that same day that the Geneva Agreements called for consultations to start in July 1955. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, December 21, 1954 (held on December 21), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL; NSC 5429/5, “Current U.S. Policy Toward the Far East,” December 22, 1954, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 12, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, p. 2413; OCB Special Working Group on Indochina’s “Preliminary Working Draft (Progress Report) Prepared in the Department of Defense for Discussion at OCB Meeting,” January 19, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, Southeast Asia, DDEL.

And that was not all. The Special Envoy Collins also warned the NSC machinery. His report to the NSC on January 20 dealt in part with the elections issue. Collins wrote that once the people of South Vietnam heard about the “adverse conditions of life in the north” it would affect their electoral behavior in the summer of 1956, if indeed the all-Vietnam elections were to be held in the first place. However, Collins referred to the elections as “hanging as a threat over Free Vietnam”. According to his report, the threat could lead to a crisis by July 1955, when the two sides were to commence consultations on the matter.⁷³

Several alarming signals forced the Special Assistant Anderson and the PB to include the issue as an item on the Council agenda. When the NSC discussed the PB recommendation of a careful preparation for the the elections, Secretary Dulles noted that the holding of the elections could be prevented by utilizing Communist techniques, since the Vietminh themselves would not call them off. The Council assigned the State Department to study the elections issue further.⁷⁴

The State Department did not waste time, but swiftly answered the request made by the NSC. The State Department’s Division of Research for the Far East produced a report in early February 1955 on the elections issue. The Division concluded that there was a possibility that almost any type of election “that could conceivably be held in Vietnam” would result in a Communist victory. This reflected the tone of the NIE on November 23. The State report also commented on the zonal elections. Furthermore, a referendum on the question of reunification would be a problem for Diem, but it could have served “as a device for gaining additional time” for South Vietnam to improve its political position.⁷⁵

Diem’s position must have been known to the top US policy-makers. Before coming to power, Diem had refused in advance to accept those parts of the Geneva Agreements which dealt with the reunification of the country. He had also stated that South Vietnam would not violently prevent the implementation

73 “Report on Vietnam for the NSC by Collins,” January 20, 1955 (submitted to the NSC on January 24), FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 54, 56.

74 Memorandum of Discussion of the 234th Meeting of the NSC, January 27, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp., 68–69. The Board had prepared points for the Council to be discussed with Collins. The basic questions were about how they should deal with the issue in general and how the French, Vietnamese and the ICSC felt about the elections. Furthermore, the OCB referred to the impact of the truce violations (and their exploitation) on the elections. “List of Problems and Questions Proposed by the OCB for Discussion During the Visit of General Collins,” January 21, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 38, DDEL. For details about the alleged truce violations see an unsigned 11-page State Department report “Communist Truce Violations – Indochina,” June 3, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 124, Box 124, International Communist Activities in Asia, RG 59, NA.

75 The officials of the State Department’s Division of Research for Far East mentioned that “on the basis of present trends” it looked likely that Diem was going to lose the elections. They added that the conditions would offer the Communists “ a very significant if not decisive advantage”. Intelligence Report no. 6818, February 1, 1955, Records of the Department of State, Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Lot 58 D 207, Box 2, Collins’ Mission – Elections, RG 59, NA.

of the Agreements, even though South Vietnam had not signed them. In January 1955, Aiem pointed out this point and consequently he declared that the Geneva Agreements did not bind South Vietnam. The elections, Diem predicted, would perhaps not be held because they would have to be completely free. This would not happen, according to Diem, because totalitarian North Vietnam did not fulfil the demanded criteria.⁷⁶

The NSC officials came up with quite imaginative ways to guarantee Diem's success in the forthcoming elections. Aware of the reactions of the Board and the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, Edward P. Lilly suggested to Kenneth P. Landon of the OCB Staff that the expected rice famine in North Vietnam in May and June would "provide an opportunity of influencing these elections in favor of" South Vietnam.⁷⁷

Officially, Secretary Dulles's opposition to the elections was not publicized. The Chairman of the HFAC, Clement J. Zablocki, believed in March 1955 that the Diem Government was prepared for consultations on the 1956 elections. Diem had already appointed, Zablocki said, a delegation to take part in the consultations. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William J. Sebald told the members of the HFAC that the policy of the Eisenhower Administration had not changed. The US supported, just as Bedell Smith had said in his unilateral statement in July 1954, the reunification of Vietnam in free elections, because the country had been divided against the will of the people. The ICSC would, Sebald continued, supervise the implementation of the elections.⁷⁸

NSC 5519 – The United States Backs Diem's Decision to Cancel the Elections

In the course of paper-drafting for the NSC machinery the State Department officials had needed to contact the field operatives to clear up questions relating to the elections issue. During the crisis in Saigon, for example, Secretary Dulles cabled the US Embassy informing them that the NSC had assigned the State Department to submit a paper on the elections by mid-April. Dulles admitted that the staff at the Department had "been working on the problem in great detail over [the] last several weeks". The Secretary was sure that the issue was going to come up in the Franco-American talks scheduled to commence in Washington in two week's time. Dulles continued that the US therefore wished to inform the French and the British about the US position, which would be to support Diem's Government rather than being a list of unilateral US recommendations. The South Vietnamese Government should, according to their basic principles, tell the North Vietnamese that there would be no consultations on the

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76 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 245; Fall, Bernard B., "The Second Indochina War," *International Affairs*, Volume 41 (January 1965), p. 40.

77 Lilly's memorandum for Landon, March 16, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

78 Sebald's answer to Zablocki's question, March 17, 1955, HFAC His. Ser., Volume XVIII, Part 2, pp. 215–217.

elections unless the Vietminh accepted certain guarantees. Dulles wrote that with Diem's "general acceptance" the French and British could be informed of the policy, which would not be in conflict with the Geneva Accords but at the same time would be "unassailable in intent but probably unacceptable to Communists", as there would be "provisions for strict supervision to ensure genuinely free elections". Dulles then advised the Embassy to discuss the matter with Diem urgently "without showing him [the] formula". The objective was not to "secure his approval", the Secretary added, but to make sure that Diem "understands our viewpoint and accepts it to a degree". The US could then assume that Diem's position was close to that of the US, so that the latter could proceed. Dulles suggested that Diem could be reminded of the cases in Korea and Germany, where the desired result had been achieved. The absence of such previously agreed safeguards would involve serious risks to the fate of South Vietnam in the possible consultations. Dulles concluded that Diem should be asked whether he shared this view.⁷⁹

Regardless of the current crisis in Saigon and the uncertainty which accompanied it, the OCB proceeded with the consideration of future developments. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina noted at its meeting on Monday, April 18, 1955, that the French were anxious to hold the elections as they felt that they were committed to the Vietminh on the basis of the Geneva Agreements. There was also information that the State Department paper on all-Vietnam elections was "expected to go to the NSC this week"⁸⁰, which appears odd, as the papers were already being drafted.

The State-Defense controversy did not always affect their positions. The Pentagon Staff study forwarded to the State Department on April 22 concluded that South Vietnam had no chance of winning the elections in the prevailing conditions. Therefore, the paper recommended, the US "should make every effort to abolish or postpone indefinitely the elections".⁸¹ Thus the issue seemed quite clear because the Defense recommendation was consistent with the recommendations of the State Department representatives and those of the intelligence community.

There are obvious indications that the interdepartmental background work produced results. In mid-May 1955, the PB completed its draft statement on policy affecting the elections issue. The statement and a staff study pertaining to the matter were initially prepared in the State Department. The papers had then been submitted to the PB for discussion and revision. On May 2, the PB had

79 Dulles's cable (drafted by Hoey and cleared by Young, Sebald, William R. Tyler and MacArthur II in substance) to Collins, April 6, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 208-209; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 892-893.

80 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, April 19, 1955 (held on April 18), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

81 Pentagon Staff study titled "Programs for the Implementation of U.S. Policy Towards South Viet-Nam," (undated) as an attachment to Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Hensel's letter to Robertson, April 22, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 277-280; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 923-926.

discussed the April 21 draft in the light of the developments in South Vietnam and referred it to the PB Assistants for revision, which was to be based on the PB discussions and the proposed revisions prepared by the State Department. On May 16, the draft statement was amended and its submission to the NSC by the PB was approved. The statement, which was numbered NSC 5519, incorporated the old language of NSC 5429 and thus it illustrated that the US was to assist South Vietnam militarily and economically to make it stronger in order “to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections”. If such strength did not devel, the draft went on, the policy “should be reviewed”. At the same time, the Paper continued, the US should be prepared for the victories of both Vietnams. As courses of action, the PB suggested that the US should encourage the Government of Diem to participate in negotiations on the elections with the North Vietnamese. The Council also urged the US to help Diem to become aware of the worldwide Communist electoral tactics, and to help to point out that all attempts to violate the free nature of the elections would be Communist plots. According to NSC 5519, the US should get the support of the French and the British in the question of the elections and should be ready to intervene, favorably with SEATO members if the hostilities broke out again as a result of the elections.⁸² Combs correctly points out that in early May 1955 many NSC officials thought that Diem should participate in preliminary talks on the elections. But, Combs adds, they found Diem “so intractable on the issue that they decided it would be futile to try to bully him into participation”.⁸³

Even though it is difficult on the basis of the available material to discover what the real intentions of the NSC-related US officials were, it can still be argued that it seems likely that there were many within the Council machinery who thought that the only alternative in the handling of the elections issue was postponement. This was so in spite of the repercussions of such a course of action. In his personal letter to the new Ambassador, Reinhardt, Young wrote that he and Hoey felt that “we are running into stormy weather”, as the South Vietnamese were not going to join the consultations. Young felt sympathy for their line and expressed the wish that “we will not twist their arm to talk with the Communists”. Refusal to do so will, he added, be “an international issue”. Since Diem would appear to be the person who had prevented the elections, the

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82 NSC 5519, A Draft Statement of “U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections,” as an enclosure to NSC’s Executive Secretary Lay, Jr.’s note to the members of the NSC, May 17, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 16, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 410–412. For the document with attached JCS and NSC Staff views see OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, Box 16, DDEL. The draft statement had originally been transmitted by memorandum on April 21, 1955. The draft report had been forwarded for PB consideration on May 10. Records of meetings of the PB, May 2 and 16, 1955, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1955, RG 273, NA; NSC Status of Projects as of June 1, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 125, Status of Projects 1953–1956, RG 59, NA. For drafting work in the State Department see for example MacArthur II’s memorandum to Dulles and a draft paper titled “U.S Policy on All Vietnam Elections,” both on April 1, 1955. Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/4–155 and 751G0/4-455, RG 59, NA.

83 Combs, “The Path Not Taken,” 1995, pp. 50–51.

American people “would not easily support” his position. It would be problematic for the Administration as well. Young had borrowed the argument of the NSC staffers when he wrote that there was a possibility that the prevention of the elections might provoke a Vietminh attack. Young concluded that this contingency should be explained to Diem and discussed “in connection with” NSC 5519.⁸⁴

The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Robertson, pointed out at the beginning of June 1955 that Diem had continuously declared – most recently on April 6 – that he was willing to reunify Vietnam peacefully through elections. The US stood behind Diem, Robertson declared, in support of the view that free elections should be held as soon as possible. According to Robertson, a political solution in Vietnam would not be possible unless the circumstances in North Vietnam changed radically in the near future.⁸⁵

The OCB machinery recorded attempts to make the US to challenge its policies. In early June, 1955 the French had asked the US for confirmation of its approval of the South Vietnamese proposal to stage a quadripartite conference on Indochina. The French thought it was important to address problems attached to the elections as soon as possible because the Indian members of the ICSC had proposed that the ICSC had seized the initiative on the elections issue. This could lead, the French believed, to the unwanted Vietnamese reaction.⁸⁶

Dillon Anderson was not satisfied with the text of the NSC papers concerning the elections issue. He requested Lay, Jr. and Gleason to submit better documents to him. Anderson wrote on June 8, 1955:

“Won’t you try to have some language which is apt, to describe the real difference of position between the JCS and the State paper, in reference to the South Vietnam election policy? Likewise, if you could, I would like to see you and Ev[erett Gleason] try to evolve language which would be more appropriate to describe the position which we should take. Right now, I think that the effect of the change is quite fuzzy.”⁸⁷

A day before the NSC 5519 draft was sent up for Council consideration⁸⁸, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Sebald, explained to Secretary Dulles that the strengthening of South Vietnam was possible, whereas the question of whether Diem would agree to talks with the Vietminh by July 20,

84 Young’s letter to Reinhardt, June 2, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 429. Young had, in fact, concluded to Robertson the previous day that they could not speak about a “Free Vietnam” unless there was “political, administrative, and military backing [for Diem] throughout the countryside”. Young’s memorandum to Robertson, June 1, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 426–427; Greene, “John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina,” 1992, p. 571.

85 Robertson quoted in PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 246–247.

86 OCB Progress Report, June 7, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA.

87 Anderson’s memorandum for Lay, Jr., June 8, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Chronological subseries, Box 1, DDEL.

88 Originally, the consideration of the draft was to take place on June 2, but it was postponed until June 9.

1955 was a complicated one as Diem had continuously opposed such discussions. Rejection would, therefore, hold up the implementation of the proposed policy. If the consultations started, Sebald wrote, the US could be compelled to accept a compromise and it would also be difficult to blame the Vietminh for “the failure to secure free elections”. The JCS had recommended that SEATO should answer to the renewal of hostilities, but the State Department managed to retain references to the possibility of unilateral intervention. In any case, Sebald recommended that the Secretary of State would speak in favor of the draft with the referring to the potential difficulties.⁸⁹

The issues that were taken up for Council consideration were not normally easy questions. The State Department representatives, the drafters of the background paper, tried to settle their position with regard to the elections. Before going to the NSC, Secretary Dulles discussed the proposed Policy Paper NSC 5519 with his high-level staff members. It was agreed that the US was capable of reacting “alone if necessary after consulting its allies”. Bowie said that the NSC should decide if the US was ready to intervene, and if the Government and the JCS agreed, a strong stance on the elections could be adopted. But, Bowie added, given another scenario, “we should not encourage Diem to take an adamant position”. Secretary Dulles thought that more flexibility was needed. He pointed out that the US was “frustrating the holding of elections” by encouraging Diem to insist on conditions which might be unacceptable to the Vietminh. However, the US was informing Diem of a possible intervention if the Communists attacked. In the midst of the discussion over whether Diem was bound by the Geneva Accords, Phleger pointed out that the French and British would demand elections. The participants unanimously thought that Diem should disassociate himself from the Accords, settle the FEC issue with the French, and form a national assembly. Dulles questioned whether the US could intervene with SEATO by referring to the breaches of the Geneva Accords by the Vietminh if Diem was also not conforming fully to the provisions of the Accords. Young remarked that Diem’s thinking was twofold: he would be ready for the elections under genuinely free conditions but was afraid of compromises.

89 According to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Sebald the JCS suggestions concerning SEATO would practically have meant the deletion of State Department’s original recommendation of acting alone if South Vietnam “follows the recommended policy” and the major allies would not agree. Sebald, therefore, remarked: “we think it important that the Council realize that we may face a situation in which we may not, initially at least, have support from our major allies and that the Council decide whether or not under those circumstances the U.S. should be prepared to act alone”. In the end, both views were incorporated into NSC 5519 but preference was given to SEATO. Sebald’s memorandum to Dulles (drafted by Young), June 8, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 86, NSC 5519 Memoranda, RG 59, NA; Sebald’s memorandum is also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 436–438. For the JCS recommendations see the JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, May 25, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 16, DDEL. It is noteworthy that in the copy of Lay, Jr’s memorandum transmitting the views of the Chiefs to the NSC at the National Archives, there is a small note attached with Sebald’s version and a recommendation on the unilateral military action. Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, June 2, 1955 with the enclosed JCS views, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 86, NSC 5519 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

On the other hand, he was deeply worried about the technical problems involved in how to arrange the consultations. The Vietminh, Young added on the basis of the analyses of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina, were also exploiting the French to accomplish their own objectives.⁹⁰

Behind the scenes discussions continued between the State Department officials until the last minute. Just before the NSC meeting on June 9, Sebald moved to postpone the consideration of the NSC 5519 paper “until certain aspects of it can be clarified”. Sebald wrote that it would be difficult to implement the paper as there was no certainty that Diem would join the pre-electoral talks, which were “becoming a major political and diplomatic problem” because the French, the British, the Indians, and the Vietminh were “insisting on them”. In addition, the position of the South Vietnamese was not clear. There was a danger, Sebald continued, that Diem’s persistence could be utilized by the Vietminh in their propanganda and subversive actions, and it would also irritate the ICSC. Sebald pointed out that the initial purpose of NSC 5519 had been to put US position in writing in the case of Vietminh attack. Sebald therefore suggested that it would be better to talk the matter over again with Diem and the Western allies. “We will need a maximum amount of maneuverability in any event”, Sebald concluded in his memorandum.⁹¹ Even though the documents do not indicate which official influenced Sebald, his sudden change of mind points to Young, who had drafted the relevant memoranda.

The official aims required that the postponement be made in an orderly fashion. At the Council meeting Dillon Anderson started to inform the members about the State Department draft of NSC 5519, as requested by the Council on January 27, and combined with the views of the JCS. According to Anderson, the PB recommended that it should be adopted. However, this was unnecessary as the President stopped Anderson to ask Secretary Dulles whether this was the Paper which he wanted to postpone. Dulles answered positively as “the situation was not sufficiently clear to warrant Council action at this time”. He said that the British, the French and the South Vietnamese had not made up their minds yet, either, but if the US took action it would be obliged to assist in the holding of elections. Hence, Dulles added, the matter would have to be reconsidered later on. Secretary Wilson reiterated the conclusions of the Pentagon Staff study of April 22 by saying that the Pentagon supported the State Department views on the issue. Anderson said he had also doubted if “the technique and details of the election problem in Vietnam were properly in the realm of NSC policy”. He asked that the PB be given the task of considering the part played by NSC 5429/5 (paragraph 5-d), which dealt with the Vietminh aggression, since it needed revision. Secretary Dulles agreed. The NSC decided to do as had been proposed,

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90 Memorandum of conversation on NSC 5519 draft between Dulles and his close advisers, June 8, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 439–441.

91 Sebald’s memorandum to Dulles (drafted by Young), June 9, 1954, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 86, NSC 5519 Memoranda, RG 59, NA; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 441–442.

and Eisenhower approved the courses of action.⁹² The Special Assistant Anderson obviously tried to perform to the best of his ability, but he appears to have been uncertain, as he was with regard to the language of the Council papers the day before, and also in learning his duties. There is a possibility that his inexperience had caused the State Department representatives to think that there was no point in informing Anderson about the preparation of the elections issue within their Department. This would have been a strange procedure and against the principles of the NSC system. The State officials stole the show, but they may also have come up with their conclusions so late that they could not brief the Special Assistant in the proper way. On the other hand, the NSC Staff seems to have been bypassed – like the lower echelons of various participant departments and agencies of the NSC in January 1954 – as the President had been told by Secretary Dulles or Staff Secretary Goodpaster.

One explanation for the overruling conduct of the State Department is offered by Young, who wrote another personal letter to Ambassador Reinhardt. Young told about their meeting with Secretary Dulles and said that “for various reasons, it was decided to recommended indefinite postponement” of NSC 5519. According to Young, Diem’s actions had made “some of us impressed”. Young revealed that “the thinking here is more and more that the United States, itself not a signatory, should not try to compel Diem to follow through precisely according to the Geneva Accords”. He admitted that this included the risk of Vietminh aggression. Young reminded Reinhardt of the cooperation between the Vietminh and the French. He ended his letter by commenting “these are just tentative views but we are trying to work up something for high level decisions”.⁹³

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Dillon Anderson reminded the Council members that the PB had submitted the draft of NSC 5519 as a result of a Council directive of January 1955. Memorandum of Discussion of the 251st Meeting of the NSC, June 9, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 442–444. Anderson’s briefing notes indicate that NSC 5519 was consistent with US policy toward South Vietnam, especially it was “to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections”. It was a dilemma. The US could not openly oppose the principle of reunification through free elections and therefore it could not “encourage South Vietnam” to prevent them as it would have been inconsistent with basic US policy. Anderson continued that it was “definitely not in our interest to see a Communist take-over of South Vietnam, either through free elections, or otherwise”. The Special Assistant’s briefing notes reveal that he referred to the matter as being an “extremely delicate problem”. The Geneva Agreements were “ambiguous and unspecific” about the type of elections since “this circumstance provides some leeway for maintaining the principle of free elections”. The US would, therefore, get the South Vietnamese not to agree any unacceptable terms. The policy paper draft also noted the protection of South Vietnam in the contingency that North Vietnam won the elections. Anderson’s unsigned briefing note on NSC 5519, June 9, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL; OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Chronological subseries, Box 1, DDEL. For the Council Action of the June 9 meeting see Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, June 13, 1955, *ibid.*, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, Box 16, DDEL and AWF, NSC series, Box, DDEL. See also Tuunainen, Pasi, “Deepening the Commitment: The NSC and the Evolution of U.S. Policy toward Vietnam During the Eisenhower Presidency,” an unpublished paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, June 23, 2000, Toronto, pp. 4, 6.

93 Young referred to the elections and consultations as being “the current top-drawer aspects of Viet-Nam”. Young’s personal letter to Reinhardt, June 10, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 444–445.

Young's remarks are commented upon by Kahin, who argues that the draft Policy Paper NSC 5519 indicates that the US policy-makers "were not disposed to pressure Diem" for any kind of consultations. And when it was time to meet the North Vietnamese, Kahin goes on, "official US policy had swung behind him [Diem] in his refusal to do so". For Short, the Policy Paper clearly illustrates that the Americans were determined "to prevent a Communist victory". "By a sort of sleight of pen all the necessary conditions for the free expression of the national will... ", he continues, "were now neatly, reasonably and deceptively transposed to exist" before the elections were to be arranged. Arnold argues that NSC 5519 contained old features associated with taking advantage of military strength. He adds that the recommendation "to limit the election to the south so the Diem government could control the electoral process" was a new feature. The State Department recommendations contained in NSC 5519, Greene writes, "were nearly five months in preparation". Greene continues that "Diem spurned American advice and preempted NSC-5519 before it reached the Planning Board". The US policy-makers now rapidly accepted Diem's position.⁹⁴

The freedom of circumstances – and securing it with US assistance – seems to have been the basis of NSC 5519. Dulles was also referring to flexibility. Between the lines, hints at harassment and manipulation of the elections can be found. The elections were not, in theory, out of the question for the Americans, but the text of the proposed Policy Paper included several points by which the elections could have been prevented in practice. The US had prepared for all kinds of situations. According to the Policy Paper draft, the US should have been active in the question of elections by using Diem as a middleman. The man could do as he pleased as long as he opposed the Vietminh influence.⁹⁵ Where NSC 5429/5 urged the US to prevent a Communist victory in the reunification elections, the whole of NSC 5519 was an example of the typical course of action taken by Eisenhower's NSC: the subsequent policies with respect to Vietnam were based, from then on, on earlier decisions.

Secretary of State Dulles instructed President Eisenhower in the matter by writing that the US should support the all-Vietnam elections only if they could be held under totally free conditions.⁹⁶ The implementation of NSC policies sometimes included even wishful thinking. Young explained to the members of the OCB Working Group on Indochina that the Geneva Accords called for the

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 94 Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, pp. 88–90; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 209; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 287. Greene reminds us that Diem did not even "foster the impression that he might comply with some of" the provisions of the Geneva agreements. He did not, Greene concludes, listen to the American reasoning "that the consultations could be used to shift the onus of noncompliance with the accords to Hanoi". Greene, "John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina," 1992, p. 571.

95 NSC 5519, "U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections," May 19, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 16, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 410–412.

96 Dulles's memorandum to Eisenhower, June 8, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 439–441.

consultations on the elections to commence in approximately a month. The Western Powers, he added, including the US, were not opposed to the holding of the elections. The British and the French hoped that Diem would take the initiative in the issue, but he had been reluctant to do anything before he had been able to conclude an agreement regarding the FEC in order to increase the role of the South Vietnamese forces in maintaining internal security. A week later Young said that there was no reason for concern even though Secretary Dulles had made a statement favoring free elections, because the Soviet Union “had never yet won such an election”. Dulles had said in his press conference that the Eisenhower Administration believed in the reunification of Vietnam. Neither the US nor South Vietnam, Dulles pointed out, had signed the Geneva Agreements. Dulles said he was not afraid of the elections and had then repeated Young’s words.⁹⁷

Despite the fact that there was nothing new to be reported, Indochina was discussed at the July 14 Council meeting as a briefing item. Allen Dulles said that the Summit Conference of Geneva would commence on July 18, but the talks about arrangements for the elections were to start within six days. The CIA Director went through the Geneva stipulations about the consultations and quoted Chinese warnings of trouble if Diem refused to enter the discussions. Secretary Dulles added that Diem was reluctant to enter the talks for certain reasons. Diem, the Secretary of State predicted, would “soon issue a statement” on the elections, the content of which still remained unknown.⁹⁸ Gelb and Betts write that Eisenhower’s approval of the NSC recommendations “smacked of those of pre-Geneva Conference days” and meant that the US would support Diem’s position in the question of the elections.⁹⁹

Diem’s statement cancelling the elections could not have come as a surprise to the US policy-makers. Diem spoke to that effect on South Vietnamese Radio in mid-July 1955. He stated that the Geneva Agreements were against the will of the people of Vietnam. Therefore, he added, South Vietnam had not signed them. He made it clear that the consultations with the North Vietnamese would not take place.¹⁰⁰

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97 Memoranda of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meetings, June 23, 1955 (held on June 21) and June 29, 1955 (held on June 28), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL; Dulles’s press conference, June 28, 1955. Department of State Press Release no. 396, John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 338, PUL; also printed in DSB, July 11, 1955, p. 50. A month and a half earlier Dulles had told reporters that he did not know what kind of elections would be feasible in Vietnam, which did not have electorate tradition and where 60 percent of the people were illiterate. The Secretary commented that a popular election system like that of the United States did not fit as such. Dulles’s press conference, May 12, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 336, PUL, p. 20.

98 Gleason’s memorandum indicates that Secretary Dulles explained the reasons for Diem’s reluctance to begin the talks with North Vietnam. The memorandum does not, however, go into details. Memorandum of Discussion of the 255th Meeting of the NSC, July 14, 1955, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL.

99 Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, p. 63.

100 Quoted in PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 241, 286–287; Buttinger, *Vietnam*, Volume II, 1967, pp. 978–979; Young knew about Diem’s intentions to reject the elections already in early July. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, July 8, 1955 (held on July 7), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

Young appears to have been a key point of contact within the State Department and the NSC-OCB machinery. On October 5, he wrote again to Ambassador Reinhardt that “it seems to me we can now proceed with the assumption that there will be no all-Vietnam elections in 1956”. Young recommended on the same day to Robertson, against Reinhardt’s suggestions, that the US should “not press Diem to hold elections” for the National Assembly in the following three to six months. The Vietnamese democratic tradition, Young added, was young and the outcome of the elections would be “unpredictable”.¹⁰¹ Eisenhower writes in his memoirs that, had the elections been held, Ho Chi Minh rather than Bao Dai would have received even 80 percent of the votes cast if the elections had been held during the First Indochina War. Similar estimates had in fact been provided by the intelligence sources in October 1955. The Vietminh, the intelligence community predicted, would have scored a land-slide victory in the elections, and, therefore, Diem could not have accepted them.¹⁰²

With the decision to postpone the elections having been made, the State Department officials became engaged in improving the position of Diem. Robertson, for example, wrote an article for the Department of State Bulletin in which he called the elections “red”. According to him, the Eisenhower Administration was skeptical about separate zonal elections because the population in the north was higher, and so the result was predictable. Robertson called for elections in North Vietnam to discover the will of the people there.¹⁰³

Another kind of elections was, however, held. On October 23, 1955 a referendum was held in South Vietnam. The people were given a chance to choose between the monarchy of Bao Dai and the republic of Diem. According to the final result, 92.8 percent of the voters favored the republic and that Diem be elected as its president. Bao Dai received only 1.1 percent of the votes, the rest being invalidated. The Americans would have been satisfied with the winning margin of 60 percent, but Diem wanted – with the help of electoral fraud¹⁰⁴ – to demonstrate the loyalty of the people. Power was now formally

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Diem’s statement was scheduled to be issued before July 13, but the US Embassy in Saigon predicted that he would make it within five days. See Landon’s memorandum to Staats, July 13, 1955, *ibid.* See also OCB Status Report, July 12, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 6, Status Reports IV, RG 59, NA. During the calendar year 1956, for example, OCB’s Weekly Status Reports carefully monitored all the moves of Diem, the South Vietnamese military, elections, economy and refugees. It also followed the activities of ICSC and FEC and the activities of US agencies in South Vietnam as well as interesting developments in North Vietnam. See *ibid.*, Boxes 5–6, Status Reports IV–V and Activity Reports VI.

101 Young’s letter to Reinhardt, October 5, 1955 and Young’s memorandum to Robertson, October 5, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 552, 550–551. Three weeks later Young was still “worried about the complexion and consequences of an assembly, although I appreciate the need for some democratic process”. Young’s letter to Reinhardt, October 27, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 567.

102 Eisenhower 1963, p. 372; NIE-63-56, “Probable Developments in North Vietnam to July 1956,” October 11, 1956. USVNR, Book 10, pp. 993–996.

103 DSB, October 31, 1955, p. 693.

104 In the Saigon constituency, Diem got 602,025 votes, although there were at the time only approximately 450,000 registered voters in the constituency. Life magazine revealed the scam. Quoted in Gibson, *The Perfect War*, 1986, pp. 71–72.

transferred into the hands of the Diem family oligarchy, since Diem had appointed some of his relatives as ministers.¹⁰⁵

The elections issue was attached to a larger context, which, in part, explains the relatively active debate around the issue conducted by the NSC machinery. At a meeting of the new OCB Special Working Group on Vietnam in early November 1955, Chairman Young told the participants that the Soviet Union was pushing for the elections. In fact, Young added, the Soviets, who had talked about the matter with the British, had proposed a consultative conference, which would promote the holding of the elections. The OCB machinery was not willing to even consider the possibility of all-Vietnam elections. In a Board report of December 1955 on the NSC 1290-d program it was noted that the elections issue was crucial for the US in “any consideration of the area” as a Vietminh victory in them would undermine “all efforts to attain US objectives.”¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the member departments and agencies of the NSC still entertained the possibility of Diem’s chances. An intelligence brief which was circulated within the JCS in November 1955 had been prepared in order to assess the current position of Diem. The brief indicated that Diem had realized that “the Communists would probably win even under conditions of completely free elections”. This meant, the brief continued, that Diem would not feel confident enough to let the elections for reunification take place during 1956. A supplement to the brief argued that “Diem has shown considerable political acumen”. It hypothetically believed that Diem would have had a good chance of victory in the elections if he could have campaign in North Vietnam. The supplement predicted that under the kind of conditions which the North Vietnamese would accept “Diem would probably lose” and he did not intend to tolerate “any elections he cannot win”. There was, however, no problem as Diem had not signed the Geneva Agreements which called for the elections.¹⁰⁷

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105 Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 300; Penniman, Howard R., *Elections in South Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), pp. 20–21; FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 1973, p. 163. In instructions to Saigon, the same reasoning of the free conditions was continued. The OCB noted that the instructions to South Vietnam urged that “general free elections should be held in 1956”. OCB Status Report, May 24, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports III, RG 59, NA. From then on, October 23, 25 or 26, 1955, was written in the literature and official papers as the true independence day of South Vietnam. The date itself has no relevance to this study.

106 Memorandum of the discussion at a meeting of the OCB’s Special Working Group on Vietnam by Kenneth P. Landon, November 8, 1955 (held on November 7), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 572–573; OCB report, “Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Free Vietnam and Recommended Action,” December 14, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.

107 Deputy Director for Intelligence of the Joint Staff Rear-Admiral Edwin T. Layton’s memorandum for Radford, November 22, 1955 with an updated version of the intelligence brief “Emerging Pattern-South Vietnam”, undated, as enclosure “A”, Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Radford), f:091, Box 11, Indo-China 1955, RG 218, NA. The earlier CIA brief for the calendar year 1955 was borrowed from Radford by Admiral Burke, who was making a study. See Layton’s memorandum for Burke, October 14, 1955, *ibid.*; Layton’s memorandum for the Director of the Joint Staff, December 22, 1955, with Layton’s memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations), December 21, 1955, *ibid.*, Box 9, CCS

The Eisenhower Administration also faced pressures from influential people. William J. Donovan, who was the former head of the OSS and US Ambassador to Thailand 1953–1954 and an active American Friends of Vietnam (AFV)¹⁰⁸ member, wrote a letter to Eisenhower in early 1956. In his letter, Donovan asked the President to put pressure on the Diem Government to persuade it to engage in the consultations on the all-Vietnam elections and to establish a new international commission which could insure the necessary safeguards for free elections. Eisenhower promised to take up the matter immediately with the State Department. Secretary Dulles answered that he agreed with Donovan that the elections “should be deferred beyond the July date”. Donovan’s other suggestion was being studied. In the same connection, Dulles pointed out that a strong South Vietnam under Diem was the objective of the US and that he would personally discuss the elections with Diem in Saigon in mid-March.¹⁰⁹

Despite attempts to influence the process, Secretary Dulles had his way. The unchanged position of the US on the elections was spelled out in mid-March 1956 by Secretary Dulles in his talks with Diem in Saigon. Dulles said it would be useful for South Vietnam “to take [a] positive stand on principle of free elections” at a later date. There would not, he added, have to be any reason for concern as there could be no free elections in North Vietnam. Diem did not reject the suggestion, but when Young reiterated the desirability of a statement on the matter, Diem seemed “cool to the idea”. In Washington, Chief MAAG General O’Daniel briefed the President that it “would be suicidal at this time” for Diem to agree to the elections.¹¹⁰

092 Asia (6-25-48)(2), Section 17, RG 218, NA. The Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Special Operations) and an OCB Special Working Group on Indochina members William H. Godel praised the quality of the earlier brief, but requested that a re-examination of Diem’s position was needed by November 23. See Godel’s memorandum for Layton, undated, *ibid.*, Box 11, 091 Indo-China 1955, RG 218, NA.

108 The AFV had many influential members such as Senators, Congressmen, journalists, priests, businessmen, high officers, labor union leaders and academics. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 301–304; Tuchman, *The March of Folly*, 1984, p. 272. Morgan argues that in fact the AFV’s campaign against the elections meant that the AFV “acted more as a partner of the administration than as a potentially troublesome pressure group attacking the elections”. Morgan, Joseph G., *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 45. Mansfield also worked for the aims of the AFV by publicly stating that in order to have the elections held the North Vietnamese government had to be “modified”. Quoted in Olson, Mansfield and Vietnam, 1995, p. 72. See also Scheer and Hinckle, “The Viet-Nam Lobby,” in *The Viet-Nam Reader*. Ed. Raskin and Fall (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 67–81 and Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 158–159.

109 Donovan wrote that “it is not possible to defer the elections to a later date”. Donovan’s letters to Eisenhower, February 5 and 9, 1956 and Eisenhower’s letter to Donovan, February 7, 1956, AWF, Name series, Box 8, General William J. Donovan, DDEL. In fact, Eisenhower requested Secretary Dulles to have prepared “a brief report on Bill Donovan’s suggestion”. Eisenhower’s letter to Dulles, February 7, 1956, *ibid.*, Dulles-Herter series, Box 6, DDEL; Dulles’s memorandum to Eisenhower, February 10, 1956, *ibid.*; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 159.

110 Dulles stopped at Saigon, after visiting Karachi, on March 14 and left the following morning for Manila. Memorandum of discussion between Dulles and Diem in Reinhardt’s cable to the Department of State, March 15, 1956 (held on March 14), FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 659–661; Memorandum of discussion between Diem and Young in Counselor of the Embassy Daniel V. Anderson’s cable to Hoover, Jr., March 17, 1956 (held on March 16), *ibid.*, pp. 661–662. Dulles had gained the impression that the elections “were healthy and will

As the deadline for the holding of the elections came closer, Radford cautioned the Council members about the possible tension at the time when the elections should take place under the Geneva Agreements. He added that the South Vietnamese had “of course...refused to be bound” by them.¹¹¹ Likewise, Robertson pointed out in June 1956 that Diem had in April confirmed that he was looking for ways to achieve a peaceful reunification of Vietnam. According to the Assistant Secretary of State, the Administration believed in free elections and that Diem would be backed in his attempts. First, Robertson continued, conditions had to be established free of intimidation and forcing.¹¹² The minimum goal of the US to support all-Vietnam elections held under completely free conditions remained after the deadline of July 1956 had passed. For example, in NSC 5612/1 “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia” it was still mentioned.¹¹³

According to the representatives of the State Department, the Americans were not behind Diem’s decision to cancel the elections. Until May 1955, the US had favored until May 1955 the holding of the elections, but after that date Washington changed its policy and started to openly support Diem’s position on the question. Thus, the US left the matter of elections and consultations to the Vietnamese. They justified their actions by referring to the final declaration of the Geneva Conference which could not be applied because South Vietnam had not signed it and still opposed it.¹¹⁴ Young revealed over a decade later that Washington had expected the elections to take place during 1956 or a little later.¹¹⁵

Kennedy’s aide and later a liberal critic of the Vietnam War, Schlesinger, Jr., argues that the significance of the 1956 elections was greatly exaggerated during the later years. Under the leadership of Secretary Dulles, Schlesinger, Jr. writes that the US supported Diem’s statements and accepted his actions to ignore the all-Vietnam elections. Spector considers that both the President and his advisers “never adopted a firm policy” on the issue. According to Spector,

bring touch of opposition into the open which is good”. Dulles’s cable to Eisenhower, March 15, 1956, *ibid.*, p. 658; Goodpaster’s memorandum of a meeting between Eisenhower and O’Daniel with O’Daniel’s 5-page report “A Brief Concerning the Situation in Vietnam,” AWF, International series, Box 54, DDEL.

111 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 702.

112 DSB, June 11, 1956, p. 974; PP Gravel, Volume I, pp. 610–613.

113 NSC 5612/1, “U.S. Policy in the Mainland Southeast Asia,” September 5, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 18, DDEL.

114 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 245. During spring 1955 the State Department had conducted its own studies into how the Communist gains could be minimized if it was decided not to hold the elections. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 300, footnote 64. See also Dat, Ngo Ton, “The Geneva Partition of Vietnam and the Question of Reunification During the First Two Years.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1963); *Violations of the Geneva Agreements by the Viet-Minh Communists* (Saigon: Government of the Republic of Vietnam, 1959); and Weinstein, Franklin B., “Vietnam’s Unheld Elections: The Failure to Carry Out the 1956 Reunification Elections and the Effect on Hanoi’s Present Outlook.” (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 60, 1966).

115 Young, Kenneth T., “U.S. Policy and the Vietnamese Political Viability, 1954–1967,” *Asian Survey*, Volume 7 (August 1967), p. 510.

the elections were seen as “something to be delayed rather than eliminated”. Diem was given instructions to act as he saw best, Spector adds. He continues that the Americans urged Diem to consider elections in order to broaden the base of his support, but the elections themselves should have followed the will of the people. Moreover, Sheehan argues that the Council “had taken a secret decision to sabotage the Geneva Agreements”. Hence, Sheehan adds, the US “used Diem, with his enthusiastic cooperation, to block the all-Vietnam elections”. Furthermore, Arnold regards the year 1955 as a watershed in many respects. According to him, President Eisenhower made all the relevant decisions, such as supporting Diem against the recommendations of Collins, rejecting the all-Vietnam elections, and the commencement of the training of the ARVN. The previous decisions had tied down US prestige and eventually led to the Vietnam War, Arnold suggests.¹¹⁶

On the basis of intelligence reports, the US had formed the view that military support of the Diem Government was a lesser risk than permitting the all-Vietnam elections to be held, writes Kahin. Kolko emphasizes the US objective of making the partition of Vietnam a permanent situation. LaFeber states that the US policy on the elections was not only a manifestation of commitment but also a “sink or swim with Diem” policy.¹¹⁷

From the point of view of the possible malfunctions of the advisory process, it could be concluded that the NSC machinery seems to have agreed on the nature of the problem at an early stage. Yet it did not neglect the consideration of other options. The preparation of the issue was made, to some degree, in the secrecy of the State Department. The President was, however, alerted to the issue before the decisive Council meeting. The issue was not only dominated by Secretary Dulles and his staff, but various departments and agencies arrived at their own conclusions, although those spelled out in the NIEs came to prevail. Even though we cannot be certain of the role played by the Secretary of State, there is some indication that Dulles’s advice was again more important than those of other NSC advisers. This is illustrated by the fact that the issue of the

116 Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage*, 1967, p. 22. For a discussion of the role of the American intellectuals see Tomes, Robert R., *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954–1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), *passim*; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 304; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 1988, p. 174; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, pp. 289–290. According to Chaumont, the US policy encouraged the Diem Government to reject the elections. It therefore, Chaumont adds, “constitutes not only a breach of the engagements undertaken by the United States, but equally interference in the internal affairs of Vietnam”. Chaumont, Charles, “A Critical Study of American Intervention in Vietnam.” (Brussels: Permanent Committee of Enquiry for Vietnam, 1968), p. 19. Goertzel argues that by choosing to support Diem’s regime and his decision to boycott the elections, Eisenhower managed to “plant the seeds for later American intervention”. Goertzel, Ted, *Domestic Pressures for Abstention: Vietnam in Intervention or Abstention: The Dilemma of American Foreign Policy*. Ed. Robin Higham (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1975), p. 168. Cook also views the US acceptance of Diem’s refusal to participate in the 1956 elections as a major step towards intervention. Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, 1981, p. 206.

117 Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, pp. 88–89; Kolko, Gabriel, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 523; LaFeber, *The American Age*, 1989, p. 523.

elections was dropped from the agenda of the Council and postponed to a later date. The President let it happen. A consensus was not achieved.

It is somewhat difficult to assess whether Eisenhower was magisterial in the question of the elections as it was never really discussed at Council level. The NSC principals participated in the consideration and there were no breakdowns in their intellectual and bureaucratic resources. A period of almost two years would have allowed sufficient time for debate and give-and-take had it reached the top of the NSC machinery as an issue. Outside views were often accepted. The documents point out that Secretary Dulles was able to maneuver, in part, because Special Assistant Anderson was much weaker than Cutler had been. Despite Anderson's attempts to perform as a custodian-manager, he could not live up to the expectations of his demanding job. Since the elections issue was not considered by the Council, we cannot speak about true multiple advocacy procedures.

To the public the Eisenhower Administration spokesmen presented a picture of optimism over the elections process. The US deliberately made the question so complex that it was becoming increasingly difficult to carry out the elections. Washington constantly used the free conditions as an excuse for its delaying tactics. The US actions with respect to the all-Vietnam elections were transparent. Washington's position in the question would have been decisive because the US was at the time the sole outside nation which could have pressured Diem into accepting the elections. The nation-building effort would most likely have come to a halt as the Vietminh would have won the elections for reunification. The position adopted by the NSC and the fate of the elections was sealed at the latest by fall 1955 with the estimates made by the intelligence community of North Vietnam's likely landslide victory. In order to secure its own goals, the US was forced to prevent the elections.

■ Success with Diem (June 1955–May 1957)

Nation-Building and Defense for the “Miracle Man”

Contingency Planning

Apparently, the NSC did not have accurate enough reports on the situation in South Vietnam. Young admitted in early June 1955 that he was deeply worried “by the lack of control and authority” in South Vietnam, which had been reflected in reports from Saigon. Young called for more thorough evaluations and situation reports for the use of the State Department and, indirectly, the NSC-OCB machinery. He explained the request in his personal letter to Ambassador Reinhardt. Young wrote that the need stemmed from the fact that

“the interest in Viet-Nam is so extensive here in Washington and the stakes are so high...”¹

Young seems to have been exaggerating to some extent, as there were signs that the overall interest had been waning. The interest may, however, have been high from both his perspective and that of some State Department officials. In mid-June, 1955, Young continued to show interest within the OCB Special Working Group. The sending of a joint State-Defense-FOA telegram to Saigon requesting information on force levels and costs had resulted in a split opinion among the members of the Special Working Group. They had to ask a subcommittee to prepare a new joint message. Young suggested that the matter would have to be resolved “at a higher level” to determine if the OCB was to carry on with its drastic reductions and a large-scale demobilization, as the Collins program called for. Young proposed that a slower phasing down of the Vietnamese forces was the route to go. The Defense Department representative did not in principle oppose greater expenditure, but he mentioned that the Pentagon did not have the available funds for FY 56. Hence, if the force levels were not going to decrease, he added, there would be a need for “substantial additional assistance”. The

1 As Young was hoping for more accurate data, he wrote that “we are certainly short-handed here and in Saigon for good political officers. We need another officer here on Viet-Nam, if we could find one.” Yet he praised the Second Secretary and Consul at Saigon John A. McKesson, who on April 28 had coordinated a 32-page study entitled the “Problem of Combatting Communist Subversion in South Vietnam”. The Country Team had come up with the study in reply to a request by the State Department to provide background “information to the OCB in its formulation of policy toward U.S. assistance to security forces in countries threatened by Communist subversion”. Young’s letter to Reinhardt, June 2, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 430; *Ibid.*, p. 430, footnote 4. For the Country Team enclosure see Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.5/4-2855, RG 59, NA.

MAAG-Saigon, for example, had recommended that the force level of the ARVN should be 170,000 men until July 1956 and then be reduced by 20,000 by the end of the year. The Embassy and the FOA suggested, along the lines of General Collins, a reduction to 100,000. Both recommendations included conscription. The first alternative would cost almost twice as much as the second. The Special OCB Working Group on Indochina discussed the matter twice “without coming to any decision” and so established a Subcommittee to draft a cable “to the field asking for more information”. The Working Group also reported on the FOA public administration contract with the MSUG to improve civil administration by a combination of research and instruction and that the Vietnamese-American Association (Bi-National Center) had commenced preparing 140 South Vietnamese officers for specialized military training in the United States. The Working Group also noted that the USIS was attempting to condition the population to resist Communism. About 90 percent of its effort in South Vietnam was aimed at creating a feeling of civic responsibility and support for Diem’s Government. Young wrote to Hoover, Jr. that “in a week or two this matter may have to be raised at a higher level” to decide if the US should go ahead along the lines suggested by Collins, or to embark on a slower phasing down of the ARVN. Despite the higher costs, Young suggested the latter option.²

The IAC responded to these pleas and warned on July 19, 1955 that the Vietminh’s aims were twofold. First, they aimed at consolidating their rule in North Vietnam and then, second, they wished to gain control of the south. The main method was subversion, the report added. Widespread guerilla activities would start if the Vietminh Government asserted that it could only achieve victory through military operations.³

Nevertheless, the system continued to rely upon the intelligence sources as the main source of information for the NSC papers. The State Department had this time requested the CIA to provide a report on how Diem could deal with his opponents. The Agency representatives believed in Diem’s eventual success. The President had confided in Lansdale and taken advice from him. With

2 OCB Status Reports, June 21 and 28, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Status Reports IV, RG 59, NA; Young’s memorandum to Hoover, Jr. (through Robertson), June 24, 1955, *ibid.*, Box 29, Southeast Asia 4. See also memoranda of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meetings, June 15, 1955 (held on June 14) and June 23, 1955 (held on June 21), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. The MAAG alternative would have cost 336 million dollars and the more drastic reduction of the South Vietnamese forces 180 million dollars during the CY 1956. Young’s memorandum to Hoover, Jr., June 24, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 466–467. The Country Team had recommended that there be a delay in cutting down the size of the ARVN in order to answer the threat of subversion, which was increasing. The team also suggested strengthening the military police and other officials concerned with internal security, accompanied by USIS propaganda campaigns. Country team enclosure “Problem of Combatting Communist Subversion in South Vietnam,” April 28, 1955. Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/5–2455, RG 59, NA; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, p. 430, footnote 4.

3 NIE-63.1-55, “Probable Developments in North Vietnam to July 1956,” July 19, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 993–996.

respect to the most important questions, Diem, the report went on, had “given proof in the past of heeding American advice”. According to the CIA, Diem could be influenced by Lansdale and Reinhardt. President Eisenhower remembered Lansdale from his reputation in the Philippines, but in early June Secretary Dulles had to remind Eisenhower that the Colonel “was now in a position of special responsibility in relation to Premier Diem”.⁴

The Americans wanted to secure the future of their protégé by making contingency plans. The military contingency planning was conducted even though the prospects looked good for the time being. The Pentagon and JCS produced a study of the potential introduction of US forces into Vietnam. The NSC had asked the JCS in August 1955 to find out what kind of military operations were needed if hostilities broke out again in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs assigned an ad hoc committee, which consisted of soldiers, to study the possibilities. The Committee concluded that the ARVN would be capable only of restricted resistance with heavy casualties, unless any early warning of the attack came so early that the US could carry out effective countermeasures. Part of South Vietnam would be lost, the Committee added, but a fighting retreat would most probably be successful, after which the US air and naval forces could strike against targets in North Vietnam. Then two to four divisions of US mobile forces would come to the rescue. The Committee had calculated that a complete victory over North Vietnam would have required eight US divisions, two to three tactical bomber squadrons, an aircraft carrier group, and a landing detachment of the Marine Corps. In addition, the remnants of the ARVN would be needed especially to carry out an extensive campaign of internal security to secure supply lines. In the final stage, an extensive amphibious attack was to be made in the Red River Delta area in North Vietnam in order to cut supply lines, the Committee recommended.⁵

Another alternative, according to the ad hoc committee of the JCS, would have been a direct attack on North Vietnam and the annihilation of its armed forces. This Korea-style operation to throw back the aggressor would have taken a year without the help of atomic weapons. The Committee suggested that six US and five ARVN divisions would have been enough. A landing operation was also included in this option; it would have taken place just south of Hanoi by using two reinforced divisions. The landing force, the Committee predicted, would have taken Haiphong and the Red River Delta in three months. The clearing of North Vietnam, the committee calculated, would have taken an additional eight months, even if atomic weapons were used. If such weapons were excluded, the operation would last much longer and tie down more troops.

4 Memorandum from the Deputy Director, Plans, of the CIA Frank Wisner (drafted by George E. Aurell) to Robertson, June 3, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 432–434; Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, June 7, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, John Foster Dulles Chronological series, Box 11, DDEL.

5 Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 269–270. General O’Daniel had suggested that the North Vietnamese be allowed inside the territory of South Vietnam and then the US would retaliate and land further south in the north. O’Daniel quoted in *ibid.*, p. 268.

The success of the operation would depend on the efficiency of the ARVN, the timing of the early warning, and the restrictions placed upon the operation by Washington.⁶

The Pentagon study was transmitted for the information of the Council and the use of the PB on September 15, 1955. As for the deployment of atomic weapons, the Chiefs concluded that “no prohibitions should be imposed on the use” of them. The JCS pointed out that the US could not guarantee the territorial integrity of any SEATO country and especially those “applicable to protected, non-member countries” such as South Vietnam. They suggested that the preparatory military steps for the South Vietnamese military should include an increase in their effectiveness, an improvement of bases in Thailand and Cambodia for use in support of their operations, special training also in foreign countries, and SEATO combined exercises. In addition, preparations could be made to insure the rapid movement of supporting US personnel.⁷

The mobile striking forces did not minimize the importance of the ground forces “in being in the area”, Secretary Dulles told ANZUS representatives at their gathering at the State Department. The ground forces stationed in Southeast Asia, Dulles explained, would deter and slow the aggression until the mobile first-line striking forces arrived. For this reason, the US encouraged the increase of ground forces in South Vietnam, Dulles said. The New Zealand Ambassador, Sir Leslie Munro, asked CINCPAC Stump if the Americans had plans for defending Thailand and “the regions to the south” in case South Vietnam fell. The Admiral replied that this type of eventuality was the basis of US military planning. Walter S. Robertson clarified the regional thinking of the US policy-makers in an interview that he gave in 1967; Vietnam, for example, never was “an objective in itself”, but instead “a door through which the Communists hope to pass to taking over the whole area”.⁸

South Vietnam was being used as an example when the OCB monitored informational programs in late September. The Far Eastern Director of the

6 The JCS delivered the committee papers to Secretary Wilson on September 9, 1955. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 269–271.

7 At the request of the Pentagon, there was a special limited distribution of the documents and special security precautions were observed in their handling. Lay, Jr.’s memorandum for the NSC, September 16, 1955 with a Defense-JCS study “U.S. Policy in the Event of a Renewal of Aggression in Vietnam,” in JCS memorandum to Secretary Robertson, Jr., September 9, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 9, NSC 5405, DDEL. About the transmittal of the study to the NSC machinery see Robertson’s memorandum for Lay, Jr., September 15, 1955, *ibid.* The PB had, however, considered the State and Defense drafts on the subject of the study in early August and referred them to the NSC Staff and the Board Assistants for preparation. The August 11 draft reference report was amended and adopted on August 16, 1955 and transmitted for appropriate member agencies of the PB for implementation. Subsequently, three reference studies (dated September 13 and 16 and October 10) were prepared on the basis of the reference report of August 16. See Records of meetings of the PB, August 4 and 15 and October 10, 1955, Records of the NSC, Miscellaneous Documents, Box 2, Planning Board Records of Meeting 1955, RG 273, NA. The document was also referred to in connection with Council consideration of NSC 5612. It was forwarded as an enclosure to the JCS memorandum to Wilson, September 9, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 536–540.

8 Minutes of the ANZUS Council Meeting, September 24, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 136–138; Walter S. Robertson Oral History Transcript, DDEL.

USIA, George Hellyer, who had worked as a public affairs officer in Saigon, briefed the Board members on the USIA programs in Vietnam. The annotated OCB agenda for that meeting reveals that Hellyer's presentation was "designed to show that Militant Liberty does not fit into the current effort". Agenda item 1 was based on four briefing papers, two from the State Department and two from the OCB. The second item was devoted to consideration of the September 12 and 23 drafts of the general NSC 1290-d report, with a labeled tab on five Far Eastern countries, including Vietnam, attached to the briefing papers.⁹

The Eisenhower Administration received additional support for their policies from the Senate. Senator Mansfield had visited South Vietnam again in September 1955. He gave his report to the SFRC early the following month. He concluded that South Vietnam would have to strengthen its democratic political institutions and the ARVN and start reconstruction. The nation, Mansfield wrote, should reduce its dependence on foreign aid. But at the same time, the Senator urged the US to encourage its allies to help South Vietnam. Mansfield still hoped that South Vietnam would work peacefully towards reunification. He called Diem the key figure in the process of progress, who had followers only in the cities. Promoting the economy was essential for Diem to secure his support, Mansfield asserted.¹⁰

Mansfield's conclusions did not remain unnoticed in the NSC machinery. Young cited the Mansfield report and told the members of the OCB Special Working Group that Diem had consolidated his power. Young also proposed in early October that the US should commence long-range planning with respect to the Indochinese states as the situation especially in Vietnam was "stabilized enough" and the "circumstances had looked bleak and unpromising" a year earlier. Young admitted to O. Williams of the CIA that there were still critical dangers which nobody questioned, but that the chances for achieving success had improved. When the discussion turned to the costing mission, Young regarded it as "extremely important" and said that a survey team should be sent without delay. The Working Group agreed to send in two interdepartmental survey teams. At first, the costing mission would operate for a period of two months and then its findings would be incorporated into a broader survey which would be made by "a high-level mission" in three to six months. The reports would then be used for establishing "guidelines for U.S. operations" in Indochina. The OCB Staff member, Kenneth P Landon, then recommended that, as a part of long-range planning, a concise plan of operations could be drawn up for the three Indochinese states as had been done for Thailand. Landon pointed out

9 Annotated and formal OCB Agendas for September 28, 1955 meeting, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, October 4, 1955 (held on September 28), *ibid*.

10 US Senate, Council on Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos: Report by Senator Mike Mansfield, October 6, 1955, 84th Congress, 1st Session. Committee Print (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1955), *passim*. Mansfield's knowledge of the Indochinese questions was extraordinary. Senator J. William Fulbright later admitted that for the members of the SFRC in 1955 Indochina or the leaders of those countries were merely expressions. Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War*, 1981, p. 52.

that a normal Outline Plan of Operations, which in turn resembled the OCB's earlier Summary of Action Requirements (of October 19, 1954), was merely "a description of what things U.S. agencies are planning to do in the immediate future". The Working Group also authorized Consul Thomas J. Corcoran to close the Consulate in Hanoi as it had run out of supplies and the Vietminh refused to allow any rotation of personnel or for supplies to be replenished.¹¹ Young's suggestion that implementation and planning procedures should be changed implies that the internal security situation in South Vietnam had considerably improved. The issue was not perhaps viewed as a special case from then on but rather as a normal question.

Fortunately, the State Department's NSC Staff had reached similar conclusions to those of Mansfield. It had been asked by the PB to provide a draft statement on political and economic actions in case hostilities broke out again in Vietnam. According to the statement prepared by Bowie, the US should let the Vietminh know, as a deterrent, that it would retaliate under SEATO. South Vietnam should also make statements to win international support. As a preparatory action, the US could "arrange facilities for introduction of US mobile ground forces into Southeast Asian area should such commitment of forces be decided upon". In the event of a Vietminh attack, Bowie wrote, the US should get South Vietnam to request for a counteraction by SEATO. The matter could also be taken to the UN, which could also be used as a military action, but the supreme command should be in the hands of the Americans. The foreign troops would be pulled out at the earliest possible time in order not to imply that the US aimed "to establish a colonial regime", Bowie asserted. He concluded that intervention would have a serious impact on the South Vietnamese economy and that it would make the country dependent upon US aid, which would have to increase substantially.¹²

The OCB machinery was obliged to prepare continuous reports for the Council. When the Special Working Group on Indochina discussed the draft

11 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 12, 1955 (held on October 5), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 554-558. Young admitted to Reinhardt that he "would like now try to gear United States agencies to using more long-range factors in their planning and operations in Viet-Nam. This means OCB here and the USOM there." Young's letter to Reinhardt, October 5, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 551-554. Gordon Gray, who was later to become the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs after leaving the Pentagon, had recommended already on September 9 that a small interagency costing mission be sent to Saigon for a month. The actors concerned agreed and a team was appointed and scheduled to leave for South Vietnam in early November. See Gray's letter to Hoover, Jr. September 9, 1955, as an attachment to Young's memorandum to Sebald, October 17, 1955. Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.5-MSP/9-955, RG 59, NA; FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 556, footnote 4. The final draft version of the "Outline Plan of Operations with Respect to Vietnam" was completed on December 21, 1956. For the text see, for example, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, Special Working Group on Indochina, DDEL.

12 Draft study "Political and Economic Measures in Event of a Renewal of Aggression in Viet-Nam," submitted to the PB by the State Department member Bowie, October 6, 1955, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1016-1019; FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 560-562. The study had been requested by the PB in mid-August. PB memorandum with "U.S. Policy in the Event of a Renewal of Aggression in Vietnam". Lay, Jr.'s memorandum to the PB members, August 16, 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 514-516.

version of the Progress Report on the Far East on October 13, they first revised the paragraphs concerning the Indochinese states. After having completed their work on those, Young moved to suggest that they should prepare a draft incorporating material on the countries of Southeast Asia. The Working Group discussed ways to correct misinterpretations of Diem made by US correspondents. They also heard a report from Hanoi that all US personnel were going to have to be evacuated in the near future.¹³

Lower-echelon officials influenced the NSC system in a tangible way. Robertson, for example, wrote to Under Secretary of State Hoover, Jr. about the OCB Special Working Group's suggestions at its meeting on November 7. When the Assistant Secretary referred to the need for long-range planning on South Vietnam, he asked what the US expected politically and whether additional economic assistance should be considered. Robertson also pointed out that Mansfield, who was, according to Robertson, "one of the most influential and knowledgeable Senators", had recommended sending a survey team to South Vietnam. Robertson urged Hoover, Jr. to take the matter up with the ICA Director, John B. Hollister, before the OCB discussed it. In addition, the Assistant Secretary hoped that the State Department would agree to send a special economic mission to South Vietnam with the task of making recommendations. The OCB Special Working Group should be given the assignment to make preparations for long-range planning and to draft the terms of reference of the special mission. An interagency, Assistant Secretary-level committee, Robertson concluded, should coordinate the different aspects of US aid. An attachment to Robertson's memorandum reveals that the South Vietnamese wanted more capital goods instead of consumer goods. The basic principle of the US aid programs so far had been "the generation of local currency to pay the local currency costs of the military". According to a memorandum on a supplement to the OCB minutes of November 2, the MAAG ceiling question was also discussed. Chief MAAG had argued that the phasing out of the FEC would place an increasing burden on MAAG in the training effort. The participants agreed that the issue would be raised by the Pentagon with State Department personnel. In trying to find a solution, it was wondered whether "all practicable steps had been taken to substitute civilian personnel for military personnel". The Pentagon representative promised to find out.¹⁴

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13 One of the top correspondents of *The Economist* had written "an unfavorable article" about Diem titled "Mr. Diem Loses Favor". Young said that the Washington correspondent for the *Economist* would have to be contacted about the issue. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 18, 1955 (held on October 13), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. Landon had asked the departments and agencies to submit their comments on the Progress Report on August 22, 1955. The Pentagon, for example, had forwarded its comments on the Progress Report on the Indochinese states (NSC 5405 and NSC 5429/5) by early September. See Lieutenant Colonel Hugh F. Queenin's memorandum for Landon, September 7, 1955, *ibid.*

14 Robertson's Memorandum to Hoover, Jr. (drafted by Young), November 22, 1955 and its attachment "U.S. Aid Programs and Program Procedures in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam", FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 584-588. Hoover, Jr. forwarded the recommendations to Hollister in early December. The latter replied on January 20, 1956 and agreed to

An information breakdown was evident in the NSC machinery. Young, who was working hard with Vietnam, informed Ambassador Reinhardt about the appeal of the question in Washington. He wrote that “there continues to be a very great interest in the future of Viet-Nam in high levels in the United States Government, and we need plenty of background information”.¹⁵

The official minutes of the Board meeting of November 2 do not indicate serious discussions about South Vietnam, but a supplement to the minutes reveals that there had also been talk during the luncheon phase about the report from the ICA Director Hollister. According to Chief MAAG in Saigon, the MAAG ceiling posed an urgent problem. There was a shortage of military training personnel as the French were withdrawing. The OCB members contemplated how to circumvent the Geneva limitations in the matter. Furthermore, it was considered a useful idea to establish a training center in the Philippines to supplement the training efforts in the SEATO area. The Pentagon promised to weigh the chances in the context of the MAAG limitations for South Vietnam.¹⁶

Additional sources of information were outsiders such as Lansdale. He was present at the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting on November 7, 1955. Together with Lieutenant Rufus Phillips, the Colonel briefed the members about the Working Group of their joint observations. The two were reported to “have been engaged in special activities” in South Vietnam. Their main task had been to secure the popularity of Diem. The whole meeting was dedicated to reporting without any consideration of papers.¹⁷

The NSC PB informed the members of the Council in late November 1955 that the ARVN did not meet as such the military requirements, and that the economy of South Vietnam was not strong enough to maintain the ARVN then or in the foreseeable future. The PB, therefore, suggested, the ARVN needed considerable support from the US.¹⁸

long-range planning, but asked that the sending of the special mission be postponed as there was already a US technical assistance mission, the ICA was reevaluating economic aid, and Diem's Government had commenced agrarian reform. Hoover, Jr's letter to Hollister, December 8, 1955. Department of State, Central Files, 751G.5-MSP/12-855, RG 59, NA; Hollister's letter to Hoover, Jr., January 20, 1956, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 587, footnote 7. See also Bishop's memorandum for Hoover, Jr., November 9, 1955 with Staats's memorandum for the record (supplement to the OCB minutes), November 7, 1955 as an attachment, filed with the OCB Minutes, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA.

- 15 Young added that enhanced reporting would be needed “in dealing with the British and French Governments”. Young's letter to Reinhardt, October 27, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 568.
- 16 Supplement to the minutes of the OCB meeting of November 2, 1955 in Staats's memorandum for the record, November 7, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, November 4, 1955 (held on November 2), *ibid.* The former CINCPAC, Admiral Felix B. Stump, recalled that that Secretary Dulles had followed Herman Phleger's advice on the MAAG ceiling issue. Phleger argued that the Geneva Agreements limited the US options. Felix P. Stump Oral History Transcript, COHP.
- 17 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 8, 1955 (held on November 7), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 572-573.
- 18 Lay, Jr's memorandum to the members of the NSC with Review of Military Assistance and Supporting Programs as an enclosure, November 29, 1955, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume X, 1989, pp. 41-43.

The organization of the Council was not constant. “Needless” structures were abolished and new organs formed. The situation in South Vietnam seems to have stabilized by late 1955, leaving the Indochina Working Group with fewer duties. Young thus reiterated his point made a month earlier and moved to suggest the merger of the OCB Working Group on Southeast Asia (NSC 5405) and Special Working Group on Indochina. The personnel of the two Working Groups was almost identical. Young, who served as the Chairman of both, reminded Staats that in their Progress Report they had noted that the NSC papers should be prepared for the mainland Southeast Asian countries and on a regional basis. One working group, Young added, “should deal with any NSC or OCB paper covering the area of Southeast Asia, with such informal and ad hoc subcommittees as necessary on a country-by-country basis”. Young proposed that those subcommittees could be chaired, as his alternates, by the appropriate political desk officer from the State Department.¹⁹

The new paper-producing policy of the OCB really mattered. There was no need to submit all the papers for formal consideration. In late 1955 several Asian-related Working Groups, when developing the semi-annual Progress Report to the NSC, also prepared and agreed to a detailed listing of major actions taken in relation to Southeast Asia (NSC 5405 and portions of NSC 5429/5). The detailed listing was a compilation of reports from the State, Defense, Commerce and Treasury Departments, the ICA and the USIA. The listing was given to the OCB members and other agencies as well as to the NSC Staff on an informal basis. It was intended as a background document and for reference purposes. Even though it was being made available in connection with the Progress Report, it was not to be submitted for the formal action of the Board Assistants or the Board itself, but meant only to assist in briefing those principals who were to act on the Report. The subject paper included numerical and statistical information on MAAG and the Training Relations Instruction Mission (TERM)²⁰, military assistance, evacuation and South Vietnamese force levels. It also mentioned that a small survey team had departed for South Vietnam to produce recommendations for making economies less dependent on US financial aid.²¹

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- 19 Young’s memorandum to Staats, December 2, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 4, RG 59, NA. Staats agreed that the merger should be undertaken. Staats memorandum for the Board Assistants, December 5, 1955, *ibid*.
 - 20 The OCB machinery had noted that in early March, 1956 the members of the ICSC and the French had already opposed the US proposal to establish TERM, since it was inconsistent with the Geneva Agreements. In early April, the Weekly Status Report of the Board indicated that the establishment of the 350-strong TERM had been approved in order to achieve the NSC objective of military assistance. The developments and difficulties concerning TERM were followed throughout May. See, for example, OCB Status Reports, March 5, 19 and 26 and April 9, 16 and 23 and May 7, 21 and 28, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 5, Status Reports V, RG 59, NA.
 - 21 OCB Secretariat Staff memorandum for the Board Assistants, December 2, 1955 with a subject paper (dated November 29, 1955) as an attachment, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 4, RG 59, NA.

The Board also had its regular duties to perform. The OCB monitored the NSC 1290-d police program. As suggested by Hoover, Jr., the Board had agreed at its September 21, 1955 meeting that all US Government agencies with responsibilities for NSC 1290-d “should maximize their efforts to improve” the program in South Vietnam. The final action on the completed report on South Vietnam, which had been transmitted to the Board in early September, was to wait until the complete list of country reports and the comprehensive report had been submitted. In mid-December 1955 a report on developments was completed. This analyzed the nature of the security threat in South Vietnam in detail and concluded that the US should not lose South Vietnam. In order to maintain internal security, US assistance programs and support for the ARVN were considered essential. The crucial elections question was to be considered in connection with all policies. The recommendations of the Report were written as if they were additional action items for the Outline Plan of Operations. The actions included the improvement of the police and military forces as well as technical and economic assistance, and political education provided by the USIA. This time the ICA and the Pentagon had somewhat more responsibilities than the State. Considering the report on December 14, the OCB noted that the paper was subject to the instructions and procedures which had been specified by the Board for all NSC Action 1290-d papers at its meeting on November 16. It meant that specific amounts of funds were thus subject to the normal programming and budgetary procedures and that the implementation of recommendations contained in the report was to be carried out in a similar manner, since the action items in Outline Plan of Operations were implemented through the overall leadership of the ICA. Furthermore, The Board noted that a request from Diem’s Government for the urgent establishment of a village defense corps had been supported by the US Embassy in Saigon and the issue was thus “under active consideration in Washington”.²²

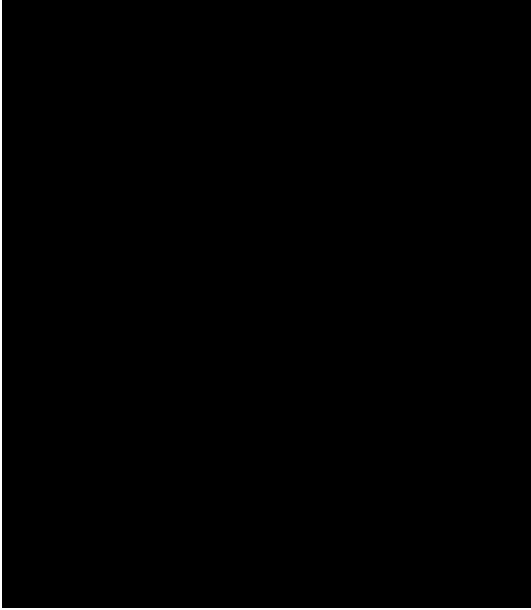
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The format – the names of the sections – of the Progress Reports had been changed in October 1955 to make it more concise. In indicating identifiable problems or areas of difficulty the Working Groups were directed to elaborate upon them by the use of annexes which were to accompany the Progress Report to the NSC. For details see Staats’s memorandum for the Board Assistants, October 31, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 11, Board Assistants’ Miscellaneous Memoranda 1959, RG 59, NA.

22 OCB Minutes, September 23, 1955 (held on September 21), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 12, DDEL; OCB Minutes, December 16, 1955 (held on December 14), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA. There was a previous draft of the report “Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Free Vietnam (Pursuant to NSC No. Action 1290-d taken at the 229th meeting of the NSC) and Recommended Action,” dated August 22, 1955, which was authorized to destruct. OCB Secretariat Staff’s memorandum for the record, December 19, 1955 with a 12-page report under the same title, dated December 14, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. For a copy of the draft of August 22, 1955, see *ibid.* The over-all report had been revised and concurred in by the Board on November 23, 1955 and it had been afterwards noted by the Council. *Ibid.* For corrections in the 1290-d Vietnam country analysis to be revised by the OCB see the Chairman of the Working Group on NSC Action 1290-d Landreth M. Harrison’s memorandum for Staats, December 2, 1955 with corrections (dated December 1) as an attachment, *ibid.* The Office of Special Operations of the Joint Staff had argued that the NSC

Occasionally, the reports required fine-tuning, as the OCB was rather strict about the proposed language which it was to approve. At its meeting of December 21, 1955, for example, the OCB revised and concurred in the Progress Report on NSC 5405 (dated December 9, 1955). The Board urged the Working Group on Southeast Asia to alter the language of the Progress Report “to indicate the respects in which the policy needs clarification and in which more specific guidance is required for operational consideration”. After clearance with the member agencies the amplification of one paragraph, the Progress Report would be ready for transmission to the Council. The Board also noted a memorandum by Rockefeller III questioning the adequacy of NSC 5405. The OCB members agreed to forward the memorandum to the Working Group. Furthermore, some questions required a long period for their consideration. It had taken the Board more than a month to respond to the requests from Saigon about a MAAG ceiling. The OCB agreed that the Pentagon would send a letter to the State Department asking the State to consider further the possibility of increasing the number of MAAG personnel in South Vietnam.²³

New concepts were incorporated into the NSC work. This could also mean problems. Towards the end of 1955 there were some exchanges of letters in the US Government on the concept of Civic Action²⁴ and its relation to Community Development²⁵ in South Vietnam. There was considerable disagreement about

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- Action 1290-d taken at the 229th meeting of Council specifically called for the OCB to make a report to the NSC and did not indicate that action should be taken by the pertinent departments and agencies on the report before it had been submitted to the Council. Within the Joint Staff, all NSC 1290-d-related papers had been informally staffed, because it had been believed that they were to be in support of a study. The final study was going to be submitted to the JCS for comments and recommendations before the Pentagon would approve the study at the OCB level. Deputy Chief of JCS’s Joint Subsidiary Activities Division, Colonel D. W. Fuller’s memorandum for the Office of Radford’s Colonel Leroy H. Watson, September 20, 1955, Records of the JCS, Chair’s File (Radford), Box 29, 334 NSC, RG 218, NA. The Board decided to consider the final draft of the overall report and related country papers at its meeting of November 16 in order to permit the consideration of JCS views, which were to be available after November 7. OCB Minutes, October 4, 1955 (held on September 28), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA.
- 23 OCB Minutes, December 9 and 23, 1955 (held on December 7 and 21), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 1, Minutes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Progress Report on NSC 5405, March 16 through November 16, 1955, December 21, 1955, Documents of the National Security Council 1947–1977, First Supplement, Microfilm reel II. The OCB Special Working Group on Indochina and the Working Group members in the NSC 5405 Committee had started discussions on the first draft of the Progress Report in early November. Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, November 8, 1955 (held on November 7), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.
 - 24 Civic Action was a form a psychological warfare. For Diem it was a means of bringing the central government down to village level. See George M. Hellyer’s memorandum to OCB’s Landon, December 2, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL.
 - 25 The term referred to a technique used by the Diem Government to stimulate organized self-help programs. OCB Staff Representative Kenneth P. Landon’s memorandum for the Ad Hoc Working Group on Community Development, March 27, 1957, with a draft paper “Civic Action and Community Development,” undated, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 7, Southeast Asia (NSC 6012)(4), DDEL.



Eisenhower participated in and presided over more than 90 percent of all of the weekly NSC meetings during his Presidency. Depending on the whereabouts of the President, the Council meetings were sometimes held at emergency relocation sites. In this picture Eisenhower, Nixon and Dulles are seen leaving an NSC meeting held at Camp David in December 1955. (National Archives)

the relationship of the two concepts and their utility, but an OCB Working Group had again been designated on an ad hoc basis to study the question in general. At the October 13 meeting of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina Young had been supported in his wish “to secure more information” about the matter as it might, in his opinion, have been “a very useful technique for smoking out Communists in the villages”. On December 30, 1955, Landon from the OCB took up the matter with Staats. Landon suggested that the OCB would “pursue this subject with vigor”. In addition, he wrote that it would be wise to “establish some basis for interagency interest in making the most of community development or Civic Action in carrying out NSC objectives”.²⁶

Mansfield’s reports were not the only outsider studies to supplement the NSC-commissioned surveys. Senator Theodore F. Green’s report on the US technical assistance in several regions was published at the beginning of 1956. Green concluded that the need had been and still was considerable in the case of South Vietnam. It was a miracle, Green added, that South Vietnam still existed, even though it did not possess economic resources. He also mentioned that the Americans had succeeded in achieving so many programs in a such a short time, although the time for planning had been insufficient. The US military and

26 Memorandum of the OCB Special Working Group on Indochina meeting, October 18, 1955 (held on October 13), WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central File series, Box 39, DDEL; Landon’s memorandum for Staats, December 30, 1955, with ICA’s Chief of Community Development Division Louis Miniclier’s memorandum, dated December 27, 1955, forwarding ICA Mission Chief Leland Barrows’s letter, dated December 12, 1955, as attachments, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central File series, Box 39, DDEL. For further correspondence on Civic Action and Community Development see Hellyer’s memorandum to Landon, December 2, 1955, Miniclier’s memorandum to Landon, December 15, 1955, and Landon’s memorandum to Staats, December 19, 1955, *ibid*.

economic aid had played an important role in the harmonization of South Vietnam, Green wrote.²⁷

At times, the information offered by the intelligence community also concentrated on larger Far Eastern questions with a bearing on the problems in South Vietnam. The SNIE of January 17, 1956 stated that South Vietnam would support a US trade embargo of China because the country pursued an anti-Communist foreign policy, and because US aid was vital to its own economy and security. South Vietnam, the SNIE continued, did not think that there would be any economic gains to be made from trade with the countries of the Communist bloc. If the US was to ease its sanctions against China, it would probably lead to a loss of prestige in South Vietnam because the South Vietnamese would think that the US was unable to restore a staunchly anti-Communist policy, and that it would have adhered indirectly to the demands of the Communists, the intelligence sources predicted.²⁸

Some criticism arose from within the Council system. Deputy Executive Assistant Edward P. Lilly from OCB's Secretariat Staff, for example, was not satisfied with the work of the NSC machinery. He therefore recommended to Staats of the OCB that a Navy Lieutenant, Thomas A. Dooley, who had worked as a medical doctor among the refugees in Haiphong during the entire evacuation operation, should be invited to the PB and the OCB to give a presentation. Lilly, who viewed the issue of Vietnam in a regional context and against the background of the overall US policy objectives, hoped for improvements in the work of the NSC, and wrote that:

“...the whole gamut of his briefing is an examination of American policy in capsule form. A briefing of this type might easily cause the Planning Board to do a ‘re-think’ on American policy in the Far East, if not on American policy as a whole.”²⁹

The NSC system had not become so set in a fixed mold, after all. In the presence of a pressing time factor, for example, certain significant items could receive prioritization. At the Council meeting of January 26, 1956 Allen Dulles made an exception to his routines. The CIA Director omitted all of the parts of his briefing except the situations in South Vietnam and Indonesia, “where he perceived worrisome trends”. Allen Dulles commented that Diem was in fact

27 US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report to the Committee by Senator Theodore F. Green on Technical Assistance in the Far East, South Asia, and Middle East, 84th Congress, 2d Session, January 13, 1956 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1956), pp. 14, 540.

28 SNIE-100-56, “Political Effects of a Relaxation of Controls on Trade with Communist China,” January 17, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 290–298.

29 Lilly's memorandum for Staats, January 27, 1956, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. Staats's comments on the document indicate that he regarded the suggestion as a “practicable idea”. Ibid. Dooley also gave a presentation on the emphasis on psychological warfare at the Pentagon. The OCB representatives were invited to participate. An undated note for OCB Staff meeting, *ibid.* About Dooley see Dooley, Thomas A., *Deliver Us from Evil: The Story of Viet Nam's Flight to Freedom* (New York: Farrar, 1956) and Fisher, James T., *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927–1961* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

“having serious troubles”. Despite his good record, Diem was now facing increased infiltration from North Vietnam and the elections were close. Furthermore, his Government, Allen Dulles added, “was not sufficiently broad-based”. Radford confirmed that during his discussion with Diem he had received a much worse picture of the situation than the policy-makers in Washington possessed. According to Radford, Diem regarded the infiltration by the Vietminh as worse than the military situation. Diem had wanted to enlarge the village militias and had complained about the French reluctance to assist in preventing infiltration from the sea. Radford believed that it would have been against the Geneva Agreements for the French Navy to do so. The Chairman of the JCS thought that Diem had reasons for suspicion, since some lower-echelon French officials were assisting the dissident groups in South Vietnam. Allen Dulles answered “that the time was at hand for a fresh review of the situation”.³⁰

The original idea of the NSC was interdepartmental and -agency cooperation and coordination. The Defense Department could not, for example, solve issues without the assistance of the State Department. At the end of January, the Secretary of Defense Wilson was worried about the logistic situation in South Vietnam because the costing team had reported. Wilson wrote to the Secretary of State that “prompt action at highest levels” would be required to solve the problem. This meant, Wilson recommended, 150–200 additional American maintenance personnel should be sent to South Vietnam to fill the void left by the withdrawal of the FEC and to salvage US military materiel.³¹ In early February, Dulles approved the plan made by the State and Defense Departments to establish a temporary mission of not more than 350 men to locate the surplus US materiel and return at least part of it. Another task of TERM was to enhance the logistical capacity of the ARVN.³²

When the Council turned to the question of Vietnam at its meeting on March 8, Dillon Anderson went through the highlights of the OCB’s Progress Report on NSC 5405, which had been completed before Christmas of the previous year. The Acting Secretary of State, Hoover, Jr., asked permission to report on developments after the completion of the Progress Report. He argued that the policies “needed to be up to date though many of them remain generally valid”. Information coming from Southeast Asia did not alarm him. He reported on the closing of the US Consulate in Hanoi and the outcome of the elections. According to him, 83 percent of the eligible voters had indeed voted and given

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30 Memorandum of Discussion of the 274th Meeting of the NSC, January 26, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL.

31 Wilson’s letter to Dulles, January 31, 1956, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1046–1047; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 626–627. The costing team was headed by the Department of the Army’s Chief of the Budget, Major General William Lawton. The costing team’s recommendations exist as an attachment to the Summary of the Lawton Mission Report in Young’s memorandum to Robertson, January 18, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 616–618.

32 Dulles’s cable to Reinhardt, February 9, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 640–641. Dulles’s concern about the US equipment dates back to the time of the Geneva Conference. He instructed the US delegation to protect the US materiel which was being used by the French. Dulles’s cable to Bedell Smith, July 16, 1954, FRUS 1952–1954, Volume XIII, Part 2, pp. 1843–1845.

their support to Diem, and the Vietminh threats to disrupt the elections had thus not worked. Furthermore, the Chief MAAG, who was in the US, regarded the situation as encouraging. He had pointed out that it was time to present requests for aid appropriations to Congress. Hoover, Jr. also told the NSC that there was a need to increase the assistance earmarked for South Vietnam for FY 1957, which would provide the tools to implementing US policy in Southeast Asia. Hoover, Jr. concluded his presentation by advertising the upcoming report by Secretary Dulles due after his return from his Asian tour. Eisenhower stopped the discussion to ask about Dulles's return as he wished to discuss the Bricker Amendment with him.³³

Seemingly simple issues could sometimes be complicated. Despite the agreement between the State and Defense Departments, the TERM had not solved the training question. The Acting Secretary of Defense Wilber M. Brucker informed the Council about the Pentagon plans to augment the size of MAAG. Secretary Hoover, Jr. supported the plan and said that the State Department "had been working very hard" on the issue, but, he added, the question "was a complex and difficult problem". Eisenhower interrupted and commented "let's keep pegging at it", but Hoover, Jr. pointed out that their key allies had even protested against sending rescue teams to salvage American military equipment, stating that this was against the Geneva Accords. Brucker stressed that there was 50–75 million dollars' worth of materiel to be brought back. The President could not understand why the British and the Canadians would not allow such a salvage operation. The personnel would have to be civilians as the British were determined on this matter, Brucker replied. The NSC directed the PB to revise the NSC 5405 Policy Paper "on both a regional and country basis", as Hoover, Jr. had suggested. The Council also taken note of Eisenhower's task for the Pentagon to study the possibilities of utilizing civilian contracts to salvage the US military materiel from South Vietnam.³⁴ The Council had, in cases like this, to divert its procedures from long-range planning to specific, acute matters.

In connection with his Asian tour, Secretary Dulles had visited Saigon in mid-March 1956. In his two-hour discussions with Diem, mainly political issues had been addressed. Dulles had urged Diem to take the armistice question seriously as neither the US nor Britain wished to go to Geneva for a second time. South Vietnam, Dulles stressed, should "give some indications of practical

33 Memorandum of Discussion of the 279th Meeting of the NSC, March 8, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 653–654; OCB's Progress Report on NSC 5405, December 21, 1955, Documents of the National Security Council 1947–1977, First Supplement, Microfilm reel II. OCB Special Working Group on Indochina was initially going to discuss the first draft of the Progress Report on NSC 5405 at its meeting on October 13, 1955. To speed up the drafting process, the Working Group had its own members on the NSC 5405 Committee. The first draft was due for consideration on November 14, 1955.

34 Memorandum of Discussion of the 279th Meeting of the NSC, March 8, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 655–656; NSC Action No. 1526, March 8, 1956, *ibid.*, Box 2.

compliance". When Diem commented that South Vietnam was not going to allow foreign troops onto its territory or to form military alliances, Dulles "cautioned" Diem not to finalize his country's position. South Vietnam, Dulles specified, might want to join SEATO at a later date. Dulles wrote to Eisenhower that he had been impressed with Diem's success against the sect armies. According to Dulles, Diem had gained in self-confidence and Dulles believed he had managed to get his message across about the declaration on the armistice.³⁵

The implementation of NSC decisions, such as the one concerning TERM, required cooperation not only in Washington but also in the field. On April 12, Secretary Dulles informed the Embassy in Saigon about the TERM. He wrote that the State Department had authorized the Pentagon to assign a total of 740 military personnel, of whom 692 men would be physically in South Vietnam at any given time. The French had reduced the numbers of the FEC to 35,000 by the end of 1955, although Collins and Ely had agreed that gradual withdrawal would have meant that there should still have been 100,000 troops at that point. By February 1956 there were just 15,000 French left in South Vietnam. By mid-April, 350 US officers and enlisted men had been given orders to be ready to leave in 120 days as members of TERM, which was planned as separate program, although it was under MAAG command. MAAG was given 48 new jobs to cover for transfers, those on leave, and others who were outside South Vietnam.³⁶

At its January 26 meeting, the NSC machinery did not regard a "fresh review" as necessary, and Secretary Dulles felt later during the spring that the threat of war was greater on the part of the Chinese than that of the Soviets. Clashes could start in danger spots, Dulles envisioned, which included Taiwan, Vietnam, or Korea. According to him, South Vietnam was the most problematic

35 Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Diem in Reinhardt's cable to Acting Secretary of State Hoover, Jr., March 15, 1956 (held on March 14), FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 659-661. In fact, Young, who was a member of Dulles's delegation, and Reinhardt that same day helped Chau in considering what the possible declaration on the armistice should consist. Reinhardt's cable to the Department of State, March 16, 1956, Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751G.00/3-1656, RG 59, NA; FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 661, footnote 4. Young also met Diem in order to persuade him to issue a statement about the armistice. Diem seemed to accept the point. Memorandum of conversation between Diem and Young in Counselor Anderson's cable to Hoover, Jr., March 17 (held on March 16), 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 661-662; Dulles's cable to Eisenhower, March 15, 1956, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, p. 658.

36 The State and Defense Departments agreed that the TERM personnel would be flown in by civilian planes in secrecy. The ICSC should be notified with delay. Dulles's cable to Reinhardt (drafted by Paul M. Kattenburg), April 12, 1956, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 669-671; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 224-225; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 254. The task of the TERM was to supervise the recovery and outshipment of excess US military equipment and to assist the ARVN to improve its logistical capability. Letter from the Under Secretary of State Murphy to Secretary Wilson, May 1, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 674-676; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1057-1059; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 289. In TRIM, the number of US officers grew as the number of their French colleagues diminished. The number of the latter came down from 209 in March 1955 to zero in March 1956. During the same time period, the number of the Americans rose from 68 to 189. Spector 1985, p. 252; Dulles's cable to Reinhardt, April 12, 1956, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 669-671. Dulles had heard in early December 1955 from Secretary Wilson, that he and the JCS regarded it as possible that the Geneva Agreements could be interpreted in such a way as to allow the US advisors to replace the French advisors. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 259.

of the three, because it would have required mainly indigenous military forces. There were no important targets in Vietnam for a US nuclear retaliatory strike, Dulles admitted to a couple of Cabinet members and NSC principals. The Chinese role in Vietnam, he added, was difficult because they could act through the Vietminh.³⁷

In public, however, President Eisenhower spoke to US journalists in April 1956 and presented his view that there were no serious problems. Since the Korean War the Communists had been finally stopped in the northern part of Vietnam, he said. The President evaluated Diem's performance, saying that he was "doing splendidly". Diem had proved, Eisenhower added, a much more competent statesman than anybody had dared to hope.³⁸

As its first item under NSC 5405, the OCB reported on April 30 that the French High Command in Saigon had been dissolved two days earlier, thus making the normal activities of the ICSC difficult unless the Diem Government established better liaison with the ICSC.³⁹

The use of TERM was unclear. The State Department reminded the Secretary of Defense that although the TERM personnel would have to participate in training, it was not its primary task. The program was aimed at rescuing a considerable amount of materiel and with the agreement of the ICSC shipping it out of the country.⁴⁰

The policy remained firm. The unchanged policy of the US was announced by the Assistant Secretary of State Robertson in his line speech on June 1 about US policy in Vietnam. He said that at that moment democratic institutions were being developed in South Vietnam. The United States, Robertson stated, supported with pride such a process. He put the guiding principles of US policy in a nutshell. Firstly, the US was supporting a friendly non-Communist government and assisting it in reducing and eventually weeding out Communist insurgency and influence. The second point was that the Eisenhower Administration had committed itself to assisting the Government of South Vietnam in developing sufficient armed forces to maintain internal security. At this stage, Robertson pointed out, the Chinese had built roads, railroads and airfields in North Vietnam. Thirdly, the US would strive to encourage the non-Communist world to support South Vietnam. And finally, the US had decided to help in the reconstruction of South Vietnam. In addition, Robertson pledged support for organizing, training, and equipping of the South Vietnamese police forces.⁴¹

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37 Memorandum of conversation between Dulles, Wilson, and Humphrey, April 19, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI: East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), , pp. 214–215.

38 Eisenhower's address at annual dinner of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 21, 1956, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1956, p. 423.

39 OCB Weekly Status Report, April 30, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 5, Status Reports V, RG 59, NA.

40 Deputy Under Secretary of State Robert D. Murphy's letter to Wilson, May 1, 1956, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1057–1059; FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 674–676.

41 Robertson's speech of June 1, 1956, quoted in PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 610–613. The speech was published as an article in DSB, June 11, 1956, pp. 972–974. For curiosity's sake, Robertson had also visited South Vietnam twice, in late 1954 and in March 1955.

Senator Kennedy, who was both Mansfield's colleague and a friend of South Vietnam, spoke at a symposium held by the AFV in early June 1956. He regarded South Vietnam as the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia and the test area of democracy in Asia. Kennedy also said that the US was responsible for South Vietnam, and that the responsibility and determination of the US policy-makers was to be tested in the future. Finally, the Senator referred to the possibility of intervention if the situation in South Vietnam called for it.⁴²

The positions maintained by various departments and agencies presented at the PB were apparently considered at other member agencies on the eve of Council meetings. This was at least true in connection with the State Department. In preparation for the meeting, the Secretary of State was particularly well briefed on the PB deliberations and Pentagon views on the questions of principle. A day before an NSC consideration of the US capability for dealing with local aggression in Vietnam, on the basis of the Pentagon presentation, the State Department representative on the PB, Robert R. Bowie, briefed Secretary Dulles on the matter. He pointed out that local war questions were one of the basic issues in the drafting of the "Basic National Security Policy" (NSC 5501), which was adopted on January 6, 1955. To answer the threat, NSC 5501 called for highly mobile US forces equipped with atomic weapons, but the PB, Bowie added, hoped that the forces would be flexible and that the Pentagon could present the matter to the NSC so that Vietnam could be considered a "test case". Bowie continued that the matter could be "most useful" to the Council if the Pentagon were to explain whether there were already such forces and capabilities and what the principles would be governing the use of atomic weapons. The Pentagon had not revealed, Bowie wrote, what it was going to present, but he feared it was going to be conducted in Vietnam only at the expense of US local war capabilities elsewhere. He also reminded his superior of the Pentagon-JCS study from mid-September. Bowie recommended that Dulles should neither accept a decision that would exclude the use of atomic weapons in local conflicts nor agree to their use as a normal procedure without consideration of the possibility of a political solution.⁴³

The State views appear to have been correct. At the NSC meeting on June 7 Admiral Radford presented a thorough report on how US forces could deal with local aggression in Vietnam both with and without resorting to atomic weapons. He said that he assumed that the Chinese would not intervene and that the SEATO nations would "furnish at least token forces". Radford commented that the Vietminh army was strong. In checking the aggression, the first American

42 Kennedy's speech at the conference of the AFV, June 1, 1956. Kennedy, *Strategy for Peace*, 1960, pp. 62–65; also quoted in Fishel, Wesley, ed., *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict* (Ithaca: Peacock, 1968), pp. 142–147. Excerpts of Kennedy's speech can also be found in Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 1978, pp. 12–13 and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 303–304.

43 Bowie's memorandum to Dulles, June 6, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 123, Miscellaneous NSC memoranda 1957–1959, RG 59, NA; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 693–695.

troops would have to be deployed immediately. There would be an “Asian victory over Asians”, the Admiral told, and therefore the ARVN would “carry the main burden”, with the US mainly offering naval and aerial help. Radford saw the Tourane area (Danang) as essential in achieving a victory. As part of their preparations, the US advisory effort should be strengthened, ARVN personnel should be trained in other countries, and they should organize joint SEATO exercises, make preparations for the early deployment of USAF units and develop the roads. Radford went on that intervention would not seriously harm the US military posture elsewhere and it would have a good chance of success. Atomic weapons could be dropped on Vietminh concentrations and this would bring the conflict to a swift end. The same could be done against the Chinese if they intervened. Any rapidly deployed forces, Radford concluded, would have to assume an active role in campaigns and be prepared to use atomic weapons without delay.⁴⁴

The NSC’s consideration of the plans had not been changed into mere briefings, but, rather, definitely included discussion. After Radford’s report, for example, Eisenhower asked the Council members for their comments. Secretary Dulles praised Radford’s presentation and commented that the military considerations and aid were “well within the political capabilities” of the US. The Secretary expected that the SEATO allies would participate, except perhaps the French and the British. Radford agreed and added that the French were not needed, but he believed the British Navy would assist. In reply to the President’s question on joint military planning with the South Vietnamese, Radford answered in the negative and added that there was no indication of Vietminh plans to attack South Vietnam. Secretary Dulles said that if the peoples of Southeast Asia were to become aware of this discussion at the NSC it “would be altogether revolutionary”, since it would give hope. Dulles was supported in this view by the Acting Secretary of Defense, Reuben B. Robertson, Jr. The Chairman of the JCS took up the matter of familiarizing the new US commanding officers with South Vietnam. The President asked what kind of problems there would be. Radford replied that it could “leak”, but Eisenhower said that this would be

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44 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 695–697; Paper presented by Radford to the NSC, “Broad Outline Plan for U.S. Military Participation in the Event of Viet Minh Aggression in Viet Nam,” June 7, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 703–709. Radford had discussed the plan with Admiral Stump and Chief MAAG O’Daniel. The Chairman of the JCS was concerned that the plan was “designed to be implemented on a very austere basis” by existing units. He did not include in his presentation what he regarded as the “most important” aspect of the concept, the plan to send US Regimental Combat Team commanders to South Vietnam “that are earmarked for this operation...to look over the terrain and to acquaint themselves with the tactical setup”. Radford’s letter to CINCPAC, Admiral Felix B. Stump, June 14, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 712–713. The US Army planners had disagreed with Radford’s assumptions. The Admiral had assumed that the Chinese would not intervene, and that holding the 17th parallel would be enough to defeat the aggression of North Vietnam. Radford had also forgotten to deal with the threat of infiltration through the neighboring countries. He had also overestimated the performance of the ARVN and US aerial and naval power. Yet Radford’s scenario was distributed in July to US Commands throughout the Pacific and the Far East with orders to supplement their plans accordingly. Quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 272.

“additional evidence of US concern”. Radford shared this view, but pointed out the restrictions imposed by the Geneva Accords. Eisenhower laughed and admitted he was being facetious in suggesting that they should “take out an orderly and put a colonel in his place”, but added that the US military should “indicate...an active interest in the area”. Reuben B. Robertson, Jr. said the Pentagon would start working on the matter.⁴⁵

Secretary Dulles next asked the President to call on the Assistant Secretary of State, Walter S. Robertson, to comment on the use of atomic weapons. When Eisenhower agreed, Robertson remarked that it was evident that all of the members of the NSC were of the opinion that the atomic weapons should be resorted to only “in the gravest situations” as their use would seriously affect public opinion in Asia. Radford disagreed. The Acting Secretary of Defense, Reuben R. Robertson, Jr., briefed the Council on his recent conversations with Diem. He said that Diem was doubtful about the real intention of the US to intervene, but was happy about the program to build up the infrastructure of South Vietnam. In addition, Diem was taking the American advice to emphasize the defense at the 17th parallel. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robertson, Jr. concluded that neither Diem nor he was too happy about the plan to use atomic weapons. The President could not understand why it would be difficult to send Nike missiles with small atomic warheads.⁴⁶

Stassen⁴⁷ suggested that, for psychological purposes, the US should show that the alliance with the West would guarantee a bright future for Asia. Allen Dulles said that South Vietnam was threatened because its weak neighbors permitted Vietminh invasion through their territories. Eisenhower agreed with this estimate and said that he would be willing to help countries which want to be independent. Dillon Anderson inquired whether the President intended a decision on the initiation of joint military planning with the South Vietnamese. The Chief Executive replied that he would not hint at full cooperation but rather

45 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 697–700. A week later, Radford wrote to CINCPAC Burke that he thought that the paper “was quite well received” by the NSC. Radford’s letter to Stump, June 14, 1956, *ibid.*, p. 712.

46 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 699–700.

47 As the Special Assistant to the President for Disarmament (1955–1958), Stassen lost his seat at the OCB. He had, however taken the matter up with Eisenhower and the Under Secretary of State, Christian A. Herter, suggesting that he should be allowed to see the agendas and minutes of the Board meetings. If he found out, Stassen had suggested further, that some matters were dealing with disarmament problems, he would contact Herter and ask to be included in the meeting. Herter thought Stassen’s proposition was reasonable. “And, since it came from him”, Herter wrote to Secretary Dulles, it “might simplify some of your discussion at the White House”. Herter’s memorandum for Dulles, February 27, 1957, Christian A. Herter Papers, Chronological File, Box 1, February 1957, DDEL. Eisenhower was obviously pleased with Stassen’s contribution as he hoped that Stassen would continue to attend the Council meetings and have a representative on the PB. They also decided that Stassen could attend only those Board meetings in which matters of interest to him were under consideration. Dillon Anderson’s memorandum for the Director of BOB Roland R. Hughes, July 5, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary’s Subject File series, Box 14, DDEL. For the representation of Stassen and the Disarmament Staff in the NSC machinery see also Cutler’s memorandum for the record, March 5, 1957, *ibid.*

a “series of little things”, as he thought that the US “must avoid making commitments...we are in no position to carry out”. Furthermore, he added, laughing, there was a chance that he would lose the Presidential elections. Radford admitted that the South Vietnamese could easily misinterpret their level of commitment.⁴⁸

Eisenhower asked Secretary Dulles to specify what he could do under SEATO in order to help South Vietnam. Secretary of State replied that the President could order intervention in a matter of hours, but he suggested that Congress, if it was in session, should also be consulted. Eisenhower agreed and added that “it would give a little more leeway to our military people in their planning”, but the US should not give the impression that it was “planning a war”. The Acting Secretary of Defense, Reuben R. Robertson, Jr., suggested that the Administration might get the advance approval of Congress for intervention and do as they had done in the case of Formosa, and not care about the restrictions imposed by the Geneva Accords on the number of military personnel, since the Vietminh had also built up their own military strength. Secretary Dulles disagreed and was supported by the President, because the circumstances were, according to them, different in Vietnam. Radford pointed out that there could be tensions in July, as the all-Vietnam elections would not be held. The President was not worried, and again joked that he was “sorry to say... Congress would still be here at that time”. The Council noted Eisenhower’s point “to encourage Vietnamese military planning” against Vietminh attack “along lines consistent with US planning concepts”, based upon approved US policy. The US would also “discreetly manifest” its objectives to aid in the defense of South Vietnam within the framework of SEATO.⁴⁹

Radford’s scenario in the contingency plans followed the accepted pattern of the SEATO courses of action, since the burden would be borne by the indigenous forces. Against the background of the current internal security situation in South Vietnam, it could be noticed that the threat was at its lowest as a result of Diem’s successful campaigns. The only visible threat was invasion by North Vietnam. Admiral Radford had abandoned the recommendations of the JCS ad hoc committee made in the fall of 1955. Despite the duration of the meeting, the discussion was presumably centered on providing guidance for military contingency planning and not to aid in making basic policy decisions. The issue was considered in relation to the overall US defense strategies and as an attempt to integrate the defense of South Vietnam with US military planning, thus harmonizing the two. In addition, the memorandum of the discussion at the June 7 Council meeting suggests that even though the items on the Council

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48 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 700–701.

49 Memorandum of Discussion of the 287th Meeting of the NSC, June 7, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 7, DDEL; also printed FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 701–702; NSC Action No. 1571, July 9, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 2, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 702–703.

Agenda were often extremely serious, their consideration was not conducted in a serious mood but with occasional touches of humor and laughter.

In reality, planning had already commenced on the basis of the NSC paper and at the Council discussion which reflected the Presidential interests. The June 7 meeting, however, provided a further impulse to the planning effort. In May and June 1956, a group of leading Generals and Admirals had engaged in a discussion over what should be done in the event of a surprise attack against South Vietnam from the north. All of the officers considered that the option of using nuclear weapons was a possibility. The NSC PB requested the Defense Department to consider South Vietnam as a test case to discover the US readiness to reply to local aggression. The CNO and member of the JCS, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, envisioned the possibility of South Vietnamese gaining control of all of Vietnam. In Burke's view, the US troops should only be supporting the ARVN. CINCPAC Admiral Felix B. Stump asserted that in order to achieve that goal there would be a need for a US attack against North Vietnam. Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, the new Chief MAAG, who was supposed to be in command of such operations, agreed with Stump and referred to the use of between six and eight US divisions. Yet, Williams added, such a US invasion would make Ho Chi Minh look like a hero and Diem like a puppet. He suggested that the size of the ARVN should be increased. The Chairman of the JCS, Admiral Radford, joined the exchange by commenting that he was not certain whether Williams was the right choice to head the kind of operation suggested by the scenario.⁵⁰

Anderson, who refers to the same discussion, points out that it took place at the same time as when the "Eisenhower administration wrestled with the difficult global challenge of coordinating conventional and nuclear strategy". Radford was a Navy aviator, and hence he was irritated by Williams's infantry approach, Anderson notes. Radford's own idea was close to Burke's concept.⁵¹

The US Army planners wrote that most of the US resources allocated to the South Vietnamese were meant intended for dealing with internal security as well as to deter overt aggression. Furthermore, the JCS had concluded that the major threat in South Vietnam was subversion. The estimates of the PB and the intelligence community supported that conclusion.⁵²

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50 Burke's cable to Stump, May 30, 1956; Stump's cable to Burke, June 1, 1956; Williams's cable to Stump, June 4 and 7, 1956; Radford's cable to Stump, June 14, 1956, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 687688, 689-691, 692-693, 709-711, 712-713. See also Bowie's memorandum to Secretary Dulles, June 6, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 693-695. About directing the CINCPAC to prepare a contingency plan for defending South Vietnam against overt invasion see, for example, Futrell, Robert F., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, D.C.: United States Air Force, 1981), p. 43.

51 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 137-138.

52 Planning Director, Major General Earle G. Wheeler's memorandum to PB, June 20, 1956, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1060-1063; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 272. See NIE, "Probable Developments in Vietnam to July 1956," October 11, 1955, CIA Research Reports, Microfilm reel III; "U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia," PB's draft statement of policy, July 11, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Chronological subseries, Box 4, DDEL.

Occasionally, the Chief Executive had a special interest in the NSC programs. In those cases, the emphasis of the OCB was directed towards the implementation of such programs. One of those was the NSC 1290-d program, which had been delayed. This was reported by Hoover, Jr. at a Board meeting held on July 11, 1956. When the Board discussed the implementation of the NSC 1290-d program, the members were briefed by the ICA representatives. Stassen's alternate, D. A. FitzGerald, said that they had set up a group under a full-time chairman and that the group had been "functioning effectively". As the OCB was responsible to the Council for any implementation, Hoover, Jr. added, the ICA was therefore requested to produce a report "within 30 days on the steps taken to get effective action and also on the organization to provide coordination and backstopping in Washington". Fitzgerald suggested that specific points of contacts should be named within each agency and that after this particular report subsequent general reports should be submitted to the OCB every three months and to the NSC every six months. At the suggestion of William H. Jackson – who had also served as temporary Special Assistant for National Security Affairs – the importance and urgency of the whole program was reaffirmed. The Board also agreed that the number of proposed NSC 1290-d programs should be reviewed and the difficulties vis-à-vis Washington should be studied by the Board Assistants with the task of reporting back to the OCB. In addition, the OCB approved the Progress Report on Southeast Asia on July 11, 1956, but made some minor changes to the text.⁵³

Approval at the highest level was needed for new programs to be succeeded with. In mid-July 1956, for example, Secretary of Defense Wilson wrote to the Joint Chiefs regarding the US position on local aggression in South Vietnam. He informed them that Eisenhower had approved a plan to encourage South Vietnamese military strategists to concentrate on deterring overt threats and on self-defense, in accordance with the Manila Pact.⁵⁴

The economic issues were also of interest to the NSC machinery, insofar as they were interrelated to security. The intelligence sources predicted on July 17 that eliminating the economic problems of South Vietnam would take a long time. During the course of the following year, the NIE did not believe that rice-growing or rubber production would increase at all. The nation would continue to be dependent upon extensive US economic assistance.⁵⁵

The State Department supported the implementation of the NSC policies by publicizing pro-Diem news. The Acting Head of the State Department's Office for Philippines and Southeast Asian Affairs, Young, wrote in the summer of 1956 that without a strong leader South Vietnam would have been lost a long time ago. The US support to Diem was justified, Young added, because Diem was a staunch nationalist.⁵⁶

53 Preliminary Notes on OCB Meeting, July 11, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes I, RG 59, NA.

54 Wilson's memorandum to the JCS, July 16, 1956, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1064–1065.

55 NIE-63-56, "Probable trends in North and South Vietnam through mid-1957," July 17, 1956, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1068–1081.

56 DSB, August 27, 1956, p. 346.

Since the Council was preparing to consider the new Policy Paper on South-east Asia in mid-August, 1956, the PB submitted a draft revision of paragraph 5-d of NSC 5429/5, as requested by the Council at its meeting on June 9, 1955. The revision stated that, in the event of a renewal of hostilities by the Vietminh against South Vietnam, the US would “invoke the UN Charter or the SEATO treaty, or both”, and assist any country militarily “to save a vital interest” of the US. Moreover, Congress, the PB wrote, should be notified and consulted in advance if there was enough time.⁵⁷

Budgetary limitations had to be taken into consideration. In the spirit of the recommendations of the so-called Prochnow Committee, which was an Interdepartmental Committee on Certain Aid Programs⁵⁸ headed by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, Herbert W. Prochnow, in order not to reduce US military assistance, Charles A. Haskins of NSC’s Policy Coordinating Special Staff suggested in late August 1956 an increase in the number of force bases for South Vietnam. The force bases had been set forth in NSC 5525 “Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1955” and NSC 5610 “Report by the Interdepartmental Committee on Certain U.S. Aid Programs” and then incorporated into the Financial Appendix of NSC 5612. The JCS had increased the force base by two divisions, from six to eight.⁵⁹

Even though the Policy Papers were broad in scope, the language in them needed to be precise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had, for example, prepared their recommendations for the new Policy Paper. With respect to the revised paragraph of NSC 5429/5, which included the same idea as paragraph 19 of the draft policy statement NSC 5612, the JCS stated that there was no need to refer to the normal advance request to Congress by the President, as the Chief Executive had already been authorized to take military action. Knowledge of that fact served as a deterrent, but it should be mentioned, the JCS added, that authorization could be obtained beforehand, “when circumstances indicate it advisable”. The Chiefs declined, in referring to paragraph 2, to refer to missing the chance of “establishing an equipoise of power” if Indochina was lost.

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57 Draft revision of paragraph 5-d of NSC 5429/5 by the PB as an enclosure to Lay, Jr’s memorandum to the NSC, August 15, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 232–233.

58 The Interdepartmental Committee on Certain US Aid Programs had members from ICA, BOB, and State and Defense Departments. The idea came in late 1955 from the PB. See, for example, Executive Secretary Lay, Jr’s memorandum to the members of the NSC, November 29, 1955 and its enclosure “Review of Military Assistance and Supporting Programs” and the Terms of reference for the Committee, December 2, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 41–43, 43–44.

59 In June 1955, the Pentagon had planned that the force bases for FY 1957 through 1959 would be three infantry and three territorial divisions. The Prochnow Committee and JCS added one division of each type. In addition, the force bases for the Navy were to include 2 Marine battalions. In the connection of NSC 5612 the higher figures were mentioned. Haskins’s memorandum for Dillon Anderson, August 23, 1956, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL. See also NSC 5525, Part 2, Annex 2 and NSC 5610, p. 2. See also JCS’s memorandum for Wilson, “Revised Force Bases for Vietnam,” August 19, 1955, which had been sent to the NSC machinery as a supplementary memorandum to the Defense-JCS study “U.S. Policy in the Event of a Renewal of Hostilities in Vietnam,” September 15, 1955. Both in WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 9, NSC 5405, DDEL.

Because of the incorrect phrasing, they suggested that, instead, it should be phrased to suggest that a Communist victory would “have far-reaching consequences seriously adverse to US security interests”. In referring to aid to the SEATO members (paragraph 11), the JCS did not suggest that the Indochinese nations “necessarily be treated less favorably than Thailand”, even though they preferred to impose “measures to assure adherence” and preferential treatment, as the Pentagon and the Treasury had proposed. The State Department suggested aid should simply be “justified by US strategic objectives”.⁶⁰ In referring to the Chiefs’ recommendation of advance authorization, Henderson notes that it resembled a “‘Gulf of Tonkin’ styled resolution long before its time”.⁶¹

NSC 5612 – A Slight Revision

As might be expected, Secretary Dulles seems to have been anxious to know if there had been any unusual developments, but Walter S. Robertson’s briefing note of August 29, 1956 indicates that nothing alarming had occurred. Robertson recommended to the Secretary of State that he should support the approval of the draft Policy Paper the following day. Robertson added that there was going to be an individual statement on North Vietnam incorporated into NSC 5612. The proposed Policy Paper, Robertson went on, was not inconsistent with the Prochnow Committee studies on aid to Thailand and South Vietnam. Robertson pointed out that NSC 5612 called for continued military and economic aid in order to accomplish US objectives without specifying the aid levels.⁶²

The detailed phrasing of the language of the Policy Papers was often clarified at the Council meetings. When the NSC started its discussion of NSC 5612 (and some portions of NSC 5429/5), Dillon Anderson briefed the NSC members that “organized resistance endangering internal security has been greatly reduced”. Anderson then carefully went through the proposed changes in paragraph 2 of the PB paper made by the JCS. The President interrupted Anderson in order to approve the proposal. Anderson turned to the idea of preferential treatment and asked Secretary Dulles to elaborate on the State Department proposal, which did not mention the term. Dulles answered that there really were no “serious differences of substance” as compared to the Pentagon-Treasury proposal which had called for changes to assure adherence to and the achievement of the

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60 The JCS pointed out that there had been “unanimous agreement” among the SEATO members that the Indochinese states had “come within the meaning of treaty area as set forth in Article 7 of the Pact”. JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, August 24, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 233–236. The recommendations were forwarded to the Council five days later as an attachment to Lay, Jr’s memorandum to the NSC, a memorandum, August 29, 1955, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 18, NSC 5612, DDEL; Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA.

61 Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al., *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, pp. 163–164; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, pp. 98–99; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, pp. 131–132.

62 Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles, August 29, 1956, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA.

US strategic objectives – even preferential treatment in the granting of US assistance was desirable. Secretary Dulles added that the State did not want to “lay down [preferential treatment] as a fixed policy statement” in the context of countries formally aligned with the US. Eisenhower partly agreed with Dulles, but continued that the US “should extend preferential treatment to allies over neutrals”. The President was supported by Radford. The Acting Secretary of Defense, Reuben B. Robertson, Jr., felt it was important to assure the Southeast Asian countries of the US determination to assist them in their defense against the Communists. Without “some strong assurances” of their readiness to intervene, those nations would, Radford argued, either maintain stronger armies “or else take refuge in a policy of neutralism”. Neither course of action would be “advantageous” to the US, the JCS Chairman added. Stassen responded that “automatic pledges of intervention” would mean that the US was not controlling its own foreign policy. Stassen therefore suggested that intervention would be conditional upon the President’s judgement of American vital interests being at stake. Eisenhower did not believe that it was constitutionally possible to include the JCS proposal into paragraph 19 as he needed a declaration of war by Congress in order to go to war.⁶³

Anderson then directed the discussion toward the question of military aid to Southeast Asia. Stassen favored reducing the assistance. The President supported the Pentagon-JCS proposal, which called for aid which emphasized internal security and to “provide limited initial resistance to an attack”. He agreed with the Director of Budget’s recommendation that the “duration of the term ‘limited initial resistance’” should be properly defined. The Council assigned the task – as it had done earlier – to the Pentagon. The proposal of the JCS on paragraph 2, dealing with the repercussions of a Communist victory, was adopted. With these views in mind and in relation to the question of asking Congress for authorization, the Council agreed, at the suggestion by Stassen, to add that authorization by Congress would not be required if the “emergency is deemed by the President to be so great that immediate action is necessary”. Furthermore, the NSC took note of Eisenhower’s request to the State and Defense Departments to confer with the recipient nations in order to find ways of reducing the US assistance programs.⁶⁴

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63 In Dillon Anderson’s draft version there was also an optional course of action as the Pentagon had argued at the PB that “generous treatment of those who will *not* stand up and be counted gets us into trouble with those who will”. The draft oversimplified State position “that neutrality can be tolerated in aid recipients”. Draft briefing version of NSC 5612, August 28, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Chronological subseries, Box 4, DDEL; Memorandum of Discussion of the 295th Meeting of the NSC, August 30, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 240–246. The draft statement of policy contained in NSC 5612 and draft revisions of some portions of NSC 5429/5 had been transmitted by a reference memorandum on August 15. See item 3 of NSC Agenda for 295th meeting (dated August 24, 1956), Records of the NSC, NSC Agenda 1951–1961, Box 6, NSC Agenda 1956, RG 273, NA.

64 Memorandum of Discussion of the 295th Meeting of the NSC, August 30, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 248–250; NSC Action No. 1599, approved by the President on September 5, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 2, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 250–252.

The August 30 Council meeting is – in the same way as the meeting of January 8, 1954 – especially illustrative of the workings of the highest level of the NSC system. Several scholars agree with this assessment. Greenstein has found – and he is supported by Prados – that “in the course of an extended discussion of NSC 5612” a total of eight disagreements were settled, some of them rapidly by arriving “at alterations in shadings of wording”. The President listened to a “sharp debate” and then approved the overall revised paper. The Special Assistant Anderson performed his particular task, Greenstein concludes, by summarizing PB papers and identifying points of disagreement. Henderson argues that the debates in the NSC “were significant in identifying finely honed differences of opinion between various advisors on the Council”. He has written that there were “at least four major ‘splits’” at the August 30 Council meeting. This is important, Henderson continues, in the sense that it illustrates that “important policy disagreements were not glossed over” as the critics of the Eisenhower NSC have charged. On the contrary, the dissenting viewpoints, Henderson adds, “were set forth in lucid fashion by the” PB and they were also “subjected to...the ‘acid bath’” of the debate in the Council. “The depth of the discussions” of a typical NSC meeting is also revealed, Henderson adds. Furthermore, he goes on, the memoranda of discussions illustrate the role of the NSC “in debating and refining issues and in assisting the President in resolving complex problems through consideration of policy options”. Finally, Henderson reminds us that the role of Eisenhower at NSC meetings was “pivotal”.⁶⁵

The NSC adopted its next Policy Paper on Southeast Asia and Indochina – NSC 5612/1 – in September 1956. This had taken seven months to prepare instead of a month, as Allen Dulles had demanded a “fresh review” in late January. The paper united policies and reiterated them. It stressed the Domino analogy and the need to check Communist threats – both external and internal – against the nations of the region. Economic considerations were also brought in to serve military purposes and to provide market areas for Japan in Southeast Asia. The NSC favored collective security measures, with SEATO and military aid packages as its instruments. According to the section which relates specifically to the South Vietnam paper, the US was to support South Vietnam in order to make it “a strong, stable and constitutional government”, which could serve as a contrasting example to North Vietnam. Reunification would be possible when the power of the Communists had diminished and “genuinely free elections” could be held. In terms of military assistance, internal security was deemed a priority, whereas the ARVN was to be developed to the point where it would be capable of “providing limited initial resistance” to an

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65 Greenstein explains that the PB papers “served as a debate-forcing procedure”. He used the Memorandum of Discussion of August 30, 1956, Council meeting as this was already available when he had been researching for his book. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, pp. 127–132; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 70; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al, *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, p. 163–166. The “acid bath” is a description that had been used by Cutler in his statement to the Jackson Subcommittee. Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, pp. 97–101; also quoted in Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 128.

invasion from the north. The South Vietnamese were to be trained in utilizing military planning “consistent with U.S. planning concepts” and the US was to “discreetly manifest in other ways” its determination to help South Vietnam’s defense within the framework of SEATO. As far as the Vietminh regime was concerned, the US was not to recognize the Hanoi Government and it should request its allies to do the same. The US was also to weaken the Vietminh regime and its political influence and military capabilities vis-à-vis South Vietnam and Laos by applying political, economic (such as embargos) and psychological warfare methods. In addition, nationalism was to be utilized in weakening the North Vietnamese political system.⁶⁶

It is undeniable that the JCS had participated anxiously in the sketching of the points dealing with the military matters. The suggestions of the Joint Chiefs were discussed by the NSC in late August. NSC 5612 was approved on August 30 with additions, and distributed as NSC 5612/1.⁶⁷

Gelb and Betts argue that NSC 5612 incorporated “fears for Asia in its own right”. They continue that the Policy Paper warned that the fall of one country would clear the ground “toward accommodation by the rest”, which would have economic and political effects on India and Japan. According to Henderson, the President altered the language of NSC 5612 on the basis of the recommendations of the JCS. The final language of the Policy Paper, Henderson adds, “could be construed broadly to reflect an American commitment to maintaining a balance of power” in Southeast Asia. To Condit, the Paper clearly bore a resemblance to its predecessor NSC 5405. Arnold considers that the development of the South Vietnamese political organizations to be “more effective” and to enhance loyalty to the central government constituted the “refined objectives of American assistance to [South] Vietnam” as set forth in NSC 5612.⁶⁸

66 The amended Policy Paper was adopted by the NSC on August 30 and the President approved the report on September 5, 1956. NSC 5612/1, “Statement of Policy on U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia,” September 5, 1956 as an enclosure to the Note by Lay, Jr. to the NSC, September 5, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 18, DDEL. A partially declassified text of NSC 5612/1 is also printed in USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1082–1095 and in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 252–263. Young commented on the objectives of NSC 5612/1. He wrote to Robertson that the aim of making South Vietnam “more attractive for all Vietnamese” than North Vietnam was of the utmost importance. “The sooner and better we do this”, he added, “the more assured will be our long-term policy in Southeast Asia”. Young’s memorandum to Robertson, October 26, 1956, *ibid*, Volume I, pp. 756–757.

67 JCS memorandum to Secretary Wilson, August 24, 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 233–236; Memorandum of Discussion of the 295th Meeting of the NSC, August 30, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 240–252. See also the JCS memorandum to Wilson, December 21, 1956, *ibid.*, p. 276.

68 According to Gelb and Betts, the NSC planners no longer spoke about “a Communist monolith”, but instead argued that China was more significant in Asia than the Soviet Union. Sino-Soviet alliance could result in “fraternal conflict”. Furthermore, as Gelb and Betts argue, “Asia was placed on a par with Europe”. Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, pp. 183–184; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hióxie et al., *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, p. 163; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, p. 98; Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955–1956*, 1992, pp. 233–234; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 305. Greenstein points out that NSC 5612 was actually based also on “U.S. Policy in the Event of Renewal of Aggression in Vietnam,” dated September 16, 1955. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 129.

Nevertheless, the Policy Paper was clearly based on NSC 5429. The NSC usually asked its subordinates to study the problems further, and the OCB produced Progress Reports or Operations Plans at regular intervals. The US was to retain sufficient military capacity in the region. Several points – of the approximately 30 aims – were intended for spreading the influence of American culture and society to the nations of the region. In NSC 5612/1 there were four deleted points. It can be guessed that some of them dealt with the CIA's covert operations, which were included in the early versions of NSC 5429. The new Policy Paper had a slight military emphasis.⁶⁹

There was no doubt that US support would continue. This was assured in a ceremonious manner when President Eisenhower sent Diem a letter on the first anniversary of South Vietnam as a Republic. Eisenhower said that freedom was an asset which would defeat all obstacles in the fight against Communism. “The achievements of the people of Vietnam will long remain as the sources of inspiration for other free nations”, the President wrote. In the same message he announced that the US would continue to support the Government of Diem because reconstruction and rehabilitation were still in progress.⁷⁰

The NSC continued to hear presentations by the outside specialists whom it had commissioned to study specific problems (NSC 5610). Prochnow informed the Council on October 26, 1956 that his committee had concluded that the sizes of military assistance programs in six countries – Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, South Vietnam, Taiwan, and South Korea – were so large that the countries in question would be unable to develop them or even – with the exception of Iran – maintain them. The total sum given by the Americans amounted to 2 billion dollars a year through 1960. Despite US efforts, the Committee continued, the military capabilities of the respective nations had not been “greatly enhanced when compared with” those of their enemies, and the same was also the case with economic growth. Prochnow concluded that it was difficult to “drastically change” the aid programs. Heavy local economic burdens had some compensatory advantages, such as the repair of roads and harbors. Cuts in military and economic aid would be politically difficult, especially if the aid continued for a long time, since in the recipient countries US aid was taken for granted. The country teams lacked vision, the committee added. It also warned that reducing the level of commitment in 1960 would possibly be as hard as in 1956. According to the Committee, the increasing economic aid at the expense of military assistance would be wise for the future. In addition to that imbalance, the key questions involved taking local conditions into consideration, and general flexibility.⁷¹

69 NSC 5612/1, “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia,” September 5, 1956 as an enclosure to the note by Lay, Jr. to the NSC, September 5, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 18, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 252–263.

70 Eisenhower's letter to Diem, October 25, 1956, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1956, pp. 1019–1020.

71 Memorandum of Discussion of the 301th Meeting of the NSC, October 26, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 124–125. See also

After Prochnow's presentation, Eisenhower commented that the State Department would have to determine "how far the United States could go in reducing its foreign assistance expenditures" as the recipients regarded the aid "as commitments made solemnly" by the US. The President guessed that most members of the Council felt in the same way that American military aid was already too extensive. The real question, he added, was over how to make cuts "without inducing disastrous political repercussions". Secretary Humphrey wished that the discussion would take into consideration the financial restrictions and not simply focus on the projected needs. The President supported Radford's motion that private investment might come to the rescue in helping the nations receiving US military aid. On the basis of the Prochnow Committee report, the NSC, in its typical style, directed the PB to review the aid programs in five of the ally countries, excluding South Vietnam.⁷²

Even if a Policy Paper was adopted, this did not mean that the discussion of it would be stopped. The JCS, for example, commented on the wording of NSC 5612/1 in their memorandum to Secretary Wilson on December 21, 1956. They had been asked three months earlier to define the term "limited initial resistance" in reference to the Indochinese states. The Chiefs wrote that it would imply a defensive or delaying action in the event of a Communist attack in order to allow the UN, SEATO or the US to take countermeasures. It was hard, the JCS added, to predetermine how rapidly US forces could be deployed as this would depend on the prevailing circumstances and the nature of the aggression. In the case of South Vietnam, they anticipated it would mean approximately two days before "appreciable assistance by external forces" could be provided.⁷³

Continuous interdepartmental effort was needed to solve the language of NSC policies. In early 1957, the State and Defense Departments were working on the assignment given to them by Eisenhower at the NSC meeting of August

Prochnow's memorandum to Secretary Dulles on the summary conclusions of his committee, July 27, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 85–87; Prochnow's Committee's assignment, December 2, 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 43–44. According to a report to the OCB by Dillon Anderson on July 11, 1956, the NSC was already on August 16 to consider a new policy with respect to Southeast Asia if the Prochnow Committee's advance report was completed by that date. OCB Minutes, July 13, 1956 (held on July 11), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 2, Minutes IV, RG 59, NA.

72 Memorandum of Discussion of the 301st Meeting of the NSC, October 26, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 127–128, 132; NSC Action No. 1624, October 26, 1956, AWF, NSC series, Box 2, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, p. 133.

73 JCS's memorandum to Wilson, December 21, 1956, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL; Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA; Also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, p. 276. In 1956, the memoirs of Chief of Staff of the US Army from 1953 to June 1955 General Ridgway were published. The JCS member and opponent of the US intervention in Vietnam, Ridgway, criticized the prevailing US military thinking. He referred to South Vietnam as consisting of nothing but rice paddies and jungles, which were more favorable to the activities of the guerillas. Every person working for the government in the countryside needed the protection of soldiers 24 hours a day. The US could have fought, Ridgway wrote, on the side of the French in Indochina, but the casualties and costs would have been immense, even greater than in Korea. Ridgway questioned why the Americans had forgotten the bitter lessons of the Korean War so quickly since they were close to repeating the mistakes of the past. Ridgway, *Soldier*, 1956, p. 277.

30, 1956. The exchange of letters between the Assistant Secretaries of Defense, Gordon Gray and State Walter S. Robertson, reveals that the work on defining “limited initial resistance” was under way.⁷⁴

Operations Coordinating Board Reporting

New types of OCB papers emerged. In late 1956, the Board machinery had been working on the “Outline Plan of Operations with Respect to Vietnam”. This was prepared, with the merger of two Working Groups, by the OCB Working Group on Southeast Asia. It was the first of its kind under NSC 5612/1. The draft Plan covered both the regional and country actions in so far as they applied to Vietnam. The paper was intended to set forth “courses of action, responsibilities and timing prepared by the OCB in order to carry out NSC policy”. The Plan for NSC 5612/1 did not encompass every US agency activity, but included major programs, especially those requiring interagency coordination. It mentioned those actions which were being carried out as well as other contemplated important actions. As each agency had agreed to implement the Plan individually, it had been noted that modification or review might be needed if circumstances changed quickly. The lay-out of the Plan resembled Erskine’s Subcommittee’s Report Part II of April 5, 1954 and early OCB Status Reports, the first of which on NSC 5405 had been completed on April 6, 1954. To begin with, however, operating guidance was in the hands of the Outline Plan of Operations.⁷⁵

The OCB reports were, in fact, the result of careful consideration. Initially, the final draft of the 15-page Plan was to be considered by the Board Assistants at their meeting on January 4, 1957. Staats urged them to concur in it for transmittal to the Board for its consideration on January 16. The NSC citations of certain paragraphs were marked in the left columns, whereas the OCB courses

74 Gray’s letter to Robertson, January 4, 1957 and Robertson’s reply to Gray, January 28, 1957. Department of State, Central Decimal Files, MSP/1-457, RG 59, NA. About the JCS definition see Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, January 2, 1957. Records Relating the State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA. The editors of the FRUS series have not been able to locate any more substantive documentation on the matter, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume XXI, p. 252, footnote 16.

75 New Plans were to “be prepared as soon as practicable following approval of new or revised NSC statement of policy”. Normally, the State Department sent the Plans to the Chiefs of Mission in the field. Other agencies had permission to transmit the full text or extracts to senior field representatives – on a strict “need-to-know” basis – who already had access to the basic NSC Policy Papers. Approved Plan did not automatically mean that operating officials were authorized to start new programs or modify existing programs. Instead, the Plan was to serve as a basis for operating instructions to be developed by each of the participating agencies. See, for example, OCB Special Representative Kenneth P. Landon’s memorandum for the members of the Working Group on Southeast Asia, November 2, 1956, with revised draft of the “Outline Plan of Operations with Respect to Vietnam,” dated November 1, 1956, as an attachment and Staats’s memorandum for the Board Assistants, December 26, 1956, with the final draft of the Plan on December 21, 1956 as an attachment, both in WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948-1961, OCB Central Files series, Box 39, DDEL. For the text of OCB Status Report on NSC 5405, dated April 6, 1954, see Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 28, Southeast Asia 1, RG 59, NA. Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 311.

of action were marked in the righthand columns, including their main responsibilities. All agencies were assigned general political and economic actions. Defense matters were to be handled by the Pentagon with the State Department in a supporting role. The action agency for internal security issues, such as the police forces (under the NSC 1290-d program) and village self-defense corps, was the ICA. Information campaigns were primarily assigned to the USIA. The State Department was, for example, to mobilize the overseas Chinese in South Vietnam in the anti-Communist effort. The OCB was also preparing a separate Outline Plan on the subject. The State Department was the main action agency, with some involvement in almost every action item, but it was primarily involved in the main action responsible for roughly half of the items which bore no agency label. The Pentagon, the USIA and the ICA had almost as many assignments as the State, but far fewer support roles. The second in terms of supporting assignments was the CIA. All of the action items had been agreed upon by the Board. Furthermore, it had no additional proposals to consider. In late January, the OCB agreed, since it was auditing an ICA briefing and considering the general NSC 1290-d Progress Report (dated January 15, 1957), to suggest to the Council that it did not need separate reports on the status and implementation of the NSC 1290-d programs. This was so because the Council had received information on the programs through “the regularly scheduled progress reports” on specific NSC policies. It was, therefore, decided that in connection with the consideration of each Progress Report and Outline Plan of Operations the OCB would discuss whether it would be desirable to incorporate special NSC 1290-d programs into “the regular country or area operating programs”.⁷⁶

Three weeks later, the OCB members revised the February 12 draft of the Vietnam Outline Plan, but centered their discussion on the proposed land reform program. They agreed that the State and ICA representatives would have further discussions and work out a factual paper on the subject for the Board. It was also agreed that the issue of the exchange rate of the piaster⁷⁷ should be added to the Outline Plan.⁷⁸

76 The operational and coordinating arrangements for NSC 1290-d program had changed in September 1956. An NSC Action 1290-d Senior Group had started its work. The Pentagon had suggested, and the Board agreed in late September, that one of the first tasks of the group should be to study the relationships between the NSC 1290-d programs to the MSP and MAAG activities in order to prepare interdepartmental guidelines for different activities for programming and funding such programs. OCB Minutes, September 28, 1956 (held on September 26), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 2, Minutes IV, RG 59, NA.

77 The exchange rate of the South Vietnamese currency, the piaster, to the US dollar in 1953–1961 was 1:35. From 1957 the black market rate of American dollar was 1:90. Dacy, Douglas C., *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development in South Vietnam, 1955–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 190.

78 Staats’s memorandum for the Board Assistants, December 26, 1956, with the final draft of “Outline Plan of Operations with Respect to Vietnam,” December 21, 1956, as an attachment, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Central File series, Box 39, DDEL; OCB Minutes, February 6 and 26, 1957 (held on January 30 and February 20), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 2, Minutes V, RG 59, NA. The deferred Outline Plan was still delayed after a month and a half, because of it

The Director of Cabinet in the South Vietnamese Defense Department, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, met CINCPAC Admiral Stump in March at the SEATO Council meeting in Canberra, Australia. Thuan told Stump that Diem was worried about the rumors that SEATO would be transformed into an economic alliance. Diem requested that the strength of the ARVN be increased by 10,000 men. The US, Stump told Thuan, intended to maintain strong mobile forces capable of operating effectively in the treaty area. Although the firepower of the Vietminh forces had risen threefold, the South Vietnamese should not concern themselves, because the massive potential of SEATO was available to deter any aggression against South Vietnam, Stump stressed. He added that SEATO did not object to increasing the participation of South Vietnam in the activities of the Manila Pact.⁷⁹

The OCB took note of the fact that a new constitution had been drafted and approved in South Vietnam. In March 1957, the OCB commented on the issue in one its Progress Reports on NSC 5612/1. On March 13, the Board revised and concurred in the Progress Report. The OCB regarded the planning and implementation of the law as a credit to the American advisors, and that it was in harmony with US objectives. The OCB also listed the totals of the US aid that had been given.⁸⁰

The Manila Pact also called for economic cooperation, which was beneficial to South Vietnam. MAAG had, in fact, informed the Secretary of Defense in its Semi-Annual Report in January 1957 that the ARVN's capacity to deter overt aggression had increased day by day. This was due to the fact that the ARVN had succeeded in getting rid of the sect armies.⁸¹

The efficiency of the staff work was also true in the context of the OCB machinery, which had been struggling with a paper on Vietnam land reform. In connection with NSC 5612/1 and the Vietnam Outline Plan the Board had agreed in late February that State and ICA members would prepare a special paper on land reform for the March 6 meeting of the Board Assistants. Both papers were submitted for Board consideration on March 27. When it was considered by the Board Assistants on March 29, the land reform paper turned out to be more complicated. The consideration of both papers was postponed

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had not been concurred in by the ICA. The OCB had to request the Board Assistants to work on it. OCB Minutes, March 25 and April 5, 1957 (held on March 20 and April 3), *ibid.* The OCB Working Group on Southeast Asia completed in early November the revision of the Outline Plan for transmission to the field for comment. OCB Weekly Activity Report, November 5, 1956, *ibid.*, Box 5, Activity Reports VI.

79 Secretary Dulles's cable to the Department of State, March 13, 1957, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume XXI, pp. 327-328.

80 OCB Progress Report on 5612/1, March 14, 1957, Documents of the National Security Council 1947-1977, First Supplement, Microfilm reel III. The March 1 draft of the Progress Report had been approved by the OCB for transmittal to the NSC on March 13, 1957. OCB Weekly Activity Report, March 18, 1957, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 5, Activity Reports VII, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, March 18, 1957 (March 13), *ibid.*, Box 2, Minutes V. About the role of the Americans see Grant, J.A.C., "The Viet Nam Constitution of 1956," *American Political Science Review*, Volume LII (June 1958), pp. 437-462.

81 USVNR, Book 2, Tab 4.A.5., p. 13-14.

until the OCB meeting of April 3. The Board Assistants agreed to separate the land reform problem from the Operations Plan until the land reform could “be considered promptly by the concerned agencies” and then referred to Board consideration for a decision. However, on behalf of their principals the Board Assistants accepted the Operations Plan on March 29 as an approved paper. Nevertheless, they revised the Plan on April 12, leaving it subject to a language check to be made by the State Department on the land reform program.⁸²

Judging from the increased number of Council discussions on economic matters, it may be that the conclusions of the Prochnow Report were thoroughly read by those briefing the NSC principals. The Secretary of the Treasury, Humphrey, reported at the NSC after mid-April 1957, in the midst of discussion on US foreign economic policy, that he was disappointed by South Korea, Taiwan, and South Vietnam, which had been given a major share of US aid. Humphrey criticized this with the suggestion that the US was only “maintaining military symbols” in these countries which overshadowed projects which were aimed at ensuring real economic progress. Eisenhower warned Humphrey that the current aid programs should not simply be weighed against the US budget but also against the global aims of the US, such as peace, security, the development of international trade etc. The three countries in question, the President said, in his view areas from which the US would not get positive returns for its investments. He added that money would be given in the future to maintain the status quo and “not permit it to be upset against our national interests”. Secretary Wilson recommended a 5–10 percent reduction in the aid programs, but Eisenhower replied “that we could not throw down the burdens” in the three recipient countries because of the Soviet Union. Vice-President Nixon predicted that in the following decade there were going to be increasing demands for US economic assistance in Asia, Africa and Latin America as the rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union was going to get tighter. Eisenhower commented by referring to the role of private capital in assisting the Third World countries.⁸³

The content and size of the reports within the NSC-OCB machinery had been determined and further nothing could have been done about it without doing so in an orderly fashion. Cutler, who had returned to his position as Special Assistant, apparently believed that the OCB Progress Reports were only standard

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82 The State Department and the ICA informed Saigon that they regarded the land reform as important, but advised against direct payments to Vietnamese landlords for the transfer of land. They preferred that US funds would be used to meet the piaster cost of other development programs. The sums were 3.5 million dollars for FY 1958 and 1959. OCB Weekly Activity Reports, February 4 and 25, March 18 (revised) and 25 and April 16, 1957, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 5, Activity Reports VII, RG 59, NA.

83 Memorandum of Discussion of the 320th Meeting of the NSC, April 17, 1957, AWF, NSC series, Box 8, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1955–1957, Volume X, pp. 185–186. The NSC machinery had received copies of the USOM “Report on Foreign Economic Policy Discussions Between United States Officials in the Far East and Clarence B. Randall and Associates,” December 1956 for background usage, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 12, DDEL.

reports. He politely thanked the Assistant Director of BOB, Ralph W. E. Reid, for his comments on the Progress Report in NSC 5612/1 by noting that it was surprising that they were “so carefully read”. Reid had forwarded the recent observations made by the USAF Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Materiel, Major General Donald R. Hutchinson, on the Far East which were to be incorporated into the Progress Report. Cutler said that these views had emerged after the Progress Report “had gone through the OCB machinery”. The observations should have been available to the Board Assistants when they had still been working on it. In reply to the BOB comments about the wording of the Progress Report Cutler explained:

“Great effort has been made to compress the size of the Progress Report, with the obvious sacrifice of some explanatory details. On the other hand, it is certainly not intended to compress the expression at the expense of accuracy.”

Regarding the origin of a request for an increase in forces, for instance, Cutler remarked that it had only been forwarded by MAAG, but that the initiative had come from the Diem Government. A memorandum from Cutler’s assistant, T. B. Koons, reveals that he had reviewed the budget memorandum. Koons had given Cutler the views for the Special Assistant’s reply to Reid and suggested that Hutchinson’s “points do not appear to me to warrant reviewing the Progress Report”. A State Department Far Eastern desk officer, Howard P. Jones, wrote on May 1 to the Acting Secretary of State, commenting “that over-all progress has been achieved in the mainland Southeast Asia with respect to NSC objectives”. Jones argued that South Vietnam had “a stable free government” and was on the correct, free world-oriented track. Thus, Jones recommended that the Progress Report on NSC 5612/1 should be approved at the Council meeting the following day.⁸⁴

On May 8, 1957, President Diem arrived in Washington on Eisenhower’s plane for a three-day official visit on Eisenhower’s plane. He was greeted by President Eisenhower himself. As one might guess, the NSC system appears not to have been directly involved with the arrangements for Diem’s visit. On the second day of his visit he spoke to the joint session of Congress. In his speech, Diem said that the Southeast Asian countries were struggling against Communism

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84 Cutler’s memorandum for Reid, April 17, 1957, WHO, OSANSA, Special Assistant series, Chronological subseries, Box 4, DDEL; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Howard P. Jones’s memorandum to Dulles, May 1, 1957, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA. Koons reminded Cutler that “the Progress Report is talking about progress, not future plans. Everyone is trying to look to the time when Vietnamese armed forces can be reduced, this has not come about yet”. Koons’s memorandum for Cutler, April 16, 1957 with Reid’s (Hutchinson’s) memorandum, April 12, 1957, as an attachment, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, DDEL. Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Mansfield D. Sprague urged Assistant Secretary of State Robertson that the State Department should work in order to nullify the ceiling imposed on MAAG. Sprague clarified the matter by referring to increases in training requirements, which were caused by the departure of the FEC. Sprague’s letter to Robertson, April 15, 1957, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1098–1099.

and thus they needed technical development. He begged the US for assistance. In New York, the Mayor of the city, Robert Wagner, praised Diem. The leaders of the two nations discussed the situation in Vietnam on a general level. One concrete result of Diem's visit was a promise of American help in dealing with devaluation. Advice would be based on the findings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and on the joint considerations of South Vietnamese and US officials.⁸⁵

As a result of his success during the crisis of the spring of 1955 in Saigon, the South Vietnamese President, Ngo Dinh Diem, earned the support of the Eisenhower Administration. Diem visited the United States in May 1957 as a celebrated Asian hero. He received an exceptional welcome and was referred to as "the miracle man" by the American press. Diem was at that time at the height of his power. Here he meets with Eisenhower and Dulles at the Oval Office of the White House. (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library)

85 Eisenhower had only personally greeted King Saud of Saudi Arabia. FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 1973, pp. 97, 597, endnote 1. See also Eisenhower's welcoming and toast addresses, May 5, 1957, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957, p. 334-335; Diem's speech to the joint session of Congress, May 9, 1957, CR, May 9, 1957, p. 5978; DSB, May 27, 1957, pp. 852-854; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 161; Memorandum of conversation between Eisenhower and Diem, May 9, 1957, AWF, International Meetings series, Box 2, Diem visit, DDEL; A Joint Communiqué by Eisenhower and Diem, May 10, 1957, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957, pp. 335-337; DSB, May 27, 1957, pp. 851-852; Pach, Jr., and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1991, p. 77; Secretary Dulles's cable to Durbrow (drafted and approved for transmission by Young), May 16, 1957, FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 819-820. Diem had hired an American firm, the Oram-Newcomb Company, to take care of his public relations during his stay in the United States. Co-owner Elliot Newcomb was also the treasurer of the AFV. Joseph Buttinger had written many of the speeches for Diem. Scheer, Robert, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam* (Santa Barbara: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1965), pp. 32-33, 39. Buttinger advised Diem to release his political prisoners, but Diem had said, that there were hardly any. Buttinger was angered by Diem's obvious lies,

For the two-year period starting from May 1955, the Council functioned again in the way it was intended to. It concentrated on long-range planning. The period could be characterized as a time of routine staff work. The issue of Vietnam was no longer handled in a special manner. Even the current policies on Vietnam seem to have been based on earlier decisions. With the defense-related questions having been decided upon, economic considerations were also frequently taken up. The system – which was reviewed and reorganized – underwent some minor readjustments, especially in its paper-producing procedures. Consideration of the Vietnam question seems not have forced the NSC-OCB machinery to change very much. The beginning of Eisenhower's second term in January 1957 clearly had no effect on the NSC process, either. The available documents suggest that the influence of the well-informed and interested State Department officials at different levels continued to be high within the system, but this was counterbalanced by the influence of the Defense Department. There were, however, no serious personality clashes and there is even some indication of a team spirit between the participants in the NSC machinery. This was possibly the result of a realization that a truly interdepartmental and interagency effort would not violate the basic principle of the NSC system. If State and Defense Department officials agreed on a problem it would almost certainly be guaranteed success. Likewise, coordination within the OCB was even more effective than normally.

Owing to the fact that the period between late spring 1955 and late spring 1957 was a period when Diem seemed to be triumphant in his domestic politics, the occasions on which the Council met to discuss Vietnam diminished rapidly. Apart from the appearance of a single item on the NSC Agenda in mid-1955, there was a six-month break until late January 1956. During that year the issue was discussed every two or three months by the Council. However, the issue was only considered thoroughly on June 7, 1956, when the NSC addressed the question of the defense of South Vietnam in detail. On the other hand, Vietnam only came up once in the first five months of 1957. All in all, the subject came up at the highest level at some 10 percent of the Council meetings held during that period.

The malfunctions of the advisory process are difficult to assess as the NSC-OCB machinery did not really engage in serious policy consideration during the period in question. On the other hand, if we look at the requirements of multiple advocacy we can draw some conclusions. The President was obviously a committed magistrate, but he seems at times to have been insufficiently briefed. The policy advocates had intellectual and bureaucratic support, but the continuous

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but the matter did not bother other Americans. This disappointment led to the eventual resignation of Buttinger from the AFV in 1965. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 1970, p. 153; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 301, footnote 69, 332, footnote 132. The USIA made full use of Diem's visit to the US both in Vietnam and other nations of Asia. See Part 6 (The USIA Program) of NSC 5720, "Status of United States Programs for National Security as of June 30, 1957," FRUS 1955–1957, Volume IX: Foreign Economic Policy; Foreign Information Program (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1987), p. 609.

reliance upon NIEs and SNIEs apparently had an effect on their performance. Generous amounts of time were available for thorough consideration of policies. However, the treatment of the issues in the form of contingency planning did not require competition through debates or face-to-face debate. Committees that consisted of “outsiders” were utilized by the NSC. The OCB and its Working Groups also occasionally received additional viewpoints presented to them in person by Ambassadors and other field operatives. Dillon Anderson clearly had some problems in performing his tasks. But although he was not as competent a custodian-manager as Cutler had been, Anderson nevertheless provided the process with continuity.

■ The National Security Council and the Deepening Commitment (May 1957–January 1961)

Fading Interest

In addition to the studies commissioned by the NSC, the Legislative Branch of the US Government occasionally assigned both of its chambers to conduct surveys on specific, often regional affairs, like Mansfield's and Green's reports discussed above. The Senate had conducted surveys on the US aid programs in selected countries, including South Vietnam. The conclusions were published immediately after the Diem visit on May 13, 1957. The South Vietnam case had been studied by the Chairman of the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, Clement Johnston. He had found that US aid had been successful in containing Communism, and that the internal security situation of South Vietnam had improved considerably. Johnston, however, considered the US aid to be too lavish in scale. He recommended that it be decreased by at least half over the following two years, reducing the size of the MAAG in the Indochinese states, and concentrating on education and technical aid. The best way to help the economic development of South Vietnam would be to create American-style free markets, Johnston wrote. According to him, the task was enormous because the Asian culture and economies were so different from that of the US¹

As the recommendations of Congressional committees put pressure on the NSC-OCB machinery and the President, the intelligence community found contrary evidence. The NIE of May 14 stated that the Vietminh “remained in firm control” as a result of the support of the army, the strength of which would allow it to overrun the armies of the other Indochinese states. Although the Vietminh Government had lost some of its popular support, it was determined to restore the situation. Furthermore, North Vietnam was not going to launch an overt attack against South Vietnam the following year, but it was going to be a nuisance to Diem's Government through infiltration and subversion.²

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1 US Senate, Special Committee to Study the Foreign Aid Program, Report to the Committee by Clement Johnston, Foreign Aid Program Compilation of Studies and Surveys: Survey No. 7, Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma), Document 85–52, 85th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), pp. 1423, 1434–1437. Senator Wayne Morse objected to the US foreign aid program. On June 13, 1957, he told his colleagues, while the Foreign Aid Bill was being introduced, that the Eisenhower Administration had not taken the recommendations of Johnston into consideration. CR, June 13, 1957, pp. 8963–8971.

2 NIE-63.2-57, “The Prospects for North Vietnam,” May 14, 1957, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume I, pp. 818–819.

The reasons for the chosen policy were presented to the public by Eisenhower, who said in a televised message that the US was the guarantor of the security of South Vietnam. He also referred to the obligations of SEATO. Hence, the President went on, the US was giving South Vietnam military and economic aid. Although the US had spent vast sums of money, this had produced results in the form of bolstering the South Vietnamese and at the same time also US security, Eisenhower explained.³

The bulk of the NSC-related work was done in different departments and agencies. It is, therefore, no surprise that the Council assignments also spawned reports in the member departments and agencies which they needed for their own purposes. In mid-August, 1957, for example, the ICA completed a 200-page report, "Evaluation of Viet-Nam Program," which was based on NSC 5612/1 and on the courses of action of the Vietnam Outline Plan of Operations of April 1957. The report, which had been prepared by the Office of the Assistant to the Director for Evaluation, was intended for the decision-making process within the ICA. It examined the basic ICA program objectives and program content in South Vietnam from the standpoint of determining whether the US foreign policy objectives were being effectively carried out. It was an internal Executive Branch communication, which consisted of opinion and advice on official matters. In forwarding the report to the Chairman of SFRC's Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs, Senator Mansfield, in November 1959, Eisenhower still regarded it as "one of a class of reports". The President explained the reasons for the preparation of such reports, thus capturing the essence of the NSC machinery:

"It is essential to effective administration that employees of the Executive Branch be in a position to be fully candid in advising with each other on official matters, and that the broadest range of individual opinions and advice be available in the formulation of decisions and policy. It is similarly essential that those who have the responsibility for making decisions be able to act with the knowledge that a decision or action will be judged on its merits and not on whether it happened to conform to or differ from the opinions or advice of subordinates. The disclosure of conversations, communications or documents embodying or concerning such opinions and advice can accordingly tend to impair or inhibit essential reporting and decision-making processes, and such disclosure has therefore been forbidden in the past, as contrary to the national interest, where that was deemed necessary for the protection of orderly and effective operation of the Executive Branch."⁴

3 Eisenhower's radio and tv address, May 21, 1957, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957, pp. 386-388; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 614-616. See also Eisenhower's special message to the Congress on MSPs, May 21, 1957, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957, pp. 373-376; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 613-614.

4 Three officers had conducted extensive study in the field and in Washington. The report contained their candid opinions, suggestions and recommendations. ICA "Evaluation of Viet-Nam Program", August 15, 1957, White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject series, Box 40, Mutual Security and Assistance 1959, DDEL. Mansfield had asked the ICA Director on October 8, 1959 for a copy of the report. Eisenhower's letter to Mansfield, November 10, 1959, *ibid*.

Eisenhower's points confirm the requirements of multiple advocacy. In fact, as we have seen above, his administrative style and the management of national security affairs clearly bore remarkable resemblance to George's descriptive theory.

Even so, it was not always clear who was to report on what. The NSC machinery, therefore, attempted to find ways to have the Council members periodically briefed on the subject of a limited war in the nuclear age. Cutler thought it would be the task of the JCS "to do an exercise" for the NSC on country cases in which the circumstances called for US intervention. According to Cutler, the Chairman of the JCS would have preferred their appearance before the Council, rather than the appointment of a high-level committee, as had been the case within the NSC. In their discussions Radford reminded Cutler of the exercise he had presented to the NSC at its meeting on June 7, 1956. Radford said that the original version of that presentation prepared by the JCS Planning Staff had been "too detailed" and he had therefore had to rewrite the paper.⁵

President Eisenhower seems to have been convinced that the US policy on South Vietnam had been correct, even though there had been opposition. In October 1957 he told his speech writer, Hughes, that many people had assured him that Diem would be able to rule and that he would not long remain in power. In fact, the leaders of several Western Powers had warned the US that nobody could save South Vietnam. The success of the NSC policies was also confirmed to Congressmen by Ambassador Durbrow, who explained in November 1957 to the House of Representatives Committee that Diem had achieved a lot, although there had been armed resistance. For internal security reasons, the Ambassador added, the Government of Diem had had to postpone several US-sponsored reform programs.⁶

Within the OCB machinery there had been talk of adopting a regional approach. This was consistent with Eisenhower's instructions to the Special Committee of the Board in early 1954. The OCB Special Working Group had merged into the Working Group on Southeast Asia (NSC 4505), and South Vietnam was no longer viewed as a problem. In early November, the Board talked about the region of Southeast Asia as a whole and noted that discussions on the Mekong River development had already begun indicating that the

5 Cutler's memorandum to Lay, Jr., August 23, 1957, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 12, Limited War, DDEL. There were also references to Vietnam in NSC 5810/1, "Basic National Security Policy," April 14, 1958, and the State-Pentagon study "U.S. and Allied Capabilities for Limited Military Operations to 1 July 1961," which had been forwarded to the Council by Secretary Wilson on June 17, 1958 and discussed by the NSC on June 26, 1958. The PB sent its comments to the Secretaries of State and Defense in early July, 1958. For documentation see *ibid.*

6 Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power*, 1963, p. 251; US House of Representatives, Committee on Government Operations, *Foreign Aid Construction Projects*, 85th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO 1958), pp. 864-866. Durbrow and the US representatives in Saigon were not apparently familiar with the newly instituted OCB. Special Assistant to the President Frederick M. Dearborn, Jr. had briefed the Embassy Staff about the OCB. Dearborn, Jr.'s letter to Durbrow, September 30, 1957, WHO, OSANSA, OCB series, Subject subseries, Box 2, Far East Trip, DDEL.

countries of the region were starting to realize the synergy of approaching problems in common. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Karl G. Harr, Jr. (who was to become the Special Assistant to the President and Vice-Chairman of the OCB in 1958), said that from a strategic point of view it was almost impossible to follow developments in any one country without taking the others into consideration. The OCB followed up the implementation of NSC 5612/1 and concluded on November 6, 1957 that the most difficult problems for Diem's Government were the budget deficit and the financial difficulties caused by it: inflation, the exchange rate of the piaster, and the inadequate will to invest on the part of the South Vietnamese public.⁷

The NSC planners appear to have indeed believed in the apparent success of Diem. The PB concluded in November 1957 that the Diem Government was on the road to parliamentary democracy. The position of Diem was considered to be particularly strong. The members of the PB hoped for effective actions on the part of Diem to prevent Communist subversive activities.⁸

Towards the end of 1957 even the standard interest shown by the State Department officials associated with the Council system seems to have been fading. This trend is indicated by Assistant Secretary Robertson's briefing memorandum to Secretary Dulles. In late November, Robertson forwarded to Secretary Dulles a copy of the latest OCB Progress Report on NSC 5612/1 (March 13 through November 6, 1957), which had been concurred in by the Board on November 6 and was scheduled for Council consideration on December 5. He regarded the report as a routine matter. Robertson pointed out that, prior to its submission to the OCB, it had been circulated and received concurrence in several bureaus of the State Department. In listing the major changes made to it, Robertson did not mention South Vietnam. He concluded that "as this report introduces no significant changes in US policy, it is expected that the NSC will have little comment in its consideration".⁹ Possibly, the language in the OCB Progress Reports had found its way right to the top. Unlike the NIEs, the short reports prepared by the Board may even have been read by the NSC principals themselves.

The field operatives were in a position to send frank appraisals of the situation. In early December 1957, for example, Durbrow sent a cable to Washington in which he stated that while Diem had been performing "miracles" he had failed to carry out political, social, and economic reforms, because he had placed security as his priority. According to the Ambassador, Diem was suspicious

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7 Preliminary Notes on OCB meeting of November 6, 1957, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 7, Preliminary Notes II, RG 59, NA; OCB's Progress Report on NSC 5612/1, November 6, 1957, Documents of the National Security Council 1947-1977, First Supplement, Microfilm Reel III. The draft Progress Report, dated October 18, 1957, had been revised and concurred in for transmittal to the NSC by the OCB on November 6. OCB Minutes, November 8, 1957 (held on November 6), *ibid.*, Box 2, Minutes V.

8 Minutes of the PB meeting, November 26, 1957, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1108-1110.

9 Robertson's memorandum for Dulles, November 29, 1957, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA.

and authoritarian and did not see the problems facing his administration. Diem was still a useful leader for the US in Asia, but he should be pressured into making reforms, Durbrow recommended. The members of the Country Team, apart from General Williams, thought Diem was failing, at least, in the long run. But they agreed that there was no alternative to Diem, and to putting the military first, because the military situation of South Vietnam was weak.¹⁰

The working files for expected NSC studies could sometimes include useful ideas for the use of the Council machinery. The NSC staffer Frank C. Nash (former Pentagon's PB representative) noted in Mill Paper number 191 that, despite the US not having bases in mainland Southeast Asia, the US was helping to train Asiatic forces "and to build and maintain certain facilities, such as roads and airfields" that could be used in the event of war. The paper pointed out that the presence of MAAGs was sensitive to charges that the armed forces of Southeast Asian countries were controlled by the US. The Council Staff recommended that there was a need to minimize the American military presence for political reasons, but on the other hand there was a need for a sufficient number of military advisors "to improve defense capabilities and to provide evidence of US willingness to protect them from aggression".¹¹ The Mill Paper was expected to become a Policy Paper sometime in 1958. This did not, however, happen. This might have been the result of the fact that the paragraphs relating to Southeast Asia, for example, contained no new language but only matters that had been incorporated into existing Policy Papers on the region. Furthermore, the issue of the MAAG ceiling for South Vietnam was still an unsolved question.

It was probably no surprise to the contemporary participants in the NSC-OCB machinery that classification to some extent hampered the development of NSC papers. This can be illustrated by examining a memorandum by the Harvard Professor and PB representative of the ODM, William Y. Elliott, who

10 Durbrow's cable to Dulles, December 5, 1957 (accompanied with a Report "Evaluation of Situation in Viet Nam: December 1957"), FRUS 1955-1957, Volume I, pp. 869-872, 872-884. Young cabled Durbrow a week later and informed him that his evaluations and recommendations were being studied by himself, Robertson and Hoover, Jr., *ibid.*, pp. 869-870, footnote 2.

11 Mill 191, "United States Overseas Military Bases," December 1957, A Report to the President by Frank C. Nash, Records of the NSC, Mill 191, Box 4, RG 273, NA. See also a "P" File number 86, "Interim Report of US Personnel Stationed in Foreign Countries" (Overseas Operations), *ibid.*, P 86. The PB recommended that the President should authorize the responsible agencies to circulate the Nash Report (93 pages and 191 appendices pages), which Eisenhower had requested in October 1956. It was to be circulated as classified. The full report was to be viewed only by key operating personnel, whereas the rest could see extracts. Memorandum of Discussion of the 358th Meeting of the NSC, February 27, 1958, AWF, NSC series, Box 9, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1958-1960, Volume III: National Security Policy; Arms Control and Disarmament (Washington, D.C.: GPO 1996), pp. 44-49. See also Lay, Jr's memorandum for the NSC, February 14, 1958, *ibid.*, Microfiche Supplement (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1998), p. 7. North Vietnam had gathered some information on US airfield and road construction activities in South Vietnam. See Imperialist Schemes in Vietnam Against Peace and Reunification. (Hanoi: Press and Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, July 1958), pp. 25, 28, 35-38, 40.

wrote to Under Secretary Herter on January 9, 1958 that the permission for declassification or downgrading to confidential could come either from Cutler or the President's OCB Representative, Frederick M. Dearborn, Jr. Elliott suggested that the NSC papers could be "suitably paraphrased" in order to avoid classification and thus they could be circulated. Elliot added that "the language is largely the work" of the State Department's PB member Gerard C. Smith.¹²

Worried reports continually arrived, indicating that the performance of the Diem Government fell short of the conditions set forth in the Eisenhower letter of October 23, 1954. In early January 1958, Durbrow and his economic advisers from USOM cabled to Washington a critical report about Diem's person and policies. According to the paper, power had been centralized as Diem had assumed the tasks of his ministers of whom he was suspicious. Diem did not understand even the basic realities of the economy, and thus he had neglected the economic development and land reform as he was concentrating on security. The discontent among the farmers had grown, the report added.¹³

Even though the Council was not responsible for the overview of Congress, the NSC-approved programs were subject to evaluation by Congressional committees. The House of Representatives Subcommittee for Foreign Operations headed by Porter Hardy, Jr. had visited Southeast Asia, including South Vietnam, in the fall of 1957. They had familiarized themselves with the economic and political objectives of the aid funds. The Subcommittee members felt that the people of the recipient countries did not realize the purpose of US aid. The US was using too little funds, the Subcommittee complained, to improve things visibly in the everyday lives of the people. The ordinary people were not at all concerned about military aid, the Congressmen reminded.¹⁴ In turn, the military could not care less about economic problems. In response in March 1958, CINCPAC Admiral Stump invited the members of the SFRC to South Vietnam to witness the astonishing progress made by MAAG. Stump praised their achievement in considerably raising the capability of the ARVN.¹⁵

12 Elliott was referring to NSC 5612/1. Elliott's memorandum for Herter, January 9, 1958, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 88, RG 59, NA.

13 Quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 304–305. The reforms called for in the Eisenhower letter were forgotten or they existed only on paper, Schlesinger Jr. states. He explains, that Diem was allowed to continue his authoritarian rule, family despotism in a Far Eastern style, without effective or even visible US opposition. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage*, 1967, pp. 23–24.

14 CR, February 25, 1958, p. 2793.

15 Quoted in USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., p. 32. It is useful to notice the frequent visits by high US officers to South Vietnam. Admiral Radford had been there in the summer of 1956. Assistant Chief of Staff of the army, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer went to Saigon in January 1957. Two months later, his superior, JCS member General Maxwell D. Taylor also traveled there. CINCPAC Admiral Stump went in September. *Imperialist Schemes*, 1958, p. 28; Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, p. 117. Diem had visited Stump in Hawaii in May 1957 when returning from the United States. *Ibid.*, p. 118; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 161.

NSC 5809 and the “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam”

Policy Papers were revised, but sometimes the revisions contained only technicalities and minor changes in their language. NSC 5809, for example, was a new Policy Paper to be approved on April 2, 1958. It did not mean a shift in policy. In planning it, the CIA had proposed an amendment to the draft Policy Paper. According to the Agency, South Vietnam needed a strong, stable, and constitutional government, the mere existence of which would act as a comparison to the conditions in the Communist zone. Hence, the CIA proposed, there was a need for more information campaigns, which should be written about in the next Policy Paper. As the NSC machinery produced a great number of documents they could not all be error-free. There was also a comical error in NSC 5809. On April 9, Lay, Jr. cautioned that a revised page had substituted “Viet Minh” for “Viet Nam”. The NSC did not discuss the proposed Policy Paper NSC 5809 at a meeting, but adopted it by memorandum. When one examines the contents of the document, one can see that, although renumbered, the paragraphs relating to South Vietnam are in fact identical to those in NSC 5612/1. The only exception is in the supplementary statement of policy toward North Vietnam. The first point, which deals with recognition of the Vietminh regime, had been removed. The US objectives and courses of action with respect to Southeast Asia had not been changed at all.¹⁶

Stavins, Barnet and Raskin argued that the wording of NSC 5809 “clearly indicates Washington’s aims toward the North as well as the South”. According to Kahin, the NSC staffers believed that South Vietnam would be capable of absorbing North Vietnam into a single state. This proposition, which he regards as “unrealistic”, was still incorporated into NSC 5809.¹⁷

The unchanged nature of US policy toward South Vietnam was also evident in the Presidential level courtesy messages. In his letter to Diem, Eisenhower took note of the improved regional recognition of the Diem Government. Furthermore, Eisenhower mentioned Diem’s recent declaration on the reunification elections which “laid bare the propaganda nature of the proposals” by North Vietnam.¹⁸

Despite the fact that Diem was facing obvious problems, the OCB machinery was merely interested in the wording of its own reports. The OCB estimated in its report on NSC 5612/1, of which the draft of May 23 was approved by the

16 USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., pp. 28–29; Lay, Jr’s memorandum for all holders of NSC 5809, April 9, 1958, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Box 95, Lot 63 D 351, NSC 5809 Memoranda, RG 59, NA; NSC 5809, “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia,” April 2, 1959, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 25, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1113–1133; for extracts of the Vietnam sections see editorial note, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 34–35.

17 Stavins, Barnet and Raskin, *Washington Plans an Aggressive War*, 1971, p. 15; Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 66.

18 The letter had been drafted by State’s officer in charge of Vietnamese Affairs, Joseph A. Mendenhall and cleared by Robertson and Secretary Dulles. Eisenhower’s letter to Diem, May 23, 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 39–40.

Board on May 28, 1958, that the progress made in accomplishing US objectives in Southeast Asia had been modest. There had been difficulties in avoiding damaging delays in carrying out aid programs. The operating problems in Southeast Asia were not, however, the Board argued, due to either Communist activities or the shortcomings of the US programs but instead the result of “the nature of the peoples and governments of the area”. The greatest problem of the Diem Government was the internal security situation. Ambassador J. Graham Parsons said that the State wished to preserve in the Vietnam summary evaluation that Diem had been “heavy-handed” in handling the issue and that his opposition was likely to increase because of the “tendency toward authoritarianism” in his Government. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Mansfield D. Sprague, objected on the basis of their reports from Saigon. The Board members seemed to have agreed that the US was not considering any stop to its support of Diem. Cutler regarded “heavy-handed” as “unjustified” and was supported by Allen Dulles. The Special Assistant recommended the word “stern”, instead. There was also the problem of continuous dependence on foreign aid. The US aid made up more than 85 percent of the nation’s imports. As a result of the US aid, the OCB concluded, the South Vietnamese had found out that they did not have to strive themselves. In discussing the report, which lacked the word progress, the OCB members had finally come to the conclusion that the Executive Secretary should “arrange for the revision of the paper to eliminate the split position in connection with Vietnam relating to the Board’s judgement as to the deteriorating to some degree of President Diem’s prestige and authority”. The (Progress) Report did not recommend any policy revisions for NSC papers on Southeast Asia.¹⁹ Durbrow’s constant reports had apparently resulted in new thinking among the State Department officials.

The new kind of OCB paper, “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam”, for the implementation of NSC 5809 was completed on June 4, 1958. It was an improvement on the previous “Summary of Action Requirements”, dated October 19, 1954, and the “Outline Plan of Operations “, dated April 12, 1957. The OCB gave operating guidance to the American officials in South Vietnam and wrote that the main objective of the paper was to prevent the fall of South

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19 The report covered the period from November 1957 through May 28, 1958. OCB (Progress) Report on NSC 5612/1, May 28, 1958, Documents of the National Security Council 1947–1977, First Supplement, Microfilm reel III; Preliminary Notes of the OCB Meeting, May 28 (held on the same day), 1958, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes III, RG 59, NA. Cutler’s “stern” has found its way in the Minutes of that Board meeting. Furthermore, there is no reference to “heavy-handed” in the approved Minutes. OCB Minutes, June 2, 1958 (held on May 28), *ibid.*, Box 2, Minutes VI; also in WHO, OSANSA, OCB series, Administrative subseries, Box 4, DDEL; Memorandum of Discussion of the 368th Meeting of the NSC, June 3, 1958 with Harr, Jr’s briefing note on the report dated June 3, 1958, as filed together, AWF, NSC series, Box 10, DDEL. The draft Operations Plan was dated May 23 but it has not been found. According to the editors of FRUS, its destruction had been authorized in the covering memorandum by Elmer Staats on June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, p. 40, footnote 1. The State Department supported the approval of the report. See J. Graham Parson’s memorandum for Herter, June 2, 1958, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 95, NSC 5809 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

Vietnam as an “outpost of the free world”. The US was committed to strengthening Diem’s Government as an example and a competitive counterforce to the Communists countries, especially North Vietnam, and to diminish the influence of neutralism in the region. A reference to the points in the draft NSC 5519 was also made. The US was also to improve the relations between South Vietnam and its Indochinese neighbors. In the aid programs, flexible joint enterprises were stressed because the South Vietnamese cooperation was deemed essential in order not to give the impression of unilateral US action. A balance had to be found between military and non-military resources. The OCB warned of delays in order to insure the support of the South Vietnamese. In addition, the budgetary situation of South Vietnam would have to be taken into consideration in developing aid programs, and private US investors would have to be encouraged to participate. The Board urged the operating agencies to recognize the Geneva Accords and the ICSC “for the time being”. The Operations Plan also took note of the worsening internal security situation in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the OCB predicted that the Communists might try to exploit the overseas Chinese minority in South Vietnam. The Plan finally referred to the need for discreet behavior on the part of American personnel and for attention to be paid to the local attitudes toward it.²⁰

In order to achieve the policy objectives, the OCB listed 51 action items in the Operations Plan. The summary of actions items in October 1954 made up only about half of the Operations Plan, whereas the Outline Plan had contained some 60 action items and additional requirements from the NSC 1290-d police program and individual action items, under the heading “current and projected programs and courses of action”. The items were divided into five categories: political (13 items), economic (13), military (10), informational and cultural (8), and overseas internal security program (7). The political items were mainly assigned to the State Department, the economic issues to the State Department, the ICA and the Commerce. The Pentagon was charged with most of the military items, with State in a supporting role. The main responsibility for the cultural and informational items was assigned to the USIA, and to a lesser degree to the State Department. The internal security issues were given to the ICA, State and Defense. The Departments of Agriculture and the Treasury were only in a minor support role in a handful of economic programs. The State Department was involved in 46 of the 51 items, either in a major or a supportive role, the ICA in 32 and the Pentagon in 25. All agencies were instructed to “popularize...the image of [a] genuinely independent” South Vietnam, to support Diem’s

20 Introduction sections of the OCB’s “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam,” June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 40–45. The Operations Plan superseded the OCB’s “Outline Plan of Operations With Respect to Vietnam” of April 12, 1957 and its later annex “Overseas International Security Program for Vietnam” of January 31, 1958. In the questions of handling of the Chinese community and the attitudes of the local population, the OCB gave instructions for reading the OCB paper “Guide Lines for U.S. Programs Affecting the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia,” December 11, 1957 and OCB’s Special Report “United States Employees Overseas: An Inter-Agency Report,” April 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, p. 40, footnote 1, p. 44.

Government in all possible ways to make it more attractive than North Vietnam, to improve South Vietnam's relations with the other US allies in Southeast Asia and the Far East, to trade especially with Japan and Taiwan, and, finally, to give assistance in the psychological warfare efforts of South Vietnam. The number of items assigned to all of the agencies had decreased considerably as well as the action items for the Defense Department in comparison with the ICA. At the same time, the responsibilities of the State Department had accumulated to some extent.²¹

Investigation of the Operations Plan shows that the OCB clearly intended to improve the position of South Vietnam over North Vietnam. In the economic field the tools were offered to accomplish the political objectives. The military items emphasized the SEATO connection and the reorganization of the ARVN along US lines. In order to provide a justification for the adopted courses of action, the US needed informational campaigns, including the use of Voice of America radio broadcasts. The OCB also wished to clarify the areas of responsibility for internal security between the ARVN and the civilian sphere. The Plan provided a clear picture of the duties and responsibilities of the various agencies and departments, or their field operatives. The programs covered almost all sectors of South Vietnamese society. The political considerations were consistent with those of NSC 5612/1 and NSC 5809. One paradoxical aspect can be found in the Plan: in the seventh item the need for cooperation with the ICSC is noted, but in item 20 it is suggested that the chances of the work of the control commission should be limited through diplomacy. On a general level, the leading principles of the OCB Plan were the continuation of support to the Government of South Vietnam and the development of regional cooperation, i.e. collective security.²² Despite the numerous details of the Plan, one question is left unanswered: Where was the CIA? This is puzzling, especially as the plan incorporated psychological warfare issues. It is hard to believe that the CIA would have had no role to play. The strong posture of the State Department is an indication of the Department's power within the OCB, and the ICA had considerable responsibility for internal security issues.

As we have seen, the NSC system encouraged the presentation of differing views. Even though some State and Defense Department representatives may have agreed on a question, the others could still voice their opinions freely and submit them to their respective NSC principals. Obviously, with this in mind, Assistant Secretary of State Robertson reminded Secretary Dulles that he had promised Eden in the course of the Geneva Conference that the strength of MAAG would not be increased. Although the quota of French military advisors was switched to the Americans and the TERM personnel assisted in training,

21 OCB's "Operations Plan for Viet-Nam," June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 45-54. There was a mention that when an individual action item was extracted from the Plan, it might be downgraded to the appropriate security classification. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

22 OCB's "Operations Plan for Viet-Nam," June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 45-54.

there were still too few US advisors in South Vietnam, Robertson asserted. He recommended to Dulles that the US should “begin phasing out TERM” and that the Secretary should discuss the lifting of the ceiling with Britain’s Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. There were, Robertson continued, several persons in the State Department who favored increasing the US military presence in South Vietnam. The Pentagon officials also tended to oppose the imposition of a ceiling on the MAAG personnel.²³

The old Policy Papers needed to be revised while the new ones were being produced. In August 1958, there was considerable disagreement within the State Department on whether NSC 5429/5 was useful any longer. Since early 1955 the OCB had had no responsibility for preparing a separate report on NSC 5429/5, and so the Working Groups on the Far East and Southeast Asia had been required to include activities relating to the Policy Paper in their regular reports. The State Department members of the OCB Working Group for Southeast Asia felt in the summer of 1958 that the Southeast Asia portions of the paper were clearly obsolete, because they had already been covered in greater detail in NSC 5809. The Far East section of the State Department disagreed, but also thought that there was no need for revision. The problem was to be decided within the OCB structure.²⁴ Both positions were held by the State Department representatives, who had apparently been unable to resolve their disagreements within the Department. As we have already seen earlier, this was not the first time that lower-level officials disagreed with the NSC principals.

There had been a long pause since the previous NIE on Vietnam (May 14, 1957). As information had to be secured, other departments and agencies assigned their subordinates and field representatives to produce reports. MAAG, for example, issued its study on the threat of North Vietnam in August 1958. It centered on the conventional capacity of the country. An invasion of South Vietnam could begin at any moment without warning, military advisors asserted. They also believed that Hanoi would continue its attempts to reunite Vietnam through diplomatic, economic, political, and subversive means. According to MAAG, overt unilateral use of force would probably be part of the Communist objective of seizing the whole of Southeast Asia.²⁵

The question of the South Vietnamese Civil Guard was a reflection of the State-Defense controversy. It was both a matter of principle and also about whether the ICA or MAAG could be responsible for the training, equipping and funding of the Guard. Secretary Dulles wrote in early September to Saigon that the State Department would most likely have yielded in to the military’s views, and thus the Civil Guard would be transferred to the Ministry of Defense of

23 Robertson’s memorandum to Dulles, June 7, 1958, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 55–58; Regional Director for the Far East at the Office Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA B. A. Robbins, Jr.’s memorandum to Young, April 16, 1958, *ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

24 Executive Secretary Bromley K. Smith’s memorandum for the Board Assistants, August 28, 1958, Records Relating the State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 11, RG 59, NA.

25 Quoted in USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., pp. 18–19.

South Vietnam. The US, Dulles added, should train only 32,000 well-equipped members of the Guard, instead of 50,000. Lansdale, who was the Special Assistant of the Pentagon's Office of Special Operations, had already written to Chief MAAG General Williams in mid-March 1958 that he and his superior General Erskine, the former Chief of MAAG-Indochina and Chairman of the Subcommittee of OCB's Special Committee in 1954, viewed it as foolish to arm separate military forces under the Ministry of Defense of South Vietnam. The Civil Guard should have been assimilated into the ARVN, as Lansdale had recommended.²⁶

More pressures on the NSC-approved assistance programs came in September 1958 when a group of Democrat Senators started to criticize the imbalance between the US military and economic aid. The Senators sent Eisenhower a letter in which they wrote that they did not oppose military assistance but demanded more funds for economic aid. The military emphasis was, in fact, clear. At the end of 1958, only 10 percent of the 692 members of MAAG in South Vietnam were in administrative duties, while the rest were working as advisors in the field. Only in Taiwan and South Korea were there more US officers at that time. The US paid still 84 percent of the costs of the military in South Vietnam, and 44 percent of the other expenditures of the Government of Diem.²⁷

The OCB reports forwarded to the Council for consideration were not necessarily compiled by the OCB machinery, but could have been prepared by individual agencies where most of the work was, in fact, done. The Board had transmitted, for example, on March 28, 1958 to the NSC its annual report of the operations of the Overseas Internal Security Program (OISP), which had been prepared by the ICA. The report was accompanied by a record of the Board action in respect to the report. The OCB members agreed in the fall of 1958 that reports on the OISP were not needed in the future as "information on the program will be contained in reports to the NSC". They referred to those policy documents which had been assigned to the OCB for coordination. In the case of the OISP, the Annual Status Report to the Council on the MSP would "contain an adequate appraisal of the developments of the [OISP] program in terms of its general objectives".²⁸ The decision of the Board mirrors the overall change in

26 Dulles's cable to Durbrow, September 3, 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 79-80; Lansdale's memorandum to General Williams, March 14, 1958, *ibid.*, pp. 26-27. The controversy over the status of the Civil Guard had been continuing for some time. USOM withheld some funds until the Guard was released from the the Ministry of Defense. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 324.

27 The bipartisan group consisted of Fulbright, Greene, Humphrey, Kennedy, Mansfield, Wayne Morse, William Langer, and John Sparkman. Quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 322; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 306.

28 Staats's memorandum to the Board Assistants, September 4, 1958 with the OCB Annual Status Report July 1, 1957 through June 30, 1958 as an attachment, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Status Reports, RG 59, NA. The Board Assistants had revised and concurred on January 31, 1958, on behalf of their principals, in the "Overseas Internal Security Program for Viet-Nam," dated January 13, 1958. The paper, which was sent for implementation by the responsible agencies, was an annex to the "Outline Plan of Operations for Vietnam," dated April 12, 1957. Record of Action of the Board Assistants's meeting, February 3, 1958 (held on January 31), *ibid.*, Box 11, Board Assistants - Record of Actions 1958-1959.

the procedures of the NSC-OCB machinery. Eisenhower had concluded in the spring of 1958 that the discussion in the Council meetings should center on issues rather than on papers (see “Advising the President” in chapter 1, above).

Even though the effectiveness of the NSC-OCB machinery had not diminished in five years, there were naturally some problems associated with the functioning of the system. As noted above, due to the nature of the NSC-OCB machinery, the staffers were eager to submit their views on possible trouble spots within the whole Council system. J. I. Coffey, for example, harshly criticized the recent OCB report on NSC 5809. According to Coffey, it did not mention the basic causes of Asian dissatisfaction with SEATO, or operational problems such as slowness in implementing US aid programs or strengthening the positions of Southeast Asian leaders. Coffey referred to the language as having been “obscure” and recommended changes in language and in the OCB assignments for its Working Groups to find measures to reduce military costs and the settlement of the Civil Guard issue.²⁹ It is likely that Coffey’s points were useless, because most of the principals, and – above all – the President, were still satisfied with the system. Furthermore, there is some indication in the NSC-related documentation there were a number of initiatives taken even by the Special Assistants to change the system and attempts by the JCS to get their representative onto the OCB.

Nevertheless, the NSC system functioned effectively as a whole. The consideration of the Vietnam question did not, however require time-consuming planning work in early January 1959. The only changes that were recommended to be made to NSC papers were the Pentagon’s suggestion to change the words “hot pursuit” to read “immediate pursuit” in NSC 5429/5, and in NSC 5604, “Unprovoked Communist Attack Against U.S. Aircraft”. In his briefing notes for the State Department representatives of the PB, Haskins wrote that the change was “unobjectionable” despite the fact that it eliminated “the colorful and, to the layman well understood, Cutlerian language”. Haskins continued that the PB might be asked whether any portions of NSC 5429/5 needed reviewing. This request, Haskins added, would only be another way of laying the foundation for a possible later Council statement that the PB did not think there should be a review of NSC 5429/5.³⁰

It remains doubtful whether the highly formalized NSC-OCB machinery was capable of changing its working habits and structures swiftly, despite the Presidential decision in the spring of 1958. And despite the fact that new procedures in paper-producing and discussions had been adopted, the Board discussions, for example, still focused on papers at the beginning of 1959. In

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29 Coffey’s memorandum to Gray, December 30, 1958, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, Southeast Asia, DDEL.
30 Haskins’s briefing note for the PB meeting of January 2, 1959, Records of the NSC, Memoranda for Approval, Box 3, Memo Approval # 2049, RG 273, NA. The reasons for the Defense Department recommendation remain unknown, as the attached JCS Study on “Hot Pursuit and Pursuit Under Doctrine of Self-Preservation,” October 23, 1958, has been deleted, as well as portions of the accompanying memoranda. Ibid.

addition, the OCB Working Group on Southeast Asia prepared a revised version of the OCB's "Operations Plan for Viet-Nam" of June 4, 1958, which on December 31 Herter called an "extremely fine document". The new Plan, with the same title, was discussed by the Board on December 31, 1958 and January 7, 1959. The OCB also went through the report on NSC 5809. Both draft documents, dated December 19, were only briefly considered as they were deferred to the next Board meeting. During the former meeting, the Under Secretary of the Treasury, Fred C. Scribner, had had comments to make on the papers, but had had to leave the meeting early. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, John N. Irwin II, briefed the participants on the Civil Guard program, which had been proposed by Ambassador Durbrow and the Country Team members to meet the problem of internal security, stating that the Pentagon was willing to use available funds for strengthening the Guard. Herter replied by saying that he wanted to have a rapid decision on the matter. In reply, the Deputy Director of ICA, Leonard J. Saccio, was sure that another decision would be taken by Under Secretary Dillon and ICA Director James H. Smith, Jr., with Pentagon representation and OISP in mind. The Pentagon's views, Saccio added, would be taken into account and the OCB instructions would be kept in mind. When Gray referred to the Pentagon study, he said that the force levels should be seriously reviewed against the background of the total security requirements. An unknown defense specialist answered that the changes in the force levels in North Vietnam would dictate the actions taken by the US. Saccio then briefed the meeting on the current trend toward emphasizing economic assistance, in comparison to military aid in South Vietnam and similar countries. At the following meeting, the Civil Guard question was addressed, but with a Treasury split. Saccio said a decision was about to be made with the CIA views in mind. The ICA was, Saccio went on, ready for a Civil Guard program during 1959. On January 7, in connection with noting a Pentagon study on the South Vietnamese force levels and their ability to resist an invasion, Gray thought that this was rather a Civil Guard issue. The Pentagon representatives replied the question was about the capabilities of the armed forces of the Southeast Asian nations. Saccio reminded the participants that Dillon and Smith would return to the Guard issue in a few days' time in light of the CIA views on the significance of the Guard. The ICA agreed to the Civil Guard program for 1959, Saccio continued, since long-range plans were desirable. The OCB approved the report on NSC 5809, which Saccio called "a 'good' one", and also the new Operations Plan, because during the first week of January the departments and agencies concerned had managed to agree on the language in such a way as to resolve their differences.³¹

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31 Preliminary Notes of OCB meeting, January 7, 1959, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, December 31, 1958, *ibid.*, Box 3, Minutes VII. Before his departure Scribner had asked about the economic situation in North Vietnam. In reply, Eric Kocher, the Director of State Department's Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, had promised to provide statistical figures within a week. Preliminary Notes on the OCB meetings, December 31, 1958, and January 7, 1959, *ibid.*, Box 8, Preliminary Notes III-IV, RG 59, NA; also quoted in FRUS

The approved Operations Plan did not differ much from the one dated June 4, 1958, but it also superseded the latter. The new Plan called for actions to improve Diem's position, especially by discreetly asking him to liberalize his political control. In referring to the private capital investment, the Plan mentioned, for example, industrial projects and power facilities. Ownership should be in private hands. The strengthening of South Vietnamese-Cambodian relations had received an action item. The South Vietnamese would be sent to the US and other countries for administrative, technical, professional and military training. Contacts between private organizations, foundations and individuals in South Vietnam and the US were also encouraged. Most of the assignments went to the State Department, the ICA, the Defense Department, and the USIA.³² The changes were in fact minor compared to the Plan of June 1958. The Plan aimed at creating an American style of economy in South Vietnam, which would be even more dependent on US aid than before. References to Cambodia can be understood if it is remembered that the known infiltration routes used by the Communists went through that country, which the US and South Vietnam could not have afforded to lose to the Communists.

Eisenhower is known for having preferred short reports, and his new general paper-producing instructions had to be adopted by the OCB. In January 1959, the OCB reported, that the dissatisfaction with Diem had grown even amongst the middle classes, although Diem had tried to enhance his following by traveling. Durbrow had passed on to Diem the wish that he would install a new and more liberal political and administrative regime in order to increase the control of his Government. According to the OCB, the question was a delicate one for Diem, which limited the possibilities of Ambassador Durbrow. The preliminary notes of the actual Board meeting on January 7 indicate that the discussion had apparently centered at length on the report on NSC 5809, and the

1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 117–118, footnote 1. Landon had notified the Executive Officer, Bromley K. Smith, that the discussions of the Board Assistants and the OCB Report on NSC 5809 and the “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam” indicated that there would be splits in the positions held by the ICA and the Pentagon at the Board meeting of January 7. Landon’s memorandum for Smith, January 6, 1959, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Special Staff File series, Box 7, Southeast Asia, DDEL. The Board Assistants had reviewed and revised the “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam” on May 23, 1958, but twice in December they deferred consideration of the Operations Plans revisions pending the OCB action on the report on NSC 5809. This was done “in view of the substantive questions raised therein, so that the views of the Board could be obtained concerning them” before Board Assistants would take final action on the Operations Plan. Both documents had been scheduled for the Board consideration on December 31. Records of Action of the Board Assistants’ meetings, May 26, December 8 and 19, 1958 (held on May 23, and December 5 and 19), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 11, Board Assistants – Record of Actions 1958–1959, RG 59, NA. The Guard was to get 14 million dollars – as MSUG had proposed – over the course of four years under the condition, that it would be reorganized and transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. In January 1959, Diem announced that he would concur. Robertson urged Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Dillon to get Director of the ICA Smith, Jr. to concur in the compromise. Robertson’s memorandum to Dillon, January 8, 1959, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 128–131; USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.4., pp. 22–33.

32 OCB’s “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam,” January 7, 1959, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 117–124. See also USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1156–1189.

“Operations Plan for Viet-Nam” had simply been approved for implementation. The former was to be the last OCB report to be presented to the Council for the following six months. The NSC noted the President’s directive, in which Secretary Dulles agreed, that from then on the Board would transmit its reports at yearly intervals, unless the OCB believed there had been “significant developments affecting the policy” or wanted to recommend a policy review. Eisenhower argued that there was no need to produce reports in vain as there were “just too many reports”.³³ According to Anderson, the Board – while revising the Operations Plan – kept the “basic policy guidelines”.³⁴

The OCB did not improvise. It acted upon the task assigned to it by the NSC. The OCB Deputy Executive Officer, Roy M. Melbourne, wrote to Harr, Jr., who was Special Assistant to the President on January 20 to say that in discussions within the OCB machinery certain points of major interest had arisen. Melbourne referred to the paragraphs in the Progress Report on NSC 5809 about economic development in South Vietnam which indicated that process had not been as rapid as was “politically desirable and, indeed, it appears doubtful whether our political objectives can be achieved to the degree desired.” The Progress Report hinted that the Council had requested the OCB to review the OISP. Thus, the problem of internal security in South Vietnam was especially interesting, since the Civil Guard question had not been resolved and the amount of US assistance still had to be decided.³⁵

33 OCB Report on NSC 5809, January 7, 1959, Documents of the National Security Council, Fifth Supplement, Microfilm reel II; Preliminary Notes of OCB meeting of January 7, 1959, Records Relating to the State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; Memorandum of Discussion of the 395th Meeting of the NSC, January 26, 1959, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL. For new form of OCB reports and Operations Plans see Smith’s memorandum “Proposed Revised Form of OCB Reports and Operations Plans,” March 26, 1959. The memorandum is filed with the OCB minutes in Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, OCB Minutes VII, RG 59, NA. As a result of the new policy, Deputy Under Secretary Murphy told the Board that it might be that the weekly informal luncheons would continue, but there would not necessarily have to be a subsequent formal meeting every week. He added that therefore “non-urgent matters and briefings, in general, should be consolidated for discussion at a single meeting”. Harr, Jr. had feared that “a lessening of OCB activity” could have a negative effect on the morale of the OCB staff. Preliminary Notes of OCB meeting of October 14, 1959 – OCB luncheon, *ibid.*, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV.

34 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 171.

35 WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL. On April 1, the OCB discussed and revised a draft “Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group in Connection with the Overseas Internal Security Program,” March 27, 1959 (earlier drafts on February 11 and 16, 1958). The Working Group had received its terms of reference on January 13, 1959. In its report South Vietnam was only briefly mentioned in the connection that there was now better supervision of police activities as a result of improvements in communications systems and increased mobility. Furthermore, police transportation and training facilities had also been improved. South Vietnam had been an easier case since no duplicating forces for internal security missions had had to be created, thus reducing costs. Only Burma and Laos were bigger recipients of aid amongst the 27 countries dealt with by the OISP. In March 28, the OCB had agreed that there should be additional country-by-country guidance from the NSC if there were to be significant reductions in the indigenous military forces. Missions would need to be assigned to them to determine if they would affect US security. The Board concurred in the conclusions of the report and, when the OCB minutes of April 1 were approved a week later, transmitted the report to the NSC. Later the Board agreed that there was no further need for the annual OISP report to be transmitted to the NSC as the information on

In consonance with Eisenhower's thinking, the Under Secretary of State Herter favored a regional look in Far Eastern NSC policies. He did not believe that there had to be a separate NSC paper on China, even though Gray had urged one in mid-January 1959. Herter had argued that US policy on China could be reviewed in the context of a review of NSC 5429/5. In replying to Herter's initiative, Gray suggested that the review of Basic National Security Policy should come first, but that the PB could start its consideration of NSC 5429/5 in early April.³⁶ In this connection it is necessary to restate that the State Department officials had already questioned the feasibility of NSC 5429/5 in August 1958.

The US military machine needed alternate base facilities. In March 1959, the JCS recommended to the Secretary of Defense that Saigon's Than Son Nhut airport should be expanded and that Tourane airfield should be converted for the use of jet aircraft. According to the Joint Chiefs, both modifications could have been disguised by referring to the needs of commercial air freight.³⁷ It seems apparent that by expanding and developing the airfield facilities of South Vietnam, the US believed in the continuation of its military aid. It is likely that they made preparations for the possible intervention of their own aerial power within the framework of SEATO.

The implementation of NSC policies required funding. On March 19, President Eisenhower requested 835 million dollars from Congress for the twelve defense-support countries. The President announced that two-thirds of the aid would be given to Turkey, Taiwan, South Korea, and South Vietnam. He termed those countries "courageous and strategically located nations", which were dependent on US defense support aid. The aid the US provided was for organizing "front line" defense without harming the economies of the recipient countries.³⁸

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- the program could be written in other OCB reports. See Bromley K. Smith's memorandum to the NSC, April 8, 1958 with the report as an attachment, April 8, 1954, Records of the NSC, OCB Central Files, Box 1, OCB 014.12 (File # 2), RG 273, NA; ICA's "Annual Report of Operations of the Overseas Internal Security Program to the Operations Coordinating Board for the National Security Council," (December 1956 through November 1957) March 4, 1958, *ibid.*; OCB Action on OISP, April 25, 1958, *ibid.*, (File # 2); Preliminary Notes on the OCB meetings of April 1 and 8, 1958, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes III, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, April 1 and 8, 1958, *ibid.*, Box 2, Minutes VI. The Board Assistants had concurred in the OISP annexes for Cambodia and South Vietnam, which had been revised in accordance with the new format. OCB Weekly Activity Report, February 3, 1958, *ibid.*, Box 4, Activity Reports IX.
- 36 Gray's letter to Herter, February 5, 1959, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 82, NSC 5429 Memoranda, RG 59, NA. According to an accompanying note, when Herman T. Skofield had shown Herter's idea to Gray, the Special Assistant had been "very calm about it". Skofield's hand-written note attached to Gray's letter, undated, *ibid.*
- 37 JCS' memorandum to Secretary McElroy, March 19, 1959, USVNR, Book 10, p. 1184. In late December 1958, the Joint Chiefs had asked the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, John N. Irwin II, to replace the fighter planes of the South Vietnamese Air Forces. Irwin disagreed and replied, that the reduction in their performance was due to bad maintenance and cuts in obtaining spare parts. This, in turn, had been caused by the interim transition from the French to the Americans. Irwin II's memorandum to the JCS, January 22, 1959, *ibid.*, p. 1183.
- 38 Eisenhower's special message to Congress on the MSP, March 19, 1959, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1959, p. 263.

The OCB members sometimes cited information by well-known and respected specialists. Irwin II, for example, quoted Lansdale's recent report on the civil activities undertaken by the military forces in Southeast Asia at the Board meeting of April 1, 1959. Lansdale had prepared the report as a member of the Southeast Asia Subcommittee of the President's Committee to Study U.S. Military Assistance Programs (the Draper Committee) in order to investigate the training and use of military personnel in economic development projects as a contribution to the stability of a specific country. The report explained that Diem had conducted two large pacification campaigns in the far south and in the central coastal region. Pacification had continued in the Highland Plateau area, including road- and bridge-building and bringing government administration to the nomad tribes. Lansdale's report, which was sent to the OCB members for comments on April 3, concluded that the project concept could be exported to other regions of the world.³⁹

President Eisenhower reiterated the Domino analogy in April 1959. He regarded the MSP as vital to South Vietnam, which was weak in its struggle against Communism. "The United States is now responsible for helping South Vietnam", Eisenhower declared. The President referred to the Domino analogy by saying that the fall of the countries would begin by losing 12 million people, and then the peoples in adjacent lands would be seriously endangered. The process of falling, Eisenhower said, included South Vietnam and Laos. According to the President, collective action was the only serious alternative in checking the threat. Eisenhower pointed out the economic needs of Japan in relation to Southeast Asia, the former being the place for manufacturing goods, and the latter the source of raw materials. Economic growth was essential to South Vietnam, which needed foreign capital. The President said that the core of the problem was the maintenance of military capacity without crushing the economy. He said he was certain that by strengthening South Vietnam and guaranteeing the security of the Southern Pacific they would eventually enhance the economic capabilities of the whole region. Japan would benefit from all this and freedom would spread throughout the Western Pacific, Eisenhower stated.⁴⁰

39 In the course of the pacification, the South Vietnamese army had cooperated with "Operation Brotherhood" of the International Jaycees staffed by Filipino volunteer doctors and the Vietnamese Government's Civic Action. Irwin II's memorandum to the members of the OCB, April 3, 1959 with Lansdale's report "Civic Activities of the Military, Southeast Asia," March 13, 1959 as an attachment including a picture appendices, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL. In reply to Irwin II, Harr, Jr. recommended that since Civic Action programs seemed useful from the military viewpoint the Pentagon could prepare a general program to that effect for the consideration of the OCB and later for the use of MAAGs, Mission Chiefs and local government authorities. Harr, Jr's letter to Irwin, II, May 4, 1959, *ibid.*, OCB series, Subject subseries, Box 6.

40 Eisenhower's address at Gettysburg College, April 4, 1959, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1959, pp. 311-314; DSB, April 27, 1959, pp. 580-581. Goodpaster recalls that Eisenhower did not use the term Domino theory. He did, however, often think of "Communist outward expansion" as threatening Indonesia, Malaya and India. The "mechanical picture image" of the concept, Goodpaster adds, was produced by the reporters. Andrew J. Goodpaster Oral History Transcript, DDEL. In 1956, South Vietnam had expressed

From Opposition to Communist Subversion

The NSC-OCB directives were not always easily implemented. This meant that the various participant departments and agencies each interpreted the OCB language in their own way. This problem was evident in military questions. In late March 1959, for example, General Williams complained that he had not been able to “fully carry out” the task of training the ARVN for the role of internal security which had been called for by the OCB Operation Plan of January 7. Williams added, in his letter to the CINCPAC’s Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Riley, that the “recent anti-guerilla operations show marginal results”. He saw serious problems in conducting the operations. Furthermore, the Chief MAAG was not provided with information on the operations. On April 9, 1959 Riley suggested to Chief MAAG General Williams that operative planning with respect to South Vietnam should be commenced. At the same time, Riley referred to the possibility of allowing US military advisors to take part in the military operations of the ARVN, but he predicted that the “Washington superiors would frown upon direct participation in guerilla hunting”. At the Pentagon, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Irwin II, summarized the main points of the OCB Operations Plan. According to him, they were the popularization of the picture of South Vietnam, figuring out the weaknesses of the Vietcong⁴¹, the development of the combat capacity of the ARVN to its maximum, and the provision of encouragement to the Government of South Vietnam to maintain effective self-defense forces.⁴²

The Pentagon managed to overcome the problems in the implementation of policies. In May Riley’s recommendations were answered when the US military advisors received orders from CINCPAC to move downward from division level

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- its willingness to join SEATO. In early spring of 1957 this had been forgotten. The US Ambassador in Saigon Durbrow estimated that behind this shift in policy was the recent trip of Ngo Dinh Nhu to India. As South Vietnam was coming closer to India it did not want a burden imposed on it by SEATO. During his visit to the United States, Diem did not wish to discuss the matter. Diem had probably calculated, Durbrow asserted, that full membership in SEATO did not bring any more protection than the special protocol, and that political support from neutral and non-aligned South Asian and Southeast Asian countries was worth considering. Diem wanted to take advantage of Indian support, Durbrow wrote. By August 1957, Diem’s India enthusiasm had faded away. Durbrow’s cable to Dulles, August 12, 1957, FRUS 1955–1957, Volume XXI, pp. 358–363.
- 41 The etymological background of the word Vietcong is unclear. Spector argues it was already in use in mid-1957. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 316. On the other hand, Kahin traces the name back to an ambush which took place in the fall of 1959. Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 111. Sheehan maintains that the US psychological warfare specialists had come up with the term to replace the expression Vietminh, and introduced it to newspapers in Saigon as early as 1956. Vietcong was not widely used, because Diem himself used the word Vietminh. In the American community, Vietcong was not accepted until the early 1960s. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 1988, p. 189.
- 42 Williams had found it embarrassing when Diem had asked for his recommendations even though the Chief MAAG had not been briefed about the operations in advance. William’s letter to Vice Admiral H. D. Riley, March 31, 1959, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 178–179; Riley’s reply to Williams, April 9, 1959, *ibid.*, pp. 179–180. Arnold notes that Ely had recommended the matter even earlier. Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 341; Irwin II’s memorandum to the JCS, May 20, 1959, USVNR, Book 10, p. 1185.

to lower levels. The members of MAAG started instructing the ARVN troops at regiment and battalion levels. The military advisors participated in the ARVN operations against the guerillas.⁴³ The idea of MAAG participation in the field operations of the ARVN was a new one. The decision deepened the commitment by giving it new dimensions. The precise objective of the new policy gave remains unclear, but it seems to refer to a possible military intervention.

Information-collecting had been neglected. The intelligence community had not submitted a NIE or SNIE for over two years. In May 1959, the intelligence community, however, analyzed the situation in Vietnam and considered the chance of reunification of the country to be remote. According to the intelligence sources, Diem would stay in power for the years to come by repression of the opposition through the Can Lao mechanism⁴⁴. The ICSC demands for the withdrawal of TERM threatened the “continuance of the present level of training [of the ARVN]”. Given the continuing US aid, there would only be “modest improvement” in South Vietnam’s economy as the security concerns were, and would remain, a priority for Diem’s Government. The intelligence sources predicted that North Vietnam would continue to harass South Vietnam and Laos. Relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia were not going to improve.⁴⁵

The fifth anniversary of Diem’s rule was not left unnoticed in the United States. In July 1959, Senator Mansfield went through the achievements of the Diem Administration in Senate. President Eisenhower also congratulated and praised Diem by writing that South Vietnam was a country which was determined to retain its freedom and develop its economy.⁴⁶

Economic issues were not completely strange to the military. The JCS took up a stance on the US policy toward the Far East in mid-July 1959. The Chiefs argued that the US actions would not possibly be viewed positively if they were simply aimed at containing Communist influence and diminishing its power. In consequence, the JCS suggested, the US should concentrate on economic growth within the constraints of security needs. Security was an important background factor for economical growth, the JCS wrote.⁴⁷

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43 Collins, James Lawton, Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1975), p. 17; Krepinevich, Andrew F., Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 24; Post, Ken, *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Viet Nam, Volume 2: Viet Nam Divided* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1989), p. 318.

44 Can Lao was a secret network of the Nhu family. It was headed by Diem’s brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. The network was involved in corruption, as it had been used to dispense import-export licenses. See Durbrow’s report to Secretary Dulles, March 2, 1959, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 144–170; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 132.

45 The strength of the ARVN was 136,000 men, the Civil Guard 48,000, the self-defense corps in the villages 47,000, the police forces 10,500, and the security police 7 500. NIE-63-59, “Prospects for North and South Vietnam,” May 26, 1959, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1190–1195; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 201–203.

46 CR, July 7, 1959, pp. 12773–12775; Eisenhower’s letter to Diem, July 11, 1959, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1959, p. 519.

47 JCS memorandum to NSC Staff, July 14, 1959, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1211–1235. JCS referred to Southeast Asia as an area, which included Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaya, Burma, China, North Korea, and North Vietnam.

American casualties were a type of emergency issue that had to be explained to the public and so it was raised at the NSC. The new Secretary of State, Christian A. Herter, commented on the deaths of two American military advisors by saying that the US had been aware for some time of the activities of terrorist organizations in South Vietnam. This was the third attack, Herter pointed out, on Americans in South Vietnam. Diem had apologized and promised that the murderers would be punished, the Secretary of State said. The US, Herter continued, had assisted the South Vietnamese, and would continue to do so, in developing the police forces in order to manage internal security. The incident did not go unnoticed in the NSC when Allen Dulles briefly referred to the news. He said that the assailants were evidently Communists and that there were as yet no further details available. At the OCB the Under Secretary Murphy argued that the incident had been an “isolated instance” and therefore offered “no ground at this time for amending earlier instructions” to the field operatives.⁴⁸

The handling of larger questions reflected the new policy of holding discussions not based on papers but rather on issues. On June 18, 1959, the NSC had discussed a study entitled “Political Implications of Afro-Asian Military Takeovers”. The Council took no formal action, nor was it approved by the President. The State Department dispatched the study and a copy of the oral presentation made to the NSC to US Embassies on August 11. Ambassador Durbrow commented on the documents in his cable on December 7, 1959. According to Durbrow, there had not been a recent military takeover and there were no indications of one, even though Diem’s regime had been authoritarian. The Ambassador asserted that two problems had emerged in South Vietnam that had been raised in the NSC paper. Diem had alienated the Western-oriented intellectuals, and there had been too much emphasis on security instead of economic development, as had been the case in the countries which were run by military regimes, Durbrow wrote. While giving credit to Diem’s rule, Durbrow recommended that, in order to prevent coups, he should be made to recognize human rights and to better represent the government. MAAG should “carefully observe political tendencies which may develop among the officer corps [of the

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48 Quoted in Noble, G. Bernard, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Volume XVIII: Christian A. Herter (New York: Cooper Square, 1970), pp. 110–111; DSB, July 27, 1959, pp. 115–116. In the memorandum of the discussion the incident was referred to as “the terrorist raid on a U.S. MAAG station near Saigon”. Memorandum of Discussion of the 412th Meeting of the NSC, July 9, 1959, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL; Preliminary Notes of OCB meeting of July 15, 1959, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA. See also CR, July 9, 1959, pp. 13128–13129. Those killed were Major Dale R. Buis and Master Sergeant Chester M. Ovnand. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 329; The two MAAG members were not the only American casualties during the Eisenhower Administration. In the summer of 1955, the USIA’s office in Saigon was attacked with a bomb. In addition, 13 Americans had been injured on October 22, 1957 by a bomb. In late 1960, one police instructor was killed in South Vietnam. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*. 2nd rev. ed. (Boulder: Westview, 1984), p. 331. According to Prados, the first American prisoners of war were a group of five soldiers who had been captured on June 15, 1954. Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*, 1995, p. 10.

ARVN]”. The Ambassador recommended that the US should continue its assistance and policy along the lines set forth in the OCB Operations Plan.⁴⁹

The OCB continued to monitor the situation in South Vietnam. In August 1959, the Board wrote in its (Progress) Report that the Government of Diem was continuing its strong political control despite the opposition of the elite. According to the OCB, this was necessary because of the internal security situation. Diem’s Government was truly concerned about the growth of Communist terrorism and sabotage, the OCB report concluded. The OCB referred to the ICSC as a nuisance, especially in its objection to the work done by TERM. The Board was briefed by a joint State-Defense paper on the TERM personnel and “the tactical approach” to solving the problem of the MAAG ceiling. The BOB report, which was also read at the Board meeting, confirmed that, from a financial viewpoint, TERM had achieved its objectives. When the OCB discussed the report dated August 4, they did it based on the briefing of four visiting representatives of State Department’s Office of Southeast Asian Affairs. Harr, Jr. asked whether the Scripps-Howard articles on the US aid program in South Vietnam, which had had a very severe impacts on the South Vietnamese, were going to be circulated in Saigon in connection with the forthcoming Colegrove hearings⁵⁰. The OCB noted a comment of the Southeast

49 Memorandum of Discussion of the 410th Meeting of the NSC, June 18, 1959, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL; State Department circular airgram, August 11, 1959 (including the study “Political Implications of Afro-Asian Military Takeovers”, May 22, 1959 and an oral presentation to the NSC), Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 611.90/8-1159, RG 59, NA; Durbrow’s cable to Herter, December 7, 1959, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 255–271. About the circular airgram see also *ibid.*, p. 255, footnote 2.

50 Albert M. Colegrove had written six articles that were highly critical of the US economic aid program in South Vietnam. The articles were published between July 20 and 26, 1959 in eighteen newspapers of the Scripps-Howard chain. Both SFRC and HFAC became interested and arranged hearings to study the alleged misuses of the US aid fund. Montgomery, *The Politics of Foreign Aid*, 1962, pp. 304–305; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 321–329. The hearings did not result in changes in the delivery of US assistance. See US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings before the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs, *Situation in Vietnam*, Part 1, July 30 and 31, 1959 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1959). US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific, *Current Situation in the Far East*. July 27, August 3, 11, and 14, 1959, 86th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1959), *passim*. The House of Representatives had established in October 1958 a Subcommittee to study the MSPs. One of its first staff reports had been completed in May 1959. See US House of Representatives, *Staff Report on Field Survey of Selected Programs in Viet-Nam and Korea*, May 14, 86th Congress, 1st Session. Subcommittee Print (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1959). See also CR, March 13, 1959 & July 22, 1959, pp. 4186–4187, 14012–14013. In late 1959, a joint Congressional team continued the Colegrove hearings in Saigon, but they found only minor points to complain about. See US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings before the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs, *Situation in Vietnam*, Part 2, December 7 and 8, 1959, 86th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), *passim*; McGee quoted in CR, February 9 and April 20, 1960, pp. 2330–2332, 8385–8386. The conclusions of the HFAC hearings have not been published. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 323–324, footnote 111. On the Senate’s work in both hearings see US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report by Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs, *United States Aid Program in Vietnam*, February 26, 1960, 86th Congress, 2d Session. Committee Print (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960). William P. Bundy, who was working for the CIA at the time, has revealed later that there was nobody in Congress in the late 1950s who would have been against commitment. Congress sympathized

Asia Working Group Chairman that the investigation into the US aid to South Vietnam had had an “adverse effect on South Viet-Nam officials”. The Board members also took note of the fact that the Board Assistants had agreed with the Working Group on “the continued validity of” the operations plans for Southeast Asia, including that for South Vietnam’s. Among the American technicians working in South Vietnam in 1959, there were agronomists, horticulturists, and livestock and fiber crop technicians. This is revealed in a report of the OCB Ad Hoc Group on Increasing Food Production in Asia. The Group submitted its report to the Council on August 12, 1959.⁵¹

Eisenhower also wanted to have studies conducted by the NSC principals. The President had appointed a Committee in November 1958 to find out how military aid could promote the objectives of US national security and foreign policy. The Committee was headed by General William H. Draper and included the former JCS Chairman, Admiral Radford, the former Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Dillon Anderson, and various former Assistant Secretaries of Defense. The Committee’s task was to find strong arguments for justifying to Congress the need to expand the military assistance programs. The Southeast Asia Subcommittee of the Draper Committee had been headed by Dillon Anderson. The Subcommittee argued that it was likely that “brush fire” wars would take place in Southeast Asia, and it called for immediate action to prevent them from expanding into major conflicts. The report on Vietnam noted its surprise at the “vitality and effectiveness” of the South Vietnamese army. The Subcommittee recommended a realistic exchange rate for the piaster, as well as changes in the determination of military aid, especially a re-examination of force goals. The report stressed the poor level of economic growth. Instead of giving South Vietnam advanced weapons technology, the Subcommittee suggested that efforts be made to build up the non-military infrastructure. South

with Diem’s cause. There were even several Congressmen who were AFV members. The Chairman of the SFRC, Mansfield, started to have doubts about Diem in the summer of 1959. The Chairman of the HFAC, Zablocki remained a strong supporter of Diem. Gibbons writes that during 1958–1959 Senators Fulbright, Humphrey, Kennedy, and Mansfield and several members of the HFAC criticized the amounts of military aid compared to other forms of assistance. Huge sums of economic and military aid were allocated to Diem in the absence of dissenting voices, Gibbons concludes. Bundy quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 258–259, 318, 326–327.

51 OCB Progress Report on NSC 5809, August 19, 1959, Documents of the National Security Council, Sixth Supplement, Microfilm reel III. At the suggestion of the Working Group, the Board Assistants had agreed that the Operations Plan for Singapore was no longer valid. Preliminary Notes on OCB meeting of August 12, 1959 Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, August 17, 1959 (held on August 12), *ibid.*, Box 3, Minutes VII. The OCB was briefed on the preparations for the SFRC hearings in late July. See Preliminary Notes on the OCB meeting, July 29, 1959, *ibid.*, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV.; “Report of the OCB Ad Hoc Group on Possible Assistance in Increasing Food Production in Underdeveloped Areas of the Far East and Asia,” August 12, 1959, Records of the NSC, OCB Central Files, Box 1, OCB Misc. # 3, RG 273, NA. Obviously, the Ad Hoc Group had had problems in completing its report, as the Board had been notified at the beginning of June that the report would be submitted within two months. Preliminary Notes of OCB meeting of June 3, 1959. Records Relating the State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA.

Vietnamese-Japanese trade should also be expanded. The Draper Report's final version was published in mid-August 1959. According to the Committee's conclusions, the US military and economic aid programs in South Vietnam were examples of effective use of aid funds, which had enabled the South Vietnamese to establish and maintain a free nation. The Draper Committee suggested that the power of the State Department in military assistance matters should be reduced⁵², a request that is no more odd than the composition of the Committee itself, which mainly consisted of mainly Pentagon personnel.

The OCB countered Colegrove's accusations. The Council approved the OCB Progress Report on NSC 5809 at its meeting of September 10, 1959. The Progress Report, in which the OCB had concurred on August 12, indicated that there had been substantial progress – as compared to modest progress fifteen months earlier – toward meeting the objectives of the Policy Paper in most of the countries in mainland Southeast Asia. The Progress Report specifically noted that the US programs had been successful in general and that regional cooperation in the area had improved.⁵³

Counterinsurgency as an Alternative

The Activity of the Council-Board Machinery Intensifies

Even though the State and Defense Departments agreed on a problem such as the MAAG ceiling, its implementation could be difficult. In late January 1960, the Board discussed the question of the MAAG ceiling. The US Embassy in Saigon urged a rapid resolution of the issue. After having presenting the Board

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52 Anderson's letter to Draper, March 3, 1959, with the Anderson-Southeast Asia Subcommittee report (including a 7-page country summary on South Vietnam) as an inclosure, undated. White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject series, Box 51, Draper Committee, DDEL. Interestingly, Under Secretary C. Douglas Dillon alarmed the Draper Committee and called for limited war capabilities for the US armed forces, which would be "susceptible of prompt movement to the Asian and African areas where limited wars are most likely to be fought". Quoted in Shafer, D. Michael, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 19; Letter to the President of the United States from the President's Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program. Composite Report, Volume I, August 17, 1959 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1959), passim. One of the suggestions of the subcommittee had already been put into action. In the fall of 1958, the OCB monitored under the Asian Regional Economic Development and Cooperation (CFEP 562/1) as based on NSC Action No. 1853, a road project to connect Laos and South Vietnam and possibly Thailand which had been planned in the State Department and the ICA to be put into effect at the end of the Eisenhower Administration. Likewise, South Vietnam was also involved in a regional telecommunications project for which it allocated 1.2 million dollars of Defense support funds. OCB Weekly Activity Report, November 3, 1958 and October 17, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Boxes 3–4, Activity Reports X and XII, RG 59, NA.

53 OCB Progress Report on NSC 5809, August 19, 1959, Documents of the National Security Council, Sixth Supplement, Microfilm reel III. The State Department had recommended that the Progress Report be approved by the Council. See also J. Graham Parsons's memorandum for the Acting Secretary of State Dillon, September 4, 1959, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 95, NSC 5809 Memoranda, RG 59, NA.

members with statistical information on MAAG and TERM, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for NSC Affairs and Plans, Haydn Williams, moved that the increased MAAG ceiling would be approved after the departure of TERM at the end of 1960. The Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Livingston T. Merchant, pointed out that “as a last resort” the US was willing to take unilateral action to raise the ceiling permanently if the ICSC members did not agree to do so. In reply to Gray’s question about the justification of TERM, Merchant praised the working of the mission. He was supported in this by Loring K. Macy from the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Foreign Commerce.⁵⁴

Not all intelligence reports were the result of a coordinated effort. In early February 1960, for example, the CIA, the coordinator of the NIEs and SNIEs, produced alone a report for the OCB on the reactions of the Communist countries toward South Vietnam. The Board used the report in its consideration of the drafts of the new “Operations Plan for Vietnam”. According to the paper, neither the Soviets nor the Chinese “agitated vigorously against South Viet-Nam”, but North Vietnam had again raised the question of reunification. The Soviet Union had vetoed the membership of South Vietnam in the UN. The Vietcong, the CIA continued, had intensified their propaganda activities in rural areas and scattered “acts of terrorism” were changing to “larger scale guerilla warfare”. The Vietcong had managed to infiltrate the ARVN and government agencies. The report argued that the Vietcong were, however, not “a major military threat” to the Government of Diem “at this time”. As a countermeasure, the anti-guerilla tactical capabilities of the ARVN had been stressed in its training. The CIA estimated that North Vietnam was going to continue to pressurize Diem into normalize relations with the North. South Vietnam, the report concluded, was going to “step up military action against the dissidents.”⁵⁵

54 Informal notes on OCB Luncheon, January 27, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA. The last resort proposal was apparently initiated in the State Department. See an unsigned Weekly Activity Report Background Memorandum, January 26, 1960 (for January 27, 1960 Board meeting), *ibid.*, Box 3, Activity Reports XII – 1960. In October 1959, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Charles H. Shuff had informed the Working Group that the US was finding ways to lift the ceiling of MAAG before the ICSC was told about the plans of TERM’s withdrawal. Shuff’s memorandum to interdepartmental Working Group, October 20, 1959, USVNR, Book 10, p. 1248. In its report for 1959, the ICSC gave TERM permission to stay until the end of 1960. Thus the strength of MAAG went up from 342 to 685. *Ibid.*, Book 1, Tab IV.A., p. 31.

55 Central Intelligence Précis, “Sino-Soviet Bloc Activity in South Viet-Nam,” February 9, 1960 as an Annex C to the OCB’s “Operations Plan for Vietnam,” April 29, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 423–425. For the Operations Plan see *ibid.*, pp. 412–422. It is striking that the same Operations Plan of April 29, 1960, as that printed in FRUS in 1986 had after over 40 years been removed from and not returned to the OCB-related files of the State Department kept at Archives II, College Park, Maryland. The withdrawal sheet indicated that it contained classified information. This is not unusual. It seems that “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing”. The reason is obvious: the copies of documents have been scattered amongst various archives and the NSC does not release its own files. Furthermore, scholars have not requested the classification through the mandatory declassification process. Likewise, some Vietnam-related NSC documents, especially from 1954, remain classified or have been declassified with deletions. For the “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam” see Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Regional and Country Operation Files, Lot 62 D 430, Box 33, Vietnam, RG 59, NA. The Board had concurred in

In mid-February 1960 Eisenhower asked Congress for 724 million dollars, which was 111 million less than the previous year, for the defense-support countries. The money would mean that they would have the economic resources to assure their defense capabilities. The President said the recipient countries had improved their economic conditions. South Korea, South Vietnam and Taiwan were to receive 56 percent of the total because they were divided states threatened by the Communists, and their defense demanded more than they could themselves afford. The requested funds were “the least” the US could offer, Eisenhower added.⁵⁶

The splits not only occurred in the formulation of policies, but they were also possible at the implementation stage. When the OCB discussed the proposed “Operations Plan for Vietnam”, dated February 5, Daniel V. Anderson, the new Director of State Department’s Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, briefed the Board on the problems caused by the provisions of the Geneva Accords. According to him, it was hard that TERM was due to be terminated by the end of 1960. It was problematic to try to get the ICSC to approve the lifting of the MAAG ceiling. The OCB members – namely, the State and Defense Departments – were not unified on how to deal with the ICSC. Allen Dulles and Secretary Irwin II therefore suggested a compromise in the wording of the Plan, to the effect that, in the case of serious disagreements and danger to US operations, “the nature and extent of such cooperation should be reviewed”. After having listened to the Board members, Chairman Gray agreed to the revision. The Treasury representatives did not, however, agree with the idea of encouraging South Vietnam’s participation in “feasible regional projects”, together with other Southeast Asian countries, “on a basis of mutual aid”. Thus, the OCB members could not agree on the wording of the Plan and decided that both matters were to be settled by the Board Assistants. The Board concurred in the Operations Plan.⁵⁷

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the Plan on February 10, 1960, leaving the Board Assistants with the task of concurring on behalf of their principals in the new objectives paragraphs for Burma, Thailand and South Vietnam operations plans. See OCB Activity Report, May 2, 1960, *ibid.*, Box 3, Activity Reports XII-1960.

56 Eisenhower’s special message to Congress on MSP, February 16, 1960, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1960, p. 183.

57 A difference in the wording of paragraphs 1 and 21 and proposed amendment by the Treasury for paragraph 16. Preliminary notes of the OCB meeting on February 17, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, February 19, 1960 (held on February 17), *ibid.*, Box 3, Minutes VII. The Board Assistants had viewed the Plan as a somewhat routine case, with the notion that the State and Defense Departments would work out the wording of paragraph concerning the ICSC. The Board Assistants received the Treasury Department language for paragraph 16 before their meeting on February 19. Records of Action of the Board Assistant’s meetings, February 8 and 23, 1960 (held on February 5 and 19), *ibid.*, Box 11, Board Assistants – Record of Actions 1960. There were two draft versions of the “Operations Plan” (dated February 5 and April 14), but according to the editors of FRUS, the papers were destroyed. This makes it impossible to determine the nature of the splits between the State Department and the Pentagon over the ICSC and between the State and the Treasury Departments on area policy guidance. It is, however, certain that the differences had been resolved and the language of the Plan had been revised by the Board of Assistants representatives of the three Departments, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, p. 412, footnote 1.

South Vietnam was a test case for the NSC. It meant that new theoretical concepts such as Militant Liberty and Civic Action were tested in real-life situations. In March 1960, the JCS considered the ARVN to be a force that was inadequately trained and organized⁵⁸. The Joint Chiefs urged MAAG to improve the counterinsurgency capacity of the ARVN. In addition to the overt threat, the internal security threat posed by guerillas and other opposition groups would have to be taken into consideration, the JCS stated. The Chiefs started by sketching the Counterinsurgency Plan (CI-Plan), which had been assigned to the military by Eisenhower in the beginning of 1960.⁵⁹

The success of the NSC policies came under question in March 1960 when the Country Team reported that the internal security situation in South Vietnam had worsened considerably as the farmers were being intimidated and threatened by the Communist guerillas. The adaptation of the programs to the conditions of the countryside made in Saigon was not checked. According to the members of the Country Team, Diem was partly responsible for this new development. In order to improve the confidence of the people in the Diem Administration, Diem would have needed to change his civil servants and put some of them on trial for misusing funds, the report suggested.⁶⁰

The reports of a growth in insurgency were also forwarded to the NSC. Apparently, the volume of subversive activities was now alarming. In connection with the consideration of the reference OCB Special Report on NSC 5809, dated February 10, 1960, Harr, Jr. briefed the NSC members on the developments in the Indochinese countries, but without paying any attention to South Vietnam. The Council thus agreed to direct the PB to review the policy paper, placing emphasis on the portions pertaining to Cambodia and Laos. The following week, Allen Dulles told the NSC members that guerilla activities in South Vietnam had been increasing as an “influx of fresh cadres” had infiltrated the country through the neighboring states. The total number of guerillas had thus doubled from the previous level of 1,500. The guerilla attacks had changed from minor harassment to “bold attacks to frighten the villagers”. Allen Dulles said that the terrain was suitable for guerilla operations, which could also be directed against US personnel. The CIA Director predicted that the guerillas aimed at increasing tension, at discrediting Diem’s Administration and at taking over larger areas of the countryside, especially in the South Delta provinces. “Any action against the Communist”, Dulles concluded, “would probably have to be counter-guerilla action”.⁶¹ The answer was to use the same methods as the enemy.

58 The ARVN had been reorganized into regiments and divisions by MAAG according to a model devised by General O’ Daniel. The reorganization work had started in the spring of 1956 and continued until 1959. See Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 278, 285–286, 295–296; Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam*, 1986, p. 24.

59 Quoted in USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.4., pp. 1.1., 1.3; Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam*, 1986, p. 26; Whitlow, Robert H., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1977), p. 29.

60 Country Team report to Herter, March 7, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1254–1275.

61 Memoranda of Discussion of the 436th and 437th Meetings of the NSC, March 10 and 17, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 11, DDEL.

The lack of cultural understanding appears to have posed problems both in the field and in Washington. The OCB attempted to tackle the problems. In the latter part of March, the Board machinery was called on to implement a request from the US Embassy in Saigon concerned with English teaching. This was needed, in part, because only a few of the US field representatives could speak Vietnamese. The Embassy proposed a coordinated effort by the USIA, the ICA and the State Department, without specific mentioning either funds or personnel, to prepare for the expansion of language training in the spirit of the Operations Plan.⁶²

New types of intelligence were being made available as a basis for Vietnam policy-making. In April 1960, the intelligence sources estimated that South Vietnam was only formally a constitutional Republic, where Diem controlled the government, the legislation, the civil servants, the ARVN, the police, the security forces, etc. The National Intelligence Survey (NIS) added that the transformation of power could not take place peacefully.⁶³

Initiatives entered the process from officials with various ranks. Lansdale, who was the Secretary of Defense's Deputy Assistant for Special Operations, wrote on April 14 to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for National Security Council Affairs and Plans, Haydn Williams, about the counter-guerilla training in South Vietnam. According to Lansdale, the British advice on the matter was not needed as their experience in Malaya had been quite different. Lansdale praised the working relationship that existed between the American advisors and the South Vietnamese soldiers. It would be even more fruitful, Lansdale concluded, "if we can get the wraps taken off". Some days later, the President was briefed by Goodpaster about the main aspects of Allen Dulles's remarks at the NSC meetings, about the intensified subversion in South Vietnam, and on the fact that Diem had asked the US representatives to work closely with the South Vietnamese authorities to improve his Government's "counter-subversion effort", including Civic Action. Those efforts, a State Department situation report added, "may call for increased US assistance in counter-guerilla training and for certain specialized US equipment".⁶⁴

The new version of the OCB's "Operations Plan for Vietnam" was dated April 29, 1960. Its lay-out had been changed: the whole Plan had been shortened, but the wording was based on NSC 5809. The draft new paragraphs had been read –

62 OCB Activity Report, March 21, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Activity Reports XII-1960, RG 59, NA.

63 National Intelligence Survey (NIS), Intelligence survey on South Vietnam, April 1960, CIA Research Reports, Microfilm reel III.

64 Lansdale was writing after having heard of an informal discussion in which the possibility of British participation was raised. He suggested that Williams should talk about the matter with Rear Admiral Edward J. O' Donnell, who was the Regional Director for the Far East in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA. Lansdale's memorandum to Williams, April 14, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 386-387. On April 18, John S. D. Eisenhower had telephoned a request for a report on the situation in South Vietnam. Director of the Executive Secretariat John A. Calhoun's memorandum for Goodpaster, April 21, 1960 with "Situation in Viet-Nam," undated, as an enclosure, AWF, Dulles-Herter series, Box 12, Herter-March 1960, DDEL.

in a single day – by Gray, who had written to Bromley K. Smith on April 26 that he could “see no objections to the objectives paragraphs in the Operations Plans for Burma, Viet Nam and Thailand”. The document noted there had been a “substantial increase in Communist guerilla and terrorist activity which requires emphasis on measures designed to combat such activity”. The government’s control “over considerable areas” was the result of insufficient infrastructure and poor administration. Nevertheless, the Plan added, the questions “are slowly being resolved”. In addition, North Vietnamese subversive units were able to operate freely from Cambodia. Diem’s Government was only “essentially stable”. It was also clearly stated that the US wished to broaden the base of Diem’s Government and reduce the dependence of South Vietnam on the US. After commenting on the increasing dissatisfaction with the Diem Administration, the Plan referred to “limited discreet contacts” which should be restricted to prominent members of the non-Communist opposition. The US should be careful when giving advice to Diem Government. Hinting at the possible abuse of US aid funds should also be done with discretion. In relation to the minorities, including both the Chinese and other minorities, such as the Montagnards (the hill tribes) and Cambodians, these were now considered to be “potentially susceptible to Communist influence”. The ICSC might serve as a watchdog for the Americans. In the field of economic assistance, the OCB Plan called for “flexible economic and technical assistance”. A survey of the South Vietnamese economy should be made to “ensure the most effective use of available resources”. Atomic energy was a new feature in the Plan. Orientation programs, including language and area training, should be held for the personnel assigned to South Vietnam. The Plan claimed that the objective of the US would also be to try to facilitate contacts between other countries, international agencies, non-governmental charitable organizations as well as private individuals with “similar interests in Vietnam”.⁶⁵

It is doubtful whether the new Operations Plan incorporated any real changes in policy implementation, since the actors within the OCB had changed since

65 Bromley K. Smith’s memorandum for Gray, 1960 with new paragraphs for the Burma, Vietnam and Thailand Operations Plans, April 25, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL; Gray’s note to Smith, April 26, 1960, *ibid.*; OCB’s “Operations Plan for Vietnam,” April 29, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 412–422. There were several Program Summary Annexes to the Plan produced by the State and Defense Departments, the CIA, the ICA and the USIA. The Pentagon, for example, reported that “the combat effectiveness” of the ARVN had “improved materially during the past year”. The South Vietnamese had received several vessels, and more than 1,000 South Vietnamese military personnel were trained annually in the US or in third countries. Annex B-1, Defense Department Program Summary, undated, *ibid.*, pp. 244–423. At the beginning of August 1960, the Board discussed the desirability of updating all operations plans for the new administration. They requested the Executive Officer to report on the status of the plans the following week. OCB Minutes, November 7 and 14, 1960 (held on November 2 and 9), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Minutes VII, RG 59, NA. According to more detailed preliminary notes of the Board meeting, Gray had commented as if he knew that the OCB was going to be abolished in a few months, to the effect that updating would take place after the successful Presidential Candidate sent his representative to familiarize the new Administration with the NSC machinery. Preliminary Notes of OCB Meeting of November 2, 1960, *ibid.*, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV.

the first Operations Plan had been produced in June 1958. However, the last Plan reveals that, in fact, a deteriorating situation existed in South Vietnam, which was dangerous to US interests. This meant that the methods for dealing with the situation could not be the same as those which had been used two years earlier.

It is clear that the Council was capable of discussing matters which it did not want to hear. The NSC discussed the events in South Vietnam in early May. Robert Amory, Jr. of the CIA reported about the growing insurgency in South Vietnam. Amory, Jr. said "Diem's own ranks had been crumbling". The opposition had grown stronger and accused Diem of being a dictator. President Eisenhower noted that Diem had a good history but evidently "he was now becoming arbitrary and blind to the situation". Amory, Jr. replied that Diem was alienated from the people and left the direct contact to his incompetent brothers. When Eisenhower asked if anything had been done to remedy the matter, Amory, Jr. answered that Durbrow and Williams were "constantly" advising Diem to keep in touch with the people. The Under Secretary of State Merchant reminded the participants that Diem was surrounded by only a small group. Eisenhower then came up with the idea of sending Diem a letter. According to Secretary Gates, Jr., the South Vietnamese internal security forces were unable to defeat the insurgents in the difficult swamp terrain. The President noted that the US should do "everything possible to prevent the deterioration of the situation". Merchant thought that South Vietnam was already receiving enough economic aid and that it could not effectively absorb any more. Eisenhower reminded the Council members that in 1955 the NSC had already considered replacing Diem. The President ordered the CIA and the State and Defense Departments to suggest what to do with respect to South Vietnam.⁶⁶

Informal initiatives had also potential effects on the NSC process. One indication of this is what occurred between the luncheon and meeting phases of the subsequent Board meeting on May 11. On that occasion the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Raymond A. Hare, informed Gray about the situation in South Vietnam on the basis of a memorandum by the State Department's Southeast Asian specialist, Daniel V. Anderson. This led to the Special Assistant's decision to present the subject to the OCB. Gray mentioned that he was already familiar with it as he had been briefly exposed to it at the Council meeting of May 9.⁶⁷

The consequences of the NSC-OCB actions could sometimes be misunderstood because of their limited media coverage. Senators Mansfield and Fulbright, for example, had read in a newspaper that MAAG was going to be doubled. In early

66 Eisenhower told to the NSC members that: "We had rescued this country from a fate worse than death and it would be bad to lose it at this stage." Memorandum of Discussion of the 444th Meeting of the NSC, May 9, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 12, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 446-448.

67 Informal notes of OCB Luncheon meeting of May 11, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA.

May, they wrote to General Williams demanding an explanation. Williams replied by telling the Senators that the news item had been only a rumor, and that TERM had been merged into MAAG. The strength of MAAG, Williams added, would be reduced by 15 percent in 1961, after which the US officers would be called home at the rate of 20 percent a year.⁶⁸

With its new procedures for holding discussions on issues, the Council took up matters within broader contexts. The NSC, for example, favored regional approaches. On May 24, 1960, the Secretary of State Herter warned the NSC that the US should be prepared for renewed Chinese aggression and that they should therefore be ready to deter the Communist subversion in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹

As Diem's difficulties cumulated, the Board made revisions and then concurred in a special report which envisaged the means to cope with the situation. The Pentagon had proposed some language revisions in which the Board Assistants were to concur on behalf of the actual OCB members. In addition, the State and Defense Departments were to hold discussions about the recommendation concerned with the Civil Guard issue. The Special Report was to be then transmitted to the appropriate departments and agencies for "possible action".⁷⁰

Controversies within the Council machinery could continue for years. An old question re-surfaced when the OCB continued to discuss the Civil Guard question at its meeting of June 8. Under Secretary Merchant spoke about "an interim satisfactory understanding" between the two departments on the training of the Civil Guard. The USOM would "hire directly" ten civilians to train the Vietnamese, whereas MAAG would continue its efforts in training the Civil Guard and in trying to arrange some of the training to take place on Okinawa or Taiwan. It was also agreed that the Southeast Asia Working Group of the OCB would amend the language of the Special Report accordingly, and the Board Assistants would then approve it as they had already on June 10.⁷¹

68 Mansfield's letter to Williams, May 5, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1276-1277; Williams's letter to Mansfield, May 20, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 1279-1280 The SFRC had reported in January 1960, that the MAAG personnel could be reduced in the near future. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 1984, p. 328.

69 Memorandum of Discussion of the 445th Meeting of the NSC, May 24, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 12, DDEL; also quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 362-363.

70 "Special Report: Possible Actions to Improve the Situation in Viet-Nam," June 15, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 498-500; OCB Minutes, May 27, 1960 (held on May 25), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Minutes VII, RG 59, NA. The Board Assistants revised the language of the Special Report on June 10, thus concluding the OCB action on the paper. Record of Action of the Board Assistant's meeting, June 13, 1960 (held on June 10), *ibid.*, Box 11, Board Assistants - Record of Actions 1960.

71 Preliminary notes on the OCB meeting of June 8, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 8, Preliminary Notes IV, RG 59, NA; OCB Minutes, June 13 and 20, 1960 (held on June 1 and 15). *Ibid.*, Box 3, OCB Minutes VII. The Embassy's reactions to the details of the OCB approach were requested in a joint State-Defense-ICA message of June 10. OCB Activity Report, June 13, 1960, *ibid.*, Box 3, Activity Reports XII-1960. Daniel V. Anderson shed light on the Civil Guard controversy in his letter to Ambassador Durbrow. Anderson wrote that as Eisenhower had urged the NSC machinery to do everything possible, there was a need to agree swiftly on the Guard matter.

Alarming developments helped in solving the State-Defense disagreements. Secretary Herter cabled Durbrow in June 1960 that he and Secretary of Defense Gates, Jr., of whom Herter had asked whether the counterinsurgency capabilities of the governments of South Vietnam and Laos could be enhanced, supported the training of the Civil Guard for insurgency missions. If USOM was in charge of the training, Herter and Gates, Jr. had agreed, there would be problems. The Guard should, therefore, stay under the Ministry of Defense despite the opposition of the ICA (USOM).⁷²

The OCB, like the intelligence community, was also capable of producing reports for the use of the Council machinery. The Special Report of the OCB came out on June 15 and it recommended actions to improve the situation in South Vietnam. The report said that the Diem Government not only had difficulties within its borders but it also had disagreements with the Thai and Cambodian Governments. The Vietnam Working Group of the OCB listed Diem's actions. He had broadened the authority of the military commander of Saigon, started a program of moving people from the dangerous areas into large, protected garden towns (agrovilles), constructed more canals and airstrips, and established a commando unit. The growth of MAAG from 342 to 685 advisors had taken place when 36 were assigned to anti-guerilla duties. In addition, Diem had made public announcements about the reforms and had given the press some leverage. The report suggested that the US should demonstrate its continued support for South Vietnam, try to get broader-based government, improve its pre-emptive intelligence activities, and persuade Diem to improve relations with his neighbors and to work together with the allied countries to accomplish goals. As additional measures, the US should also emphasize the anti-guerilla training of the ARVN and the Civil Guard, and supply the South Vietnamese with special equipment for use in those operations, such as helicopters. All of this was to be accompanied by economic aid, the training of "high caliber" administrators and increased propaganda.⁷³

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The task of writing a Special Report was given to the Working Group of the OCB. Therefore, the matter was discussed at the OCB level, and Merchant and Irwin II settled the question. The Pentagon reserved the right to take it up in the future. Their aim was to "unify all internal security", Anderson wrote. Anderson's letter to Durbrow, June 15, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, p. 498, footnote 1.

72 Ten counterinsurgency instructors had recently been sent to South Vietnam as the USOM's civilian advisors. Herter's cable to Durbrow, June 10, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 493-494; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 363. Rear Admiral O' Donnell commented four days earlier on the OCB proposal to train the Civil Guard. He referred to the positions of CINCPAC and the JCS. CINCPAC favored that MAAG should take over the whole Guard and that the JCS could not define a clear position. O' Donnell did not believe that USOM could be in charge of the training because it had "failed to utilize existing resources effectively". He concluded that if the OCB disapproved of the recommendation, the Civil Guard program should be continued under USOM and the Minister of the Interior of South Vietnam. He added that military training should, however, be given by the ARVN and that in emergency situations operational control of the Guard "be transferred to regular military commander. O' Donnell's memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Irwin II, June 6, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, *Ibid.*, pp. 489-492.

73 The report mentioned the proposed dispatch of six H-34 helicopters and four small air-propeller boats to South Vietnam. Special Report of the OCB, "Possible Actions to Improve the Situation in Vietnam," June 15, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 498-500.

The NSC-OCB machinery sponsored new concepts related to internal security. During the late 1950s, the Americans supported and the OCB monitored the so-called agrovillage program, which was intended to isolate the rural population from the Communist guerillas. The program initiated by the Diem Government meant that the peasants living in dangerous areas were resettled in fortified villages that were intended to serve as centers for economic development, political security and military communication. The whole program, however, alienated the villagers because their traditional social pattern was disrupted when they were forced to leave their native villages and ancestral graves. Further discontent was caused among the peasants by the fact that they were ordered into forced labor in exchange for a house and a plot of land for their families. The manner in which the agrovilles were built and managed made many villagers feel imprisoned instead of "protected" from the guerillas. Nevertheless, the agrovilles to some extent improved the quality of life in the South Vietnamese countryside as they had schools, shops, dispensaries, electric power plants and other amenities of urban life. The farm communities belonging to the agrovillage program were fortified with barbed wire fences, guard towers and moats that bristled with sharpened bamboo stakes. Despite the obvious problems of agrovilles, a similar program of strategic hamlets was started in the early 1960s. (US Army)

The State-Defense controversy was anything but over in Washington. Lansdale wrote to Chief MAAG Williams, who was about to be replaced, that the initiative to send him to Saigon to review the situation for counterinsurgency had not been taken up. Lansdale complained that it was very difficult to persuade others to adopt new measures. According to Lansdale, “Washington is the point of decision on almost everything, not Saigon”. Describing the atmosphere in the high-level circles, he referred to caution in the handling of the South Vietnamese question. The most critical opponents of Diem and his supporters were in the State Department. Lansdale wrote that “the battle about my visit is still being waged behind the scenes here”. Nixon, after having heard from Gates, Jr. about the actions of the State Department, Lansdale added, “got angry”, which meant that the State Department was going to have to “look to its arguments again”.⁷⁴

NSC 6012 – Another Slight Revision

Far-reaching questions and those relating to the application of new technology required NSC consideration. The PB used the draft Financial Appendix of NSC 6012 for its briefing purposes. It specified that the introduction of jet aircraft into South Vietnam was under consideration. It meant that between FYs 1962–1964 South Vietnam would have received four different types of jet aircraft (F-86F, F86D, T-33 and FT-33), as the JCS had recommended in March 1959. The members of the PB noted that this was against the Geneva Agreements. Gray considered this to be an “important policy decision” and therefore it would be wise if the Council were to state in its Record of Action that the it would review the issue of jet aircraft later.⁷⁵

With these views in mind, Gray arranged for the issue to be placed on the agenda of the Council. The NSC discussed it together with the proposed changes to be made to NSC 5809 by the PB and the JCS on July 21. In reply to Gray’s information to the NSC members about the jet aircraft plan for South Vietnam, Herter said “that we would want to take a good look before we decided to give” them because of the Geneva Agreements and the ICSC. As the PB had recommended, the Council agreed that it should consider the jet aircraft question again in the future. The members also heard Allen Dulles’s oral briefing on the situations in Burma, Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam. The

74 Lansdale explained that he had tried to do some lobbying. Referring to the State Department officials and the Embassy personnel, he wrote that they were “emotionally involved in thinking that you and Diem and others like you are a bunch of bums who need a come-uppance”. Lansdale added that he, “as one of you bastards”, was becoming “mighty lonely” in Washington. The high State Department officials tried to surpass the military, which was part of the power struggle. He also touched on the issue of the new Administration. According to Lansdale, counterinsurgency thinking was only going to go further if Nixon or Johnson became the new Secretary of State. Lansdale’s letter to Williams, June 21, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 501–502; Lansdale had also suggested to Williams that he could be called to Washington to discuss his extension as Chief MAAG. In his reply, Williams turned down the idea as he realized he could not compete with the State Department. Williams’s letter to Lansdale, June 28, 1960, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 502, footnote 8.

75 Briefing notes for PB meetings, July 5 and 19, 1960 and for NSC meeting on August 18, 1960, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, Box 16, DDEL.

only comments on South Vietnam came from Herter. The Secretary referred to South Vietnam when he said that it was planning anti-Sihanouk (Prince Norodom) campaigns. Later Herter concluded that if the US was going to give more military aid to Cambodia, “Thailand and [South] Vietnam would soon be crying”, that Cambodia intended to use it against them. The changes to NSC 5809 on South Vietnam which were adopted by the Council referred to improving public relations and relations with Cambodia. Eisenhower approved the Policy Paper four days later. The Policy Paper, which kept its old title “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia” but was renumbered NSC 6012, scarcely differed from the old one. One sentence had been added to the paragraph dealing with developing South Vietnam as a more attractive alternate than North Vietnam for the Vietnamese people. In so doing, the US was to “encourage and assist public relations and public information programs” for Diem’s Government. These were meant for the peoples of both Vietnams. A completely new paragraph was also added to the Policy Paper which called for the US to help in improving relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia. This reflected the substance of the discussion and Herter’s thinking. The rest of NSC 6012, including the supplementary statement of policy toward North Vietnam, remained, in substance, identical to that of NSC 5809.⁷⁶

Gelb and Betts write that NSC 6012 contained “rather sophisticated themes” relating to China as the main enemy in Asia. The Policy Paper, Gelb and Betts added, included an “elementary paradox” as it still alluded to the significance of Indochina for American security interests. However, it placed the responsibility for resisting aggression and satisfying the aspirations of the peoples of the area on the Indochinese themselves. According to David L. Anderson, the “basic policy goals” of the Eisenhower somewhat did not change during the period from 1956 to 1961. He based his correct conclusion on a comparison of NSC 5809 and NSC 6012. The objectives were basically to strengthen South Vietnam and help it to win the reunification elections, to develop its armed forces, and to use any means to “weaken Vietnamese Communists”. NSC officials, Anderson concludes, thought optimistically that they could achieve their goals, “but the program to implement them was slow, tedious, and often contentious”.⁷⁷

76 The PB had transmitted its views on July 11. Memorandum of Discussion of the 452rd Meeting of the NSC, July 21, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 12, DDEL. The JCS concluded on July 16 that from the military point of view the proposed changes were acceptable. Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, July 18, 1960 with the JCS views, dated July 16, 1960, as an enclosure, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 25, DDEL. The Far Eastern section of the State Department also agreed with the proposed revisions. See J. Graham Parsons’s memorandum to Herter, July 19, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 95, NSC 5809 Memoranda, RG 59, NA. See also Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, July 11, 1960, with proposed changes as an enclosure, *ibid.* A revision of the paragraphs of NSC 5809 relating to Singapore was adopted by the NSC at its 423rd meeting on November 5, 1959. Lay, Jr’s memorandum for the NSC, November 10, 1959, *ibid.*; NSC 6012, “U.S. Policy in the Mainland Southeast Asia,” July 25, 1960, WHO, OSANSA, NSC series, Policy Paper subseries, Box 29, DDEL; also printed in USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1281–1297.

77 Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, p. 184; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 151.

It is likely that the situational factors no longer determined the formulation of Policy Paper revisions, but rather the two-year interval. Acting Executive Secretary of the NSC Marion Boggs had on August 5 sent the Council members two draft revised paragraphs and one new paragraph of NSC 6012 to be considered by mid-August. All of this new material was concerned with promoting relations between Taiwan and the countries in mainland Southeast Asia. The revised text referred to the position of the overseas Chinese, who had, according to an OCB report of December 1957, been antagonized by the measures of the Diem Government. The new text called for the US to “discreetly encourage” the Southeast Asian countries to assimilate and integrate their racial minorities. The new paragraph elaborated on the theme by referring to the recognition of the Republic of Viet Nam (South Vietnam) instead of North Vietnam and to the recognition of Taiwan and South Korea by the Southeast Asian nations. The documents show that every agency evidently concurred as the President approved the changes on August 24, 1960. The revisions in the Policy Paper meant that the OCB Working Groups were required to revise operations plans accordingly, and also to inform the appropriate departments and agencies about the revisions.⁷⁸ The consideration and revision of papers had been made easier and less time- and paper-consuming than earlier. Encouragement of the integration of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia may be considered somewhat paradoxical since parallel civil rights problems had not been solved in the United States.

The intelligence sources reported on Diem’s problems, which had accumulated during the course of 1960. The discontent of the people had grown rapidly, which gave North Vietnam the opportunity to increase its aid to the guerillas operating in the south. The transportation of the troops and materiel, the NIE continued, had been made possible by the introduction of the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail⁷⁹ and the South China Sea supply lines. The non-Communist opposition had also grown stronger during 1960, especially in reaction to the activities of Can Lao. The problems of the Diem Administration would eventually lead to the fall of Diem, unless swift measures to stabilize the situation were taken, the intelligence community warned.⁸⁰

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78 Some 5 percent of the population of South Vietnam were ethnic Chinese. Bogg’s memorandum for the NSC, August 5, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 99, NSC 6012, RG 59, NA. Lay, Jr. requested “that the superseded pages be destroyed by burning”. Lay, Jr.’s memorandum for all holders of NSC 6012, August 24, 1960, *ibid.*; OCB Activity Report, August 29, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Activity Reports XII-1960, RG 59, NA; “OCB Guidelines for United States Programs Affecting the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia,” December 11, 1957, *ibid.*, Box 28.

79 In May 1959, Group 559 had been established in Hanoi with the task of expanding the infiltration route, which ran through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam along a complete network of routes. This eventually included paths, roads, and waterways in the heart of the jungle and mountains. Group 759 was founded in July 1959 to plan the shipment of men and equipment on water. Karnow, *Vietnam*, 1984, p. 237. See also Prados, John, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: Wiley, 1999).

80 NIE-63.1-60, “Short-term Trends in South Vietnam,” August 23, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 536–541; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1298–1301.

By September 1960, the situation in South Vietnam had reached almost crisis point. Ambassador Durbrow noticed that the farmers could do nothing against the attacks of Communists. The overt threat of North Vietnam, the Ambassador added, was remote as a result of the ICSC existing as a moral deterrent and SEATO as a physical deterrent. Dissatisfaction, Durbrow wrote, had grown even in the Catholic groups. Some subordination had taken place within the ARVN because Diem's favorites had been promoted. The commanders of the largest units were supposedly loyal to Diem, Durbrow estimated. The Ambassador opposed the proposal that the Civil Guard should be turned over completely from the Interior Department to the Ministry of Defense of South Vietnam, because in that case Diem would simply make it an ordinary part of the ARVN and arm it with heavy weapons. The ARVN units stationed in central Vietnam whose particular emphasis was on resisting external attack should be rotated and persuaded to accept the new thinking, Durbrow recommended. He also hoped for more MAAG advisors would be assigned to train the Civil Guard.⁸¹

Since the summer of 1958, the OCB Operations Plans had long hinted at the need to train the ARVN for an internal security role. For that purpose, the Plan urged the utilization of counterintelligence, pacification, anti-guerilla operations and the maintenance of a self-defense corps. The OCB also considered it necessary to "clarify areas of responsibility".⁸²

The only solution to the problem seems to have been the reversal of methods that had been based on conventional thinking. Lansdale recommended to the Far Eastern Regional Director of the Office of Special Operations (of Pentagon's office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA), Rear Admiral E. J. O' Donnell, that the organization of MAAG should be changed in a direction in which it could better serve the objectives of counterinsurgency. In addition, Lansdale suggested, the activities of MAAG should be re-directed from training and advising towards guidance in the field. Lansdale hoped that American military advisors would participate in the tactical operations of the ARVN and would indirectly take part in combat missions. During an emergency the Civil Guard should be under the command of the Ministry of Defense, but the ARVN could be used for Civic Action, Lansdale wrote. Although internal security was a priority, he concluded, the morale of the ARVN and the security forces should also be monitored carefully.⁸³

Lansdale's views reassured the Pentagon policy-makers. On September 16, Assistant Secretary of Defense Irwin II sent the new CINCPAC, Admiral Harry D. Felt, a draft of the Counterinsurgency Plan. This was titled the "Plan for the Counterinsurgency Operations of the Government of South Vietnam". The draft

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81 Durbrow suggested that the Civil Guard should be equipped by the military and that the ICA would later reimburse the Pentagon. Durbrow's cables (2) to Herter, September 5, 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 556-560, 560-563.

82 Action items in Section E. of the OISP, OCB's "Operations Plan for Viet-Nam," June 4, 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, pp. 53-54.

83 Lansdale's memorandum to O' Donnell, September 13, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1307-1309.

had just three pages and was based on the continued support of the US.⁸⁴ At the same time, the JCS informed Admiral Felt and the new Chief MAAG, Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr, that the Joint Chiefs and the Deputy Secretary of Defense, James H. Douglas, Jr., had approved the draft of the Plan on April 26, 1960, and the full Plan had been approved by the JCS on June 6, with the addition of its own suggestions. The CI-Plan called for an emergency – with US support – under which the Government of South Vietnam would integrate all civilian and military resources for counterinsurgency activities under a unified command. The Chiefs hoped that Secretary Gates, Jr. would do everything possible to persuade the highest political leadership of the US and the Government of Diem to adhere to this new structure.⁸⁵

In response to the deteriorating situation, CINCPAC had by mid-September drafted a Counterinsurgency Plan for South Vietnam. The Plan called for the establishment of a National Emergency Council for “over-all conduct” of the campaigns. The US Ambassador would provide the US administrative and logistic support directed by the appropriate departments and agencies. The CINCPAC planners wrote that the military would be in charge. The Plan required the establishment of effective organization at governmental, regional, provincial and village levels. It was to be accompanied by a special emphasis on coordination, political and economic stability and development, and intelligence and counterintelligence systems. In addition, psychological warfare would be essential and, as an additional control measure, the “exercise [of] more than [an] ordinary degree of control over the population”. It was also anticipated that the permanent local security establishments would to be reinforced by militias and civil guards after operations, when the counterinsurgency forces would move in to pacify a new area. The CINCPAC draft had left some of points connected with task organization, enemy and friendly forces, and command structures to be completed by the Country Team and the Government of South Vietnam.⁸⁶ The Chiefs had forwarded their own recommendations on the improvement of counterinsurgency operations to Secretary Gates, Jr. some two weeks earlier. The JCS considered the Plan to be vital for the future of South Vietnam. They had basically agreed with the text of the Outline Plan. In addition, the Chiefs had suggested that the course of action could serve as an example and be adopted as standard operating procedure. They concluded that the proposed actions set

84 Irwin II's memorandum to Felt, September 16, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 572–575.

85 USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., pp. 60–61, 83. General Williams was criticized for putting conventional warfare first and thus forgetting counterinsurgency and the need to boost morale. His successor Lionel C. McGarr was also accused of having a similar attitude. McGarr had concentrated on the development and implementation of the CI-Plan since August 1960. Warner, *The Last Confucian*, 1963, pp. 129–130; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 365; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 337. See also Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 1968, p. 291.

86 Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA informed CINCPAC that the JCS and the Deputy Secretary of Defense had approved the Plan, “Approved Draft Plan for Counter-Insurgency Operations by the Government of South Viet-Nam,” (undated) in Irwin II's cable to Admiral Felt, September 16, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 572–575.

forth in the CI-Plan were “worthy of consideration as an approved procedure for other underdeveloped countries with actual or potential insurgency problems”.⁸⁷

Ambassador Durbrow was deeply worried and so was trying to convince Herter and the NSC at the gravity of the situation. On September 16, for example, Durbrow envisioned two threats facing South Vietnam. First, there was the possibility of demonstrations and a possible coup d'état, which would come from the non-Communist opposition. But the second threat, Durbrow wrote, the spread of Communist control in the countryside, was much graver. Political and psychological actions were adequate for dealing with the first problem. The second, the Ambassador predicted, called for economic precautions. Drastic reforms would need to be carried out to eliminate both dangers. Hated figures such as Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu and the Head of the Secret Service, Tran Kim Tuyen, could be sent out of the country as diplomats. Durbrow went further by suggesting the appointment of some of the opposition politicians to the National Assembly, which should be given more power, the abolition of Can Lao, and the rooting out of corruption. In addition, the Ambassador recommended certain economic improvements, such as raising wages and granting compensation to refugees. Durbrow asked Washington to grant him the authority to pressure Diem toward reforms. The Ambassador finished his report by commenting that the US should continue its support for Diem for the time being “as [the] best available Vietnamese leader”. But if Diem's position was threatened by his incompetence in carrying out reforms, Durbrow concluded, the US might be forced to look for a replacement.⁸⁸

In fact, Durbrow's warnings were raised at the Council meeting of September 21. Allen Dulles reported on the worsening situation in South Vietnam. This had been caused by an increase in insurgent activity over the previous three months. Dulles told the NSC that 5,000-strong guerilla units were operating in the swamp areas south of Saigon, making the roads unsafe. Diem's leadership style, the CIA Director added, had met with dissatisfaction in the countryside, and it also criticized in Saigon. Therefore, Dulles said “we believe” it necessary to increase the representation of the government and appoint Nhu as Ambassador. Under Secretary Dillon commented that the State could put pressure on Diem to broaden the base of his government. He explained that the troubling ineffective-

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87 The JCS, however, urged that more calculations and reviews should be produced by Country Team and the US Government agencies. The Chiefs commented on the draft outline plan of the approved version of September 16. JCS memorandum to Gates, Jr., August 30, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 547–548.

88 The Ambassador wrote to the NSC: “...it may become necessary for U.S. Government to begin consideration alternative courses of action and leaders in order to achieve our objective”. Durbrow's cable to Herter, September 16, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 575–579; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1311–1313. In an interview with Joseph Mendenhall conducted by State Department historians in 1983, he maintained that it was he who had “nudged Durbrow in this direction” [of making Diem conduct reforms]. Mendenhall's oral history quoted in *ibid.*, p. 579, footnote 5. Lansdale disagreed with Durbrow's final comment. He admitted that the proposals, which he called “bare-boned ideas”, put forward by the Ambassador required “much more mature consideration”. Lansdale's memorandum to O'Donnell, September 20, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 579–585.

ness of the Civil Guard had been caused by its training and support, the responsibility for which was divided between the Pentagon and the ICA. Dillon believed that the situation might improve now that MAAG was to take over responsibility for the Guard. It would take “about three months”, he concluded, to “convert [the Civil Guard] into an effective anti-guerilla organization”.⁸⁹ In analyzing the memorandum of conversation at the September 21 Council meeting, Anderson correctly asserts that Allen Dulles and Dillon “suggested an effort along the lines proposed by Durbrow”.⁹⁰

Durbrow received his long-awaited reply in early October when the policy was announced in public. Dillon, who was acting as Secretary of State, admitted the gravity of the situation and delegated almost full authority to Durbrow to put pressure on Diem. The issues should be expressed, Dillon added, as his own thoroughly examined views. Dillon advised Durbrow to tell Diem that South Vietnam would face real problems in the field of internal security if far-reaching reforms were not carried out swiftly. The “firing” of Nhu and Tuyen would remove the main cause of dissatisfaction, and Diem would gain supporters among the educated people, Dillon wrote. He noted that the US supported the economic reforms in the countryside.⁹¹

It appears that the organs of the Council system functioned as a forum for debate and exchange of views. The highest-level frank talks were usually enough to resolve interdepartmental and interagency feuds. The Civil Guard controversy was not as clear as the OCB members had believed in early June. The Board, therefore, requested on September 28 that either the State Department or the Pentagon should report on the status of arrangements for training the Guard. A week later, both Departments and the ICA reported agreement had been reached on who was to be responsible for the training and funding of the Guard. At the following week’s meeting the Board noted that after FY 1961 the training would be financed from Mutual Security/Military funds instead of Mutual Security/Economic funds. On October 7 the Departments of State and Defense, together with the ICA, sent a joint cable to Saigon in which they agreed to transfer the Guard temporarily to the Ministry of Defense as a result of the current crisis. They also stated that MAAG would be responsible for anti-guerilla training, which meant that the ICA-contracted instructors were to be detailed from USOM to MAAG.⁹²

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89 Memorandum of Discussion of the 460th Meeting of the NSC, September 21, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 13, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 585–586. Lansdale disagreed with the conclusions reached by Durbrow and Allen W. Dulles. He believed that the transfer of Nhu would mean “removing Diem’s ‘right arm’”. Lansdale’s memorandum to O’Donnell, September 20, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 581–582. For Dillon’s instructions on handling the Nhu problem see his cable to Durbrow, October 7, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 591–594.

90 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 189.

91 Acting Secretary of State Dillon’s cable to Durbrow, October 7, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 591–594. For Diem’s reactions to Durbrow’s “fairly frank criticism” see Durbrow’s cable to Herter, October 15, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 595–596; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1323–1324.

92 OCB Minutes, October 3, 7 and 14, 1960 (held on September 28 and October 5 and 12), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Minutes VII, RG 59, NA; OCB Activity Report, October 10, 1960, *ibid.*, Box 3, Activity Reports-1960,

The importance of working interdepartmental and interagency coordination was understood by the NSC principals. One indication of this is a joint message by Secretaries Herter and Gates, Jr. to the Country Team. The two ordered the US community in Saigon to draw up a detailed plan to support the Government of Diem during a national emergency in order to defeat the Communists and restore stability. The draft was to be sent to Washington for approval.⁹³

The Diem Government needed some persuasion to confront in its difficulties. President Eisenhower sent a standard congratulatory message to Diem on the fifth anniversary of the Republic of South Vietnam. The letter, however, did not reflect the real situation. It mentioned the “double challenge”, which meant South Vietnam’s twofold tasks and achievements “of building your country and resisting Communist imperialism”. The President referred to a chaos-like situation which had been turned into progress. Eisenhower also admitted hearing about the widespread educational improvements in South Vietnam. The letter had also been an item for an OCB luncheon on June 8, but apparently it was not discussed as it seemed to be a clear, routine question.⁹⁴

In late October, the MAAG had come up with its own outline version – the final form of a revised draft – of the CI-Plan. Compared to the draft Plan produced by CINCPAC in mid-September, MAAG’s work was far more comprehensive, yet still somewhat unfinished. It was intended as “the basis for development by the Country Team” and called for a “national emergency effort to defeat insurgency and restore political and economic stability”. The Outline Plan took note of the ever-deteriorating situation and the fact that discontent with the Diem’s Government had grown. Furthermore, the ARVN had lost the initiative and was involved in pacification and “static-type guard”. The Plan assumed that insurgency supported by the regular forces of North Vietnam and Communists from the other Indochinese countries in the Mekong Delta posed the greatest threat to South Vietnam. The situation would worsen until the South Vietnamese took the

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p. 1; State-Defense-ICA cable to the Embassy in Saigon, October 7, 1960, Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 751K.5-MSP/10-1560, RG 59, NA; also quoted in FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, p. 597, footnote 2.

93 Herter’s and Gates, Jr.’s joint message to Durbrow, October 19, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 604–605.

94 Eisenhower’s letter to Diem, October 25, 1960 (dated October 22), Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1960–1961, pp. 807–808; PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 628–629. Durbrow had suggested that Eisenhower should send a letter to Diem. Herter thought that a letter “would balance the effect” of the recent harsh criticism expressed by Durbrow. Herter’s memorandum to Eisenhower, October 20, 1960. The proposed letter (drafted by the officer in charge of Vietnam affairs, Chalmers B. Wood) was attached as an enclosure to the memorandum, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 609–611. According to a note by Goodpaster, the President approved the wording of the letter on October 24 with only one word-change. The pronoun your was added to a sentence which read: During the years of your independence... Ibid., p. 609, footnotes 1 and 2. A month earlier, Lansdale had recommended within the Pentagon that a letter should be sent to Diem. He referred to a “strong statement of U.S. support of Vietnam by” the President. See Lansdale’s memorandum to O’Donnell, September 20, 1960, *ibid.*, p. 585. The letter was added in handwriting as an extra item for the OCB meeting but it is also mentioned that it was “not discussed”. Items for OCB luncheon discussion, June 7, 1960 (for the Board meeting of June 8), Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 9, RG 59, NA.

kind of action which they were capable of taking. The main policy concern of the US was to coordinate all of the activities in order to “eradicate insurgency”. As an addition to the CINCPAC Plan, the development of border and coastal patrol systems, including the civil affairs components in the internal security programs and placing the Civil Guard under the Ministry of Defense, as had been done for the duration of the emergency, were listed as new tasks for the South Vietnamese authorities. The Country Team was assigned to undertake “combined planning” and to obtain Diem’s acceptance of it, to offer coordination in logistics support, and to change its routines toward that end. South Vietnam was obliged to “remove destructive influences in public office”, retain four divisions in readiness against an overt attack by North Vietnam and as “a deterrent against further Viet Cong expansion”, and to coordinate operations between all of the services and the neighboring countries when “politically feasible”. Command structures and communications arrangements were also to be settled.⁹⁵

Things were truly falling apart in Saigon. In the spring, a number of intellectuals had displayed their opposition in the form of the Caravelle Manifesto⁹⁶. In November 1960, Diem was faced by an attempted coup d’état staged by ARVN paratroopers, led by a group of soldiers and politicians.⁹⁷ Herter appealed to both parties to find a swift solution and to avoid bloodshed. Lansdale considered

95 “U.S. (Outline) Plan for Counterinsurgency in South Vietnam,” by MAAG, October 27, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 613–620. A couple of weeks later Chief MAAG McGarr sent MAAG’s views on the proposed increase in the ARVN from 150,000 to 170,000. Durbrow and the Embassy objected the idea but MAAG was in favor in order to cope with the internal security situation. McGarr’s letter to CINCPAC Felt (with MAAG comments), November 21, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 695–703.

96 In the spring of 1960, eighteen dignitaries had issued a statement at Saigon’s Caravelle Hotel. This so-called Caravelle Manifesto called for democratic reforms, and effective action by the ARVN against the Communist guerillas. The Manifesto was not published in any of the South Vietnamese newspaper, and some of the signatories were imprisoned. Caravelle Group’s (Committee for Progress and Freedom) Manifesto, April 30, 1960, PP Gravel, Volume 1, pp. 316–332; USVNR Book 1, Tab IV A., pp. 34–41; Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, 1984, pp. 435–441; Scigliano, South Vietnam, 1964, p. 88. The November coup was not successful because the paratroopers failed to take the radio station and close the roads into Saigon. The leader of the coup, Lieutenant Colonel Vuong Van Dong, had called Durbrow to speak for him, but the Ambassador replied that the US was committed to Diem until his Government fell. The forces loyal to Diem hurried to Saigon and crushed the coup, leaving 400 people dead. Karnow, Vietnam, 1984, p. 236; Alexander, Holding the Line, 1975, p. 285. Diem’s known opponent, Doctor Pham Quang Dan, acted as a political adviser to the paratroopers. Dan was arrested and would have been executed if the Americans had not intervened. Scigliano, South Vietnam, 1964, pp. 83–84. Durbrow cabled Washington to confirm that he and the new Chief MAAG McGarr had tried to stay neutral during the coup, and not back Diem, as in the Hinh case in 1954. They had, Durbrow claimed, done their best to avoid bloodshed. There had been only 30 soldiers defending the Presidential Palace in the initial stage of the coup. Durbrow’s cable to Herter, December 4, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1334–1336; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 707–711. The CIA’s representatives had been in contact with the paratroopers’ leadership by delaying their attack against ill-guarded Palace for two days. Colby, William with Peter Forbath, Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA (New York: Simon, 1978), p. 163–165. Colby was the CIA station chief from June 1960 until the beginning of 1962. Sheehan, A Bright Shining Lie, 1988, p. 18. See also Rust, William J., Kennedy in Vietnam (New York: Da Capo, 1985), pp. 7–19.

97 PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 324; Karnow, Vietnam, 1984, p. 236; Smith, An International History of the Vietnam War, 1983, p. 234; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, editorial note, p. 631; Allen Dulles had already referred to the possibility of a coup against Diem on October 2, 1958. Memorandum of Discussion of the 381st Meeting of the NSC, October 2, 1958, AWF, NSC series, Box 10, DDEL.

the role of conciliation to be a dangerous task, because Herter had granted Durbrow power to interfere. He informed the Ambassador of the US decision to continue supporting Diem, who needed to conduct reforms. Lansdale reminded Defense Secretary Gates, Jr that Diem was suspicious of Durbrow. The Ambassador should therefore be changed. He also argued that there was a need for the “U.S. policy makers [to] have some deeper understanding of people and events in Vietnam, if we are to keep Southeast Asia free.”⁹⁸

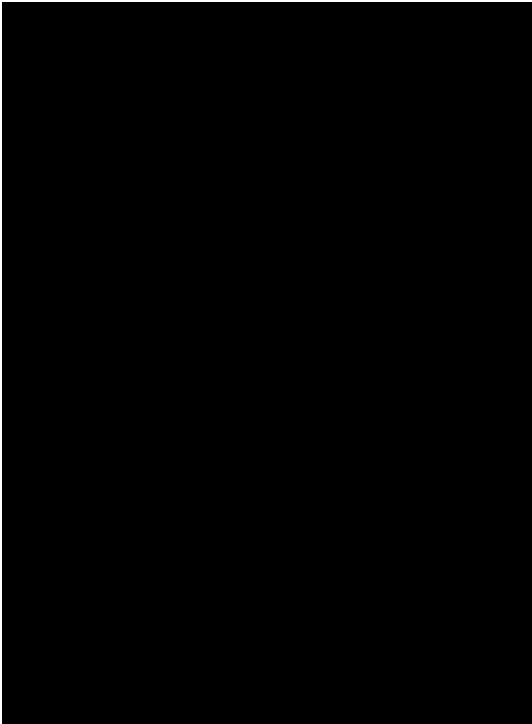
Despite the seriousness of the attempted coup, it was only a standard reporting item at the NSC. The Council was informed by Allen W. Dulles that the attempted coup would almost have succeeded “if it had been alert”. The events in Saigon had caused Under Secretary Merchant to ask whether the US should continue to train paratroopers. Dulles continued that Diem would have to punish the coup leaders and broaden the base of his government. North Vietnam, the CIA Director concluded, could exploit the situation by stepping up its guerilla activities.⁹⁹

The coup stimulated new thinking to improve the performance of the ARVN. Since late October, Assistant Secretary of State Parsons and Durbrow had been exchanging messages about increasing the strength of the ARVN. Parsons gave his blessing, with the situation of Laos in mind, but Durbrow initially had objected because he thought that Diem could have regarded it as a military remedy for social and economic problems. After the coup Durbrow insisted that Diem should carry out reforms and accept the principles of counterinsurgency. By early December, the Ambassador favored increasing the strength of the ARVN by 20,000 men. In addition, Durbrow informed Washington that the situation in Saigon had been normalized. Diem and Nhu were furious about the US press coverage of the events, as South Vietnam was referred as an authoritarian state. Durbrow had heard rumors about another coup being planned. The November coup had raised anti-American sentiment among the opposition to the Diem Government. The Ambassador reminded Washington of his favorite theme, the urgent need for reforms and to “bring as much pressure as we possibly can on Diem to take drastic action”. Diem had to be made to see sense, although the situation had become very dangerous for US interests, Durbrow wrote. He concluded by proposing that six H-34 helicopters should be donated to the ARVN.¹⁰⁰

98 Herter’s cable to Durbrow, November 11, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, p. 1327; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 634–635; Acting Secretary of State J. Graham Parsons’s cable to Durbrow, November 12, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 654–655; Lansdale’s memorandum to Gates, Jr., November 11, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1328–1329; Lansdale’s memorandum to Deputy Secretary of Defense James H. Douglas, Jr., November 15, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 1330–1331; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 667–668. Both sides had been in contact with the American Embassy. Durbrow’s cable to Herter, November 11, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 636–637.

99 Memorandum of Discussion of the 467th Meeting of the NSC, November 17, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 13, DDEL.

100 Parson’s cable to Durbrow, October 21, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 611–613; Durbrow’s cables (2) to Parsons, November 8 and 30, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 626–627, 694–695; Durbrow’s cable to Herter, December 4, 1960, *ibid.*, pp. 707–711; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1334–1336. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA had asked on November 9 from the JCS a statement on the helicopter issue. The Joint Chiefs and CINCPAC had favored sending eleven H-34 helicopters to the ARVN. JCS’s memorandum to Gates, Jr., December 1, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1332–1333; FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 703–



In addition to making long-range plans, the NSC often discussed urgent problems. The November 1960 coup d'état in Saigon did not, however, attract the full attention of the Council members, unlike the 1955 spring crisis. Despite the alarming developments in various parts of South Vietnam, the Vietnam-related issues increasingly became briefing items during the last years of the Eisenhower Presidency. A South Vietnamese paratroop Captain reporting the capture of the Presidential Guard barracks in 1960. (François Sully, Black Star)

Paradoxically, the concern of the intelligence community was shifting towards Laos and thus reducing the relative weight of the difficulties in South Vietnam. The US objectives were also being questioned across the border, in Laos. The country was moving toward a civil war, which would make it even easier for the North Vietnamese to infiltrate to South Vietnam by using the Ho Chi Minh Trail.¹⁰¹

At the same time, as might be expected, the situation in South Vietnam had gotten out of hand. The new Chief MAAG, McGarr, had reported in November 1960 that a large part of the South Vietnamese population supported the Communists. This development led to the establishment of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in December 1960. The organization's program was anti-American and nationalistic.¹⁰² The members of the NLF have generally been called Vietnamese Communists or the Vietcong.

704. Eisenhower had been briefed about the issue and agreed to it. Special staff note made at the Pentagon, December 1, 1960 and John S. D. Eisenhower's memorandum for Irwin II, December 12, 1960, WHO, Office of Staff Secretary, International series, Box 17, DDEL; also printed in FRUS 1958-1960, Volume I, p. 705. The OCB machinery had noted Diem's request for helicopters in light of the grave internal security situation in early November. OCB Activity Report, November 7, 1960, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 3, Activity Reports XII-1960, RG 59, NA.

101 SNIE-68-2-60, "The Situation in Laos," December 29, 1960, USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1340-1345.

102 McGarr quoted in Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 1985, p. 105; NLF's political program, December 20, 1960. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 1984, pp. 442-446.

During late 1960, Durbrow continued to issue warnings and to call for rapid action.¹⁰³ On the last day of the year, Acting Secretary of State Merchant replied to Durbrow that the pressure to liberalize was becoming “counter-productive”. He informed the Ambassador that the 20,000 increase in the forces of the ARVN was being studied in Washington. Durbrow should no longer openly make any suggestions to the alternative leaders in South Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ At the end of 1960, Eisenhower told his NSC advisers that the US would not be able to stand by and do nothing while Laos was fell, even if the Americans had to prevent it alone, with no help from its allies.¹⁰⁵ Thus, despite the seriousness of the situation in South Vietnam, the Council neglected the issue and concentrated on Laos.¹⁰⁶

The CI-Plan was like a Policy Paper on a specific issue. The amended version of the CI-Plan was sent to Washington on January 4, 1961 for approval. It took note of the situation which had been deteriorating since early 1960. The Diem Government was in danger, but the economy had grown. The Plan emphasized the threat of overt aggression instead of exaggerating the internal security concerns. Like the draft versions, the final Plan assumed “that at the present time the Diem Government offers the best hope for defeating the Viet Cong threat”. The paper also pointed out the increased capability of North Vietnam to invade. The Plan continuously called for “extraordinary [military] action” in counterinsurgency, accompanied by appropriate political, economic and psychological programs, including better technical facilities, better freedom of the press and an emphasis on public relations activities. South Vietnam was to develop effective control, planning, intelligence, border/coastal surveillance, and communications systems. Furthermore, the command structures and the use of reserves should be correctly utilized. The ARVN should also be reorganized and its numbers increased by 20,000 in order to improve its morale, training and “combat effectiveness”. In comparison with the drafts, there were no actual big changes, except that the task of establishing “a base for political and economic stability and development” had been forgotten.¹⁰⁷ Smith argues that the

103 See, for example, Durbrow’s cable to Herter, December 12, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 707–711; USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1334–1336.

104 The liberalization program was set up at the US Embassy in Saigon on December 23. Durbrow’s cable to Herter, December 27, 1960. USVNR, Book 10, pp. 1353–1355. The whole situation in South Vietnam was coming up for review as a SNIE and the CI-Plan were being prepared. Merchant’s cable to Durbrow, December 31, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 751–752.

105 Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 1965, pp. 607–610.

106 Memorandum of Discussion of the 472d Meeting of the NSC (by Boggs), December 29, 1960, AWF, NSC series, Box 13, DDEL.

107 The finalized CI-Plan had been prepared by the Country Team Staff Committee, which was chaired by Mendenhall. It was still missing the economic actions, which were to be forwarded in a supplemental submission. In defining the enemy forces, the CI-Plan referred to the current NIEs and SNIEs. “Basic Counterinsurgency Plan for Viet-Nam”, January 4, 1961, FRUS 1961–1963, Volume I: Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), pp. 1–12. Komer, who was later a civilian deputy to the Commander of the US forces in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, General William Westmoreland, and in charge of pacification campaigns, argued in 1972 that “little was done” about counterinsurgency capabilities even though the policy urged such action. Komer, Robert W., *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-Government of Viet Nam Performance in Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: RAND, August 1972), p. 130.

Americans strengthened their military relations with South Vietnam because of the general situation in Southeast Asia. South Vietnam and the Philippines were the only nations that had clearly Western-oriented, friendly governments. The CI-Plan, Smith maintains, had many dimensions: it was meant for the defense of the free world. At the same time, it offered the US a chance to intervene in the future. By that point in time, at the latest, Smith concludes, the military line in the US decision-making had won. Lansdale was the main architect of the new approach, Smith writes. The Vietnam War, he states, was lost when Diem and the Americans failed to defeat the guerillas in late 1960 and early the following year. From then on, the US countermeasures were always one step behind, Smith adds.¹⁰⁸

The paper-producing procedures had finally affected the OCB. The reports of the Board on Vietnam became shorter as the end of Eisenhower's second term approached. In a paragraph of less than half a page long, titled "Semi-Annual Appraisal of U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia", and dated January 11, 1961, the Board concluded that it had proved to be difficult and "unrealistic" for the Working Group on Southeast Asia to prepare Operations Plan as "the situation...continues to be in flux". Robert G. Cleveland, who was in charge of economic affairs for the region at the State Department, said that the appraisal did not recommend a policy review, but added that there should be one as soon as the situation clarified. Gray agreed and pointed out the importance recognizing the need for a policy review when possible. The OCB had still requested the Working Group to "appraise the policy within ninety days in light of [the] circumstances then prevailing" in order to determine if a comprehensive review of NSC 6012 by the NSC should be recommended. Talking about the changing situation, the OCB referred specifically to an attempted coup in November which indicated that the situation required evaluation. In addition to the fact that the Board members were given new intelligence support material, a new SNIE had been requested on the basis of which a revision of the Operations Plan could be made. The appraisal had been reduced to a minimum as even some of the explanatory sentences concerning the reasons behind the coup and methods of coping with the situation had been deleted from the January 4 draft. The Semi-Annual Appraisal was then concurred in by the Board.¹⁰⁹

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108 Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, pp. 117, 194, 235.

109 The final draft was dated January 4. It was concurred in on that same day, but it became official after the Minutes were approved on January 11. OCB's "Semi-Annual Appraisal of U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia," January 11, 1961, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the OCB, Lot 62 D 430, Box 29, Southeast Asia 3, RG 59, NA; Informal notes of OCB meeting of January 4, 1961, *ibid.*, Box 9, OCB Luncheon meetings 1959-1960. The Board Assistants had already discussed and revised the December 8 draft appraisal on NSC 6012 in mid-December. The appraisal was originally scheduled for OCB consideration on December 28, 1960. Record of Action of the Board Assistants' meeting, December 19, 1960 (held on December 16), *ibid.*, Box 11, Board Assistants - Record of Actions 1960. The other earlier drafts were dated December 16, 1960 and January 4, 1961. See *ibid.*; Lay, Jr.'s memorandum for the NSC, January 13, 1961, with Bromley K. Smith's memorandum for Lay, Jr., January 11, 1961, and the above-mentioned Semi-Annual Appraisal of NSC 6012, January 11, 1961, as attachments, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 63 D 351, Box 99, NSC 6012, RG 59, NA. The OCB members

Nevertheless, not everybody within the NSC-OCB machinery was satisfied with the quality of the Cutlerian language. Coffey continued his crusade against the bad language of the OCB Operations Plans. He could not attend the forthcoming OCB discussions and thus wanted to offer his comments on the semi-final drafts of the Progress Report on NSC 6012 and the “Operations Plan for Viet-Nam”, which were to be considered during the last week of the Eisenhower Administration. Coffey argued that guidance in the Operations Plan was “misleading” and “deficient”. In addition, he suggested that it should be mentioned that the US had “limited objective in providing military assistance to Vietnam”.¹¹⁰

The new thinking among the NSC principals and staffers was an irreversible trend. They received further background material for the chosen course when Lansdale visited South Vietnam in the first half of January 1961.¹¹¹ He was shocked by the power of the Vietcong and the extent of infiltration. There was a risk, Lansdale thought, that the free Vietnamese and the Diem Government, even with the help of the Americans in South Vietnam, could only postpone the final victory of the Communists unless they could find ways to mobilize all available resources. According to Lansdale, the loss would be a blow to US prestige and influence, not only in Asia but also elsewhere in the world. Lansdale suggested changing Durbrow and USOM Director, Arthur Z. Gardiner. He referred to the aid programs, which had filled stomachs but had forgotten the spiritual side. The well-being of the people had risen, Lansdale wrote, but they had lost their will to safeguard their freedom. Hence, the aid programs needed re-evaluation. Diem was still the only leader capable of leading and thus he deserved US backing in the future. He should be understood and treated as a friend, Lansdale concluded. Diem should be treated as a human being who had been through hard times, and not as an opponent who had to be put on his knees. Lansdale added that Nhu could be changed. As a practical solution, Lansdale proposed dispatching new specialists and combat troops to South Vietnam. They should be prepared to give their lives for the ideals of freedom. He repeated that the military advisors should have broad authority in the field of fire.¹¹²

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could read that at the beginning of 1960 there had been 1,040 US personnel in South Vietnam (State 98, Defense 748, ICA 169 and USIA 25). CIA’s N. C. Debevoise’s memorandum for Smith, January 3, 1961, WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, OCB Secretariat series, Box 7, Southeast Asia (NSC 6012)(4), DDEL.

110 Coffey’s memorandum for Smith, January 12, 1961, WHO, OSANSA, OCB series, Subject subseries, Box 6, DDEL.

111 Lansdale had contacted Williams and asked the General to invite him to Saigon. Lansdale’s cables (2) to Williams, April 30 and June 21, 1960, FRUS 1958–1960, Volume I, pp. 425–426, 501–502. In late November, Deputy Secretary of Defense Douglas, Jr. had asked the State Department to permit Lansdale’s inspection tour. The Ambassadors in the region opposed Lansdale’s political suggestions because they knew they would have an effect on the decisions. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 194. Lansdale’s visit was noted in the OCB machinery. Landon referred to Lansdale as someone who had “had considerable field experience”. See Landon’s memorandum for Bromley K. Smith, January 9, 1961, WHO, OSANSA, OCB series, Subject subseries, Box 6, DDEL.

112 Lansdale’s report to Gates, Jr., January 17, 1961. USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., pp. 66–77; USVNR, Book 11, pp. 1–13. Lansdale was not pleased with his orders, which were to listen to Durbrow and stay out of trouble. Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 1988, pp. 210–218; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 194–195.

As noted above, Lansdale's suggestions had gathered supporters within the Pentagon.¹¹³ He favored an extension of US involvement. He wanted to see the role of the military increased. According to his proposals, the US should stay in South Vietnam and prepare a new strategy.

US intelligence had kept track of the changes in the numbers of Communist guerillas throughout the second half of the 1950s. Back in 1955, the number had been 10,000, but by 1957 it had sunk to 1,000–2,000 as a result of Diem's actions. Over the next two years it stayed at approximately 2,000. A visible change took place in 1960 when the number rose from 4,000 in April to 10,000 in December. In addition, the number of murders and kidnappings of civil servants in the Diem Administration grew alarmingly. The number of deaths went from 193 in 1958 to 1,400 two years later, and the hostage-taking from 236 to 700.¹¹⁴ In January 1959, the OCB had already expressed concern over the increase in the number of murders – from 15 to 35 per month.¹¹⁵ For military reasons Diem had resettled peasants in the central high plains. For that purpose the government had had to build roads. The road-construction projects were supported by the US through the latter part of the 1950s. Special emphasis was placed on the Mekong Delta because General Williams had regarded it as the main passage for North Vietnam's offensive. At General Williams's request between 1954 and 1961, a 32-kilometre military highway between Saigon and Bien Hoa received more money than the education, social, and health programs together.¹¹⁶ Estimates of the total sum of US economic and technical aid to South Vietnam during the Eisenhower era vary slightly. Montgomery writes that it was little less than 1.3 billion dollars, whereas Warner mentions a figure of 1,302,000,000 dollars. Smith argues it was roughly 1.4 billion and Kahin 1.5 billion dollars. According to Post, it was 1,399,300,000 dollars.¹¹⁷

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113 Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 351.

114 As a comparison, in June 1961 the number of guerillas was 15,000 and by the fall they were already 16,000–17,000, and the situation continued to deteriorate, USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., pp. 24–25.

115 USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.5., p. 20.

116 Road-building was a controversial issue among the Country Team. The representatives of USOM favored improving the existing roads, and the MAAAG did not want to discuss military matters with other members of the Team. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 307–308; Scigliano, *South Vietnam*, 1964, p. 115; PP Gravel, Volume 1, p. 268; During the FY 1957 (July 1, 1956–June 30, 1957), for example, more than half of the MSP funds had been distributed to the Far Eastern countries, and during that same period, South Vietnam was the biggest recipient of defense-support aid. The military budget of South Vietnam for 1957 amounted to 207 million dollars, of which the Americans paid approximately 187 million dollars. DSB, February 10, 1958, pp. 222–223; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 306.

117 Montgomery, *The Politics of Foreign Aid*, 1962, p.23; Warner, *The Last Confucian*, 1963, pp. 136–137; Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 1983, p. 190; Kahin, *Intervention*, 1986, p. 85; Post, *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Vietnam*, Volume 2, 1989, p. 88. According to Pentagon historians the figures were 322.4 million dollars in 1955, 377.3 in 1956, 392.7 in 1957, 242.3 in 1958, 249.3 in 1959 and 252.9 in 1960. The calculations add up to over 1.8 billion from the summer of 1954 through the summer of 1961. PP, Gravel, Volume 2, IV A4, Table 4, p. 37; also cited in Kenny, *The American Role in Vietnam and East Asia*, 1984, p. 15.

On his last day in office, President Eisenhower briefed President-elect Kennedy on the foreign policy crises. Eisenhower said that Laos was the biggest problem facing Kennedy in Southeast Asia. According to the retiring President, the situation in Laos would require the sending of troops, for which Kennedy should be prepared. Eisenhower promised to give support on the question of Laos in the future. He only briefly mentioned South Vietnam.¹¹⁸

Young, who had been an active State Department representative in the NSC-OCB machinery, later stressed the lack of cultural understanding on the part of the Americans, as has also been noted previously in this study, and the administrative incompetence of the South Vietnamese as the reasons for the failure of US policy. He wrote that since the Eisenhower letter of October 1954 the US had been seeking ways to enhance the viability of South Vietnam. The problems had arisen, Young admitted, from the fact that the Americans did not understand the behavior and political institutions of the Vietnamese. The US was working in South Vietnam at the invitation of Diem's Government. The central aim was to create a nation with a strong government which should have been based on the nationalistic aspirations of the people, Young claims this, but admits that the Eisenhower Administration had not been aware of the nature of those aspirations. According to Young, the tools of US policy consisted of a strong leader, a national administration in Saigon and in the countryside, land reform, and guaranteed internal security. The Eisenhower Administration little by little lost its confidence in Diem and in his abilities as an administrator.¹¹⁹

In the scholarship there exists numerous interpretations about the workings of the interdepartmental and interagency coordination of the Vietnam question by the Eisenhower Administration. Pentagon researchers consider that the failure of the US to establish an effective ARVN was due to the opposition of the South Vietnamese Government and current US military thinking. In addition, the feud between the State and Defense Departments resulted in MAAG being unable to train the ARVN as an effective force for deterring the guerillas. The defense against external threat was not tested, the Pentagon researchers conclude.¹²⁰ Gelb and Betts have analyzed the various objectives of American national security officials. They assert that the CIA wanted to expose a world-

118 Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War*, 1981, p. 58; Ambrose and Immerman, *Ike's Spies*, 1981, p. 262. Gibbons maintains that Kennedy had insisted upon placing Laos at the top of the agenda. Gibbons, William Conrad, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships. Part 2: 1961–1964* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 9. See also Greenstein and Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina?," 1992, pp. 568–587. The President's son, John S. D. Eisenhower, wrote that there was no basis for suggestions that US involvement in Vietnam began between 1953 and 1961. He regards "such insinuations, probably politically motivated". John S. D. Eisenhower cites an off-the-record meeting on New Year's Eve 1960 in the Oval Office between high-ranking representatives of the State Department, the Pentagon and the White House. At the meeting Laos had been the subject. In addition, he uses another indication to support his point. The President had apologized in his memoirs that Kennedy had inherited the difficult Laotian situation from him. Eisenhower, John S. D., *Strictly Personal* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p. 288.

119 Young, "U.S. Policy and Vietnamese Political Viability, 1954–1967," 1967, pp. 507–514.

120 USVNR, Book 2, Tab IV.A.4., pp. 4.1.–5.1., 31. For similar official policy conclusions see Trager, Frank N., *Why Viet Nam?* (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 161, 163–164.

wide Communist plot, whereas the soldiers yearned for combat. Finally, the diplomats wanted to do everything to inflate the magnitude of the problems in order to strengthen their own position.¹²¹ The military and the economic-political aspects of the foreign assistance were not at any stage combined. In order to achieve better coordination, the JCS had written to Secretary of Defense Gates, Jr. in early June 1960 that the State and Defense Departments should work together to produce new, more practical guidelines of execution for the Country Team in South Vietnam.¹²² Cook writes that during the Eisenhower years the military assistance programs were seen as a means of saving governments from coups. The military aid and the CIA's activities boosted regimes which were considered to be the best alternatives in Asian and African countries. This kind of thinking, Cook adds, and the broadly covert operations all contributed to a full US commitment in South Vietnam.¹²³

As has been continuously pointed out in this study, some participants and scholars have criticized the quality of information that was fed into the NSC mechanism by the intelligence agencies. Eisenhower's former Staff Secretary, Goodpaster, for example, assigned some of the credit for the US loss of Vietnam to President Eisenhower. Goodpaster was certainly in a position to know as he was in charge of briefing the Chief Executive daily on intelligence matters. According to Goodpaster, the President had had the power to make decisions, but he had been short-sighted. As Goodpaster explained in an interview, this was the result of insufficient and low-quality intelligence. Policy that was made relied on such intelligence. Ambrose regards Goodpaster's criticism as unjust if the former Staff Secretary is referring only to the CIA. He emphasizes that US policy was not made at the Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, but in the White House and in the State Department. The CIA simply supplied the Chief Executive with information. The intelligence reports, Ambrose adds, could have been interpreted and acted upon in any way. Ambrose contends that, as the choice- and decision-maker, Eisenhower could also have terminated US support for Diem on the basis of the same intelligence.¹²⁴ Goodpaster's recollections are supported by Khong, who referred in his analysis of the Dien Bien Phu crisis to the fact that Eisenhower and the NSC principals faced "ambiguous and conflicting information from all sources".¹²⁵

Spector has evaluated the impact of the NSC-approved programs in South Vietnam. He argues that the American policy-makers believed that normal military aid and cosmetic reforms were a sufficient means to change the development. They did not listen, Spector adds, to the warnings made by General Ridgway about the difficulties involved in fighting the guerillas or the assurances by Ambassador Durbrow about the fact that the basic problem was

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121 Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, p. 227.

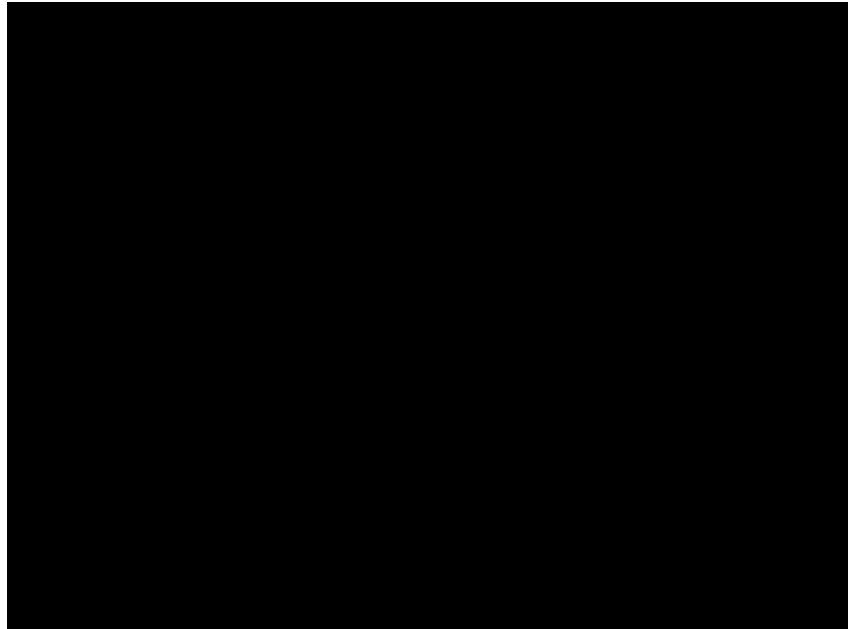
122 Gates, Jr's interview is quoted in Charlton and Moncrief, *Many Reasons Why*, 1978, p. 77; JCS initiative quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, p. 362.

123 Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, 1981, pp. 206, 332.

124 Goodpaster had described the US information on Vietnam as "inadequate, poor, terrible". Goodpaster interview quoted in Ambrose and Immerman, *Ike's Spies*, 1981, p. 262.

125 Khong, *Analogies at War*, 1992, p. 165.

When briefing President-elect John F. Kennedy in January 1961, Eisenhower did not manage to persuade the new Chief Executive to keep the NSC structures intact. Kennedy abolished, for example, the OCB, which had been established in 1953. Moreover, Eisenhower gave Kennedy warnings at their meeting about the situation in Laos but curiously said very little about Vietnam. (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library)



political and psychological. According to Spector, the training responsibility of the Civil Guard and other paramilitary forces had been in the wrong hands for too long, although it should have been MAAG's. MAAG did not work well because the tours of duties of the US advisors were too short, the members of MAAG did not earn the respect of their trainees and the means for evaluating the results were unclear, and both cultural and language difficulties affected the work of MAAG, Spector continues. He concludes that the problems of South Vietnam did not really make a difference in Washington prior to 1961.¹²⁶ Likewise, Cable argues that all attempts to change the ARVN to make it better able to deal with the internal threat failed. This was not caused, Cable adds, by the obstructionist attitude of the American military leaders or by paranoia, although they deliberately led the policy-makers astray. Perceptions of change were not included in the doctrinal world of the discourse.¹²⁷ Arnold considers that the reason for the failure of the ARVN training was the trust of the ARVN officers in artillery support, and a trust also held by the US officers. The South Vietnamese were reluctant to operate in any other way than with the range of artillery pieces. This kind of tactics, Arnold maintains, confined the operations to be near the roads. He adds that the US advisors instructed the ARVN to fight as the FEC had done in the First Indochina War. Arnold asserts that Eisenhower took decisions which followed the strategies practiced in the Truman years. The pieces simply fell into their respective places. The actions of the Eisenhower Administration tied the US and South Vietnam inextricably to each other's fate.¹²⁸

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126 Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, pp. 372, 375, 378–379.

127 Cable, *Conflicts of Myths*, 1986, p. 179.

128 Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, pp. 240, 321, 377, 389, 399.

Anderson concludes that the implementation of US policy on Vietnam had meant pouring millions of dollars into South Vietnam. In comparison to a political and military occupation, “this dollar diplomacy was so effective and relatively inexpensive that its limits were obscured” and thus trapped the American policy-makers within the view that it was a success story. After 1955, Anderson correctly asserts, Vietnam was “essentially a second-echelon issue”. Anderson adds that “through the orderly structure” of weekly NSC meetings – and his frequent conferences with Secretary Dulles – “Eisenhower was substantially a part of the process”.¹²⁹

Basically, Eisenhower’s second term was the time of the national security bureaucrats in Vietnam policy-making, as Anderson has argued. It was simply one of the standard questions, which was, nevertheless, handled with a considerable degree of efficiency. The NSC-OCB system kept the matter alive, but it rarely reached the top of the agenda other than as a short briefing item. The OCB, which continued producing various kinds of reports, was preoccupied with the implementation of the chosen policy. The staff work sometimes tackled technicalities such as the phrasing of language. The NSC and OCB staffers were not unanimous: they disagreed on questions such as the responsibility for the South Vietnamese Civil Guard. Yet there seem not to have been any serious interpersonal clashes. The bulk of the work was done at the member departments and agencies. The machinery received information from a great variety of sources, and the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community made attempts at producing better quality information. There were, for example, new kinds of intelligence reports becoming available. Eisenhower’s decision in the spring of 1958 to concentrate the Council discussions more on issues than papers was reflected in the paper-producing of the NSC-OCB machinery. In practice, the reports became shorter and their intervals were changed from six months to much longer periods, emphasizing the long-term nature of the work of the NSC. The OCB had clear problems in adapting its structures and procedures to the new ways of operating. In many cases, the President and his NSC advisers simply requested the staffers to study the problem further. South Vietnam ceased to be an actual problem for the Eisenhower Administration. From 1956 on, the Policy Papers on Vietnam (in Southeast Asia papers) were approved with only minor changes. Thus they were clearly revisions of earlier documents. This conclusion is supported by the findings made by Anderson¹³⁰.

After a break starting in the spring of 1957 in the Council consideration of the Vietnam issue, it surfaced again in the summer and early fall of 1959. During

129 According to Anderson, US policy was “based on image rather than substance”. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, pp. 20, 90, 119, 151. Furthermore, Anderson argues that the policies of the Eisenhower Administration “sharply limited US choices”. Anderson, David L., “Presidential Leadership and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia: The Buck Stops – and Starts – Here” and “Dwight D. Eisenhower and Wholehearted Support of Ngo Dinh Diem,” both in *Shadow on the White House*. Ed. Anderson, 1993, pp. 7, 59. About Eisenhower’s later comments on the Vietnam War see *ibid.*, pp. 262–263, Nixon, RN, 1978, p. 155, and Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, pp. 386–394.

130 Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 151.

the last full year of the Eisenhower era, the issue was addressed on an average of every second month. During the last year and a half, when the internal security situation was deteriorating in South Vietnam, the issue was discussed by the NSC at fewer than 20 percent of its meetings. Owing to the waning interest and the relative importance of the issue after 1955, the total percentage of time which the Council devoted to consideration of the Vietnam issue at all of the NSC meetings during Eisenhower's eight years in office was a little over 20. Nevertheless, the figure is quite high if we take into account the number of countries in the world or even the possible hot spots in the Third World and the overall number of Cold War crises facing the Eisenhower Administration. Hence, the perception among the Washington policy-makers that Vietnam was not viewed as a problem raises serious questions about the accuracy of that perception.

If we look at the workings of the NSC process through multiple advocacy lenses, we can argue that there is no indication that Eisenhower was not committed to the process. On the other hand, the issue was not of the kind which would have required either his attention or Presidential decisions. Furthermore, neither intellectual nor bureaucratic resources were badly distributed or misdirected in a major way among the participants in the NSC-OCB machinery. Even though the availability of sources make it quite difficult to evaluate the performance of the new Secretary of State, Herter, we can judge from his experience as the Chairman of the OCB that he may even have been somewhat more competent in handling the NSC-OCB-related matters than his predecessor. He took, for example, initiatives and participated in discussions. The member departments and agencies of the Council system conducted their own studies, which were based on NSC papers. The lack of information relevant to the policy issue continued to pose problems for the results produced by the NSC-OCB machinery. In contrast, there was no shortage of time for the preparation of issues. In the absence of frequent Council meetings, the debate typical of the NSC on the issue of Vietnam was taking place at the Board meetings. Outsider views were also utilized, and the initiatives produced by Ambassador Durbrow and Colonel Lansdale seem to have had some influence. Committee work was assigned within the NSC framework in the same manner as it had been in the past.

The limitations of the documentation on the role of the Special Assistants does not allow us to draw firm conclusions, but it appears likely that Robert Cutler continued to be a custodian-manager with high capabilities during his second term from early 1957 through July 1958. In addition, the performance of Eisenhower's last Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Gordon Gray, who had a Pentagon background and had already enjoyed a long relationship with the NSC(-OCB) machinery during the Truman Presidency, was probably at least as efficient a custodian-manager as Cutler had been.

■ Conclusion – A Manifestation of Efficiency

As a striking contrast to the view derived from analyzing the sources of this study, one cannot but wonder why in 1960 the Jackson Subcommittee had so strongly criticized the National Security Council (NSC) system as it existed under Eisenhower. Even more amazing are Kennedy's decisions in early 1961 to abolish the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) and to choose not to make much use of the Council machinery *per se*. This can be explained by the fact that the critics of the NSC in the 1950s and later had either misunderstood the workings of the systematic NSC process or had been greatly misled. Such a reaction may have been easy, given that the nature of the process was confidential in order to avoid leaks. But the critics' arguments seem to be one-sided or not properly justified. In the light of the available sources – including some of the newly declassified documents – on Vietnam policy-making between 1953 and 1961 it can be concluded that Eisenhower's Council deserves some remission for the sins attributed to it. Regardless of its red tape and routinized procedures, the NSC mechanism was certainly not a slow and toilsome “paper mill” or a “rubber stamp” organ that specialized in producing consensus recommendations and Policy Papers only for long-term use. Rather, the whole of the NSC and its supporting committee and staff structure appears to have operated better than has been previously accepted. It was, in fact, almost a success story: it functioned with considerable efficiency and flexibility, thus providing the President with a wide range of options and demonstrating an ability to adapt even, to some extent, to rapid situations. The source material clearly indicates that the NSC process was sophisticated in nature and had a finesse that has not often been commented upon in the academic literature. Efficiency and Eisenhower's NSC are almost interchangeable terms.

Several scholars have been right in pointing out that Eisenhower's Council apparatus, and the whole advisory process for that matter, were carefully formalized and structured, thus making the Presidential choices and the subsequent decisions relatively easy. The substance of the Council discussions was normally reflected in the Presidential decisions. Despite the fact that some observers have claimed that Eisenhower's NSC was too large to be advisory, it was definitely meant to be an advisory and deliberative body, like a think tank in its structure. It functioned effectively in accordance with its original mission. The role of the Council was, as both Eisenhower himself and many scholars have noted, crucial for the President. In essence, his NSC was all about how to formulate integrated policies and how to get interdepartmental and interagency cooperation and coordination to function. The role of the Council was pre-eminent in national security planning. In consequence, it did not exceed its

powers. There had been a long leap forward from Truman's small advisory body to the substantial "second Cabinet" that took over foreign and defense policy-making in the US Government. Some of the supporters of Eisenhower's NSC have correctly concluded that it flourished especially during those eight years. The beginning of Eisenhower's second term did not immediately bring about changes in the NSC-OCB machinery. President Eisenhower aimed at having the system at his disposal and thus attempted to commit the departmental and agency representatives to the accomplishment of common objectives. He could delegate, but instead of ruling by committee, he took over total control of his NSC system, becoming, as the careful Chief Executive that he was, the ultimate choice- and decision-maker himself. Eisenhower, however, received considerable practical help from the Special Assistants for National Security Affairs. All in all, the Council – which consisted of business executives, lawyers and soldiers – appeared to have responded positively to Eisenhower's needs and methodical administrative style. Of course, the situation was in fact the reverse, since Eisenhower's style obviously had a great influence on the form of his advisory arrangements.

Examination of Eisenhower's NSC mechanism as an advisory system in the context of his Vietnam policy-making seems to indicate that the Council machinery – after its formative stage in early 1953 – did not really have to encounter any of the malfunctions identified by George.¹ Neither Eisenhower nor the Council members as his advisers agreed "too readily on the nature of the problem" in any of the key questions that can be assessed on the basis of available source materials. Rather, they carefully debated them at NSC meetings which were at the highest level of the US Government. At those meetings, a frank exchange of views and principles took place. To a great extent, the President took part in the substantive discussions. The thorough consideration of policies offered him a venue for testing his own ideas, and a place where he could receive well-reasoned advice so that he could make up his mind and deliver clear-cut decisions. Even at the height of crises there were quite often meetings which did not produce any substance. Thus, as Anna Nelson has correctly asserted², they were plainly informative and instructive in nature.

There is some evidence that in its debates the NSC machinery explored all of the relevant options for Vietnam policy. Moreover, unpopular options (such as extremes) were, in fact, advocated by various Council members. In some cases, the Special Assistant arranged for an outsider advocate to advise the NSC. If a policy had been fixed, there was, however, no need to consider a variety of options. At that point the downhill slope of the "policy hill" was brought into play, when the OCB monitored the situation and reported back to the top. At times, the Council discussions produced instructions for the Planning Board

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1 For detailed discussion on the possible malfunctions of the advisory process see George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 121–136, APPENDIX X and "The Research Task" in chapter 1, above.

2 See Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill,'" 1983.

(PB) or other NSC-OCB committees or staffs that were hard to make sense of. The Council principals – or their PB representatives – certainly did not debate their dissenting positions in secrecy and then appear in front of the President with a consensus recommendation. The advisers always alerted the President, even if there was a difficult decision to be taken.

The President and his NSC advisers seem to have been equally well briefed. Eisenhower and his Council members received information via multiple channels, thus eliminating the possibility of a single source of information malfunctioning. However, the main sources of information in the NSC process were the estimates produced by the intelligence community. But there is clear evidence about information breakdowns at various levels of the NSC-OCB machinery. Much of the information that was used, for example, seems to have been based on inadequate intelligence reports, basically on national intelligence estimates (NIEs). In addition, the quality of the information that was fed into the NSC-OCB process was not the fault of the system but depended on the ability of the individuals involved. Goodpaster has also noted in interview that the quality of information was low and thus inadequate³. Furthermore, there was not enough collected and processed information available on ever-changing, sometimes chaotic, situations or such information was already obsolete. Even a good system cannot compensate for mistaken perceptions used as a basis for advice and decision-making. Burke's and Greenstein's question over whether information was vigorously gathered and processed by the PB to supplement the available intelligence appraisals⁴ is left unanswered, since the bulk of the PB material still remains classified. In the Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, there is, however, some circumstantial evidence which suggests that information was gathered in a vigorous manner at least until the spring of 1955. The efforts of the PB were definitely not consensus-driven nor did it act as a "paper mill", as critics have argued. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) submitted their views on almost any question even if they had not been requested to do so. Reports of US diplomatic representatives were often received or their briefings heard within the NSC. Analysis and advice was then forwarded to the President by the participants in the Council machinery at both formal and informal levels.

The presentation of information, analysis and advice to the President partly took place at the weekly NSC meetings. The Council principals were briefed by their subordinates and the Chief Executive by his Staff Secretary, the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs or the Secretary of State. Sometimes Eisenhower apparently heard in detail about certain events for the first time – as did his NSC advisers, Defense Mobilizer Arthur S. Flemming and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon – only at the NSC meetings. The President and other Council members wanted to keep the issues simple. They used simple rhetoric, such as the description of the dangers depicted by the Domino analogy, even though the

3 Goodpaster quoted in Ambrose and Immerman, *Ike's Spies*, 1981, p. 262.

4 See Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991.

concept may not have been properly or accurately formulated. When the Council met, the issues were thoroughly discussed on the basis of the filtered intelligence, simplified information and analysis by the lower-level departmental and agency representatives of the Council principals. Lower-echelon officials were able to propose initiatives, and anxious individuals could also make a difference in processing the information by adding their own reasoning. As David L. Anderson and Robert Shaplen have correctly argued⁵, available sources show that the views of some State Department officials actually made a difference within the NSC-OCB system. The desk officer and OCB Working Group Chairman, Kenneth T. Young, the Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Philip W. Bonsal, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William J. Sebald, their superior, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson, and the Director of the Policy Planning Staff and PB member, Robert R. Bowie, all seem to have been interested in South Vietnam and to have been respected by Secretary Dulles, and thus promoted the South Vietnamese cause within the NSC-OCB machinery. The same is true of the Pentagon's representative on the PB, Charles H. Bonesteel III. The Council also took seriously the comments made by the JCS. Because of the kinship of John Foster and Allen W. Dulles there was a special connection between the Foggy Bottom and the Agency. For the Dulles brothers, one important source of information and an implementor in the field was Edward G. Lansdale, who was a great proponent of unconventional warfare methods for South Vietnam. The connection worked both ways. Although source materials on the activities of the CIA are limited or deleted, it can be claimed that, apart from being an instrument of NSC-approved policies, the operatives of the Agency could also participate in shaping the policies they were assigned to implement.

Eisenhower did not normally go beyond his Council system, but in the NSC process there were also informal channels – often off-the-record conferences with his close associates, including Secretary Dulles, the Special Assistants for National Security Affairs, and Staff Secretary Goodpaster – which seem to have been of varying importance for the process. The small-group meetings were obviously intended for clearance purposes. Attendance at these informal meetings was not fixed. The assessment that they were informal is supported by the findings of several scholars, some of whom, however, have tended to overemphasize the role played by informal advisory arrangements.

In Eisenhower's NSC system there was no chance that the key assumptions and premises connected with a certain plan would have been evaluated only by the individuals advocating that particular option. Rather, the PB procedures, together with its splits, ensured that proposals were in fact considered by various officials. The positions of the NSC principals often differed from each other to a considerable degree. Council members evidently felt comfortable

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5 See Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1965, and Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991.

engaging in heated debates stimulated by questions from outside. Hence, the system generally functioned as it was planned to do. Despite differing views, the NSC provided a forum for its members to get to know not only each other but also the problems facing the US better than previously and to work as a team in the best interests of the US. The system was kept under constant review, and readjustments were made from time to time, the biggest being the 1958 change so that there would be more discussion on issues rather than on papers. This did not really make a great difference to the question of Vietnam, since the basic policy decisions had already been made in the mid-1950s. There was, however, an impact on the manner in which reporting and other paper-producing was conducted. The OCB structures, in particular, had clear problems in adapting to the new procedures of the NSC-OCB machinery.

Because of his position, the President appears not to have accepted the advice of one NSC adviser over another. In addressing the question of the influence wielded by certain individual advisers, it should be mentioned that the State Department had a somewhat dominant position at the different levels of the NSC and OCB structures. Yet Secretary Dulles seems to have had less influence on the NSC process than has previously been claimed, because Eisenhower did not consistently value the advice given by Secretary Dulles, even in questions of foreign policy. Dulles was only one important player amongst others, but it is most likely that he was not an overruling character in the process. Dulles did, however, attempt to protect both his own position and that of the State Department. He knew in advance, for example, almost all of the moves that the other Council principals were going to make. The Secretary of State occasionally wanted to reduce the importance of the Council. He was obviously jealous of others' power. Nevertheless, he did not openly oppose the wishes of the President nor did he encourage his subordinates to boycott the NSC work in any way. Secretary of State Christian A. Herter seems to have been committed to the process: he was already introducing initiatives when he was still serving as the OCB Chairman. Vice-President Nixon's influence varied, depending on the topic: in early 1954 he played the role of an outspoken expert in the NSC after his return from the Far East. On the other hand, he sometimes seems to have been poorly informed. The Secretaries of the Treasury, for their part, had a special standing in the NSC system. George M. Humphrey, for example, was a dissident and also possessed substantial influence, which is illustrated by the fact that his position opposing the need for the US "to police" the rest of the world carried enormous weight in the issue of intervention at Dien Bien Phu. The Treasury Secretaries also kept a close watch on the budgetary implications of proposed NSC programs. The Secretaries of Defense also expressed doubts and favored the cautious line. Wilson, for example, brought factual points into NSC discussions. The Chairmen of the JCS, especially Radford, were elevated almost to the status of NSC principals even though they were supposed to attend Council meetings only in an advisory capacity. Likewise, the CIA Director, Allen W. Dulles, was mainly charged with presenting the NSC oral briefings, but he normally took an active part in the discussions. Moreover, as a member of the

OCB he had a rare chance to monitor the implementation of policies. Stassen of the MSA (later the FOA), who also sat on the Board during Eisenhower's first term, had a fierce voice in Council debates. He often challenged not only Secretary Dulles but also the President himself. Stassen – together with Nixon, Radford and Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith – was a hard-liner who favored intervention, as has been suggested in previous scholarship. The performance of Defense Mobilizer Flemming at the NSC is difficult to assess as he seems to have opened his mouth quite infrequently and even then he was a questioner, who simply waited for mobilization instructions. It must also be pointed out that the extracts of summaries of NSC discussions may in some cases distort our view of the degree to which a Council member participated. In addition, this may, of course, depend on the nature of the issue in question. A change in the personnel would normally result in some procedural changes or changes in policy, but in Vietnam policy-making such changes are hardly perceptible.

Finally, Eisenhower appears not to have taken consensus among his advisers for granted and not to have failed to have looked beneath its surface. Rather, he seems to have always tested the nature of the consensus in depth in order to determine whether it was in some way imperfect or how it had been reached. There was, however, one minor exception in late April 1955, when he himself requested consensus. The President asked a lot of questions, stated his convictions, and was also able to admit if he did not know, for example, what to do in a specific situation. Furthermore, as a resourceful President he often came up with his own alternatives. Nor did Eisenhower hide his emotions in the NSC work. He sometimes emphasized his points by swearing and made highly serious issues a little lighter by joking about them.

On the other hand, George has also admitted that the nine malfunctions do not cover all of the possible cases.⁶ Although there appear to have been only a few problems associated with the workings of the Council machinery during the Eisenhower era, the system often had difficulty in adapting to rapid developments. In consequence, it had to turn flexibly to alternative methods and to improvise. Furthermore, there is also some evidence that there were problems pertaining to the interaction between the participants. The relationship between the State Department and the Pentagon representatives clearly had a slightly negative impact on the advisory process itself. This can in part be understood against the background of the traditional civil-military rivalry and other bureaucratic confrontations. The NSC-OCB machinery was a system within a system, and much of the NSC-related work was done in departments and agencies. Most of the NSC participants found themselves operating in a dual role and thus they were sometimes unable to leave their departmental biases behind, resulting in a tendency to act in the interest of their own respective departments and agencies. In this respect, Eisenhower's original idea was not fulfilled. The interdepartmental

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6 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 121–136.

and interagency coordination did not, therefore, always function properly, either, in the formulation or implementation of policies. This conclusion, and the occasional lack of information relevant to policy issues, should not obscure the fact that in overall terms the Council functioned effectively. There were even occasions on which some sort of team spirit seems to have been achieved within the NSC-OCB machinery. If the State and Defense representatives agreed on a policy it almost certainly guaranteed its success.

The Eisenhower Administration's strategy of avoiding the majority of the potential malfunctions of the advisory process was achieved through the use of the right kind of organizational model, which caused the foreign policy-making process to function well. It is easy to argue on the basis of the available source materials that the organizational model for the NSC system is remarkably close to the requirements of George's multiple advocacy model⁷, which draws attention to the way in which decisions were made. Even though multiple advocacy is difficult to achieve in practice, it was clearly employed, not only in the Dien Bien Phu crisis of 1954 as has been correctly asserted by George and a couple of other scholars, but also in every key item that came before the Council for consideration in connection with policy and examined in this study. Hence, Eisenhower managed to use the NSC in his Vietnam policy-making in a way that seems to have avoided the problems of premature consensus or limited advice. This management style improved the processing of information and exposed the President to a wide range of options, on which the Chief Executive was able to base his decisions. George's descriptive theory can be said to be apt from the point of view of the workings of Eisenhower's Council.

Having drawn such conclusions, it is useful to look at the individual requirements of multiple advocacy. The first requirement of the multiple advocacy model is fulfilled in virtually every instance explored, since President Eisenhower took executive initiatives and defined his role as that of a "magistrate". Even though adherence to multiple advocacy fed a large number of decisions to the top and was time-consuming work, Eisenhower also actively participated in the process by overseeing and regulating it (Hall's "Participation Principle"⁸). In doing so, he had changed the work of the NSC process into a series of adversary proceedings. There is no doubt that Eisenhower was committed to the NSC; in making extensive use of his Council machinery on the question of Vietnam he demanded that his subordinates should perform their dual roles and also commit themselves to the process.

Second to executive management is the requirement calling for the equality of the intellectual and bureaucratic resources and opportunities among the "policy advocates" ("Fairness Principle"). This is scarcely less clear than the first requirement. Eisenhower had had the freedom to decide whom he wished

7 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 191 ff.; see also APPENDIX X and "The Research Task" in chapter 1, above.

8 See Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947-1980", 1982.

to turn to for information and advice. Luckily, he had chosen competent advisers (although perhaps not quite the best minds), who as members of the Council performed the task of advocates. They were not usually entrenched behind their prejudices, but in most cases remained open to suggestions. This dual role was not an easy concept; sometimes, those officials and policy advocates who were in the NSC-OCB apparatus had a hard time trying to put aside the interests of their own departments and agencies. This suggests that the traditional civil-military controversy and other bureaucratic rivalries were deep-rooted⁹. The effectiveness of the policy is debatable. It seems, however, that good policy on Vietnam was not necessarily achieved, but it did not apparently depend upon the process. Successful policy requires the selection of information relevant to the policy issue. Even though the Council principals, and especially the NSC and OCB staffers, had access to information, the quality of that – mainly NIE-based – information evidently was, as discussed above, if not quite faulty, at least not totally adequate. It seems that the mistaken perceptions of the NSC-OCB participants constructed on the basis of inadequate information led eventually to flawed decisions by the President which no process could any longer have corrected. Thus, the system “worked”, but that the policy failed, as Gelb and Betts conclude¹⁰, appears to be correct. This means that the Council participants did not have an accurate knowledge of Southeast Asia, let alone Indochina. The policy advocates obviously had sufficient analytical support from their own departments and agencies as well as from the organs of the Council machinery. Their bargaining skills and influence varied slightly depending on the nature of the question. There seem not to have been any evident status problems between the NSC principals and the President. The Council consideration was a matter of issues, not personalities. Thus the position of an individual NSC adviser was not weakened by the fact that other participants could have a say in the field represented by that particular department head. Whether the NSC advisers had been properly informed or whether they were interested, is hard to say.

The time for an “adequate” handling of the issues on a competitive basis could have become a problem (“Competition Principle”), but in the instances examined it appears not to have done so. George has remarked that multiple advocacy “entails costs”¹¹. Thorough deliberation (including debate and give-and-take) therefore slowed down the process, but, at the same time, it also prevented the NSC from producing premature agreements or the President from reaching hasty decisions. If the issue was not pressing, the NSC often requested its PB, the State and Defense Departments, the latter and the CIA or a committee to study the problem further and to make recommendations. Advocate performance

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9 For discussion on the problems relating to political appointees supervising the work of the professionals within the national security bureaucracy and different objectives of various departments and agencies see Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, pp. 227 ff.

10 See Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979.

11 See George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980.

was sometimes clearly affected not only by inadequate background information but also by a lack of cultural understanding and real policy options. Thus, the President at times complained that his Council structure had been unable to come up with viable alternatives.

In order to secure the presentation of a wide range of policy options, special committees and consultants were brought into the process (“Diversity Principle”). The augmentation of the Council channels was often conducted within the framework of the OCB. In early 1954, such entities included the Special Committee in early 1954 and the various OCB (Special) Working Groups. Likewise, several expert panels were commissioned to study specific, often regional, problems. Sometimes, as during the Geneva Conference of 1954, a small group of NSC principals was assigned the task of operating as an emergency briefing mechanism. Vietnam-related items were hardly ever discussed in the Council with only a limited attendance but rather with a broadened participation. Often the Chairmen of the AEC or USIA were represented, sometimes even the Chief Justice, who did not actually participate. In the substantive discussions the average number of members per meeting was over twenty. The principals were busy department heads, who traveled quite extensively. They were, therefore, represented by their alternates, who could also voice their opinions. Sometimes the full JCS participated in considering of a specific item on the NSC Agenda. Additional views were presented by alternates of the principals, Special Envoys, Ambassadors, or committee chairmen, who sat in at the Council meetings or appeared before the organs of the OCB by special invitation.

Robert Cutler, Dillon Anderson, William H. Jackson and Gordon Gray were the “custodian-managers” of the policy-making process. They were responsible for the centralized coordination: they made multiple advocacy work by focusing and eliciting different advocacies. They had considerable influence as they were responsible for setting the agenda, together with the President and NSC’s Executive Secretary. The Special Assistants were not advisers. There were no role conflicts or overloads for any of the Special Assistants. They succeeded, for example, in restricting their activities to strictly defined fields, only rarely stepping over the line and exceeding their authority. They did not move into the foreign policy jurisdiction of the State Department. Thus they kept on good terms with the various Secretaries of State. Cutler did not worsen the State-Defense rivalry as he made sure that the Pentagon/JCS and the State representatives received copies of important reports. Apart from the fact that changes in the composition of the policy advocates did not noticeably affect the NSC process, changes in the Special Assistants, nevertheless, had an impact on the process. It seems that Gray’s performance matched that of Cutler, but Anderson, who was insecure, seems to have fallen short of becoming an effective custodian-manager. His performance is, however, hard to evaluate as his tour of duty coincided with the “peaceful” time in South Vietnam, caused by Diem’s temporary and apparent success.

Even though the NSC machinery had elaborate formal structures it produced content that was evidently rather vague. The Policy Papers, for example, were

intended, as called for in the original idea of the Council, for long-range contingency planning, but were hard to utilize in a time of rapid crisis. In the case of Vietnam, the emphasis of the Papers lay in safeguarding US prestige, securing freedom of action for the US, or postponing decisions until a later date. Sovereignty and the end of colonialism were overemphasized but, on the other hand, human rights were virtually forgotten, even though a Western-type democracy was supposed to be installed in South Vietnam, which was to be transformed into a strong, anti-Communist, friendly state. The NSC staffers – like the Council principals – were clearly incapable of understanding cultural factors or local nationalism. One explanation is also offered by chaos theory: the participants in the NSC-OCB machinery and those collecting information for its use did not understand what was really going in that remote Asian country, which for them was simply a place on the map. This conclusion is supported by the findings of David L. Anderson¹². The proposed NSC 5519, which was not approved and adopted, seems to have been an exception; it included specific courses of action to cancel the proposed all-Vietnam elections. The issue was also addressed in other Policy Papers. Hence, the language of NSC 5519 was put into effect through other means. On the other hand, the spirit of Geneva in 1955, for example, seems not to have had any kind of effect on the US policy toward Vietnam. The PB prepared thorough background papers, but evidently not in vain. David L. Anderson is correct in pointing out that the Policy Papers from the latter part of the 1950s basically reiterated the old ideas and included predominantly cosmetic changes in their language. In contrast, the OCB plans were certainly examples of routine, orderly paperwork. In principle, the directives of the OCB, which monitored the implementation, permitted effective coordination of their implementation. In reality, of course, as far as implementation is concerned the operating agencies and their field representatives had opportunities to interpret the instructions to their own advantage.

What kind of options did the NSC have in the question of Vietnam? After Eisenhower had received clear advice from his NSC members to back his decision not to intervene in Dien Bien Phu, the situation remained unclear. Departure from Indochina was no longer a viable option after the summer of 1954, even though Humphrey and Wilson continuously recommended it. The emphasis had shifted from an approach consisting of assistance to France to an enlarged US role, which had already been incorporated into NSC 177/NSC 5405 in early 1954. The NSC policies were clearly determined by political and military realities rather than, for example, by economic considerations, apart from the reconstruction of Japan, which was the traditional counterforce to China and the Soviet Union. South Vietnam was brought under the SEATO umbrella and attached to the US forward defense alternate (or auxiliary) base system on the opposite shore of the Pacific Ocean. The President and some of his NSC advisers favored the regional approach, and so Vietnam was sometimes

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12 See Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991.

taken up at NSC meetings “by accident” in connection with other items on the Agenda.

Was the Vietnam question handled according to the standard operating procedures of the NSC? It was, for once, a test case involving the application of new concepts and the implementation of various NSC-approved programs, be they informational, cultural, covert, economic, agricultural, land reform, internal security, military, administrative or societal in nature. Their objective was to introduce Western ideas, such as democracy, to a mainly Buddhist society. The issue of Vietnam – which grew increasingly complicated toward the end of Eisenhower’s second term – did not seem to have changed the NSC procedures, but there is a clear indication that it required the machinery to apply a multi-faceted approach. A some kind of arrogance prevailed among the NSC members: they thought they would not repeat the mistakes of the French, and so they repeatedly blamed first the French and later the South Vietnamese for the problems they experienced in implementing US policies. This attitude is illustrated in Secretary Dulles’s remarks at a NSC meeting in December 1954:

“The situation in Vietnam...was not a typical case but a special case, and we should not generalize on the basis of Vietnam, where the French had messed up the situation so thoroughly.”¹³

Even though the Vietnam question was frequently a part of US policy toward Southeast Asia or Indochina, it was, indeed, sometimes handled in a special way, since all of the possible augmented channels of the Council mechanism were utilized. This was in accordance with the original mission of the Council. A wide selection of methods produced a wide range of options. The array of channels used included informal meetings, consultants, powerful Senators, press leaks, special briefing arrangements and committees (on an ad hoc basis, or otherwise). In spite of the meticulous nature of the NSC system, it possessed a certain degree of flexibility¹⁴. The Council could, for example, adapt to rapid situations by “improvising” and by disengaging from its routines, and convene on almost consecutive days instead of following its weekly meeting schedule, or it could take up an item not on the Agenda. In order to speed up the process or to avoid leaks, some of the channels within the hierarchical system were occasionally bypassed. This meant that lower-echelon officials did not always have a chance to pre-view the proposed policies. Nevertheless, this conclusion does not suggest that consideration of the Vietnam question alone forced the NSC-OCB system to change the way in which it operated. A veil of secrecy thus hindered the work of some NSC staffers. For the same reason, Congressmen or the American people were only told a partial story about the Council deliberations and policies. Even though the NSC was not accountable to Congress, Eisen-

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13 Memorandum of Discussion of the 229th Meeting of the NSC, December 21, 1954, AWF, NSC series, Box 6, DDEL.

14 Prados also concludes that “between Gray and Goodpaster the system had flexibility”. Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991, p. 560.

hower acted cautiously within his NSC by carefully following the current Congressional opinion and the attitude of the American people.

The significance of the Vietnam question for the Eisenhower Administration and its NSC system has not been emphasized in previous scholarship. The issue was, in fact, discussed – briefly or substantively – at some 20 percent of all Council sessions held between 1953 and 1961. The peaks in consideration of the issue came the first half of 1954 and the spring of 1955. Thereafter, it was carefully monitored by the OCB, but only infrequently taken up at the Council other than as a briefing item. In the high seasons, Vietnam was often the last item on the Agenda, indicating that the matter may have been discussed after the more routine items had been dealt with. This certainly raises further questions, since in January 1961 Eisenhower did not emphasize Vietnam as having been any kind of problem. Why was Vietnam then discussed so often, if US policy-makers did not view it as a problem? One explanation could be that neither the President nor his NSC advisers understood at the time the importance of the issue, let alone the consequences of their actions.

This is clearly not the final attempt that will be made to study Eisenhower's NSC mechanism. Even though a great number of NSC-related sources have been declassified, many, unfortunately, still remain unavailable for research purposes. Greater emphasis could be placed on exploration of the work of the PB and the NSC Staff. The orderly organization of Eisenhower's Council machinery still lacks an overall administrative or organizational history. In addition, there are several relevant themes that concern Eisenhower's successors. What, for example, would have been the result if Kennedy had chosen to utilize his NSC extensively and to employ an effective system of multiple advocacy? According to George, Kennedy's policy-forming and advisory system was arranged to discourage opposition and thus the new President failed to question the consensus in crises such as the Bay of Pigs.¹⁵ Would the adherence of his NSC to multiple advocacy then have prevented a premature consensus and lifted restrictions on the advice, and thus have improved the quality of his policy choices? This is a theme for another study.

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15 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, p. 132. Bose points out that during the Cuban missile crisis Kennedy was, in fact, "receptive to some form of multiple advocacy in urgent situations". Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, 1998, p. 106.

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■ Appendices

APPENDIX I

The Secretaries of State – John Foster Dulles (1888–1959) Christian Archibald Herter (1895–1966)

John Foster Dulles was born in Washington, D.C. but grew up in Watertown, New York, and it is noteworthy that some of his relatives had been Secretaries of State. He studied law at Princeton, and also philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, France. His early professional background included experience as a diplomat, as he was a member of US delegations to numerous international conferences starting in the early 1910s. He had specialized in economic diplomacy, became a Major in the US Army during World War I. Dulles also had experience of private enterprise, and he had been a Wall Street lawyer. As a religious Presbyterian, Dulles was known for his diplomatic talent and for being an idealistic and moralistic cold warrior, who employed a grand crusader strategy. He introduced a number of new concepts into foreign policy-making.

Christian A. Herter was born in Paris, France. He lived for the first nine years of his life and also started elementary school there. He studied at Harvard and graduated in fine arts honors degree in 1915. Herter continued to study architecture and interior decorating at the School of Fine and Applied Arts in New York. During World War I, he tried to enlist three times, but because of his height, underweight and bad hips he was not accepted. Herter was also a lecturer on international relations. He embarked on a diplomatic career and participated in international conferences. He was elected to Congress in 1943 and became Governor of Massachusetts in 1952. His major long-term assignment as Under Secretary of State was the Chairmanship of the OCB. Herter followed in the footsteps of Dulles in April, 1959.

Dulles attempted to maintain overall control of the NSC system, but in the eyes of the President he had equal standing with other important members of the Council. Dulles presided at several Council meetings. There is, however, considerable disagreement about Dulles's position in the Council. The President's Special Counsel and his Appointment Secretary, Bernard M. Shanley, argues that Dulles was "the most important man", while the former CNO, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, also contends that Dulles was, in fact, an effective leader in the Council. Dillon Anderson recalls that within the NSC Dulles was "not the major figure, but a major figure". According to Gordon Gray, Dulles was "a dominant figure" in questions that were close to his own domain. To some extent, Gray adds, he was even open-minded, as long as he did not have a conviction about a specific subject. He did not, however, challenge the President, and thus accepted the status quo. This led Eisenhower to characterize Dulles as "well-informed" and "not particularly persuasive in presentation". The Secretary was always prepared for the NSC meetings. According to Bowie, whom he trusted and who sat at the Council meetings behind the Secretary, he always had a briefing session of at least an hour and a half the previous day with his Assistant Secretaries and other aides in which PB splits and other views were discussed. Dulles was not always able to convince his own advisers. At the NSC meetings he often presented overly detailed and historical – and sometimes lengthy – reports which were, however, particularly closely listened to by Eisenhower, even though Dulles spoke slowly and precisely. Cutler describes Secretary Dulles at NSC sessions as follows:

Secretary Dulles was a serious, forceful man...Before speaking, he was apt to compress and relax his lips, like a runner getting into position for a race. His eyes would gleam and flash behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. He massed and focused his intellectual powers on what he exactly said.

Sometimes Dulles brought his aides – associated with the Council matters – to give presentations on his behalf. Occasionally, after his presentations, only Secretary Wilson possibly “rode him down”, Bryce N. Harlow recalls. Dulles often disagreed with Harold E. Stassen and the highly influential Treasury Secretary, George M. Humphrey, but the President seems to have often sided with his Secretary of State, Herter later told an interviewer. At times, he traveled and thus his place had to be taken by the Under Secretaries of State. Dulles, General Ridgway recalls, was extremely sensitive if JCS members happened to trespass in “the sphere of the diplomatic”, but, on the other hand, he had difficulty of absorbing military factors which he was unable to appreciate and thus left them largely to others. The State Department representatives and Dulles were not the only advisers on foreign affairs. Herter recalls that Dulles took the decisions and only delegated the preparation of background materials. According to Dillon Anderson, Dulles had “a pragmatic approach”. Dulles’s legally-minded language seems to have been sophisticated and his speech-like comments and reports, which always focused on the essential, were respectfully received. Thus, his reasoning skills produced results. His views were not, however, always predictable. Eisenhower wrote on his diary in May 14, 1953 that Dulles appeared to possess “a curious lack of understanding as to how his words and manner may affect another personality”.

Herter was more of a “standard” Secretary of State who was a loyal “President’s man”, but he never achieved the kind of standing with Eisenhower that the President had had with Dulles. Yet their relationship was, as Harr, Jr. put it, “free and easy”. Herter had familiarized himself with the Council machinery because he had functioned as an active Chairman of the OCB. His predecessor, Under Secretary Herbert Hoover, Jr. did not like the OCB because it interfered in the functions of the State Department. Herter, however, took a different approach to the OCB work. He permitted the expression of views and regarded the meetings as educational. Nevertheless, he, too, at times complained about the number of papers. For him, the usefulness of the process varied, depending on the issue. Herter found informal (OCB luncheon) discussions useful. He once remarked that “politics is not good clean fun!”. In addition to reporting, Herter participated in the Council discussions, but seems to have concentrated on broader issues than Dulles. Herter appears, for example, to have often adopted a regional approach. He also favored long-term economic planning. Yet as Felix B. Stump recalls, judging from Herter’s ability to support the military, he was not as strong a character as his predecessor had been. Nevertheless, Herter was not knowledgeable in military matters. He also introduced initiatives within the NSC system. The medical problems of Eisenhower’s last Secretary of State grew worse toward the end of the 1950s. Gelb and Lake argue that in his private conversations with Eisenhower, Herter’s poor hearing made him turn later to Goodpaster as he did not wish to ask the President to repeat his words. Moreover, arthritis impeded Herter’s movements, Noble writes, but did not affect his sharp mind.

Sources: Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 1981; Heller, Deane and David Heller, *John Foster Dulles*, 1960; Graebner, ed., *An Uncertain Tradition*, 1961; Berding, Andrew H., *Dulles on Diplomacy* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1965); Gerson, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Volume XVII, 1967; Noble, *The American Secretaries of State*, Volume XVIII, 1970; Aliano, Richard A., *American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957–1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975); Dillon Anderson, Robert R. Bowie, Arleigh A. Burke, Gordon Gray, Bryce N. Harlow, Christian A. Herter, Richard M. Nixon, Matthew B. Ridgway, Bernard M. Shanley, Bromley K. Smith, Maxwell D. Taylor Oral History Transcripts, PUL; Felix B. Stump Oral History Transcript, COHP; Guhin, John Foster Dulles, 1972; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 1973; Pruessen, John Foster

Dulles, 1982; Bowie quoted in Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980", 1982; Cutler, *No Time for Rest*, 1966; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982; Challener, "The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower," in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986; Harr, Jr., "Eisenhower's Approach to National Security Decisionmaking," in *Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III*. Ed. Thompson, 1984; Gelb and Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, 1984; Toulouse, Mark, G., *Transformation of John Foster Dulles: From Prophet of Realism to Priest of Nationalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985); Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors*, 1988; Gaddis, John Lewis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Marks III, *Power and Peace*, 1993; Craig, Gordon A. and Francis L. Lowenheim, eds, *The Diplomats 1939–1979* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Immerman, John Foster Dulles, 1999; Oikarinen, *The Middle East in the American Quest for World Order*, 1999.

APPENDIX II

The Special Assistants for National Security Affairs –

Robert Cutler (1895–1974)

Dillon Anderson (1906–1974)

William Harding Jackson (1901–1971)

Gordon Gray (1909–1982)

The position of the Special Assistant as the principal supervisory officer of the NSC was created at the beginning of the Eisenhower Administration. According to Destler, Special Assistants were superintendents of the interagency policy planning system. The Special Assistant was to remain neutral on policy matters and not to make public statements, but rather to maintain the confidentiality of the NSC process. They were to help in conducting the NSC meetings by presenting departmental and agency views to the Council members and summarizing the essence of discussions.

Robert Cutler was born in Brookline, Massachusetts. He had graduated near the top of his class at Harvard Law School, and became a Boston lawyer, investment banker and fiduciary. He had even been an English instructor at Harvard and published romantic love novels in his early 20s, but upon discovering that literature could not support him, he returned to the law. Cutler was the Director and the President of the Old Colony Trust Company. He had worked for numerous local and national charities and was a great public speaker and a raconteur. Furthermore, Cutler had served in both World Wars and was a retired US Army reserve Brigadier General (appointed in 1945). He had worked for the Pentagon during World War II. He had been active in Republican politics as a fund raiser. He was a lifelong bachelor. In the early 1950s, Cutler had served as Gordon Gray's Deputy Director of the PSB and as an SNSCS member. Cutler, who had first met Eisenhower in 1948, had urged him to become a Presidential candidate in 1952 and was an active supporter in the campaign. He wrote speeches in which the candidate promised to change "the shadow agency" into substance. Cutler was Administrative Assistant for the first two months of the Eisenhower Administration before becoming the Special Assistant in March 1953. He served until April 1955 and again from January 1957 through July 1958.

Dillon Anderson was born in McKinney, Texas. His similarities with Cutler were considerable. Anderson was a Houston lawyer and a writer who had published two novels. He had studied at Yale Law School and was involved in several corporations and associations. He was a US Army Colonel and had worked in the Department of Defense after World War II. He had some expertise on national security issues as he had worked on legislation for unification of the armed services. Anderson had also been one of the

civilian consultants to the NSC (with respect to security programs) at the beginning of Eisenhower's first term. He served as Special Assistant from May 1955 to August 1956.

William H. Jackson was born in Nashville, Tennessee. Like Cutler, he was Harvard-educated like Cutler. Jackson had also worked in business. He had served as an intelligence officer during World War II and had been discharged with the rank of Colonel. He knew Eisenhower personally, and he also had a CIA background. He filled in the position as Acting Special Assistant for a period of only three months – September–December 1955 – until Cutler was ready to begin his second stint in the Executive Office of the President at the White House.

Gordon Gray was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and came from a wealthy tobacco business family. He studied at a private school, but later at a college. He was a man with many qualifications. His activities had included three terms in the North Carolina Senate, law practice, the presidency of a publishing company and overseas Army duty during World War II, and was discharged as Captain. He had also been President of the University of North Carolina. Gray was the only Special Assistant who possessed expertise in national security affairs as he had been working for the Pentagon. He had also been the Secretary of the Army 1949–1950, and served in 1951 as the Director of the PSB and as a consultant to the NSC. He had attended the Council and OCB meetings as Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA and as an NSC principal, as the Director of the ODM from March 1957, until he became the Special Assistant.

Cutler managed the different levels of the NSC process masterfully. Bromley K. Smith recalls that Cutler “was more or less running the NSC meetings as the teacher, and the members were the class”. According to Hall, he drove the PB and the PB Assistants “at a merciless pace” and demanded that they should express their views, since his own performance depended upon them. Cutler even brought into the NSC process analytical inputs from non-governmental sources in order to have access to diverse views. Discussions with Cutler, who acted occasionally as a rapporteur, also provided the President with one of several sounding boards. In the words of Pusey, Cutler was “sharp-tongued” and “hard-working”. He was an accountant-like official, who kept a low profile. Yet he aimed at perfection. He was a joker and a quipster, but also compulsive. According to Hall, he became frustrated whenever he sensed his role to be inadequate rather than ambiguous. As a custodian Cutler, Hall adds, was an “‘active second guesser’ on planning”, occasionally also a policy adviser and a spokesman and an enforcer through the OCB. Hall concludes that he was not an operator or a watchdog. Nor did Cutler protect the partisan interests of Eisenhower either if they were in conflict with the national interest. He aimed at serving the President and avoided the press by never going to parties. Eisenhower had a very high regard for Cutler's performance. Cutler always came to the NSC meetings well prepared and commenced his briefings immediately. When moderating the Council meetings, Cutler kept the feet of the NSC members on the ground and set unruly discussion back on track by reminding the others about the existing policy papers. He interrupted discussions to ask questions about the instructions concerning language. According to Bowie's recollections, Cutler was “a facilitator, a raiser of questions, a poser of issues”, who did not step on Secretary Dulles's toes and thus got along with him. Bromley K. Smith adds that Cutler was the “introducer of the papers”. He was convinced, Hall continues, of the wisdom exercised by Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers, but doubted the intellectual merits of Wilson. Cutler, unlike the Chief Executive, could tolerate interpersonal clashes. Hall calls him “conflict-prone”. According to Elmer Staats's recollections, Cutler had once given an unusually long briefing at a meeting. The President had replied: “Dammit Bobby, bring us issues and options so we can make some decisions here!” In early 1953, Eisenhower introduced Cutler as his “keeper of the keys”. A poem about Cutler (see “Advising the President” in chapter 1, above) reveals that in telephone conversations he often pressured officials by remarking: “Will you do it or shall I take it up with the boss?” His personal activities helped to integrate interdepartmental viewpoints and also the OCB into the NSC

machinery. According to Hall, the OCB was, for Cutler, "a mechanism through which he could give veiled orders to other departments, with certain limits on his authority because of the collective and consensual character of this body".

Jackson was, in the words of Prados, "a troubleshooter" for Eisenhower. He was active by making recommendations for changes in the NSC-OCB machinery. Anderson's performance as Special Assistant seems to have pleased neither the President nor the NSC Staff. He shared in the low profile approach of Cutler. According to Shanley, Anderson was good at presentations. He has remarked that he did not take advantage of his direct access to Eisenhower; instead, he set aside his own views and did not offer policy advice to the President. In consequence, he did not have clashes with Secretaries Dulles, Wilson or Radford.

Gray was intelligent, witty, but also modest. Compared to Cutler's sharpness and aggressiveness, Gray was gracious. He earned the complete and unbiased respect of Eisenhower and was generally regarded as a man of great ability and integrity. He was sensitive to the views of the participants in the NSC machinery. The NSC and its Staff achieved its peak during Gray's tenure. Bernard M. Shanley, however, who sat in at the Council meetings, recalls that Gray "was a little out of his depth" and would have been better at the Pentagon.

None of the the Special Assistants actually had a conflict relationship with Secretary Dulles. Gray later explained that if the Special Assistant wanted to place an item on the Council agenda he would receive support from Eisenhower even if there was opposition from Secretary Dulles or the JCS Chairman. Shanley confirms Gray's recollections and adds that Secretary Dulles did not dare to challenge the President's approval of any issue.

Sources: Pusey, *Eisenhower the President*, 1956; Cutler, "Defense Organization at the Policy Level," 1959; Cutler, *No Time for Rest*, 1966; Gray, Gordon, "Organizing for Total Defense," 1960; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991; Dillon Anderson, Andrew J. Goodpaster and Gordon Gray Oral History Transcripts, PUL; Robert R. Bowie, Thomas S. Gates, Jr. and Bromley K. Smith Oral History Transcripts, COHP; Arthur S. Flemming (#504), Bernard M. Shanley (#348) and Timothy Stanley Oral History Transcripts, DDEL; WHO, NSC Staff Papers 1948–1961, Executive Secretary's Subject File series, Box 18; A poem written for Cutler's luncheon, March 25, 1955, Allen W. Dulles Papers, Box 66, PUL; Anderson, *The President's Men*, 1968; Destler, I.M., "A Job That Doesn't Work," *Foreign Policy*, Volume 38 (Spring 1980); George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980; Hall, "The 'Custodian-Manager' of the Policy-Making Process," in George et al., *Toward a More Soundly Based Foreign Policy*, 975; Eisenhower's letter to Cutler, January 20, 1956, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The Presidency: The Middle Way XVI*. Ed. Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 1972; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991; Anderson quoted in Henderson, "Advice and Decision," in Hoxie et al., *The Presidency and the National Security Policy*, 1984; Harr, Jr., "Eisenhower's Approach to National Security Decisionmaking," in *Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III*. Ed. Thompson, 1984; Bock, *The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant*, 1987. *Who's Who in America, Volume 29: 1956–1957. Two Years* (Chicago: Marquis, 1956).

APPENDIX III

The Vice-President – Richard Milhous Nixon (1913–1994)

The later President of the US, Richard M. Nixon was born into a poor Quaker family in Yorba Linda, California. He obtained a law degree from Duke Law School by graduating third in his class. During World War II he served as a naval officer and was discharged as Lieutenant Commander. Before entering political life in his 30s he practiced law and was a tax lawyer in Whittier, California. He won a seat in Congress in 1946. Four years later he moved to the other Chamber and became a Republican Senator. He served as Eisenhower's Vice-President during both terms.

Nixon apparently had respect for the Council system, but not in the way in which Eisenhower managed it. According to Hoff-Wilson, the NSC “officially included him but privately excluded him” from the process. Nixon, as he knew himself, was not part of Eisenhower’s inner circle of NSC advisers. Nevertheless, in his own presidential campaign he promised “to restore” the NSC “to its preeminent role in national security planning”. Another indication of his commitment was that he wanted to be briefed on the discussion if he happened to miss a meeting. In general, he showed interest in the Council work and tried to attend all of the meetings. Nixon often used to talk to Flemming about the meetings. A memorandum from the fall of 1955 reveals that Nixon wished “to use the NSC as much as possible to assist him in the tasks he will have to perform during the period of the President’s illness”. He sometimes also reported to the Council on the fields he was expected to know about. Nixon presided over some 30 NSC meetings and when he did he seems not to have been in control in the same way as Eisenhower. His active participation seems not to have been constant. Nixon’s role in policy formulation depended on the subject matter. Sometimes he was an outspoken expert and at other times he remained in the background. According to the recollections of a former Pentagon official, Sprague, Nixon was a careful man who “was discreet about discussing things at the NSC, and did so usually only when he was asked to do so”. He often expressed straightforward views at the Council meetings and offered feasible recommendations. He used simple and clear language as well as psychological warnings. In Council discussions Nixon favored a more militant foreign policy than that voiced publicly by the President. The Vice-President commented on the political feasibility of proposed policies, including a judgment on how Congressional leaders and ultimately Congress would receive a particular program or policy. According to Dillon Anderson, the position of the Vice-President was ambivalent in the NSC as he was a part of both the Executive and Legislative Branches. Bryce N. Harlow recalls that Eisenhower appreciated Nixon’s knowledge of Congress. Secretary Dulles managed to torpedo the proposal that Nixon should become Chairman of the OCB and take the place of the Under Secretary of State.

Sources: Harry H. Schwartz’s memorandum for the record, September 27, 1955, Records Relating to State Department Participation in the NSC, Lot 66 D 148, Box 122, NSC – Miscellaneous Memos 1955, RG 59, NA; Dillon Anderson and Mansfield D. Sprague Oral History Transcripts, COHP; Arthur S. Flemming (# 506) and Bryce N. Harlow Oral History Transcripts, DDEL; Berding, Dulles on Diplomacy, 1965; Harwood, Michael, *In the Shadow of Presidents: The American Vice-Presidency and Succession System* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966); Mazo, Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait (New York: Harper, 1968); Kolodziej, “The National Security Council,” 1969; Young, Donald, *American Roulette: The History and Dilemma of the Vice Presidency* (New York: Holt, 1972); Cassata, “The Eisenhower Indochina Policy,” 1986; Hoff-Wilson, Joan, “Richard M. Nixon: The Corporate Presidency,” in *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*. Ed. Fred I. Greenstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Harlow quoted in *Problems and Policies of American Presidents, Volume II*. Ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham: UPA, 1995).

APPENDIX IV

The Secretaries of Defense – Charles Erwin Wilson (1890–1961)

Neil Hosler McElroy (1904–1972)

Thomas Sovereign Gates, Jr. (1906–1983)

Charles E. Wilson was born in Minerva, Ohio. He studied at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and worked in businesses. He rose to the executive class and became the president of the General Motors Corporation from 1941 to 1953. Wilson, who lacked government experience, served as Eisenhower's first Secretary of Defense until October 1957. He is a typical representative of corporate power in foreign policy decision-making, "the military-industrial complex", in the U.S. executive branch between 1940 and 1967. According to Goertzel's calculations, of the 91 persons who held top positions as Secretaries or Under Secretaries of State or Defense, or as Service Secretaries or Directors of the AEC and the CIA, a total of 70 had previously been employed by major corporations and investment houses. This was understandable, given that Eisenhower viewed the NSC as a corporate body. Wilson also received help from his former colleagues: his Deputy Secretary was, for example, a former general manager and vice-president of General Motors, Roger M. Keys.

Neil H. McElroy was born in Berea, Ohio, and received his BA degree from Harvard. He was a specialist in advertising and promotion. He worked for large corporations such as General Electric and Chrysler, and was the president of the soap manufacturing and marketing Procter and Gamble Company from 1948 to 1957. In the mid-1950s McElroy chaired the White House Conference on Education and the National Industrial Conference Board. His tenure as Secretary lasted for a little over two years.

Thomas S. Gates, Jr. was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and studied at the University of Pennsylvania. He was an investment banker and worked for various private firms (Drexel and Company) before serving as the Under Secretary of the Navy between 1953 and 1957. He had seen overseas action in World War II and had been decorated and had risen to the rank of Captain in the US Navy. He became the Secretary of Defense in December 1959, which continued until the end of Eisenhower's second term.

Charles E. Wilson is said to have overlooked the briefings on national security issues by his staff. Thus, in the words of Robert Amory, Jr. of the CIA, at the Council meetings "on detail [he] just didn't do his homework and wasn't interested in it". At the meetings, "Engine Charlie" Wilson appears to have been somewhat reserved and uncertain. He was not overly talkative. Wilson, in the words of Harlow, was "a country philosopher" and not very articulate as a public speaker. He was a political novice. According to Eisenhower, who was not always satisfied with the performance of his first Secretary of Defense, Wilson could lecture, but had troubles in answering questions. Yet Dillon Anderson recalls that Wilson's greatest contribution in the mid-1950s was to ask oversimplified questions. He had a "more bang for the buck" ideology. According to Anderson, Wilson's questions could "blow a proposition out of the water". When he spoke, he often disagreed with others, but also had alternative recommendations to make. Eisenhower refused to "run Defense". Because of his business and administrative skills, Wilson was left to watch the budget, since he had little strategic understanding. Neil H. McElroy was a functionalist like Wilson, but he was much more experienced with the public. In debates, he was able to defend his positions. Eisenhower did not have a great rapport with either of the two men. Wilson's influence with Eisenhower, Kinnard writes, declined towards the end of the Secretary's term, and the influence of Secretaries Dulles and Humphrey grew. The President, however, appreciated Wilson's carefulness and positiveness, but he was not satisfied with Wilson's capabilities in legislative work and did not enjoy his "rambling" presentations. In discussions with the President, Wilson "was inclined to over-talk situations". Both Wilson and McElroy performed their roles, but would not have much

say or much flexibility in developing defense policy, in particular because, as John S. D. Eisenhower has said in interview, Wilson did not understand strategy. According to Burke and Greenstein, the President was his own Secretary of Defense, who “gave him [Wilson] guidance on his managerial responsibilities”. The former Staff Secretary, Goodpaster, also recalls that Wilson and McElroy were managers. The latter had a hard time working routinely with the JCS, except with Twining. McElroy and Gates, Jr. had a good rapport with Secretary Dulles, but Wilson was jealous of Dulles’s position. The power of the Secretary of Defense had risen in 1958 as a result of reorganization in the Pentagon. The President, however, warmed to Gates, Jr., who had special knowledge about strategy, tactics and weaponry. He also had a very good relationship with the JCS members. Gates, Jr. participated in the substance of Council discussions by producing facts. According to the recollections of Flemming, Gates, Jr., who understood his role better than either of his two predecessors, pushed hard as a civilian executive “all the time on this issue which he finally identified as the military industrial complex”.

Sources: Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 1981; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, COHP; John S. D. Eisenhower, Arthur S. Flemming (#504) and Andrew J. Goodpaster (# 378) Oral History Transcripts, DDEL; Thomas S. Gates, Jr., Bryce N. Harlow, Arthur W. Radford Oral History Transcripts, PUL; Finer, *The Presidency*, 1960; Heller, Francis H., *The Presidency: A Modern Perspective* (New York: Random, 1960); Kinnard, *The Secretary of Defense*, 1980; Wadleigh, John R., “Thomas Sovereign Gates, Jr.,” in *American Secretaries of the Navy*, Volume II. Ed. Colletta, 1980; Amory, Jr. quoted in Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991; Kinnard, “Civil-Military Relations,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986; Goertzel, Ted, “Domestic Pressures for Abstention,” in *Intervention or Abstention*. Ed. Higham, 1975; Krulak, Victor H., *Organization for National Security: A Study* (Washington, D.C.: United States Strategic Institute, 1983); Edwards, George C., III and Wallace Earl Walker, eds, *National Security and the U.S. Constitution: The Impact of the Political System*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Doyle, *Inside the Oval Office*, 1999; Flemming, “Perspectives on Eisenhower’s Values,” in *Portraits of American Presidents*, Volume III. Ed. Thompson, 1984.

APPENDIX V

Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization – Arthur Sherwood Flemming (1905–1996)

Arthur S. Flemming was born in Kingston, New York. He was well-educated and held a Ph.D. from the American University, Washington, D.C. Flemming had a professional university background. He had worked as an instructor in government at several distinguished East Coast universities, including the American University, George Washington University and Temple University. He had also been a newspaper editor. He was familiar with US Government and public affairs, and not only in theory, since he had served as the Republican member on several governmental commissions. He had, for example, been a member of the War Manpower Board and worked in the Navy Department during World War II and in the Department of Labor during the late 1940s. When he became the ODM Director, he was on leave from the presidency of Ohio Wesleyan, his home university. He was the first alumnus and the first layman of that university, and he was an active Methodist. Flemming’s tenure lasted until 1957. During Eisenhower’s second term, he served as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

Even though he was an NSC principal, Flemming was almost a back row character, and for much of the time he appears to have remained quiet. Flemming could be characterized as a listener even though he was a Council principal. He had, in fact, taken

Eisenhower's instructions literally that he should listen to the discussions and express his own views. He was, however, a frequent questioner. Usually, he wondered whether his Office had to do anything. Flemming seems not to have been too well informed. Nevertheless, Eisenhower appreciated his executive ability. The President had asked him to join his Administration because he had a wide knowledge of the function and organization of government. According to Harr, Jr., Flemming had "an unusual sense of staff work". Flemming seems to have understood the significance of the Council work and later admitted that it had made a serious impact on Eisenhower's thinking and the evolution of policy, just as the Cabinet discussions had in domestic issues.

Sources: Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 1981; Arthur S. Flemming Oral History Transcripts (# 504 and # 506), DDEL; Flemming, "Perspective on Eisenhower's Values," in *Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III*. Ed. Thompson, 1984; Harr, Jr., "Eisenhower's Approach to National Security Decisionmaking," in *ibid.*; *Who's Who in America 1956-1957*, 1956; *Newsweek*, February 9, 1953.

APPENDIX VI

Mutual Security Administrator and Special Assistant to the President for Disarmament – Harold Edward Stassen (1907–2001)

Harold E. Stassen was born in Dakota County (near St. Paul), Minnesota, and was raised as a Baptist. He studied law in the University of Minnesota, and after graduating in 1929, he opened a law office in South St. Paul. Stassen was a Governor of Minnesota between 1939–1941; at that time he was the youngest Governor in Minnesota and US history. In World War II, he served in the US Navy in World War II as Admiral William F. Halsey's Assistant Chief of Staff. Stassen was decorated several times, and was in charge of the Navy's prisoner evacuation program in Japan. President Roosevelt selected him as a delegate to the UN charter conference in San Francisco in 1945. Stassen was the President of the University of Pennsylvania from 1948 to 1953. He was a liberal Republican and had been a strong contender for the 1948 Republican nomination for President but was defeated by Thomas Dewey. He had ran a strong campaign against Senator Robert Taft for the 1952 Republican presidential nomination, but they were both defeated by Eisenhower, who found him useful. Stassen first served as the Director of the MSA until August 1953 and then of the FOA until its abolition in May 1955. Later, he attended Council meetings as the Special Assistant to the President for Disarmament until 1958. Stassen left the Eisenhower Administration voluntarily when he was asked to accept another job. Ambrose calls him "the great comic figure of American politics, the perennial presidential candidate, the ultimate leader of lost causes".

Stassen had to engage in interdepartmental cooperation in the field of economic diplomacy. At the NSC sessions, he was a serious debator and a forceful questioner. He regarded the role of the Council in determining the level of foreign aid as crucial. Stassen had personal tenacity; his charm did not last long, but he had a strong mind as well as being an energetic and impervious official. His style had given him enemies. He did not get along with Secretary Dulles, and their disagreements had to be settled face to face outside the Council meetings. In his arms control role, Dulles, however, had an advantage over Stassen as the Secretary of State cleared the disarmament proposals. Dulles also reported on such proposals to Eisenhower. After 1956, Stassen was not as influential as he had been earlier as he had seriously attempted to block Nixon's renomination and to get Christian A. Herter nominated as Vice-Presidential candidate. His simplified views were often close to Radford's hard-line hawkish positions. Stassen felt comfortable challenging the President. He asked good questions, required

clarifications and offered thought-out options for the use of the other Council members. According to Dillon Anderson, Stassen “was a terrific presenter”, who utilized such things as charts, graphs and figures to illustrate his points. An OCB Staff member and later Assistant to the Staff Secretary in the White House, Albert Toner, recalls that Stassen had taken over the strong position of the Psychological Warfare Adviser, C. D. Jackson, in the Board work. Stassen had good staff support and was also, Toner adds, “very effective in inter-agency committees”.

Sources: Matteson, Robert E., *Harold Stassen: His Career, the Man, and the 1957 London Arms Control Negotiations* (Inner Grove Heights: Desk Top, 1993); Stassen, Harold with Houts, Marshall, *Eisenhower: Turning the World Toward Peace* (St. Paul: Merrill, 1990); Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors, 1988*; Ambrose, Stephen E., *Nixon: The Education of a Politician 1913–1962* (New York: Simon, 1987); Harold Stassen Oral History Transcript, PUL; Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, COHP; Albert Toner Oral History Transcript, DDEL; Anderson, *The President’s Men*, 1968; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982; *Newsweek*, May 18, 1953.

APPENDIX VII

The Secretaries of the Treasury –George Magoffin Humphrey (1890–1970) Robert Bernerd Anderson (1910–1989)

George M. Humphrey was born in Cheboygan, Michigan, and studied at the University of Michigan, and later practiced law. He was the president of Cleveland-based Mark Hanna, a mining, manufacturing, shipping and financial concern. He was also active in steel manufacturers’ organizations. Humphrey took seriously his appointment as Secretary of the Treasury, and resigned all business positions in 1953. His tenure lasted until July 1957.

Robert B. Anderson was born on a farm near Bartleson, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas Law School at the head of his class, and worked as a lawyer, general attorney, estate manager and associate professor in Texas. He knew the Pentagon as he had served as the Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense. Even though he was a protégé of Eisenhower’s, he was also a personal friend of the Democrat Senator, Lyndon B. Johnson, a fellow Texan.

Humphrey did his job enthusiastically, but did not deeply understand foreign affairs. Rather, he was an unyielding and resolute guardian of the nation’s budget and did not favor foreign aid. Humphrey, who was candid and outgoing, had considerable influence in the Council machinery as well as in the Cabinet. His economic thinking resembled that of the President. When he spoke for a sound economy and balanced budgets at the NSC, the principals generally believed he was speaking for Eisenhower. He was well-informed and did not hesitate to present dissenting views or to oppose proposed programs forthrightly. In consequence, he was known among the Council members as “Mr. No”. Eisenhower described him in 1953 as having been “persuasive in his presentations” and as a person who always brought something new to the various high-level meetings, where he was “an acceptable figure”. Humphrey and Dulles, who equalled each other in being strong voices, often had arguments on matters at the NSC. However, the Treasury Secretary more often argued with the Pentagon representatives about money. Both Humphrey and Anderson were greatly respected by the President. Anderson had at one time even been a potential Vice-Presidential candidate. In private conversations, Eisenhower often commented that Anderson would be capable of becoming his successor. According to Hall, Anderson matched up to his predecessor’s influence, but was even “more retiring”. He could forcefully argue his views at the NSC and he was also a flexible negotiator. Other NSC members also respected Anderson.

Radford later commented on Anderson's performance as Secretary of the Navy that he "instills confidence in his subordinates and associates by his dedicated effort". When it came to economic philosophy, both Secretaries were equally fiscal conservatives.

Sources: Howard, Nathaniel R., ed., *The Basic Papers of George M. Humphrey as the Secretary of the Treasury 1953–1957* (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1965); Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 1981; Dillon Anderson and Thomas S. Gates, Jr. *Oral History Transcripts, COHP*; Dwight D. Eisenhower and Christian A. Herter *Oral History Transcripts, PUL*; Larson, Arthur, *Eisenhower; The President Nobody Knew* (New York: Popular Library, 1968); Kinnard, *The Secretary of Defense*, 1980; Radford quoted in Bauer, "Robert Bernerd Anderson," in *American Secretaries of the Navy, Volume II*. Ed. Coletta, 1980; Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947–1980", 1982; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991; Norton, Hugh S., *The Quest for Economic Stability: Roosevelt to Reagan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985); Brauer, Carl M., *Presidential Transitions: Eisenhower through Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

APPENDIX VIII

The Chairmen of The Joint Chiefs of Staff –

Omar Nelson Bradley (1893–1981)

Arthur William Radford (1896–1973)

Nathan Farragut Twining (1897–1982)

Lyman Louis Lemnitzer (1899–1988)

Even though the President has the freedom to select who is permitted to attend the NSC meetings, he has to choose the JCS Chairman from a small group of senior career military officers to become his main military adviser. The Council relied on the JCS views.

Eisenhower's first JCS Chairman was a carry-over from the Truman Administration. A war hero, Omar N. Bradley, who was born in Clark, Missouri, was Eisenhower's West Point classmate. In 1915 he graduated 44th in his class, well ahead of the future President. Bradley was an infantry officer who spent the years before World War II predominantly as a student and an instructor at various army schools. Between 1943 and 1945 he fought mainly in Europe, from Normandy across Europe. Before becoming the first Chairman he served as the Head of the Veterans' Administration and Army Chief of Staff after Eisenhower vacated the job in late 1947.

Arthur W. Radford had been born in Chicago, Illinois. He studied at the Naval Academy in Annapolis and was a mediocre student. He was one of the early Navy aviators, receiving his wings at the beginning of the 1920s. He served on board a battleship in World War I, and in the next war commanded various fleets, especially carrier groups, in the major Pacific battles. He subsequently commanded the US Pacific Fleet before and during the Korean War and also served as the High Commissioner, to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. As a result of his background, he was an Asia-firster. He was an exception in that he had not served as a service chief before coming to the chairmanship in mid-August 1953, but instead he came directly from an operational command as the Pacific Commander-in-Chief. After hearing that he was to receive a fifth star, Radford refused Eisenhower's offer of an extension and chose retirement in 1957.

Nathan F. Twining was born in Monroe, Wisconsin. In 1918 he graduated from West Point in the middle of his class from a course which had been shortened to two years from the normal four because of World War I. He was first commissioned into the infantry, and after a short ground observer mission in Europe, he entered flight training

in the early 1920s. During World War II he saw action in the Pacific and European theaters of war, as well as with the tactical and strategic air forces. Twining was awarded the Air Medal after he crash-landed a heavy bomber in the Pacific in January 1943 and was adrift at sea for six days before being rescued. He was the USAF Chief of Staff and took over the chairmanship in mid-August 1957, but resigned for health purposes in the fall of 1960.

Lyman L. Lemnitzer was from Honesdale, Pennsylvania. He was a coast artillery officer, whose career during the inter-war years bore a resemblance to that of Bradley, with the exception of some troop duty. He had the reputation of being an able military planner. In World War II he served as a staff officer in campaigns around the Mediterranean. He also worked under Eisenhower. Lemnitzer received the Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry as a division commander in Korea, and from 1953 to 1955 he commanded US Army Far East forces. He was a service chief for only a very short tenure of fourteen months before becoming the Chairman in October 1960.

Bradley was quiet and looked like a professor. His tenure ended as early as in August 1953. Eisenhower had made it plain that his first JCS had his full confidence, but when Bradley's second two-year term expired in August 1953, Bradley could not be reappointed without a change in the law, and he wished to retire. He was succeeded by Radford, who was an able advocate of the Administration's position on defense questions for a full four years. As Bradley had acquired his military experience mainly in Europe, Radford's appointment reflected the Administration's objective of re-examining its global strategy and placing greater emphasis on Asian issues. Radford was generally regarded as being tough, punctilious, and a man of controversy who made both friends and enemies. Nevertheless, in social contacts he gave the impression of a widely-read and moderate individual who had some wit. As such, he was efficient and had thus earned the admiration of the top NSC principals, including the President and Secretaries Dulles, Humphrey and Wilson, who had urged the President to change all the members of the Chiefs to carry out new policies. Although the Chairman of the JCS did not have a real role in the budgetary process, Radford's economic and strategic views were both in harmony with those of Eisenhower. As a strong person and highly influential ironclad adviser, Radford often acted in his own right and thus left the Secretary of Defense – even in budget issues – and other service chiefs in his shadow when they submitted their views to the Council. They, however, sometimes accompanied him to the Council meetings. Burke and Greenstein argue that Radford was the only adviser “whose stature approximated that of the secretary of state”. Radford was an articulate, personable and hawkish hard-liner, who advocated carrier air power. He took pride in his role within the NSC system. Even though he was not a full member of the Council, the President encouraged him to speak up at its meetings. Radford did not waste words or use rhetoric. Instead, he was, in the words of Dillon Anderson, a concise “disciplinarian”. Nevertheless, he was a spokesman for the military point of view. Apparently, Radford was not satisfied with the absence of influence on the follow-through of policies; he continuously attempted to get a JCS representative on the OCB. Radford's cooperation with his successor, Nathan Twining, was an exception among Pentagon top brass. Twining was not as partisan in his approach to the Chairmanship of the JCS. He was important to the Administration as he represented the USAF with its strategic deterrent. Twining held middle-of-the-road views and also got along well with Secretaries Dulles and McElroy. General Lemnitzer had only a very short tenure during the Eisenhower Administration but he developed an excellent rapport with the President.

Sources: Bradley, Omar N., *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Holt, 1951); Kaufmann, William W., ed., *Military Policy and National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); Huntington, Samuel P., *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Dillon Anderson and Robert R. Bowie Oral History Transcripts, COHP; Neil H. McElroy Oral History Transcript, PUL; Arthur S. Flemming Oral History Transcript (# 504), DDEL; Kinnard, The

Secretary of Defense, 1980; Kinnard, "Civil-Military Relations," in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986; Records of the JCS, Chair's File (Radford), Box 29, 334 O.C.B., RG 218, NA; Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam*. Ed. Jurika, Jr., 1980; Gavin, *Crisis Now*, 1968; McCarley, J. Britt, *General Nathan Farragut Twining: The Making of a Disciple of American Strategic Air Power, 1897–1953* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Binder, L. James, *Lemnitzer: A Soldier for His Time* (Dulles: Brassey's, 1997); Halperin, Morton H., *National Security Policy-Making: Analyses, Cases, and Proposals* (Lexington: Lexington, 1975); Korb, Lawrence J., *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Weigley, Russell F., *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944–1945* (London: Sidwick, 1981); Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980", 1982; Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume Two*, 1984; Cassata, "The Eisenhower Indochina Policy", 1986; Perry, Mark, *Four Stars* (Boston: Houghton, 1989); Webb, William J. and Ronald H. Cole, *The Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989); Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991; *Newsweek*, May 11 and 25, 1953.

APPENDIX IX

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency –

Allen Welsh Dulles (1893–1969)

Allen W. Dulles was the brother of John Foster. He was born in Watertown, upstate New York. They both studied at Princeton, where Allen graduated with high honors in philosophy and was awarded an academic prize for ethics. After graduating in 1914, Dulles taught for a year in India. He had ambitions to become Secretary of State in the footsteps of his uncle and grandfather. Allen Dulles, therefore, began his long public service as a young junior diplomat in Europe during World War I, and in its aftermath participated in international conferences, like his brother. Allen Dulles studied law at George Washington University and left the State Department in 1926 for private practice in New York. In his position as CIA Director, Dulles drew upon his wartime experience with the OSS. He had been the European Director of OSS and as such was stationed in Switzerland, from where he directed espionage services in Germany and Italy, making contacts with resistance movements. In 1950 he joined the Agency and was put in charge of subversive-control operations. He became Deputy Director in 1951. He was most interested in the operational aspects of intelligence. Allen W. Dulles was at the time generally regarded as having been one of the few real American specialists on international intelligence.

Even though Allen W. Dulles was mainly a fact-producing intelligence adviser for the Council, he had influence, as John Foster had had, in the NSC process. He was, for example, also present if the attendance was restricted. Allen W. Dulles had charm, but he was not very good with words. His toilsome and philosophical – in the words of Pinkley and Scheer – "wide-lens picture" intelligence briefings included estimates based on the facts. They usually lasted for 30 or 40 minutes. On the other hand, Allen W. Dulles biographer Grose asserts that the presentations of the CIA Director were "concise and trenchant" and that he used "colorful anecdotes" to obtain the attention of the participants. The President's psychological warfare adviser, C. D. Jackson, wrote in July 1954 that Allen W. Dulles "would rather be fired" than furnish an opinion on policy issues. Jackson adds that he always meticulously used the phrase "on the one hand...but on the other hand". He often recited statistics and used warning language when sketching the threats to US national security. He did not offer advice on policy questions, which he considered to be the domain of his brother. Nevertheless, he participated in the discussions at the NSC and offered advice on military matters. Allen W. Dulles sat in on many of the committees of the NSC-OCB machinery. He was, like Stassen and the USIA

Directors, a rare Council principal who was also a very active member of the OCB. According to Harr, Jr., the NSC and OCB Staff used to joke that Allen W. Dulles was “a most affable” character and “innocent of administration”. He did not feel there was a need for OCB approval of covert operations if his brother agreed with him. According to the recollections of Goodpaster, Cutler attempted to bring the CIA’s clandestine activities under the control of the NSC, but the Council did not achieve real control over such activities, in part because of John Foster Dulles’s brotherly interference. The CIA Director, nevertheless, had direct access to Eisenhower “in a matter of minutes on any issue that he considered of immediate importance”.

Sources: Dulles, “The State of Our Intelligence,” 1960; Dulles, Allen, *The Craft of Intelligence* (London: Weidenfeld, 1963); Dillon Anderson Oral History Transcript, COHP; Richard H. Bissell, Jr. and Arthur Larson Oral History Transcripts, PUL; Larson, *Eisenhower*, 1968; Mosley, Leonard, *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and their Family Network* (New York: Dial, 1978); Pinkley with Scheer, *Eisenhower Declassified*, 1979; Goodpaster quoted in Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1989”, 1982; Harr, Jr., “Eisenhower’s Approach to National Security Decisionmaking,” in *Portraits of American Presidents, Volume III*. Ed. Thompson, 1984; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 1991; Leary, ed., *The Central Intelligence Agency*, 1984; Breckinridge, Scott D., *The CIA and the U.S. Intelligence System* (Boulder: Westview, 1986); Pach, Jr. and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1991; Grose, *Gentleman Spy*, 1994; *Newsweek*, February 2, 1953.

APPENDIX X

The Multiple Advocacy Model – Its Development, Strengths and Weaknesses

A distinguished Professor of international relations, Alexander L. George¹, maintains that in order to make the best use of his chosen foreign policy making system, the President requires “relevant substantive knowledge and policy relevant theories”. Foreign policy-making is not solely about values but also has cognitive dimensions, which are, George asserts, important in structuring and managing a policy-making system. George refers to the use of history lessons and, as he terms it, substantive theories of crisis management, coercive diplomacy (compellence), deterrence (strategy) and détente, which are associated with standard foreign policy undertakings and strategies. On the other hand, he also places focus “on how to structure and manage the policymaking process to increase the likelihood of producing more effective policies”.²

- 1 Alexander L. George worked with the RAND Corporation before moving to the Stanford University Department of Political Science in 1968. His main research aim was to “bridge the gap between theory and practice”. His early book, written together with his wife Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Day, 1956), in which they utilized psychoanalytic theory, is often referred to as a classic study of the role of personality in politics. He also published *Propaganda Analysis: A Study of Inferences Made from Nazi Propaganda in World War II* (Evanston: Row, 1959). George elaborated on his Wilson personality studies in his article “Power As a Compensatory Value for Political Leaders,” *Journal of Social Issues*, Volume XXIV (July 1968), pp. 29–49. He became interested in Asian issues and wrote *The Chinese Communist Army in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967) and “American Policy Making and the North Korean Aggression,” *World Politics*, Volume 7 (January 1955), pp. 209–232. For a detailed description of his research program see George’s “Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice,” in *In Search of Global Patterns*. Ed. Rosenau, 1976, pp. 114–119 and George’s *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1991), preface, pp. xii–xv. In his important article “The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-making,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 13 (June 1969), pp. 190–222; George, Alexander L., “The Causal Nexus between Cognitive Beliefs and Decisionmaking Behavior: The ‘Operational Code’ Belief System,” in *Psychological Models and International Politics*. Ed. Lawrence S. Falkowski (Boulder: Westview, 1979), pp. 95–124. George studied belief systems concerning the nature of politics and political action as well as the “operational codes” they result in. For an example of the incorporation of the beliefs and perceptions of the policy-makers into the research on national security issues see Schoultz, Lars, *National Security and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987). George co-authored with Richard Smoke the Bancroft Prize winning (1975) book *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, 1974*. Hilsman considers George as being one of the “second wave” theorists studying the politics of policy-making. Other examples of the notable participants in the second wave in the 1970s were Graham T. Allison, I.M. Destler and Morton H. Halperin. The first-wavers were, in addition to Hilsman himself, Gabriel A. Almond, Samuel P. Huntington, Richard E. Neustadt, Charles E. Lindblom and Walter R. Schilling. For Hilsman’s categorization see Hilsman, *The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs: Conceptual Models and Bureaucratic Politics*. 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1990), preface, pp. xi–xii. Seyom Brown of Brandeis University calls George “the country’s dean of scholarship on national security policy”. George, Alexander L., ed., *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview, 1991), back cover. George was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1975.
- 2 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, p. 260. See also George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, 1974* and their article “Deterrence and Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Volume 41 (January 1989), pp. 170–182; George, *Bridging the Gap*, 1993, pp. xxi, 20. The strategy of coercive diplomacy places emphasis, as George puts it, on “effecting the enemy’s will rather than upon negating his capabilities”. The strategy focuses on the use of sufficient force of an appropriate kind. Even though including

The policy-makers of the Eisenhower Administration used history in the conduct of foreign policy. Furthermore, as the former State Department official, Paul M. Kattenburg, has noted, John Foster Dulles used historical analogies.³ George points out that the Korean War produced the “Never-Again School”, which “played a quite important role in keeping [the] Eisenhower administration from intervening” in Dien Bien Phu.⁴ Furthermore, the deterrence theory⁵, which also has a special place in George’s works, had evolved during the 1950s. It is probable that even geopolitical thinking prevailed among the policy-makers. In addition, a theory concerning “limited war”⁶ came into existence during the latter part of the Eisenhower era.

coercive threats, coercive diplomacy does not exclude bargaining, negotiations and compromises. The oversimplified weak and strong variants of coercive strategy are the “try-and-see approach” and the “tacit-ultimatum”. George stresses the importance of the relationship between words and actions, the two levels of communication, in the strategy of coercive diplomacy. George, Alexander L., “The Development of Doctrine and Strategy,” in Alexander L. George, David K. Hall and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy: Laos, Cuba, Vietnam* (Boston: Little, 1971), pp. 18, 25, 27, 30. See also Smoke, Richard and Alexander L. George, “Theory for Policy in International Affairs,” *Policy Sciences*, Volume 4 (December 1973), pp. 387–413; For further discussion on the coercive diplomacy see George, *Forceful Persuasion*, 1991. For George’s contribution to the study of the international system see his “Domestic Constraints of Regime Change in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Need for Policy Legitimacy,” in *Change in the International System*. Ed. Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson and Alexander L. George (Boulder: Westview, 1980), pp. 233–262. For George’s treatment of crisis management /prevention and détente see a study *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder: Westview, 1983) and his several articles in *Avoiding War*. Ed. George, 1991. George has also experimented with theories of organizational decision making, design theory – which distinguishes between the sciences and the professions – game theory and case studies in theory formulation. See George’s articles (together with Timothy J. McKeown) “Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making,” in *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*. Volume 2. Ed. Robert F. Coulam and Richard A. Smith (Greenwich: JAI, 1985), pp. 21–58; George, Alexander L., “Criteria for Evaluation of Decisionmaking,” *Global Perspectives*, Volume 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 58–69; “Problem-oriented Forecasting,” in *Forecasting in International Relations*. Ed. Chouri and Robinson, 1978, pp. 329–336; and “Strategies for Facilitating Cooperation,” in *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons*. Ed. Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley and Alexander Dallin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 692–711. See also Craig, Gordon A. and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time*. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

3 Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy 1945–1957*, 1992, passim; For the use of history see May, Ernest R., “Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

4 Craig and George, *Force and Statecraft*, 1995, p. 262.

5 See, for example, Kaufmann, William, “The Requirements of Deterrence.” Memorandum no. 7 (Princeton: Center of International Studies, 1954); also published in *Military Policy and National Security*. Ed. Kaufmann, 1956; Amster, Warren, *A Theory for the Design of a Deterrent Air Weapon System* (San Diego: Convair Corporation, 1955); Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 1959; Kahn, Herman, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); and Sivonen, Pekka, *Ydinasepelote Yhdysvaltain poliittisen vallankäytön muovaajana* (The Influence of Nuclear Deterrence on the Wielding of Political Power in the United States) (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1992), pp. 20–32. According to George, the deterrence theory was “a deductivist product of decision theory and/or game theory. The theory was developed during the 1950s and 1960s. The developers selected historical episodes “to illustrate general points they had deduced from the more abstract models”. George, however, adds that historical cases were not utilized “to assess these general theorems more systematically”. George, “Case Studies and Theory Development,” 1979, p. 48.

6 See, for example, Schelling, Thomas, *The Strategy of Conflict* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); Kissinger, Henry A., “Strategy and Organization,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 35 (April 1957), pp. 379–394; Kissinger, Henry A., *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1957); Osgood, Robert, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); and Kissinger, Henry A., “Limited War: Con-

According to George, Eisenhower's changes in the NSC altered the "burden of central coordination" all the way up to the Council level. George argues that the meetings of the NSC were turned into a "setting for formal adversary proceedings in the debate of foreign policy". For Eisenhower, the Council system was a manifestation of his preferred decision-making style. George has written a widely-quoted book *Presidential Decision-making in Foreign Policy*. His study offers a synthesis of ways of "understanding and improving the quality of presidential-level decisionmaking in the sphere of foreign policy and national security". In order to "widen the range of information, options, and judgement before [a Presidential] decision", George discusses three "procedural tools": the devil's advocate⁷, the formal options system⁸ and multiple advocacy. The first is a relatively simple organizational device, whereas the latter two are more developed "comprehensive prescriptive theories⁹ for design models". George argues that multiple advocacy of policy alternatives in the policy-making process improves the quality of policy-making. In a way, he adds, multiple advocacy is a management-oriented theory. In this system, if there is enough time for adequate debate and give-and-take, advisers should voice their different views to the President. The system functions effectively in the kind of conditions that ensure that every point is expressed by people who possess competitive resources in the fields of staff support, analytic competence and policy expertise. Substantial Presidential-level participation, George adds, is required. He describes the role of the Chief Executive as that of a "'magistrate' who listens in a structured setting to different, well-prepared advocates making the best case for alternative options". In other words, effective competition is another requirement. It is also imperative that the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs acts as a "custodian-manager", who supervises the procedures of making Presidential national security policy. The Special Assistant should strengthen weaker advocates and ensure that even unpopular (policy) options are argued for possibly by "new advisers". George prefers the system of multiple

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 ventional or Nuclear?," in *Arms Control, Disarmament and National Security*. Ed. Donald G. Brennan (New York: Braziller, 1961), pp. 138–152. Kissinger wrote in the mid-1950s about "local wars". See his article "Military Policy and Defense of the 'Grey Areas,'" *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 33 (April 1955), pp. 416–428. George and Smoke note that limited war is a concept of deterrence. George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, p. 261.

7 With "devil's advocate" George refers to an individual who is playing a role in which the person speaks for an unpopular position that has not been raised by anyone and in which the person does not believe either. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy* 1980, p. 170. Sickels agrees that multiple advocacy "is more thoroughgoing than devil's advocacy in combatting the tendency toward premature consensus among presidential advisors". Sickels, Robert J., *Presidential Transactions* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice, 1974), pp. 36–37.

8 The formal options system is, in George's words, "the most centralized and structured organizational model" and it is intended "for securing hierarchical coordination and control". George uses the Nixon-Kissinger NSC system as an example of the formal options system. Nixon's advisory system was a result of "the choice of a White House-centered organizational model of foreign-policymaking". George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy* 1980, p. 177. For a detailed discussion see Crocker, Chester, "The Nixon-Kissinger National Security Council System, 1969–1972: A Study in Foreign Policy Management," in Volume 6, Appendices, *Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy*, June 1975 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), pp. 79–99.

9 According to Holsti, prescriptive theories stress how to achieve one's purposes. There are four descriptive theories of crisis decision-making. The organizational response model is intended for decision-making groups and bureaucratic organizations who are in a position "to shape and constrain policy choices in crisis". The hostile interaction model looks at "the antecedents and consequences of interactions among nations in crises". Strategic and tactical choices made to maximize gains and minimize losses are typical of the cost calculation model. "The impact of crisis-induced stress on certain aspects of cognitive performance that are critical in decision making" are central to the individual stress model. Holsti, Ole R., "Theories of Crisis Decision Making," in *Diplomacy*. Ed. Lauren, 1979, pp. 101–103.

advocacy over the often-used judicial concept of adversary proceedings in examining policy-making.¹⁰

George admits that his construct of multiple advocacy, like all theories for organizing policy-making, has deficiencies and limitations. The President has to be receptive to it. The theory “is not a panacea” that guarantees the quality of policy-making, and the system is not easy to install. In addition, some Presidents may choose not to utilize the multiple advocacy procedures because they “may sometimes entail costs” and make the process slow. Finally, the custodian-manager might not have “enough leverage to maintain and supervise the competitive nature of policymaking that is inherent in the system”. Bureaucratic politics might also prove to be unpredictable. George emphasizes, however, that it is likely that disorderly multiple advocacy would not suit every decision-making situation. The system may, therefore, need to be employed “selectively and with some degree of flexibility”. George emphasizes that it is imperative that a researcher should distinguish between the process and the substance of the decisions. By being forced to listen and rebut the negative opinion of dissenters, George argues, senior officials may feel that the policy issue has been thoroughly considered before the decision is made. When a multiple advocate publically defends the policy, his performance is also likely to be improved. According to George, the whole process has “rehearsal value”, and the formal modalities of multiple advocacy can assist in keeping the group together, George specifies. Furthermore, the system could provide the executive with public relations values as he witnesses the conduct of multiple advocacy. George seems to have agreed with the prevailing criticism of the consensus-nature of Eisenhower’s NSC system since he claims that Eisenhower aimed at depoliticizing the policy process to some extent and favored “multiple advocacy at lower levels of the policy-formation process”. This, according to George, resulted in a “depoliticized formulation of choices, if not an agreed-upon recommendation before the matter reached him and his top advisers for decision”.¹¹

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- 10 George specifies that, together with the time factor and Presidential participation, the third requirement for the model of multiple advocacy to work is that there should not be “major maldistribution among the various actors in the policy-making system of...intellectual (competence and information relevant to the policy issue and analytical staff and technical skills support) and bureaucratic resources (status, power, standing with the President or persuasion and bargaining skills). George, “Adaptation to Stress in Political Decision Making: The Individual, Small Group, and Organizational Contexts,” in *Coping and Adaptation*. Ed. Coelho, Hamburg and Adams, 1974, pp. 202, 207–209, 220, 237–240; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. preface, xvi, 124, 193–196, 229, 236; George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” 1972, pp. 751–785; George, “Rejoinder to ‘Comment’ by I.M. Destler,” 1972, pp. 791–795; Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, pp. 569–570; George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, p. footnote 29, p. 253. George and Smoke argue there were serious gaps in deterrence and in policy planning with regard to US policies on Indochina during the winter of 1953–1954 and in responses to the Dien Bien Phu crisis. *Ibid.*, pp. 251–253, 256–257, 262; George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” 1972, pp. 771–772. For further discussion on multiple advocacy Holsti and George, “The Effects of Stress on the Performance of Foreign Policy-makers,” in *Political Science Annual*. Ed. Cotter, 1975 and George, “Toward a More Soudly Based Foreign Policy,” in Appendix D, *Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy*, 1975, pp. 1–136.
- 11 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. footnote 11, 135, 140, 202–206; George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy,” 1972, pp. 784–785; George, “Adaptation to Stress in Political Decision Making”, in *Coping and Adaptation*. Ed. Coelho, Hamburg and Adams, 1974, pp. 196–197, 212, 236; George, Alexander L., “Problem-Oriented Forecasting,” in *Forecasting in International Relations*. Ed. Chouri and Robinson, 1978, p. 331; Destler, I. M., “Comment: Multiple Advocacy: Some ‘Limits and Costs,’” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 66 (September 1972), pp. 786–790.

David K. Hall has elaborated on the proposal of multiple advocacy in his dissertation *Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980*, which has been written under the supervision of Professor George and seeks to explain the practical feasibility of implementing multiple advocacy procedures for policy-making in a complex, hierarchical organizational environment. He regards the NSC as “an excellent natural laboratory” for the conduct of his study. Hall has chosen to explore George’s proposal because he feels it adds to our understanding of the difficulties and possibilities in shaping human behavior. According to Hall, the way in which processed information reaches the decision-maker is a central aspect of the proposal. He writes that multiple advocacy is a synthesis of two other prescriptive paradigms: classical rationality with unitary decision-maker and incremental disjointed incrementalism with multiple policy-makers with conflicting interests. Hall places multiple advocacy between the two because, according to him, it is a “mixed system with differing values among advocates but partial integration of these values in a chief executive’s subjective utility function”. Hall explicates and elaborates the principles of multiple advocacy: “Participation Principle” (Presidential-level participation), “Fairness Principle” (no maldistribution of either analytical or bureaucratic resources), “Competition Principle” (open encouragement of competition among advisers), “Diversity Principle” (a wide range of value perspectives, options and consequence estimates considered by advisers before forwarding to the President)¹². The President establishes the legitimacy of the principles and roles of multiple advocacy for all major policy decisions and is required to provide sufficient political support for any subordinate as well as to remain accessible to competing policy advocates. His final choice should be based on an advocated or personally formulated option and should also be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by advisers before action is taken. The Special Assistant makes sure that all of the four principles are fulfilled. Hall interprets George’s proposal in writing that adherence to multiple advocacy principles – in the absence of any standard process malfunctions – increases the chances of high quality choice.¹³

Hall sees it fit to ask questions pertaining to the feasibility of multiple advocacy as it demands “considerable skills and flexibility” from the President and the Special Assistant and there are imbalances in the distribution of advocate power in most complex organizations. Eisenhower, Hall writes, was highly sensitive to interpersonal conflict and had a low need for personal control, both of which “defined a modus operandi unreceptive to multiple advocacy”. Yet the situational factors were important, as his tolerance for the first and his desire for the second above-mentioned matters were

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- 12 The Diversity Principle calls for procedural actions and the “introduction of distinguished outsiders, “devil’s advocates”, multiple task forces, consultants, staff assistants, or functional experts into the decisionmaking process”. Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 59.
- 13 Based on eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophy, the classical rationality paradigm assumes that individuals act rationally in decision-making situations, whereas disjointed incrementalism, which prevailed in the 1950s, emphasized simultaneously informational uncertainty, value complexity, temporality and human context and offer means to cope with them. Disjointed incrementalism consists of issue recognition, values and interests, options, estimated consequences, choice and review and reconsideration. Hall terms the first “thesis” and the second “antithesis”. Multiple advocacy represents “hierarchially regulated decentralization – a regulated market designed to insure fair competition among multiple claimants.” Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. iv, 8–10, 12, 32, 52–61, 66, 76, 750. Multiple advocacy “consists of principles and roles for decisionmaking within any complex, hierarchical institution where individual executives are ultimately held accountable for major policy decisions”. *Ibid.*, p. 58. For Hall’s conceptual framework and sixteen hypotheses see *ibid.*, pp. 92–96; See also Hall, “The ‘Custodian-Manager’ of the Policy-Making Process,” in George et al., *Toward a More Soundly Based Foreign Policy*, 1975, pp. 100–119. The article is reprinted in *The Decisions of the Highest Order*. Ed. Inderfurth and Johnson 1988, pp. 146–154.

“volatile and conditional”. In addition, Eisenhower’s insistence upon carefully defined roles and structures supports multiple advocacy. Hall regards the Secretaries of State, Defense and the Treasury, the Chairman of the JCS, the Director of the CIA and the Special Assistants as having been the major NSC participants, but admits that this point is debatable. The Council procedures were, at the time, regarded as competitive and leveling. This, Hall asserts, is suggested by the fact that Secretary Dulles and the JCS Chairmen preferred “to keep their major programs out of this advisory system”, whereas the NSC process provided less powerful advocates with “an opportunity...for bringing their information and opinions to bear on public policy”. In spite of the fact that multiple advocacy was not always achieved, Hall notes, “the evidence contradicts the argument the executive style is an insurmountable obstacle to George’s suggestions”. Hall points out that George has admitted that the Eisenhower Administration sometimes “fell short of multiple advocacy standards”. Hall comments further on NSC criticism by pointing out that, despite the merits of its decisions or its status, “the range of subjects which it considered, the regularity of its proceedings, and the universal desire by officials to attend resulted in an equity of informational distribution not likely to be exceeded”. Because of Eisenhower’s preferences in national security matters, the importance of the NSC “as a forum for serious deliberation” was, Hall continues, increased in a radical manner.¹⁴

The presentation of the theory of multiple advocacy in the fall of 1972 was followed, as Hall has noted, by comments and criticism from academics. Of the positive responses, Kohl wrote, it is one of the six models which can be identified in the US foreign policy process. The theory was also appreciated by Bloomfield as useful in reviewing current policies. Janis called multiple advocacy a promising way to cope with problems associated with information processing in small groups of policy advisers. He adds that multiple advocacy would prevent planning groups “from making some of the grosser errors” envisioned by the groupthink¹⁵. In addition, Jervis acknowledges, in analyzing multiple advocacy there is a need to employ “devil’s – or rather devils’ – advocates” in order to “seek to structure conflicting cognitive biases into the decision-making process to help themselves maintain their intellectual freedom”. Drawing upon George’s writings, Steiner argues that the policy-makers tend “to provide overly optimistic assessments of the usefulness of those behaviors they favor in order to enhance the chances of their

14 Hall adds that the distribution of advocate resources was also “a target of their efforts to create a fair and balanced process”. Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 68, 281, 285, 290–291, 300, 376–378. There are other strategies for decision-making proposed by scholars who have worked independently of George. Davidoff suggested that the advocacy planning system could replace traditional city planning commissions. Thibault and Walker have conducted group experiments which evaluate “the purported benefits of a legal adversary system. The proposals of Janis include recommendations to use outside consultants, devil’s advocates, “and multiple planning and evaluation groups and with norms providing for impartial and nondirective leadership”. Parallel to multiple advocacy is also a suggestion by Shaver and Staines to use balanced research teams and an advocate system similar to the courtroom model “in response to governmental and academic interest in systematic social experiments to evaluate public programs”. All of these concepts are, according to Hall, supportive of George’s proposal. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63, 121; Davidoff, Paul, “The Planner as Advocate,” in *Urban Government: A Reader in Administration and Politics*. Ed. Edward C. Banfield (New York: Free, 1969), pp. 544–555, Thibault, John and Laurens Walker, *Procedural Justice* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1975), pp. 28–66, 118, Janis, Irving L., *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (Boston: Houghton , 1972), passim and Shaver, Phillip and Graham Staines, “Problems Facing Cambell’s Experimental Society,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, Volume 7 (December 1971), pp. 176–178.

15 Groupthink refers to case studies made by Janis, who concludes that competent decision-makers in small groups take self-defeating actions, because the policy-makers tend to think uncritically. See Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*, 1972, passim.

recommendations being widely accepted". Hall concludes that several other scholars "have acknowledged the descriptive and prescriptive importance" of the theory.¹⁶

Roger B. Porter studied the implementation of multiple advocacy while Hall was still concentrating on how the President organizes advice and makes decisions. In his book, *Presidential Decision Making*, he characterizes multiple advocacy as a strategy "to organize the patterns of advice" which Presidents receive from their advisers and departments and agencies. Porter describes multiple advocacy as one of the three Presidential strategies pursued since 1939. Porter's three advisement patterns are: centralized management, adhocism and multiple advocacy, any of which could be utilized, circumstances permitting. The latter is seen as an open system of decision-making "designed to expose the President systematically to competing arguments and viewpoints made by the advocates themselves". Porter uses the term "honest broker" for the Special Assistant to be in operational control and to make sure "that interested parties are represented and that the debate is structured and balanced". He also emphasizes the competition of ideas in a single high-level interdepartmental mechanism responsible for the overall coordination and management of issues in a broad policy area. According to Porter, multiple advocacy provides a full consideration of alternative courses of action (as well as improving the quality of alternatives and the arguments used to support them), assists in bridging the gap between policy formulation and implementation, and produces "a context for policy making that reflects the political forces it will later have to engage". Furthermore, it mobilizes the resources of the Executive Branch and strengthens the President's influence throughout the system in a better way than other management models. It minimizes the reliance on the substantive expertise of the White House Staff. As multiple advocacy is dependent upon individuals it benefits from continuity among advisers. Porter points out that it is difficult to successfully operate multiple advocacy and that it does not guarantee that the advocates will come up with all of the viable policy options. The limitations of the model, Porter added, are its time-consuming nature, the limited number of advocates because of the risk of leaks, a great number – even an overload – of decisions based on disagreements, and the possibility of weakening the ability of senior officials because of every participant's relatively equal voice.¹⁷

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- 16 Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council 1947–1980", 1982, pp. 10–11, 106; Kohl, Wilfrid L., "The Nixon-Kissinger Foreign Policy System and U.S.-European Relations," *World Politics*, Volume 27 (October 1975), pp. 3–4; Bloomfield, Lincoln P., *The Foreign Policy Process* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974), p. 36; Janis, Irving L. and Leon Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment* (New York: Free, 1977), pp. 397–398. For the discussion of George's proposal by other scholars, as noted by Hall, see, for example, Halperin, Morton H., *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976), pp. 170, 197; Cronin, Thomas E., *The State of the Presidency* (Boston: Little, 1975), pp. 275–276; Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 1976, pp. 108, 217; Greenstein, Fred I., "A President is Forced to Resign," in *American in the Seventies*. Ed. Allan P. Sindler (Boston: Little, 1977), pp. 96–97, 100; Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 416; and Steiner, Barry H., "Policy Organization in American Security Affairs: An Assessment," *Public Administration Review*, Volume 37 (July/August 1977), p. 359. Nevertheless, Ponturo concludes that as "Eisenhower wanted speed and action he, too, went outside the NSC system". Ponturo, John, "The President and Policy Guidance," in *The President and the Management of National Security*. Ed. Clark and Legere, 1969, p. 242.
- 17 Centralized management emphasizes reliance on the staff, whereas adhocism makes use of various advisers and advice channels in an unsystematic manner. Porter concluded that the operations and procedures of the Economic Policy Board "were consistent with the principles on which the concept of multiple advocacy is based". The model was useful in improving the process. Porter, *Presidential Decision Making*, 1980, pp. 1–4, 25–27, 29, 217, 229–252. Pika, like Porter, also calls it an open system of decision-making. Pika, Joseph A., "Management Style and the Organizational Matrix: Studying White House Operations," *Administration & Society*, Volume 20 (May 1988), pp. 7–8. Analyzing the Quemoy-Matsu

In addition to the studies made by Hall and Porter, the third major application of multiple advocacy is Alexander Moens's book *Foreign Policy under Carter*, which is concerned with Jimmy Carter's advisory system. Moens has also found it useful to use multiple advocacy "as an analytical tool and a yardstick than as a pure policy prescription" in order "to show where the things went wrong" and to outline its provision of management. He regards it, however, as "eclectic and multifaceted", but admits that it is specific enough, given the conditions of the process, the Chief Executive's role and the flow of information. Moens emphasizes the "sufficient acquisition and analysis of information to provide a valid diagnosis of the issue", the process in which the President is exposed to all the major values and interests which concern the issues and alert the President to the quality of his policy choices. According to Moens, multiple advocacy emphasizes the way in which the decisions are made, thus ignoring the substance. Furthermore, he explains, the model does not properly address psychiatric or personality distortions hampering the participant, or behavior aberrations caused by crisis-induced stress. The Special Assistant, who needs to be strong enough, should be looking for potential problems. The model, Moens adds, requires a lot from the President. In addition, outsider advisers' chances of challenging the core advisers are not certain. Moens concludes that the model does not function if there are not a diversity of options open to the NSC principals before the meetings where those options are to be debated.¹⁸

A fourth scholar who has examined Presidential decision-making processes for evidence of multiple advocacy is Meena Bose. In her book, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, she compares the ways in which Eisenhower and Kennedy formulated and communicated their national security policies. She points out that Eisenhower's decision-making style offered an opportunity to test multiple advocacy, whereas Kennedy's method of making decisions provided a case for evaluating the "consequences of its presence or absence". She also contends that Eisenhower clearly appears to have employed multiple advocacy, not only in policy-making, but also in speech writing and communicating policies. In that respect, she continues, the employment of multiple advocacy can assist in ensuring "that the resulting messages do not convey unintended signals". According to Bose, "Eisenhower's development of the New Look is perhaps the most multiple advocacy laden process in the history of the modern presidency". This meant, she continues, that the decision-making process used by Eisenhower "more than fulfilled the criteria for multiple advocacy". Nevertheless, the process was not always "a pure exercise in" multiple advocacy, Bose specifies. The Council meetings, however, offered Eisenhower a forum where he could "think out loud" about his already well-developed views and hear others' reactions". The participants knew what the President expected. Extensive NSC debates were moderated by Special Assistant Cutler. Nevertheless, Bose adds, Eisenhower was at times certain about what he was going to do, but multiple advocacy "had the important effect of conveying his chosen policy to his associates and explaining to them the reasoning behind it". During the Eisenhower years,

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crisis of 1954–1955, Henderson writes that it was a case of multiple advocacy. In the case of Eisenhower's decision-making, the deliberation had been calm, important political and military issues had been thoroughly considered, independent judgments had been made "in the face of strong conflicting assertions among top advisers", and there had been "flexibility to shift course in midstream after he accumulated wisdom of counsel from those inside and outside the administration". Henderson, *Managing the Presidency*, 1988, pp. 105–115.

18 Moens finds that, even where multiple advocacy structures have been instituted, multiple advocacy proceedings do not necessarily follow. Those structures can be in place and the President may be available for listening to advice "without actually stimulating enhanced information and option processing". Finally, Moens argues, the advocacy of (Zbigniew) Brzezinski "saved the process from becoming a string of consensus meetings". The "remedial advocacy by the process manager is unsustainable". Moens, *Foreign Policy Under Carter*, 1990, pp. 1–2, 8–15, 18–19, 168–183.

Bose emphasizes, “multiple advocacy sometimes was the enemy of eloquent expression”. She adds that this was not an inevitable effect, because the Chief Executive “can be simultaneously attentive to substantive clarity and rhetorical appeal”.¹⁹

The theory also attracted critical reviews for its weaknesses. While Destler, for example, gave some credit to the utility of George’s theory as a guide to Presidential choices, he believed there would be some practical problems in giving the Special Assistant, as custodian-manager, the necessary administrative power. Thomas has come to the same conclusion. In addition, he adds that time constraints and the influence on their self-image (a decision-making conflict could be used by political opponents) make engagement in multiple advocacy difficult for most executives. George has not acknowledged efficiently, both Hargrove and Thomas suggest, that the personal needs and style of the President will dictate his decision-making processes. The main emphasis has been placed on the role tasks of the Chief Executive. Nathan and Oliver point out, and this has also been noted by Hult, that the problems in implementing multiple advocacy are associated with accountability and authority. They argue that the theory “exacerbated the uncertainty not only about who made foreign policy decisions but also about who was an authoritative public voice of American policy and the American people to the world community or the parties of negotiations”. Greenstein and Burke, who found also positive features in the theory, suggest that multiple advocacy theory has been partially constructed from Eisenhower’s 1954 Indochina decisions without accessing the NSC documentation. After viewing the declassified materials, they write, it seems clear that NSC deliberations in 1954 “were based on a multiple advocacy process”, although it is hard to determine the “ways in which this rich context of multiple advocacy influenced the Eisenhower administration’s actions”. Greenstein and Burke have found that multiple advocacy theory is better used when analyzing how it would have influenced the policy decisions of different Administration, “rather than searching for specific effects of the vigorous policy debate that occurred in 1954”. Commenting on George’s “panacea” point, Greenstein and Burke agree, and add that “it may ameliorate defective advisory processes”. They add that George made the proposal of multiple advocacy “mitigate the full range of defects in the performance of decision-making groups” and function “as a remedy” to Janis’s groupthink.²⁰

19 Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, 1998, pp. 9, 39–40, 97–103, 106–10; Bose points out that “the purpose of the custodian-manager is to provide what Hugh Hechlo calls ‘neutral competence’ in the decision-making process”. *Ibid.*, p. 9. See also Hechlo, Hugh, “OMB and the Presidency – The Problem of ‘Neutral Competence,’” *Public Interest*, Volume 11 (Winter 1975), pp. 80–98.

20 Destler, “Comment,” 1972, pp. 786–790. For George’s “Rejoinder to ‘Comment’ by I.M. Destler,” 1972, pp. 791–795; Thomas, Norman C., *Reforming the Presidency: Problems and Prospects in The Presidency Reappraised*. Ed. Thomas E. Cronin and Rexford G. Tugwell. 2nd ed. (New York: Preager, 1977), p. 340; Hargrove, Erwin C., *The Power of the Modern Presidency* (New York: Knopf, 1974), pp. 144–145 and *ibid.*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 145–146; Thomas, *Reforming the Presidency*, 1977, pp. 340–341; Nathan, James A. and Oliver, James K., *Foreign Policy Making and the American Political System*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, 1987), p. 75; Hult, Karen M., “Advising the President,” in *Researching the Presidency*. Ed. Edwards III, Kessel and Rockman, 1993, p. 124. As George’s proposal was developed before the declassification of NSC documents, Greenstein and Burke continue, his conclusion about the intervention is “incorrectly attributed” to secondary meetings. Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, pp. 569–571; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 1991, pp. 6, 286–288. Hall notes that the critics of George have based their arguments on a single example or no empirical material. Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, p. 11.

APPENDIX XI

Eisenhower, the National Security Council and Vietnam in Scholarship

Despite the fact that the literature on the Vietnam War is abundant¹, in most books the Eisenhower years are treated only briefly in the first chapters. There are, however, some exceptions in the monograph literature in which the topic is Eisenhower Administration's policy toward Vietnam or some sectors of it. There are some scholars who have commented on the role of the NSC on a general level. Smith, who has written about the Vietnam War in an international context, argues that there were "logical contradictions between different levels of analysis" as well as "bureaucratic conflict between" some government agencies and the military over how to perceive the problem. Defense-related decision-making was "an inter-agency affair", whereas the CIA assessed political situations and recommended action. This resulted from the fact, Smith concludes, that all the departments and agencies were incorporated "into the policy process...through the NSC". Billings-Yun writes that in making his Vietnam decisions "Eisenhower was more in his milieu as a general" at the NSC meetings. At these, the President voiced his opinions freely, and "probed for facts, encouraged argument". In addition to using his Council regularly "in a special way", Gardner writes, most of the time was devoted to political questions, with only a minor emphasis on "the actual military steps". Commenting on the Eisenhower revisionism and US policy on Vietnam, David L. Anderson asserts that "through the orderly structure of weekly" Council meetings and frequent contacts with

1 There are various ways to categorize the different schools of thought and theories concerning the US involvement in Vietnam. For useful historiographical reviews see, for example, Braestrup, Peter, "Vietnam as History," *Wilson Quarterly*, Volume 2 (Spring 1978), pp. 178-187; Dunn, Joe P., "In Search of Lessons: The Development of a Vietnam Historiography," *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, Volume 9 (December 1979), pp. 28-40 (also printed in *Assessing the Vietnam War: A Collection from the Journal of the U.S. Army War College*. Ed. Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1987), pp. 19-31; LaFeber, Walter, "The Last War, the Next War, and the New Revisionists," *Democracy*, Volume 1 (January 1981), pp. 93-103; Butterfield, Fox, "The New Vietnam Scholarship," *New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 1983; Melanson, Richard A., *Writing History and Making Policy: The Cold War, Vietnam, and Revisionism* (Lanham: UPA, 1983); Herring, George C., "United States, Southeast Asia, and the Indochina Wars since 1941," in *Guide to American Foreign Relations since 1700*. Ed. Richard Dean Burns (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1983), pp. 883-885; Burns, Richard Dean and Leitenberg, Milton, *The Wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, 1945-1982: A Bibliographic Guide* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1984); Gates, John M., "Vietnam: The Debate Goes On," *Parameters*, Volume 14 (Spring 1984), pp. 15-24; Hess, Gary R., "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 10 (Winter 1986), pp. 91-106; Herring, George C., "Vietnam Remembered," *Journal of American History*, Volume 73 (June 1986), pp. 152-164; Eckert, Edward K., "The Vietnam War: A Selective Bibliography," *Choice*, Volume 21 (September 1986), pp. 51-71; Cohen, Warren I., "Vietnam: New Light on the Nature of the War?," *International History Review* 9 (February 1987), pp. 108-116; Herring, George C., "America and Vietnam: The Debate Continues," *American Historical Review*, Volume 92 (April 1987), pp. 350-362; Paterson, Thomas G., "Historical Memory and Illusive Victories: Vietnam and Central America," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 12 (Winter 1988), pp. 1-18; Divine, Robert A., "Vietnam Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 12 (Winter 1988), pp. 79-93; Anderson, David L., "Why Vietnam? Postrevisionist Answers and a Neorealist Suggestion," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 13 (Summer 1989), pp. 419-429; Kimball, To Reason Why, 1990; Smith, Geoffrey S., "Light at the End of the Tunnel? New Perspectives on the Vietnam War," *Canadian Journal of History*, Volume 26 (April 1991), pp. 67-86; and Hess, Gary R., "The Unending Debate: Historian and the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 18 (Spring 1994), pp. 239-264. See also McMahon, Robert J., "United States Relations with Asia in the Twentieth Century: Retrospect and Prospect," in *American Foreign Relations: A Historiographical Review*. Ed. Gerald K. Haines and J. Samuel Walker (Westport: Pinter., 1981), pp. 237-270.

Secretary Dulles, “Eisenhower was constantly and substantively part of the policy process”.²

There are numerous accounts in the literature of Eisenhower’s 1954 Vietnam decision not to help the French at Dien Bien Phu, which is often viewed as one of his key decisions. There are even serious studies dedicated entirely to the issue. What was the role of the NSC’s advice underlying Eisenhower’s non-decision? Hammond argued in 1960, without access to the sources, that the Council’s role in the crisis was “that in this case its freedom from partisan political considerations did not assure it a greater rationality than the more public channels of Government decision-making would permit it”. In his discussions with his NSC advisers, Richardson adds, Eisenhower decided against air strikes. Ambrose notes that the President made his decision despite several recommendations from the NSC, the JCS and the State Department. Neustadt concludes in his 1990 edition of the 1960 classic, *Presidential Power (and the Modern Presidents)*, that while considering intervention Eisenhower, besides doing other things, was “invoking the NSC”. The source of the advice “to be so self-protective” in making his choices is still unknown. Neustadt wrote. He added that Eisenhower might have received advice from “aides outside the circle of his NSC advisers – persons of discretion who recorded nothing of it”. Neustadt argues that it is more likely Eisenhower “drew those considerations out of his head”. Eisenhower, Anderson adds, was unaware of “the final direction of US policy”. His attitude towards the intervention varied. Yet in the NSC discussions he showed that he was willing to involve the US directly in Southeast Asia. “In the course of deliberations in the NSC”, Duiker writes, Eisenhower had made it clear that “although Indochina was important, it was not vital to US national security and certainly not worth the risk of global war”.³

Some assessments go further to explain how the Council functioned during the Dien Bien Phu crisis. Analyzing the Dien Bien Phu crisis of 1954, George (partly together with Smoke) accounts for the decision in terms of the advisory process and concludes that the value of “vigorous multiple advocacy” in policy-making is well demonstrated in the case, with Robert Cutler as the custodian-manager. Hall confirms George’s conclusions that in the Dien Bien Phu crisis there were no violations of multiple advocacy principles (or malfunctions). During the crisis, the President “adhered...closely to multiple advocacy”. Greenstein and Burke remind us that multiple advocacy is partially constructed from Eisenhower’s 1954 Indochina decisions without access to major NSC documentation. Eisenhower’s advisory system, Greenstein and Burke add, “had many of the attributes of” George’s proposal. After viewing the declassified materials, they write, it seems clear that NSC deliberations in 1954 were based on a multiple advocacy process, although it is hard to determine the “ways in which this rich context of multiple advocacy influenced the Eisenhower administration’s actions”. For Prados “the policy machinery was functioning smoothly” with no breakdowns in communications or coordination problems. The NSC machinery, Prados argues, “successfully formulated a policy that could be implemented”. The US policy on Indochina failed with the defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Spector argues. He explains that French military intelligence estimates

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- 2 Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, Volume I, 1983, p. 191; Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, 1988, p. 59; Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 1988, pp. 199–200; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 20.
- 3 Hammond, “The National Security Council as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination,” 1960, p. 909; also printed in *The Politics of the Federal Bureaucracy*. Ed. Altshuler 1968, p. 153; Pach, Jr. and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1991, p. 76; Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume Two, 1984, pp. 206–207; Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 1990, p. 379. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, 1990, p. 300–301; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 33; Anderson, “‘No More Koreas’: Eisenhower and Vietnam,” in Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ed. Krieg, 1987, p. 273; Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina*, 1994, p. 171.

were accepted by “too many American officials”, and thus policy-makers (including NSC members) were used to hearing positive information and they were “unprepared for the crises in March and April 1954”. Despite the fact that Eisenhower’s advisers knew what the President expected, “this did not stifle debate”, Haney argues. Haney agrees completely with the case study of crisis decision-making processes about Dien Bien Phu by Herek, Janis and Huth, who conclude that Eisenhower’s handling of the crisis was particularly effective.⁴

Different meetings of the NSC during the first part of 1954 have been emphasized by different scholars. Nelson writes that NSC summaries of the discussions do not reveal much about the specific policy decisions. The Council was, however, “informed and even discussed”, but the role of the NSC “was to address the larger issues”. She suggests that the basic NSC studies on the Indochinese situation were completed “months before the battle”, yet at the height of the crisis Eisenhower “conferred constantly with individual advisers”, especially Secretary Dulles. “Policy guidelines were formulated from NSC papers and the actions of council meetings, operational decisions were usually made in the oval office, and diplomacy was largely in the hands of Dulles”, Nelson explains in her study of the three-dimensional policy process in 1954. Burke and Greenstein argue that an NSC meeting of January 8 was the moment when “the attention of the president and his associates became fixed on this [Dien Bien Phu] crisis”. The meeting is particularly revealing in terms of “the role of his advisors and the structure of his advisory arrangements”, they add. No “options produced anything of substance”, Herring and Immerman conclude in their widely-quoted article, *The Day We Didn’t Go to War Revisited*, and they stress the importance of the “long and heated NSC meeting on April 29”. They add that Eisenhower’s decision “against immediate intervention was formalized after” the meeting. Paul A. Anderson argues that the NSC machinery produced official options papers, but the Dien Bien Phu crisis was in such a flux that when it was ready for NSC consideration “it was not immediately relevant to the choices Eisenhower faced”. Anderson has also classified the types of decision-making groups; he has examined the four NSC meetings held during the critical period of the crisis (April 6 and 29 and May 6 and 8, 1954). The first three meetings can be identified as “external” and thus reflecting “the preoccupation of the decision makers with the deteriorating situation” on the battlefield and with the pleas from Paris. In addition, he argues that the meeting on May 8 “falls into the decision-external category” as it illuminates the pressures facing the US to do something to save the situation in Indochina and in Geneva. There were not many alternatives considered, Paul A. Anderson writes, but there was, instead, “conflict as measured by the frequency of incompatible alternatives”.⁵

4 George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 251–253, 256–257, 262; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 1980, pp. 124, 229, 236; Hall, “Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council, 1947–1980”, 1982, pp. 66–67, 359–360, 701. Burke and Greenstein have found that multiple advocacy theory is better used when analyzing how it would have influenced the policy decisions of different Administrations “rather than searching for specific effects of the vigorous policy debate that occurred in 1954”. Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, pp. 569–570; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* 1991, pp. 6, 286–288; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, p. 206; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 211. Haney grades the performance of the NSC in the categories well or very well. Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 1997, pp. 66, 86, 90–93, 106–110, 116, 126–127, 130, 139; Herek, Janis and Huth, “Decision Making During International Crises,” 1987, pp. 203–226.

5 Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 315; Nelson, “National Security I,” *The Illusion of Presidential Government*. Ed. Hecla and Salamon, 1981, p. 250; Nelson, “Importance of the Foreign Policy Process,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, p. 123; Burke and Greenstein, “Presidential Personality and National Security Leadership,” 1989, pp. 78, 80, 82; Greenstein and Burke, “The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing,” 1989–1990, pp. 563–565; Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Real-*

How, then, have the content of the NSC Policy Papers on Vietnam been interpreted in scholarship? The Eisenhower Administration sought “more bang for the buck”, which was enumerated in NSC 162/2, “Basic National Security Policy” (October 1953). This meant, Spector argues, that the US was determined to fight for Indochina if necessary, whereas Gibbons considers it the first step in “reevaluating the situation in Indochina” and an indication, Buzzanco adds, that the NSC wanted to send troops into Vietnam. The NSC paper NSC 177 of December 1953 (renumbered NSC 5405 in January 1954 and titled “United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia”) is generally viewed, for instance by Gibbons and Immerman, as having been based on NSC124/2. Gibbons adds that it was, however, designed to establish new guidelines for US commitment to Indochina. George and Smoke argue that the US planners had recognized the important role which political and psychological factors would play in any eventual French defeat in Indochina. The document is an example, they add, of how difficult it was to analyze the “likely possibility of a Vietminh success without Chinese intervention”. Gelb and Betts have identified a paradox in the document: Indochina could be fought over with the Chinese, but “not worth trying to save without the French”. Hess argues that the Policy Paper “set forth the critical importance of Indochina”. For both Nelson and Destler, the document “elaborated on the ‘domino theory’”. The former adds that it “stated the basic policy position that was to influence all others”. The latter argues that, while the document “was elaborate in laying out United States policy goals, military options, and dilemmas”, it “said virtually nothing about local or regional political forces and rivalries”. Furthermore it laid down “a primitive version of the domino theory”. According to Prados, the document reveals that there was “a wide gap between envisioned policy and the realities in Vietnam”. In addition, Prados continues, it referred to political problems with allies, and to the increased risks of war in the event of atomic weapons being used in Indochina. Arnold comments that “events overtook” NSC 5405. With the approval of NSC 5429 “Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East” in August 1954, Herring argues, the Eisenhower Administration took a “new initiative”, with South Vietnam as “the key”, and “shored up the United States position in Southeast Asia”. The policy paper, Gelb and Betts add, brought “fears for Asia in its own rights”. Gibbons has found that NSC 5429 “contained a provision that presaged President Johnson’s Gulf of Tonkin Resolution” of the US promise of assistance in countering Communist aggression. In debating NSC 5429 and touching on the issue of Third World nationalism, Anderson concludes, the NSC members did not understand the situation which they were facing. For Buzzanco, the NSC took a stand by optimistically arguing that a Communist victory in Indochina was not likely, “but anomalously clamoring for US intervention to stem the disintegration there”. Watson writes that the NSC policy papers adopted in 1953 and 1954 clearly indicate “that the United States would fight to maintain its position in the Western Pacific”.⁶

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ity, 1991, pp. 31, 61–62; Greenstein, “Eisenhower’s Leadership Style,” in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*. Ed. Bischof and Ambrose, 1995, pp. 61–62. Burke explains that they “found evidence of...a highly analytic cognitive style [explicit reasoning about means and ends], thinking in terms of the trade-offs presented by policy alternatives, an ability to consider long-term as well as short-run consequences, a propensity to weigh both political and military implications of the policy problems he [Eisenhower] faced, and an ability to perceive issues and phenomena as part of more comprehensive patterns”. Burke, *The Institutional Presidency*, 1985, p. 66; Herring and Immerman, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu,” 1984, p. 361; Anderson, Paul A., “Deciding How to Decide in Foreign Affairs,” in *The Presidency and Public Policy Making*. Ed. Edwards III, Shull and Thomas, 1985, p. 165; Anderson, Paul A., “What Do Decision Makers Do When They Make a Foreign Policy Decision?,” in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Ed. Hermann, Kegley, Jr. and Rosenau, 1991, pp. 301–303.

6 Spector, *Advice and Support*, 1983, p. 194; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 1986, pp. 146, 149, 155, 268; Buzzanco, *Masters of War*, 1996, pp. 38, 41; Immerman, “Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower*. Ed. Melanson

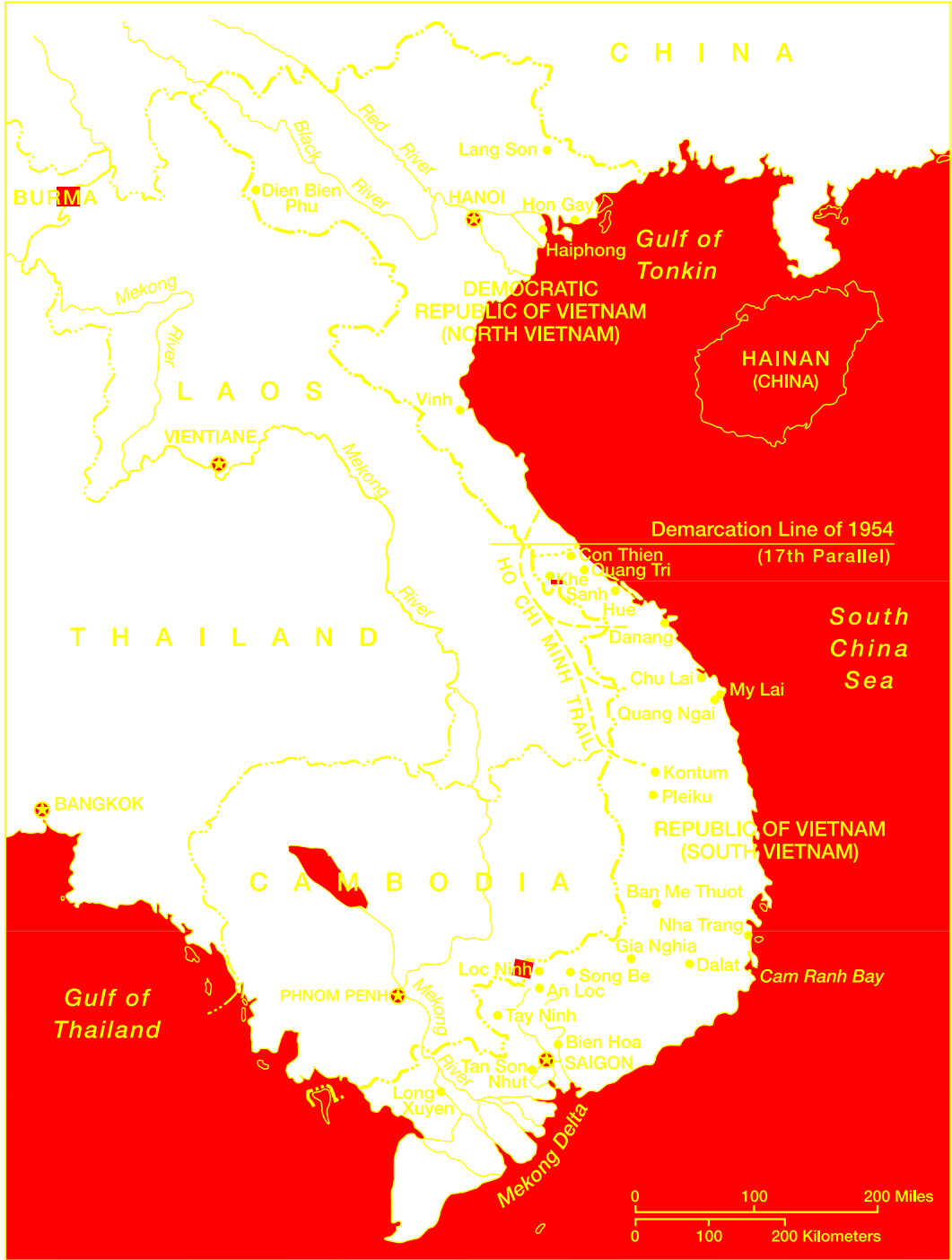
The Geneva Accords of July 1954 ended the First Indochina War, divided the nation, and called for all-Vietnam elections to reunify the country by July 1956. The US policy as stated in PB draft NSC policy statement NSC 5519 “U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections” of June 1955 meant, Kahin states, that senior American officials “were not disposed to pressure [Ngo Dinh] Diem to participate even in such preliminary consultations” as those which the Geneva Accords called for. And when it was time to meet the North Vietnamese, “official US policy had swung behind him [Diem] in his refusal to do so”. The aim of NSC 5519 was “simply to prevent a communist victory”, Short writes, and adds that “by a sort of sleight of pen all the necessary conditions for the free expression of the national will...were now neatly, reasonably and deceptively transposed to exist” before the elections could be arranged. In the draft of NSC 5519 Arnold has identified old features associated with taking advantage of military strength. He argues that the recommendation “to limit the election to the south so the Diem government could control the electoral process” was, in fact, according to Arnold, “something new”. The revision of NSC policies took place in “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia”, NSC 5612 (August 1956). According to Gelb and Betts, the policy paper continued the reasoning of NSC 5429. Greenstein and Henderson have analyzed the eight splits on the document. Greenstein points out that summaries of the discussion indicate “that eight disagreements were resolved in the course of an extended discussion” on the Paper. The debates on the Paper, Henderson argues, were “significant in identifying finely honed differences of opinion between various advisors on the Council”. Eisenhower altered the wording on the basis of the suggestions made by the JCS. Henderson writes that the final language of NSC 5612 “could be construed broadly to reflect an American commitment to maintaining a balance of power in the area”. Arnold considers that developing the Vietnamese political organizations to be “more effective” and enhancing loyalty to the central government were the “refined objectives of American assistance to Vietnam” as set forth in NSC 5612. Condit, on the other hand, has found considerable similarities between NSC 5405 and its revision, NSC 5612. Stavins, Barnett and Raskin conclude that the language in NSC 5809, “U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia”, shows that the policy-makers had interests in both Vietnams. Kahin writes that the NSC staffers “unrealistically” believed that Vietnam could be reunified. This objective was thus incorporated into NSC 5809. Anderson concludes that there were no significant changes in the subsequent NSC policies that were approved in April 1958 and July 1960 (NSC 5809 and NSC 6012, both with the same title). He argues that “from 1956 through the end of the Eisenhower presidency in January, the administration’s basic Vietnam policy goals remained the same”. They were basically to strengthen South Vietnam and help it to win the reunification elections, to develop its armed forces, and to use any means to “weaken Vietnamese communists”. NSC officials thought optimistically that they could achieve their goals, “but the program to implement them was slow, tedious, and often contentious”.⁷

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and Mayers, 1987, p. 125; George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, 1974, pp. 252–253; Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, p. 183; Hess, “Redefining the American Position in Southeast Asia,” in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*. Ed. Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, 1990, p. 124; Nelson, “The ‘Top of Policy Hill,’” 1983, p. 316; Destler, “The Presidency and National Security Organization,” in *The National Security*. Ed. Graebner, 1986, p. 230; Prados, *The Sky Would Fall*, 1983, pp. 155–156, 203, 207; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, p. 135; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 1986, p. 44–45; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 69; Watson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1953–1954*, 1986, p. 251.

7 Kahin, *Intervention*, 1987, pp. 66, 90; Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, 1989, p. 209; Arnold, *The First Domino*, 1991, pp. 287, 305; Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 1979, pp. 183–184; Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 1982, p. 130; Henderson, “Advice and Decision,” in Hoxie et al., *The Presidency and National Security Policy*, 1984, p. 163; Henderson, *Managing the Presidency* 1988, p. 98; Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1955–1956*, 1992, pp. 233–234; Stavins, Barnett and Raskin, *Washington Plans an Aggressive War*, 1971, p. 15; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 1991, p. 151.

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